

Psycholinguistic Extracts and Socio-Cultural Imprints in Job Application Discourses: A Genre Analysis

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Abstract - Genres represent purposive and staged ways of communicating in a culture and enacting a range of important institutional practices. Genre studies have paved the way for understanding the way discourse is used in academic, professional, and institutional contexts. This paper analyzed the psycholinguistic realization and drew out socio-cultural imprints in the construction of application letter and résumé in the Philippine setting. Qualitative and quantitative methods were employed in the analysis of job application documents representing different professions to determine the generic structure and the linguistic features of the moves and strategies that accomplish the communicative functions of the genres. Employers' group survey and job interview extracts were also used to cross-validate and provide snapshots on the interpretations made. A seven-move and a five-move generic structure occurring in a flexible sequence define the composition of job application letter and résumé, respectively. The construction of these two types of discourse is influenced and constrained by the applicant's psycholinguistic repertoire, professional background, and socio-cultural milieu. A genre-based pedagogy is recommended to sensitize Filipinos of the existing genres and textlinguistic variations in the workplace.

Keywords - discourse analysis, genre analysis, letter of application, résumé

INTRODUCTION

Discourses may appear to occur in a random pattern at its surface, but researches have documented highly patterned forms of language use which do not only organize language itself but also structure thoughts and construct societies and social activities.

It is in response to this notion that this research focused on discovering language patterns in workplace environments particularly on job application discourses is conceptualized. As Bakhtin argued, "Learning genres is a fundamental part of language development, and it is our ability to predict the compositional structure and length of genres that enable us to communicate" (in Derewianka, 2003).

Notwithstanding, job application is an institutionalized social activity whose import is seen in light of the need for the rendering of service as part of a society's economic activities. Given the significance of an acquired language competence in the world of employment, it is imperative for schools to produce graduate-applicants who are competitive particularly in the area of communication. Peel (2000) underscored the need to produce graduates who are literate and *can communicate*. This is parallel to Ventola's (1987, 2000) assertion that the lack of knowing how to conduct linguistically (and non-linguistically) basic social communications may result in rejection of the new host society.

Unfortunately, teaching applicants how to hurdle the job application stage is not a simple matter of teaching the parts, the formats, and showing some idealized samples but more importantly, in making learners understand the intricacies in the construction of the genres. The problem, as Fagan (2008) notes, is the want of empirically derived discipline-specific genre exemplars to be used in the L2 writing classroom. Moreover, not many of the resources point out explicitly and exactly what the elements in the text are, why some elements are chosen, and how these elements are assembled.

With genre and corpus analyses at its methodological core utilizing authentic corpora for functional description of language use, the current research situates job applicants to see the construction and interpretive process at work and get them used to the special and specific genre features (Popken in Kiloran, 2009) as practiced by

different professions and society, as well as to describe the cultural practices and norms embedded in writing application letters and résumés. Specifically, it identified (a) the elements and the sequence order of the moves observed in the genres under study; (b) the strategies used to realize the moves; (c) the similarities and/or variations in the generic structure of the application documents across profession; (d) the linguistic features and dominant syntactic patterns used; and (e) the communicative functions such linguistic features perform in accomplishing the purposes of the identified moves and strategies.

FRAMEWORK

The present study is anchored on the concept of genre and corpus analyses informed by views drawn from English for Specific Purposes, Systemic-Functional Linguistics, New Rhetoric and Contrastive Rhetoric Analysis, Ethnography of Communication, Pragmatics of Language and Theories of Face and Politeness, Schema Theory, Corpus Linguistics, and Psychology of Communication.

The term *genre* was first used in ESP context by Tarone et al. (in Flowerdew and Dudley-Evans, 2002) establishing the principle that within the conventions of the genre studied, it was the *writer's communicative purpose* that governs choice at the grammatical and lexical levels. Flowerdew & Dudley-Evans (2002) extend the concept of genre analysis stating that it involves exploring established but not necessarily codified conventions. Accordingly, the focus of the process is to help students orient themselves to the English language demands they encounter in their studies or professions.

Meanwhile, Systemic-Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1975, 1978, 1994) espouses the role of language in the social construction of life. This theory posits that language is *systemic*, that is, it offers systems of choices in language and the user draws upon language resources to accomplish a rhetorical act revealing the *functional* nature of language.

On the other hand, New Rhetoric focuses more on the detailed analyses of the social and cultural contexts in which genres occur, with an emphasis on social purposes, or actions, that these genres fulfill. The emphasis, Freedman and Medway (1994) stressed, is on the fluid and dynamic character of genres, and how they evolve and change

over time. Rather than attempting linguistic analysis for descriptions, Hyon (1996, 2001) remarked that the concern of New Rhetoric is less with the potential of genre for teaching patterns of text organization and language, and more with helping university students understand the social functions of genres. Littlefair (in Riley and Reedy, 2000), likewise, believes that teachers' sure knowledge of genre and register provides them with linguistic tools with which to examine the texts used in the classroom, and serves to enhance their understanding of why, where, and when language learners need support.

Furthermore, the concept of genre assumes that there is a recurrent feature that exists and built within the textual structure of written or spoken texts. Anchored to this notion is the seminal work of Swales' (1990) stating: "a genre comprises of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes..." Following a sociological perspective, Bhatia (1993) cautions that a text is not to be taken as a complete object possessing meaning of its own; rather, it is to be regarded as an ongoing process of negotiation in the context of social roles, group purposes, professional and organizational preferences, and even cultural constraints.

Corollary to this is the Bakhtinian theory commonly tied to a cognitive theory known as schema theory. Human consciousness, Bartlett says, processes information by means of "template-matching": new "incoming" information is compared and accommodated to a template that is permanently stored in memory. These schematic templates are seen as a "combined standard against which all subsequent changes of posture are measured before they enter consciousness" (in Keunen, 2000).

Meanwhile, a literature search done suggests that a considerable body of researches has already been conducted along the lines of discourse analysis specifically genre studies. Landmark seminal papers include those of Swales (1981; 1990) on the structure of academic and scientific writing; Bhatia (1993) on sales promotion letters and the legal profession; Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson's (1973, 1979, 1986) and Schegloff et al. (2002) on the structure and organization of everyday conversations and talk-in interactions; Labov and Waletzky (in Cameron, 2001) on the pattern of oral narratives, and Propp on the descriptive morphology of folktales. Likewise, in many other

disciplines and cultural settings, there, too, have been established overall structures and sequential patterns of moves operating in said discourse communities. These include studies research articles (Ruiying, 2003); service encounters (Hasan, 1995; Ventola, 1987, 2000); academic lectures and academic writing (Eniko, 2000; Flowerdew, 2000, Cheng, 2008); newspaper law reports (Badger, 2003; editorial articles (Flowerdew, 2004); business reports, letters of negotiation and transactions (Pinto dos Santos, 2002; Crosling and Ward, 2002; Jung 2004; Yeung, 2007), transactional letter writing (Okamura & Shaw, 2000), mobile phone conversations (Weilenmann, 2003) and application essays and letters (Bhatia, 1993; Connor, Davis and De Rycker, 1995; Upton and Connor, 2001; Henry and Roseberry, 2001; Al-Ali, 2006; Ding, 2007)--all of which have established patterns that again prove the conventional unfolding of genres although some studies found flexible and variable generic structuring.

Meanwhile, the ethnographic approach adds an external variable in analyzing communication stressing the cultural specificity of rules of communication and the totality of factors needing description. In doing this, Hymes (1962, 1971) lists eight components to be holistically described in a communication event: **Situation** (setting or locale), **Participants** (speaker, addressee), **End** (purposes, goals, outcome), **Act sequences** (message form and content), **Key** (tone, manner), **Instrumentalities** (channel or mode: spoken, written, variety of language), **Norms** (norms of interpretation and interaction), and **Genres** (categories).

Related to this, Brown and Levinson (1987) theorized about politeness strategies which are employed to save the hearers' *face* (a concept first created in 1963 by Erving Goffman defining face as *a mask that changes depending on the audience and the social interaction*) when face threatening acts are inevitable or desired. These include bald on record, negative politeness, positive politeness, and off-record-indirect strategies.

Furthermore, analytical practice in discourse analysis has evolved into one which is interdisciplinary. This is in light of the fact that human communication is a complex process which cannot be adequately captured using just one frame of reference. In the field of linguistics, another type of analysis comes in the form of identifying certain

specific features of language with certain types of writing or styles - known as *corpus analysis* or *corpus linguistics*, or the study of language based on examples of 'real life' language use. Corpus provides a broad and naturalistic sample rather than a contrived data elicited under artificial conditions (McEnery & Wilson, 2001).

Meanwhile, the contribution of psychology in genre analysis is built in the *tactical* aspect of genre construction. This means that although there is an organizational constraint implicitly imposed in the structure of a genre, an individual has strategic choices in order to execute his or her intention. In the language teaching jargon, this is known as *strategy*, a sub-move serving a typical communicative intention which is always subservient to the overall communicative purpose of the genre (Bhatia, 1993).

Yet, aside from the linguistic, sociological, and psychological analytic frames that are involved in the analysis of genre, the relationship between linguistic communication and culture should also be considered. Accordingly, these patterns and list, often meaningless, can be made more beneficial by showing their communicative functions such as how modals and hedges are used persuasively in different socio-cultural contexts. Conrad (2002) opines that corpus-based studies of grammar have the potential to revolutionize the teaching of grammar by being more focused on conditions of use taking into account functional descriptions and frequency information, as well as an analysis of students' needs.

Overall, the theoretical framework captures how the moves and strategies in the letter of application and résumé define, organize, and communicate the social and cultural expectations embedded in the genre and with an end-view of educating ESL/EFL writers to reader's expectations and enculturating them to the target discourse community.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed at determining the genre and textlinguistic features of application letters and résumés across professions, investigating how language is manipulated to meet the purposes of those texts, describing the social and cultural embeddings in writing

them in Philippine context and comparing it with other cultures.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

One hundred texts from different workplaces representing 10 professions were analyzed for their generic and textual features using qualitative and quantitative methods. Using an instrument patterned after Bhatia's (1993), Upton and Connor's (2001), and Henry and Roseberry's (2001), the different genre moves and move sequences were identified and coded for their occurrence. Afterwards, the obligatory and the optional moves were identified as a basis for making the conclusion as to which moves are considered genre-defining. After the coding and identification of the moves and strategies, the whole corpus was processed for an arithmetical count of the items using Microsoft Word Count and Anthony's (2007) AntConc 3.2.1 Concordance software. Thereafter, syntactic categorization was done by classifying and framing particular linguistic categories in a matrix. The high frequency count and ranking results observed for some lexicons were further subjected to concordance and cluster analyses and explained in terms of their role in realizing the communicative and rhetorical function of the moves and strategies.

On the other hand, the employers' perceptions on the importance of moves were processed using weighted mean, and subsequently matched with the applicants' perception on the obligatoriness of said moves using percentage.

Moreover, interview extracts were presented as vignettes to support the statistical analyses. This is to build a genre and register typology of job application discourses capturing the psychology and pragmatics of communicating as well as explicating the possible recursion and variation of different generic elements and the demarcating socio-cultural differences among the texts studied. The analysis done was informed using Hymes' ethnography of communication framework.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. *Generic Elements and Allowable Sequence Order in Job Application Documents*

Based on the analysis done, a 7-part schematic structure appeared as the generic formula of an application letter in the Philippine context. This is shown in Table 1 showing the obligatory elements (highlighted) and the other optional elements.

Table 1. Obligatory and optional moves in an application letter

	Moves	% (N=100)	Generic Structure Potential
1	Opening	98	Obligatory
2	Greetings	31	Optional
3	Personal Identification	27	Optional
4	Identifying Source of Information/Referring to Job Ads	47	Optional
5	Introducing Candidature/Applying for the Position	94	Obligatory
6	Stating Reasons for Applying	16	Optional
7	Stating Availability	4	Optional
8	Promoting the Candidate	91	Obligatory
9	Stipulating Terms and Conditions of Employment	8	Optional
10	Enclosing Documents	81	Obligatory
11	Naming References	3	Optional
12	Identifying Other Institutions Where Application is Sent	0	Optional*
13	Using Pressure Tactic	0	Optional
14	Soliciting Response/ Indicating Desire for Interview	89	Obligatory
15	Polite Ending	61	Obligatory
16	Signing Off	94	Obligatory

NOTE: A 50% occurrence is used as criterion for determining the importance of a strategy in a move

* highlighted moves are considered obligatory

*highly specific to Department of Education

The above obligatory elements showed similarity with the three foreign models reviewed on what could be considered as generic-defining moves across cultures namely: Move 1 (*Opening*), Move 5 (*Introducing Candidature*), Move 8 (*Promoting the Candidate*), Move 14 (*Soliciting Response*), Move 15 (*Polite Ending*), and Move 16 (*Signing Off*). This means that for an application letter to be effective and serve

its purpose, it must *be opened formally and its nature stated, the candidate is promoted, a response is sought, it must be ended in a polite manner, and it must be closed formally.*

On the other hand, the differences noted are: 1) the obligatory stature of Move 10 (*Enclosing Documents*) which was not compulsory in Henry and Roseberry's (2001) model; 2) the non-obligatory stature of Move 4 (*Identifying Source of Information*) which was obligatory in Bhatia's (1993) and Upton and Connor's (2001) models; and 3) the absence of Move 13 (*Using Pressure Tactic*) which was present in Bhatia's model.

Thus, the seven (7) "must have" moves define the generic structure potential of the application letter in the Philippine context consistent to Hasan's (1995) conception of obligatory elements as a criterion for defining whether texts are complete or incomplete. The existence of this template is also supported by data showing a high correspondence (i.e., 75% match) between the employers' perception and the applicants' written letters in terms of the relevance and obligatoriness assigned on the different moves.

Notwithstanding, two other moves - Move 4 (*Identifying Source of Information*) and Move 6 (*Stating Reasons for Applying*) - can be considered obligatory depending on the "context of situation". In this case, the two moves deemed "important" by employers are included in the letter only when it is not felt to negatively affect one's application.

On the other hand, five (5) moves constitute the genre-defining structure of the résumé. Table 2 shows the obligatory (highlighted) moves and the optional moves.

Table 2. Obligatory and optional moves in a résumé

Moves in a Résumé	% (N=100)	Generic Structure Potential
1. Identification of Self	100	Obligatory
2. Detailing Contact	98	Obligatory
3. Stating Candidature	7	Optional
4. Stating Reasons	30	Optional
5. Previewing Qualifications	9	Optional
6. Promoting the Candidate	100	Obligatory
7. Providing Personal Information	72	Obligatory
8. Stipulating Terms and Conditions	1	Optional
9. Stating Availability	1	Optional
10. Providing/Offering References	72	Obligatory
11. Attesting Information Given	12	Optional
12. Claiming Ownership	15	Optional
13. Detailing Contact in Case of Emergency	1	Optional

NOTE: A 50% occurrence is used as criterion for determining the importance of a strategy in a move

* highlighted moves are considered obligatory

The data suggest that for a résumé to be effective and functional, the candidate must *present himself/herself, give details for contacting him/her, state his/her educational and professional qualifications and other related experiences, provide relevant personal information, and offer references.*

B. Dominant Strategies Used to Realize the Moves of the Job Application Texts

Observed as obligatory among the *psycholinguistic* strategies are the *listing of educational qualifications* (64%) and the *listing of relevant experiences, skills and abilities and how these were obtained* (57%) for Move 8 (*Promoting the Candidature*). On the one hand, observed as a dominant strategy for Move 15 (*Soliciting Response*) is *asking for an interview/ favorable response* (85%).

The use of such strategies implies that many Filipino professionals recognize the purpose of the self-promotion move and know how to exploit this move to their advantage by maximizing exposure in a limited discourse environment. Statistically, the applicants devoted more space to promote their candidature based on the 9,460 computer word count for Move 8 which constitutes 54.94% of the total 17,308 words in the whole corpus. Specifically, more space was allotted to the *listing of experiences, skills, and abilities* (n=4,058) followed by *listing of educational qualifications* (n=1,924), *demonstrating confidence of the skills and abilities acquired from experience and education* (n=1,012), *naming and describing the job/s held* (n=993), and *citing the benefits to be gained by the company if the applicant is hired* (n=870). This word count result implies that both form and substance matter in a communication that aims to persuade by apportioning a substantial space to more important information.

But while there is a good percentage in the samples (91%) which promoted candidature, there is a considerable percentage (9%) having used the document simply as a transmittal letter. This is similar to what Bhatia (1993) observed in the letters he analyzed noting that 80% of his Asian subjects made no effort to convince the readers of the applicants' worth. But the reason for this non-promotion of candidature, at least in the Philippine context, is not without a cause. Employing a content analysis of the classified ads section of two national dailies, only 53.57% of the 112 ads used as references in this study solicited the submission of a letter compared to 92.86% which required a résumé. This documentary analysis is further validated by the employers' expressed preference for credentials to be used for shortlisting applicants ranking the *Résumé* or *Curriculum Vitae* as first in the order of importance (100%). This is followed by *Transcript of Records* (80%), *application letter* (53.33%), *certificates and proofs of relevant trainings* (20%), *exams* (13.33%), and *professional eligibility* (13.33%). Interestingly, the low expectation for an application letter as surveyed is captured in the following light: that the letter is required for formality's sake only (26.67%). Yet, even if the submission of the letter is seen for purposes of formality, this perception reveals the phatic function of the language in the whole gamut of job application as a social practice. Just as some communications are done **not** to focus

on the message (i.e., the transactional function), the writing of a letter is aimed at preserving existing social structures, that is, as part of institutional ritual conducted by a “literate culture”.

In addition, the letter, if well-staged, can showcase the applicant’s linguistic competence, and one’s ability to clearly identify skills, values, interests, and other personal attributes which are among the core strengths and ‘differentiating factors’ being looked into by screeners. This reading is validated by the high statistical index of the surveyed employers (93.33%) who admitted using the document, when provided, as bases for shortlisting candidates and inferring from it the applicant’s *ability to summarize key points* (100%), *command of the language* (93.33%), *matching skills* (86.66%), *presentation skills* (66.66%), and even *politeness* (60%) and *handwriting* (6%).

Indeed, image-building (through self-analysis of strengths and weaknesses) can be a reason for the obligatory inclusion of Move 8 (*Promoting the Candidate*) in the genre in the same way that employers put premium to this move particularly on the *listing of educational and professional qualifications* (WX=1.73) and *relevant experience, skills, and abilities* (WX=1.60), describing these two strategies as “**very important**” pieces of information to be included.

The above findings, then, put the Filipinos similar to those in English cultures (Clyne in Kaplan, n.d.) who tend to stress the written language as main medium of effective communication as well as emphasize concreteness and reasoning.

Notwithstanding, two (2) other strategies not listed in the coding frame emerged and prove to be potential differences between English cultures and Philippine culture. These are *rationalizing the recognized lack in skill, knowledge, experience, and other measures of competence as required in the job* (12%); and *begging for the job* (3%).

Move 14 (*Soliciting Response*), meanwhile, invites the reader to take action on the application. This is done in three ways: a) inviting a favorable response and asking for an interview (85%), b) offering to provide further information (5%), and/or c) detailing contact (28%). These strategies are employed to expedite communication and bring the application to the next process by asking for an interview.

Similar to the application letter, in the résumé are *the listing of educational/professional qualification* (98%), *listing relevant experiences*

such as *trainings/seminars/workshops* (63%), and *presenting past and present jobs held* (94%) in Move 6 (*Promoting the Candidate*) which are found to be dominant among the psycholinguistic strategies. These strategies are perceived important since educational qualification is an entry requirement in many jobs. The trainings received, meanwhile, show how a perceived lack of formal education is supplemented to give the idea of continual upgrading and keeping abreast with the demands of the time and the profession.

C. *Similarities and Variations of Moves across Professions and Cultures*

Factoring profession as a variable in comparing the staging of the different moves, four (4) moves appeared obligatory to specific disciplines wherein it can be said that the profession's communication style and preferences are encoded in the genre. These are Move 2 (*Greetings*) perceived to be important for inclusion by the legal (50%), medical (50%), and medical-educational professionals (50%); Move 3 (*Identification of Self*) deemed important by the Editors (50%); Move 6 (*Stating Reasons for Applying*) which appeared significant to Administrative Officers (50%) and Lawyers (50%); and Move 9 (*Stipulating Terms*) which is relevant to the group of Managers (70%).

Situational contexts and subculture seem to operate in these specific professions such as *hierarchical orientation, presence of an advertisement to be responded, perceived power or (over)qualification, and institutional preference/idiosyncrasies* that make different professions put relative importance on some moves and strategies. These contextual factors reveal the distinct thought patterns of the Filipinos involving a range of psycholinguistic and socio-cultural strategies encoded at the lexico-grammatical level to achieve the transactional and interpersonal functions of the genre.

This observation reiterates Swales' conception (1990) that what shapes the genre is the communicative purpose and the perpetuation made by members of the professional community; and as Bhatia (1993) explains, the expectations within the specialist circles put limit on certain kinds of meaning and the positioning of certain elements.

Moreover, three sets of move patterns have been observed to exhibit variability in their sequencing namely: a) Moves 3-10 (53 deviant cases) with high interchangeability in the sequence of Moves 3-5 (12 cases), Moves 4-5 (9 cases), Moves 5-8 (10 cases), and Moves 8-10 (7 cases); b) Moves 9-15 (11 deviant cases) with high interchangeability in the sequence of Moves 10-14 (9 cases); and c) Moves 14-15 (9 deviant cases). This means that except for Moves 1 (*Opening*), 2 (*Greetings*), and 16 (*Signing Off*), all the moves can be rearranged. This pattern is similar to the observed sequence variations in the moves of the foreign models particularly for Moves 4 and 5, and Moves 8, 9, and 10.

All the above findings prove that the application letter genre does not follow a straightjacket ordering of the moves similar to other genres (see Ventola, 1987/2000; Flowerdew & Dudley-Evans, 2002; Ruiying & Allison, 2003). Moreover, Filipino applicants can be said to exercise more freedom in their presentation of the different moves when constructing the genre.

Albeit, the observed differences in the move sequences can be explained by the theoretical concept of interplay and interaction forwarded by Bakhtin (n.d.) as well as Miller (1994), Freedman (1999), and Miller & Shepherd (2004), that genre rule does not create a binding constraint. Instead, human agents continually enact genres, and can challenge and change these genres. This is to say that creativity is possible everywhere. Anent to this, the dynamism observed in the study can be ascribed to differences in terms of the linguistic ability of the Filipinos (with English as a second language only) and may be influenced by one's specialization/profession and cultural uniqueness, hence, the variation in the sequential presentation of some textual elements compared to what Bhatia (1993), Henry and Roseberry (2001), and Upton and Connor (2001) found out in their studies.

Along this observation, language and culture have been identified in this research as determiners in disturbing and shaping the application genre among the Filipinos - with the inclusion of *Greetings* (31%), *Identification of Self* (27%), and *Polite Ending* (61%).

On the other hand, among the marked *sociolinguistic* strategies in realizing the purpose of the application letter are *Solidarity Enforcement* and *Form Foregrounding* in Move 2 (*Greetings*); *Conflict-Avoidance/Indirect Politeness*, *Information Presupposition*, *Adversarial Glorification* and

Approbation in Move 5 (Introducing Candidature); Off-Record Politeness Strategy and Adversarial Glorification and Approbation in Move 6 (Stating Reasons for Applying); Self-Glorification, Approbation (Mentioning and Highlighting), Sparkling Generality, Repackaging, Begging or Underdog Psychology in Move 8 (Promoting the Candidate); Topic Avoidance and Shifting, Negotiating for Flexibility, and Negative Politeness in Move 9 (Stipulating Terms and Conditions); Self-Glorification in Move 14 (Soliciting Response) and Negative Politeness in Move 15 (Polite Ending). Meanwhile, the marked sociolinguistic strategies in the résumé include *Adversarial Glorification and Approbation in Move 4 (Stating Reasons), and Self Glorification in Move 5 (Previewing Qualifications).*

Indeed, the aforementioned moves and strategies have evolved not only to make the purpose of the genre clearer, but, by modifying the conventions, the intention is achieved most effectively by allowing culturally constrained and specific ways of interacting, in this case, reflecting *solidarity, religiosity, hospitality, bestowing deference* and an *'unassuming' coyness* as a way of narrowing social distance.

Pragmatically-speaking, the application letter provides a voice and focus which can negotiate and control the direction of communication in a highly-structured, asymmetrical, and dominating workplace environment. The application letter may not be the document on which hiring decision may rest but one can sell himself/herself through it similar to what ads do for products and ideas in a space-limited discourse environment.

These conclusions support what Riley and Reedy (2000) contended that conventional mode of interacting oils the wheels of human intercourse constrained by highly context-specific modes of communicating. Littlefair (in Riley and Reedy, 2000) captured this essence articulating the idea that “a writer chooses a genre which is suitable for his or her purpose and expresses details of the communication in a register and style of language which is inevitably constrained by the immediate situation.

D. Communicative Functions of the Observed Linguistic Features in Accomplishing the Purpose of the Genre

Because the letter genre is limited in its form and content, it has

to be written pragmatically forceful and must be sociolinguistically appropriate. This purpose is achieved through the use of linguistic structures (lexical and syntactic) that ensure acceptability.

Lexically, the application letter is a highly predictable genre. Most prominent in the corpus is the use of “I” communicatively serving as a “lexical connector” and giving the sentences and the whole text a sense of cohesion. This finding is similar to Henry and Roseberry’s (2001) study that reveals not only the “generic-ness” and cross-cultural similarity of the application letter genre but also suggests the existence of a predictable lexical composition of the said text. This is worth highlighting in English writing classes in terms of the role of pronominal reference (and other lexical ties) as a cohesive device (see Halliday and Hasan, 1976; Henry and Roseberry, 2001).

The “I” point-of-view is most pronounced in Move 5 (*Introducing Candidature*), Move 8 (*Promoting the Candidate*), and Move 14 (*Soliciting Response*) fulfilling extensive transactional and interpersonal functions. This inference is supported by a computer count of the number of words used in staging these moves. Notwithstanding, while the “I” appeared frequently (n=832) so that the text seemed to appear as a self-centered presentation, the writers mitigated it with the use of *modal auxiliary verbs* (e.g., would, can, may, should, could) as well *modal lexical/mental cognition/affective verbs* (e.g., believe, feel, think). The “I” is also observed to combine with carefully planned syntactic devices such as *non-thematization* and *passivization* techniques, that is, the use of *phrases* (participial, prepositional) and *clauses* (conditionals, subordinate) in an *anticipatory* staging as well as FTA-reducing *defocalization* of the “I” through *subject-operator inversion*, *nominalization*, *third person point-of-view*, and *use of non-referential it-cleft*. All these are done to soften the impact of an otherwise egotistic “I”.

These linguistic renditions exemplify Halliday’s (1975, 1978, 1985) Systemic-Functional Linguistics espousing that in constructing a text, the user draws upon language resources to accomplish a rhetorical act. This is also consonant with what Christie (1999) and Christie & Martin (1997/2000) averred that when people use language, they: a) make choices within the linguistic systems; and b) represent ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings.

Following the argument, then, that successful communication

depends on the parties sharing background knowledge and assumptions, the above textures of the text emerged to ensure a smooth flow of communication and achieve the desired 'linguistic consequences'.

In the case of application letters, this is reflected in the words used and syntactic choices described above and in the use of face-saving strategies namely positive politeness 'solidarity enforcement strategy' (i.e., used to build up or intensify solidarity between participants), negative politeness 'conflict avoidance strategy' (i.e., used to reduce the force of disagreement), and 'off record strategy' (i.e., nonconventionally indirect disagreement) similar to what Jung (2005) found out in Korean business correspondence.

Such textualization is part of the linguistic strategy better known as *hedging* which Salager-Meyer (1993, 2001) explains as being employed in the communication process in order to guarantee a certain level of acceptability while maintaining the existing balance (or hierarchy) of human relations. Here, with the writer limited in making a straightforward presentation and because of the asymmetrical tenor of the discourse – the letter is so constructed to reflect social functions but with a strong bargaining latitude through the use of politeness strategies (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

As a whole, the requirement and utility of job application documents indicate the existence of what may be called as 'ritual' in the linguistically-driven world of employment in the Philippines particularly in professions where English is deemed relevant.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn:

Application letters and résumés in the Philippine context, follow a predictable generic structure similar to the Western and other South Asian cultural patterns but occurring in a dynamic and more flexible sequence pattern and variations across professions. Said genres are responsive to creative maneuverings depending on the perceived constraints of writing and influenced by the writer's linguistic proficiency, professional orientation, and cultural compass. Comparing

the above findings with the foreign studies reviewed, Philippine languages and culture can be said to influence the construction of the application letter with the inclusion of *Greetings, Identification of Self, Identifying Other Agencies where Application is Sent, and Polite Ending* as moves and *Solidarity Enforcement, Topic Avoidance, Adversarial Glorification and Approbation, Sparkling Generality, Rationalizing and Repackaging, and Begging or Underdog Psychology* as strategies.

These identified moves and strategies reveal the character of the Filipinos namely a) putting premium on interpersonal relationship by strongly foregrounding form through the use of positive and negative politeness strategies; b) adoption of culturally-dictated institutional preferences in job hiring; c) adoption of non-confrontational stance in a communication encounter and coyness for up-front negotiations; and d) exhibiting personal and emotional involvement as well as religiosity and over bestowing of deference. Also, the use of extra moves and wordiness in the letters reflect the verbose nature of Philippine languages. These forms of linguistic and cultural conceptions of communication are encoded in the application letter and 'nativized' as a genre written in the English language.

Likewise, situational contexts and the operating subculture in specific professions such as *hierarchical orientation, presence of an advertisement, perceived power or qualification and position, and institutional preferences/idiosyncrasies* are among the factors influencing the importance consigned by the different professions on some moves and strategies—in order to maintain the social structure and ethos of the said professions.

Peripherally, the résumé has a higher utility compared to the application letter based on the employer's perceived importance of these documents. However, the use of the application letter (as a formality requirement) and the continued submission of letter by applicants are indicative of the "phatic" function of the letter done to preserve the existing social structures and ritual required in the literate culture of Filipinos.

Pragmatically, the application letter provides a window for showcasing one's linguistic ability and allows voice and focus which can negotiate in a highly-structured, asymmetrical, and dominating social environment. Interestingly, most Filipinos recognize the value

of the application letter for self-promotion and know how to advertise themselves using universal and culture-specific strategies as well as linguistic devices in the lexical, syntactic, and discourse levels that help realize the communicative functions of the application letter and résumé. However, some moves and strategies need highlighting in the English classroom since some of the samples analyzed failed to manifest sociolinguistic competence. Some moves and strategies as well as linguistic structures were used ineffectively and inappropriately that led to the commission of face-threatening acts and increased the risk of rejection.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the import of job application as an institutional and social practice, and the conclusions drawn from this research, the following are recommended:

First, that genre-interested researchers and theorists explore further the textual and pragmatic relationship of job application genres by identifying how the written documents exert influence and control the interview procedure. Likewise, a more comprehensive cross-cultural contrastive analysis be done to further explore the role of culture in workplace communication and gain a full understanding of the role of language in the success of application. Furthermore, researchers are also encouraged to study students' writing of job application discourses within a controlled environment. This is to explore students' degree of knowledge and sensitization of the said genres and to determine differential effects of explicit teaching of the genres in ushering employment. All these are suggested in light of the objective of popularizing genre teaching as language pedagogy.

Second, that ESL teachers and job placement consultants familiarize applicants of the composition of the genre and train them how to draft the genres to maximize the pragmatic force of the texts and minimize socio-cultural repercussions.

Third, that ESL materials writers and ESP practitioners incorporate, through consciousness-raising strategy, the "beyond-the-form" structures that are usually difficult to acquire in ESL/EFL contexts. This will sensitize students to the sociolinguistic and semantic

blueprints, and pragmatic devices and help them gain some control over the language forms that are socio-culturally appropriate and pragmatically persuasive at a given level of formality - all in an effort to maintain interpersonal relationships, conform to existing socio-cultural structures, and achieve personal objectives.

Fourth, that language specialists and trainers revisit the pedagogical applications of the discourse properties of the genres studied herein, which include the formal and functional *lexico-grammatical* structures, *semantic* features, and *organizational aspects*. These shall be funneled as inputs during trainings of grassroot teachers in order to upgrade the latter's linguistic knowledge base.

And fifth, that ESL teaching as a whole incorporate the concept of genre teaching in the Philippine educational system. This genre-based pedagogy is presented as a model (see Figure 1) informed by historical, social, cultural, economic, and political factors. Given the Bilingual Education Policy of the country where English plays a specialized function, the language curriculum must be made more responsive to societal needs. It must reflect national development goals and industry needs and it must be sensitive to emerging employment patterns forced by shifting globalization trends. Among the skills to be developed include the ability to use language appropriately for a particular purpose and audience and the ability to demonstrate self-awareness, self-promotion, action-planning, matching, decision-making, and negotiating skills. To do this, curriculum planners, materials writers, and language practitioners must view language teaching through a multi- and interdisciplinary perspective that includes the areas of linguistics, sociology, psychology, applied linguistics, literary theory, cultural studies, anthropology, and communication and sieve from them a more meaningful and functional language pedagogy. Specifically, this can be done by conducting and/or assembling discourse-based studies and using different types of activities/texts in a society particularly those which exist in the workplace environment. These studies and texts must include among others 1) knowledge on how language varies in context, purpose, audience, and content; 2) knowledge of linguistic structures, features varieties of written / spoken English and the multifunctionality of linguistic items; 3) knowledge of language organization, cultural and linguistic patterns;

and 4) knowledge of organizational structure and how to adapt to organizational subculture and its norms, attitudes, values. All these insights of 'real world' discourses must be brought into the classroom (reflected in the language syllabus) in terms of the content (language and society), situation (business and corporate encounters), tasks (applying for a job), skills (spoken and written), materials (authentic texts) as well as using genre-inspired methods and activities that capture the society as a literate and linguistically-driven environment. This kind of pedagogy will sensitize the learners to the outside environment as well as meet their pragmatic needs both as students and later as professionals.

Indeed, for ESP teachers, knowledge of the moves, strategies, and the corresponding linguistic structures (though narrow-angled in focus) would make them better teachers towards helping their students wade through the competitive and linguistically-demanding world of employment. Such genre-based and functionally-focused teaching can help bridge and transform today's students into becoming employed and productive citizens of tomorrow.

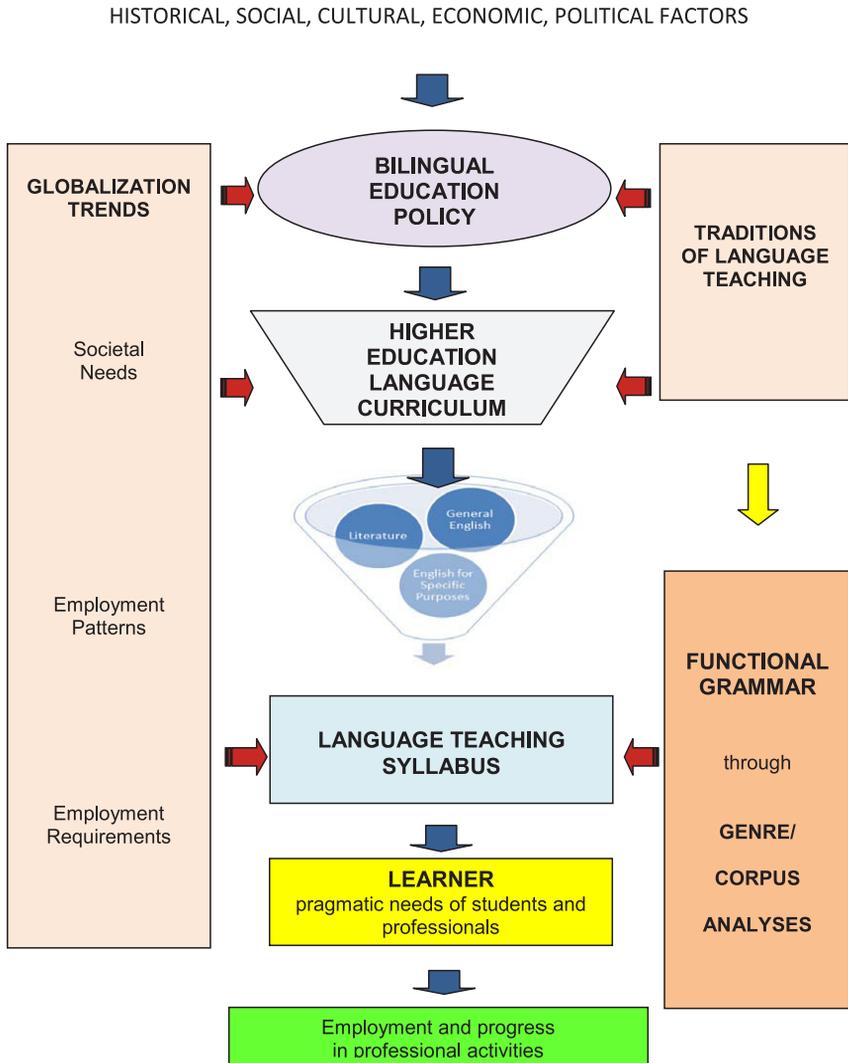


Fig. 1. Proposed paradigm on genre teaching in language pedagogy

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