An Analysis of the Physical Elements and Rhetorical Moves in Application Letters of Filipinos and Thais

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A B S T R A C T

An application letter is an initial document required of an applicant for a possible hiring by an employer. Among different linguistic and cultural contexts, there are 7 physical elements of an application letter considered by the Washington University of St. Louis (2020) as the most common ones. The nine rhetorical moves presented by Upton and Connor (2011) were used as the basis of the study. Fifteen applications letters written by Filipino graduating students and another 15 application letters written by Thai graduating students were used as a set of corpus. To determine the physical elements used by the respondents, a simple frequency count was used, and to analyze the moves employed by the writers, the coding analysis of Upton and Connor (2011) was employed. A move was classified as obligatory if its total occurrences is above 60% and if it is below 60%, a move is considered optional. Two language teachers as inter coders were also requested. The results revealed that both groups included only 6 elements in their application letters. They excluded the last element which is enclosure. This finding may be attributed to the level of familiarity or awareness of the writers are regards to the inclusion of the enclosure in an application letter. With regard to the rhetorical moves, the Filipino graduating students considered 6 out of 9 moves as obligatory while the Thai graduating students considered 7 moves as obligatory and only 2 moves as optional.

Keywords: Physical Elements, Rhetorical Moves, Application Letters

1. Introduction

Landing a job after graduation is a common goal of fresh graduates. However, the employment is a tedious process specifically preparing the necessary documents. One important document required by employers is the job application letter. Henry and Roseberry (2001) defined job application letter as a type of communicative genre that aims to obtain an interview for a job; it highlights the most significant and relevant information of the employee's resume. In the context of the Philippines specifically in Iloilo City, graduating students start to submit their resume and application letters to schools, offices, and institutions a few a months before their graduation. Similarly, graduating students in Thailand prepare their documents for a possible employment in different institutions. They would even have an enhancement program to focus on writing a resume and application letter and doing the job interview.

Even with the importance and of application letters, there are still differences with regard to the application letter's contents and structure or what technical writers similarly call as "moves". Henry and Roseberry (2001) introducedthe term "moves" as the building blocks of a communicative genre or of an application letterin particular. To be more specific, they define the term "move" as "a text segment made of a bundle of linguistic features which give the segment a uniform orientation and signal the content of discourse in it." While an application letter must adhere to certain requirements for moves, this does not rule out the possibility of variances in moves between application letters. The content, which includes various types and quantities of material that should be included in the letter, may account for the variations or differences. Nahar (2013) stated that the differences may happen because of the content which has different types and numbers of information that should be written in the letter. Nahar (2013) added that the moves can also be different because of the applicants' lack of knowledge of how to arrange and complete the parts of the letter and what text segments containing different

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purposes for the appropriate moves. The changes may stem from the accuracy of the moves utilized or the sequence's unexpected placement in the order. It implies that while a text may have a particular genre due to the permanent sequence of moves it employs, it may actually have distinct moves if it was produced by different writers from different linguistic contexts.

This implication made by Nahar (2013) may stem from the idea of Kachru (1992) regarding the three concentric circles of World Englishes. Highlighting the outer and expanding circles of Kachru (1992), there is still a lack of studies in the context of Southeast Asian nations more specifically a comparative study between countries in the outer circle and the countries in the expanding circle. One latest study was conducted in 2017 still. It was a research by Thumnong and Tongpoon-Patanasorn (2017) which explored how the applicants from the 6 ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries employ structural moves in their application letters. These countries were Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, and Vietnam. Thumnong and Tongpoon-Patanasorn (2017) revealed 8 structural moves in the application letters of the respondents based on a coding scheme developed from the synthesis of their related studies. These were: (1) opening, (2) referring to the source of job information, (3) offering candidature, (4) promoting candidature, (5) enclosing documents, (6) encouraging further contact, (7) ending politely, and (8) closing. The investigation began to shed light on how ASEAN applicants organized their application letters.

With the dearth of the contextualized studies regarding the physical elements and rhetorical moves of writers or applicants in the outer and expanding circles of Kachru (1992), it is of great significance to contribute to this specific research gap in a specific genre of writing to provide further substantial evidences as how writers in the ASEAN region employ moves in their writing.

This contrastive rhetoric study focuses on the application letters written by writers from the outer circle and the expanding circle. The writers from the outer circle were the Filipino graduating students, and the writers in the expanding circle were the Thai graduating students. The physical elements and rhetorical moves were identified, compared, and analyzed. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What physical elements are present in the job application letters of Filipino and Thai graduating students?
2. How do the job application letters of Filipino and Thai graduating students differ in terms of the number of physical elements?
3. What are the rhetorical moves in the job application letters of Filipino and Thai graduating students?
4. Which rhetorical moves in the job application letters of Filipino and Thai graduating students?
are considered obligatory and optional?
5. How do the job application letters of Filipino and Thai graduating students differ in terms of their rhetorical moves?

1.2. Seven Physical Elements of an Application Letter

When applying for a job, a prospective employer's initial requirement is the applicant's application letter. It projects the employer's first impression of the application; hence, it must be free from errors and it must be complete. According to Washington University in St. Louis (2020), an application letter is a formal letter used for applying for a job. It has 7 parts. These are the 1) heading, which includes the applicant's name, email, phone number, and address; 2) the recipient's address containing the address of the one the letter is sent; 3) the salutation or the greeting; 4) the body which is the main content of the letter; 5) the complimentary close, which is a short and a polite remark that ends the letter; 6) the signature line; and 7) the enclosure. The enclosure written to signify that there is an attached document such as a resume. These 7 physical elements of an application letter is a requirement in business correspondence most especially in application letters Washington University in St. Louis (2020).

The current study considered these elements different from the moves identified in by Upton and Connor (2011) as these terms merely refer to the parts of the application letter. It is then important to identify these physical elements first to assure a substantial coding analysis of the moves using Upton and Connor's Coding Scheme (2011).

Below is the table illustrating the order of the seven elements of an application letter.

Table 1. Seven Physical Elements of an Application Letter by Washington University in St. Louis (2020)

1	Heading
2	Recipient's Address
3	Salutation or Greeting
4	Body
5	Complimentary Close
6	Signature Line
7	Enclosure

1.3 Upton and Connor's Coding Scheme for Application Letter

In order to explore the underlying general structure of research articles in terms of moves-and-steps for instructional reasons, Swales (as cited in Swales, 2017) originally created move analysis as a text analytical approach. To pinpoint the linguistic traits that

distinguish the various research articles' moves not just in the English language but also in other languages has been a goal shared by many analysts the study rhetorical moves. The paucity of multilingual corpora completely annotated for their distinctive communicative functions in a coordinated and trustworthy manner is one issue impeding this advancement Swales (2017).The seven-mode coding scheme of Upton and Connor (2001) has actually 2 modifications. This scheme was originally developed by Connor, Davis, and De Rycker (as cited in De la Rosa et al., 2015). These 2 move alterations from the original were an extension of Move 4 (originally, "Indicate desire for an interview.") and addition of a seventh move ("Reference attached resume.") from the initial total of six. In this modified version, Upton and Connor (2001) has these seven moves: Move 1 – Identify the source of information (This explains how and where the applicant learned about the hiring.); Move 2 – Apply for the position (State desire for consideration.); Move 3 – Provide argument, including supporting information about background and experience (3a – Implicit argument based on neutral evidence or information about background and experience; 3b – Argument based on what would be good for the hiring company; 3c – Argument based on what would be good for the applicant); Move 4 – Indicate desire for an interview or a desire for further contact, or specify means of further communication/ how to be contacted; Move 5 – Express politeness strategies (pleasantries) or appreciation at the end of the letter; Move 6 – Offer to provide more information; and Move 7 – Reference attached resume. With the 3 classifications in Move 3, there are a total of 9 moves in the modified version. Although the coding scheme of Upton and Connor (2001) is designed for an application and internship of students abroad, this current study adapted this coding scheme since the participants were also students. Additionally, this framework also deals with all the complete and updated rhetorical moves in writing application letters.

Table 2. Upton and Connor's Coding Scheme (2001)

1	Identify the source of information (Explain how and where you learned of the position).
2	Apply for the position (State desire for consideration).
3	Provide argument including supporting information for the job application.
	a. Implicit argument based on neutral evidence or information about background and experience
	b. Argument based on what would be good for the hiring company
	c. Argument based on what would be good for the applicant.
4	Indicate desire for an interview or a desire for further contact, or specify means of further communication/how to be contacted.
5	Express politeness, pleasantries, or appreciation at the end of the letter.
6	Offer to provide more information.
7	Reference attached resume.

2. Method

2.1 Study Corpus

The data analyzed in this study were composed of 2 sets of job applications letters. The first set of application letters included 15 letters written by Filipino graduating students from West Visayas State University. This set of corpus was considered a representation of the outer circle as identified by (Kachru, 1992) since the Philippines belongs to the outer circle. The researcher handled a subject with these Filipino graduating students. They wrote their application letters as part of their lesson. These application letters were considered raw which means there was no intervention yet of a lecture or a workshop about enhancing and improving application letters. The students wrote an application letter based on their prior knowledge about letter writing from their previous writing subjects. On the other hand, the second set of job application letters included 15 letters written by Thai graduating students from Royal Thai Army Nursing College. This set of corpus represented the expanding circle as identified by (Kachru, 1992) since Thailand belongs to the expanding circle. The researcher was invited to have an extensive four-week workshop with the graduating students of the said the institution to focus on writing a resume and an application letter and responding to job interviews. Similarly, their application letters were considered raw since they wrote them prior to the workshop as part of the diagnostic assessment.

2.2 Procedure

For the outer circle, there were 29 Filipino graduating students enrolled in the subject Special Topics 2; however, only 15 outputs were purposively selected. The application letters of Filipino graduating students were retrieved from Brightspace which is the Learning Management System (LMS) of West Visayas State University. For the expanding circle, there were a total of 48 Thai graduating students enrolled in the workshop,but only 15 outputs were purposively selected. These outputs were retrieved through Google Mail and/or Line which an online app used by Thais. Letters of permission and consent were also distributed and gathered. It was made known to the participants that the corpora will be handled with complete confidentiality. Furthermore, they were also informed that they may have a copy of the result if they deem it necessary.

2.3 Data Analysis

The 7 physical elements present in the job application letters of both groups were identified as represented through the number of occurrences or frequencies. This means that the simple manual frequency count was used to answer the first and the second research questions. With regard to the analysis of the move structures of the application letters, the coding scheme for application letters developed by Upton and Connor (2001) was adapted. To ensure the reliability of the coding analysis, the researcher asked the help of two seasoned English language teachers as inter coders. The researcher and the inter coders made sure to employ conscientious identification and categorization of the rhetorical moves used in the application letters written by Filipino and Thai graduating students. Another feature utilized in the analysis of the moves employed by the graduating students is the classification whether the move is considered obligatory or optional. Adapted from the study of De la Rosa et al. (2015), a move is considered obligatory if its percentage of occurrences is 60% above.This means that the move appeared at least once in 9 out of the 15 job application letters evaluated. On the other hand, a move is considered optional if its percentage of occurrences is below 60%. This isequivalent to 0-8 times of appearance among the 15 job application letters under the current research.

3. Results and Discussion

Applications letters written by Flipino and Thai graduating students have minimal differences with regard to their physical elements and the rhetorical moves they employed. These differences showed how each group followed the conventions of writing an application letter.

3.1 Physical Elements in the Application Letters of Filipino and Thai Graduating Students

To answer the first and second research questions, the physical elements of the application letters written by Filipino and Thai Graduating Students were identified and at the same time, their differences in terms of occurrences were analyzed. Table 3 shows the numerical data regarding the comparison of the physical elements in the application letters of Filipino and Thai graduating students.

Table 3. Comparison of the Physical Elements in the Application Letters of Filipino and Thai Graduating Students

APPLICATION LETTERS					
Physical Elements of Application Letters	Filipino Graduating Students	Percentage	Thai Graduating Students	Percentage	Difference in Percentage
Heading	2	13%	4	27%	14%
Recipient's Address	15	100%	15	100%	0%
Salutation	14	93%	11	73%	20%
Body	15	100%	15	100%	0%
Complimentary Close	15	100%	12	80%	20%
Signature	13	87%	11	73%	14%
Enclosures	0	0%	0	0%	0%

Out of the 7 physical elements of a job application letter by Washington University of St. Louis (2020), only 6 were included in letters written by both types of participants. These were heading, recipient's address, salutation, body, complimentary close, and signature. Noticeably, all the application letters of the Filipino graduating students began with a date while the majority of the application letters of the Thai graduating students started with a date. Only 2 entries or 13% from Filipino graduating students included the heading while there were 4 entries or 27% from the Thai graduating students that had the heading. This led to a 14% difference. The second element which is recipient's address is found in all application letters from both groups. This means that since 100% of the entries included the recipient's address, and there is no difference between the 2 groups. However, there is a quantitative difference as regards the use of salutation in their application letters. Out of the 15 job application letters of the Filipino graduating students, only 14 or 93% wrote the salutation. On the other hand, out of 15 job application letters of the Thai graduating students, only 11 had the salutation which is equivalent to 73%. This showed a difference of 20% between two groups. This result is also similar to the study of Lougheed (2003) with 97% of his participants included Salutation in their application letters. Lougheed (2003) added that when an applicant does not know the recipient's name, the applicantdoes not limit his or her writing to the phrase "Dear Sir" or "Ma'am". The applicant may write either Dear + recipient's position. The applicant may also choose the common phrase"To Whom It May Concern". This common phrase was actually evident in a number of entries from both groups of the current study. The body was found in all entries of both group. This constitutes a total of 100% for each group which led to 0% difference. This implies that the body may be the most important element of

the application letter since almost all of the moves structures can be found here. Doyle (2019) considered the body of the application letter as the meat of the text since without it, the whole document would be totally meaningless. The fifth element which is complimentary close was found in all application letters of the Filipino graduating students. This is equal to 100% percentage. Only 12 application letters of Thai graduating students or 80% included the complimentary close. With this, there was a difference of 20%. There were 13 application letters of Filipino graduating students that included the signature. This is equivalent to 87% while only 11 application letters of Thai graduating students or 73% included the signature. There was a difference of 14%. The last element which is enclosure was not found in the application letters in both Filipino and Thai graduating students. This lead to a record of 0% for both group gaining no difference at all. This may be attributed to the level of familiarity among the writers regarding this element. Both groups may not be aware of the existence of this element as this may not be often used or taught in their context. This conclusion may be supported or debunked by future researches as there is still a lack of ASEAN studies regarding this specific finding.

3.2 Rhetorical Moves in the Application Letters of Filipino and Thai Graduating Students

To analyze the moves in application letters written by Filipino and Thai graduating students, the coding scheme for job application letters developed by Upton and Connor (2001) was used as a basis. Each application letter from both groups was analyzed to identify the occurrence of the rhetorical moves. Afterwards, the moves from each group of job application letters were classified as either obligatory or optional. Then, the results of the 2 groups were compared.

3.2.1Rhetorical Moves in the Application Letters of Filipino Graduating Students

Table 4. Rhetorical Moves in the Job Application Letters of Filipino Graduating Students (FGS)

Filipino Graduating Students (FGS)	Rhetorical Moves in Application Letters								
	Move 1	Move 2	Move 3			Move 4	Move 5	Move 6	Move 7
			Move 3a	Move 3b	Move 3c				
FGS 1		1	1		1	1	1	1	
FGS 2	1	1	1	1		1	1	1	1
FGS 3		1	1		1	1	1	1	
FGS 4		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
FGS 5		1	1		1	1	1	1	
FGS 6		1	1	1		1	1	1	
FGS 7		1	1	1		1	1	1	
FGS 8	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		
FGS 9	1	1	1	1			1	1	
FGS 10		1	1			1	1	1	
FGS 11		1	1		1	1	1	1	
FGS 12		1	1	1			1	1	
FGS 13		1	1		1	1	1	1	
FGS 14		1	1	1	1	1	1		
FGS 15		1	1	1			1	1	
Total	**3**	**15**	**15**	**9**	**8**	**12**	**15**	**13**	**2**
Percentage	**20%**	**100%**	**100%**	**60%**	**53%**	**80%**	**100%**	**87%**	**13%**

Based on the results of the study, there were only 3 application letters from Filipino graduating students that employed Move 1 – *Identify the source of information*. With a percentage of 20%, this move was considered optional. This low percentage of Move 1-Identify The Source Of Information is in congruence with the findings of De la Rosa et al. (2015) which revealed that Filipino teachers' application letters minimally include Move 1-*The source of information* as it was considered an optional move with a percentage of only 40%. Filipino graduating students consider Move 2 as obligatory as all application letters or 100% included Move 2-*Apply for the position*. Move 3 is classified into three. However, only Move 3a-*Implicit argument based on neutral evidence or information about background and experience* and Move 3b-*Argument Based on what would be good for the hiring company* were considered obligatory.

Fifteen application letters (100%) were found to have Move 3a and 9 application letters (60%) had Move 3b. *Move 3c*

*Argument based on what would be good for the applicant*was considered optional as it was found in only 8 application letters (53%). There were 12 application letters with Move 4- I*ndicate desire for an interview or a desire for further contact, or specify means of further communication or how to be contacted*. This is equivalent to 80% of the total corpora for this group; hence, Move 4 was considered obligatory by Filipino graduating students. *Move 5-Express politeness, pleasantries, or appreciation at the end of the letter was* also considered obligatory as it obtained a percentage of 100%. This means that all application letters of this group included statements that highlight politeness, pleasantries, or appreciation. *Move 6- Offer to provide more information* was considered obligatory as 13 out of the 15 application letters (87%) included statements that offer to provide more information. Lastly, *Move 7-Reference attached resume* is found to have the least number of occurrences among the data from this group. Only 2 application letters or merely 13% employed this move. Therefore, it was considered optional.

3.2.2 Rhetorical Moves in the Application Letters of Thai Graduating Students

Table 5. Rhetorical Moves in the Application Letters of Thai Graduating Students (TGS)

Thai Graduating Students (TGS)	Rhetorical Moves in Application Letters								
	Move 1	Move 2	Move 3			Move 4	Move 5	Move 6	Move 7
			Move 3a	Move 3b	Move 3c				
TGS 1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
TGS 2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
TGS 3		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
TGS 4		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
TGS 5	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	
TGS 6	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
TGS 7	1	1	1	1		1	1	1	1
TGS 8		1	1		1	1	1	1	
TGS 9		1	1	1	1		1	1	
TGS 10	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
TGS 11		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
TGS 12	1	1	1	1			1	1	
TGS 13		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
TGS 14		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
TGS 15		1	1	1			1	1	1
Total	7	15	15	13	12	12	15	15	7
Percentage	47%	100%	100%	87%	80%	80%	100%	100%	47%

Similar to Filipino graduating students, Thai graduating students considered Move 1– *Identify the source of information as optional.* Only 7 application letters were found to have Move 1 which is equal to 47%. *Move 2 – Apply for the positio*n was also considered an obligatory move since all of their application letters indicated its occurrence. This is supported by the study of Connor (1995) which revealed that all application letters of German applicants (respondents) included *Move 2– Apply for the Position.* Although not in the ASEAN context, Germany is still included in the expanding circle together with Thailand (Kachru, 1992). Unlike the application letters written by Filipino graduating students, Thai graduating students considered all moves in Move 3 as obligatory. Move 3a-*Implicit argument based on neutral evidence or information about background and experience* was found in all application letters. This revealed a percentage of 100%. Move 3b-*Argument Based on what would be good for the hiring company* was found is 13 application letters which is equivalent to 87%. *Move 3c Argument based on what would be good for the applicant*was also considered obligatory as it was found in 12 application letters or 80% of the data. Move 4- I*ndicate desire for an interview or a desire for further contact, or specify means of further communication or how to be contacted*was another obligatory move as it covered 80% of the data or 12 out of the 15 application letters. *Move 5-Express politeness, pleasantries, or appreciation at the end of the letter and Move 6- Offer to provide more information* were also considered obligatory as each was found in all application letters of the group. However, a similar result from the Filipino graduating students was observed in this group as regards to *Move 7-Reference attached resume.* This move was also considered optional as it was seen in only 7 application letters which is equal to 47% of the total data.

4. Conclusion

The current study drew out quantitative findings from the data gathered and analyzed. It was revealed that only 6 out of the 7 physical elements by Washington University in St. Louis (2020) were found in the job application letters of the participants. These were the heading, recipient's address, salutation, body, complimentary close, and signature. Interestingly, both groups did not include the seventh element which is enclosure. The causality or the reasons regarding the differences of the elements may be further evidenced by related studies in the ASEAN context. In addition, out of the 9 rhetorical moves by Upton and Connor (2011), there were only 6 moves considered by Filipino graduating students as obligatory while Thai graduating students considered 7 moves as obligatory. It may be implied that this minimal difference may be due to the linguistic difference as each group belongs to a different circle. However, this result may find more substance and accuracy if compared with other studies having ASEAN as their context. Other studies may also have equal representations from each of the 3 concentric circles by Kachcru (1992).

Furthermore, this study may help student applicants to revisit the move structures of their application letter to suit their own context. The findings may also be beneficial to academic institutions as they can reinforce their lessons and subjects about technical writing specifically about writing application letters to achieve coherence, substance, and quality. At the same time, employers may also want to look into this study as basis of their expectation for the application letters by the applicants.

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