



ANALYSIS OF COMPARATIVE MOVE ANALYSES OF LETTERS AND THEIR PEDAGOGICAL USE IN TEACHING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (ESP)

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INTRODUCTION

Writing a formal letter with appropriate organization and style is a demanding task for many learners as they should pay attention to the conventions of writing a particular letter and its audience expectations. In order to communicate effectively in workplaces, learners should have a sufficient command of the specific generic structure of correspondence used at target situations (Qasim et al., 2015). Therefore, to increase English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learners' awareness of rhetorical patterns, genre analysts have examined rhetorical structures of different types of letters used in business, legal and academic contexts.

The ESP approach to genre analysis focuses on the analysis of text organizational patterns. It has given rise to a text analytical approach called move analysis, introduced by Swales (1990). With the CARS Model (1990), originally employed to analyse introductions of research articles, Swales (1990) proposed that it is the communicative purpose that defines a genre which comprises a class of communicative events and the members who write and read the genre share a set of communicative purposes (p.58). Thus, the shared communicative purpose of texts that belong to the same genre results in having a similar 'structure, style, content and intended audience' (ibid., p. 58). Bhatia (1993) extended the Swalesean move analysis in two ways: 1) by applying it more generally to a number of other professional genres in legal and business domains, and 2) by extending the role of context to bring in a number of socio-cognitive factors related to the rationale for genres (Bhatia, 2012, p. 240).

One of the popular conventions of genre analysis is employing a comparative approach of analysing genres of different cultures, theoretically employing Kaplan's (1966) notion of contrastive rhetoric. It was first used in his study of international students' writing in English on the interference of first language thought and writing patterns with writing in a second language. Similarly, it has become a canonical theoretical model, used in many move analyses of letters to explore rhetorical patterns and lexico-grammatical choices across genres of different cultures. However, it seems that the comparative move analyses of letters seem diverse, and so far, researchers have not examined the diversity in comparative move analyses of letters. Therefore, this study examined selected move analyses of letters to identify the types of comparisons made and different pedagogical concerns related to their specific use of comparative approach.

METHODOLOGY

The method employed in this study is document analysis, which is "applicable to qualitative case studies producing rich descriptions of a single phenomenon, event, organisation, or program" (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994 cited in Bowen, 2009, p. 29). Further, qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was employed in this study to identify, analyse and interpret themes related to the types of comparative move analyses of letters and their pedagogic use. The sample of this study included six comparative move analyses of letters published online from 2007 to 2019. All the studies selected for the analysis were comparative genre analyses of letters that employed Swales's (1990) approach to move analysis in segmenting moves and identifying their communicative functions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The six studies have presented implications for developing letter writing skills of learners. As



per their research concerns, the studies were categorized into the following three types of comparative analyses.

1. Comparison of letters with other genres of the same domain

Chuna and Montane (2019) and Hanel (2007) focus on similarities and differences of the move structures of two or more genres of the same domain. They analysed rhetorical patterns of five Spanish genres of the same domain (written by laymen to administrators) that cause the greatest writing difficulties – job application letters, letters of allegation, complaint, claim, and application. The intention of their study was to provide an understanding of the characteristics of each genre. The contrastive analysis included the use of statistical techniques to analyse quantitative data in order to identify significant differences among these textual genres. One of the pedagogical concerns is to identify the most frequent move structures of the five genres. Similarly, Hanel (2007) compared and contrasted the rhetorical patterns of business collection letters of three stages: initial, intermediate, and the demand stage. According to Hanel (2007), the move patterns of each type of letter and communicative strategies (i.e., persuasion, face-saving strategies) used at each stage of debt collection provide insights to ESP teachers and learners of the field of business credit management (p.72).

2. Comparisons across letters of different nationalities

The most popular type of contrastive analysis of letters is related to comparing and contrasting the rhetorical patterns of the letters produced by different nationalities. For example, Thumngong and Tongpoon-Patanasorn (2017) compared the moves commonly used in the job application letters written by six nationalities in the Asian region. Their results suggest that job application letters are based on the socio-cultural setting within which it is used. The main reason for comparing letters across different contexts or countries (i.e., business quotation call letters by non-native and native employees; Qasim, 2015); cover letters written by Taiwanese and Canadian college students (Hou, 2013), and English and Persian business enquiry letters (Jalilifar & Beitsayyah, 2011) is to identify the common generic structure and compare and contrast moves commonly used by the writers of each county.

3. Comparison of letters written by different cultural groups

Nguyen and Millier (2012) compared scenario English business letters written by Vietnamese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students and authentic business letters written by business professionals. As per their study, student culture can be considered as a small culture in which novice writers represent the smallest entity and professional writers represent the bigger culture (Holliday, 1994 cited in Atkinson, 2004). Nguyen and Millier (2012) have presented similarities as well as difference in the rhetorical patterns of business letters that reflect the norms and practices of each culture.

The above three types of contrastive move analyses of different letters are based on contrastive rhetoric of Kaplan (1966) and proved that what is rhetorically effective in one culture may not be effective in another culture. In business letter writing, the writers should not be restricted to the traditional approach of using writing conventions pertaining to their native cultures to achieve effectiveness in communicating with members of different cultures in which English is used as a lingua franca. “Communicators in the global business communities increasingly encounter pluralized national and cultural identities and need to deal with the boundaries between them in multiple ways” (Starke-Meyerring, 2005, p. 477 cited in Nguyen and Millier, 2012, p.2).

The common purpose of the studies analysed was to provide ESP educators with teaching aids to increase learner’s awareness of the generic structure of letters written by different



nationalities and cultures. For instance, the findings of Hou (2013) suggest that differences in rhetorical patterns are due to the differences in writers' cultural backgrounds and their rhetorical and lexical knowledge of writing job application letters. Further, Qasim et al. (2015) aimed to develop business writing competence of the nonnative employees who worked in a Pakistani organization and needed to settle in a foreign culture. Similarly, Hou (2013) suggests that "students be taught practical writing skills by fully applying authentic language forms and cultural knowledge pertaining to the genre of job application letters" (p.80). The findings of the above discussed studies suggest that move patterns of the letters of different cultures could be used in training ESP learners to help them acquire various move patterns used in their own culture and in others to develop the conciseness of letter writing in workplaces in different cultural contexts.

The findings of the six comparative move analyses of letters confirmed Swales's (1990) definition of genre as a class of communicative events, and the members of which share some set of communicative purposes which are recognised by the expert members of the parent discourse community and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style (p. 58).

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

This study analysed comparative move analyses of letters to identify different types of comparisons and their pedagogical usefulness. It was identified that there are three types of comparative studies which are popular among the move analysts of letters: 1) comparison of letters with other genres of the same domain, 2) letters written by writers of different nationalities, and 3) comparison of letters written by cultural groups (i.e., professionals and students). The growing body of comparative move analyses of letters has revealed evidence of various cultural diversities in relation to rhetorical patterns of the letters. This study is expected to contribute to an understanding of the rationale for the use of comparative approach to genre analysis that can be employed by future genre analysts who prefer examining the impact of culture on genre production. More comparative genre analyses such as comparing student and professional genres could be conducted by future genre analysts to present useful teaching models and knowledge related to cultural norms of genre construction among professionals which would guide ESP learners producing effective letters in workplace.

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