A Contrastive Genre Analysis Of Vietnamese And English Job Application Letters- A Pedagogical Implication For Teaching Business Correspondence

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Abstract:

Since the early 1980s, genre-analytic approach has been proved to be a useful tool for analyzing texts because it can help researchers, teachers or learners to understand the communicative purpose as well as the structure move of a text. In business settings, this approach becomes more effective in evaluating a discourse of business correspondence in terms of its move structure.

This article has been conducted to explore the differences in the move structures between English and Vietnamese job application letters on the basis of genre theory with a pedagogical implication of a feasible method for teaching and translating business correspondence.

Key Word: *job application letters, genre, communicative purpose, move structure.*

I.   Introduction

Since the development of 'new' genre theory (Swale, 1981; Martin, 1984; Myers 1990; Berkenkotter & Huckin,1995) initiated from the early 1980s, the genre-analytic approach has been applied by a number of linguists to explore the genre structure of a discourse for various purposes, and has proved to be an effective and powerful instrument for analyzing texts. In respect of business correspondence texts, some scholars (Bhatia,1993; Henry & Roseberry, 2001) have employed this approach to analyze this discourse, and they find that all letters which carry the same communicative purposes share the same genre such as persuasive, good-news, bad-news, or informational genres (Bhatia, 1993).

However, it should also be noted that because of the cultural differences among countries, even the same genre of a particular discourse may not share the same types of move. Bhatia (1993, p..69) claims that "in some contexts, dominant socio-cultural factors do influence a certain type of professional genre". Therefore, people in different countries may not produce the same move structure in their languages. For example, sales letters written in Vietnamese may be different in their move structure from English ones. And if such differences exist, it is the task of a teacher of business correspondence to make it clear to their students so that they can produce both their correspondence writings and translated versions appropriately.

In the light of genre theory, this essay has been conducted to reveal the differences between the move structure in English and Vietnamese job application letters with a pedagogical implication of a practical method for teaching writing and translating business correspondence texts.

II.   Genres And Their Communicative Purposes

Genres have been studied and provided with a variety of definitions, but all of which share a common view that they are considered as the best goal-directed or purposive instruments. For example, Martin (1985) acknowledges that genres indicate the way things are done and the type of language is used to complete them; Miller (1984) states that "*genres stabilize and mediate human interactions over time and also promote change*"; For Swales (1990), he focused on the function of communicative purpose, where he termed "genre" as "*a recognizable communicative event characterized by a set of communicative purpose(s) identified and mutually understood by the members of the professional or academic community in which it regularly occurs*". Sharing the view with Swales, Bhatia (1993) gives further explanation about this definition that genre is mainly realized by their "communicative purposes that it is intended to fulfill". He stresses that genre can be characterized by differences in layers of a text, comprising some *moves*, which can be understood as "*a text segment made up of a bundle of linguistic features*".(*Nwogu, 1997*).

In nature, analyzing the genre of a text is the exploration of the move structures and types of moves incorporated in a text. A move is determined by its communicative purpose of each segment in a text.

According to Swales (2004, p. 217) a 'move' is *"a discoursal or rhetorical unit that performs a coherent communicative function in a written or spoken discourse"*. Santos (1996) explained that a move is deemed as a genre stage carrying a particular communicative purpose serving the whole communicative purpose of the text. All such definitions help us to understand that a genre can be spoken or written texts, which carry a particular purpose in a social context, and consist of certain segments which are labeled as "moves". Some of the moves in a genre are obligatory, which means they are essential components to gain the communicative purpose of the genre. Other moves can be optional, which may be employed to make the communication more effective, but it does not affect the general communicative purpose of the text. Halliday & Hasan (1989) also added that each of these moves carries its own purpose and give good contribution to the implementation of the overall communicative purpose of the text.

In business settings, correspondence can be classified into some different genres such as the genre of *letters of request, sales, complaint, job application, resignation, goodwill…* and each type can be identified by its typical move structure. For example, for a sales letter, Bhatia (1993) discovers that it consists of 07 obligatory moves, each of which serves a particular communicative purpose, namely *(1) Establishing credentials; (2) Introducing the offer; (3) Offering incentives; (4) Enclosing documents; (5) Soliciting response; (6) Using pressure tactics; and (7) Ending politely.* (Bhatia, 1993:47-49)

The move structure of a job application letter

Bhatia (1993) claims that a job application letter belongs to a persuasive genre, which is composed by a job candidate, who describes his/her characteristics or personality supported by his/her enclosed CV or qualifications to persuade his/her employer for a job offer. Further information about the candidate's ability, experience, personality and so on have also been included in a job application letter with the aim of giving impressions to an employer. To gain this aim, this kind of letter is often presented in positive, confident and persuasive discourse.

Like other types of business letters, a job application letter can be characterized by its move structure, which has been suggested by some linguists (Bhatia, 1993; Henry & Roseberry, 2001; Hou, 2013; Nahar, 2013; Rahim & Arifin, 2014). Two most significant models of move structure are proposed by Bhatia (1993) and Henry & Roseberry (2001). Bhatia (1993), after gathering and analyzing a corpus of 200 English letters asking for job and scholarship produced by writers from four South Asian countries, found that the move structure of a job application letter contains 07 major moves namely 1) Establishing credentials, 2) Introducing candidate, 3) Offering incentives, 4) Enclosing documents, 5) Soliciting response, 6) Using pressure tactics, and 7) Ending politely. Henry & Roseberry (2001), after analyzing the corpus of English letters written by native speakers, they suggested a model of 11 moves (*see Table 1 below*).

However, some scholars also maintain that the move structure of a text can also be affected by socio-cultural factors. Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993) both claimed that a genre may vary subject to the factors of cultural and social environment in which it is in use, therefore various linguistic users in different contexts express their ideas in different ways when producing their texts. These viewpoints have given an opportunity to genre-based analysts to put cross-cultural knowledge into their consideration, and they did discover some differences in the use of strategies to reflect a move structure. This brings to a hypothesis that even English and Vietnamese job application letters may serve the same communicative purpose, their move structures may not be the same in respect of the number of moves, the function of each move (obligation or optional), or the use of modality and politeness strategies.

For the purpose of revealing the resemblances and dissimilarities in the move structure between Vietnamese and English job application letters, a corpus of 15 Vietnamese job application letters has been collected, for the purpose of analyzing their generic move structure. The data collected is then contrasted against the model of move structure of English letters, suggested by Henry & Roseberry (2001).

The move structure of a job application composed by English speakers noted by Henry & Roseberry is as follows:

Table 1 The model of move structure of English application letters by Henry and Roseberry (2001)

Move	Label	Communicative purpose
M1	Opening of a letter (obligatory)	Giving salutation
M2	Referring to a job advertisement (optional)	Stating to the source of job supply
M3	Offering candidate (obligatory)	Stating the candidate's attention/interest
M4	Stating the reason for writing (obligatory)	Expressing the wish for a job
M5	Stating the availability for an interview (optional)	Informing the time available for an interview
M6	Promoting the candidate (obligatory)	Indicating candidate's ability, capability, experience… for the job
M7	Describing the working terms and conditions (optional)	Suggesting the working terms and conditions

M8	Naming the referee (optional)	Persuading an employer
M9	Enclosing documents (obligatory)	Giving more evidence about a candidate's ability and qualifications.
M10	Polite ending (obligatory)	Creating goodwill
M11	Signing off (obligatory)	Ending a letter

Under this model, there are 11 moves, 04 of which are optional and the remaining 07 are obligatory.

III. Methodology

The method employed to conduct this essay is qualitative, in which a corpus of 15 Vietnamese job application letters (see the appendix) have been selected for contrastive analysis against Henry and Roseberry's model. These letters have been collected online from some recognized Vietnamese recruitment Agencies, such as *Vietnamwork, Carrerbulider, Vieclam123…* who create and design some Vietnamese application forms and put them online for those who are concerned. These letters have been incorporated in this study as the research corpus because they are in popular use by young candidates, and also because they are noted with their special linguistic features, which reflects the typical Vietnamese culture in business communication. The letters will be put into analysis concerning its move structure in comparison with the model suggested by Henry and Roseberry (2001) in order to discover the differences between two types of languages.

IV. Contrastive Analysis Procedure

The analysis procedure is conducted in the following steps:
Step 1: Identifying the communicative purpose of each move, work out the boundary border and label them.
Step 2: Define the type of move (obligatory or optional) by their occurrences
Step 3: Set up a table of results for contrastive analysis against English letters
Step 4: Identify the resemblance and dissimilarities between the structures and types of move in two languages
Step 5: Discuss and explain the results.

V. Results And Discussions

Following is a sample analysis of one authentic Vietnamese letter (https://vieclam123.vn/mau-thu-xin-viec). Each move will be labeled in accordance with Henry and Roseberry. The moves which do not carry Henry and Roseberry's communicative purposes will be left out for consideration.

Thưa Quý công ty (*Dear Sirs*) [M1]
Qua quảng cáo tìm vị trí trợ lý kinh doanh của quý công ti trên tờ Tuổi Trẻ (*From your advertisement for the post of sales assistant in the Youth newspaper*) [M2], tôi rất mong được làm việc tại quý công ty (*I would like to have an opportunity of working with you*) [M3] và tôi rất cảm kích việc quý công ty tạo điều kiện cho những ai muốn tìm kiếm một cơ hội làm việc hấp dẫn hơn, thử thách hơn và thú vị hơn. (*and I appreciate your making favorable conditions for whom they are looking for a more attractive, challenging and interesting job*) [New move 1]
Tôi viết thư này gửi đến quý công ty nhằm đề cử cho chính mình vào vị trí nhân viên kinh doanh mà công ti đang cần tuyển. (*I am writing to apply for the job of sales representative you wanted*) [M4]
Tôi xin gửi kèm theo đây bản lí lịch ghi rõ mọi thông tin cá nhân và kinh nghiệm của tôi để quý công ty tham khảo (I have enclosed my CV with my personal information and experience for your reference) [M9].
Tôi có 05 năm kinh nghiệm trong lĩnh vực phục vụ khách hàng và hiểu rõ mọi thông tin cần thiết trong lĩnh vực này. (*I have 05 years experience in customer service and have been well aware of necessary information in this business*) [M6] Vui lòng xem thư giới thiệu của doanh nghiệp đính kèm về năng lực làm việc của tôi. (*Please find a recommendation letter about my working capacity by my previous employer for your reference*) [M8]
Tôi là người năng động, tự tin, trách nhiệm và mong muốn có cơ hội phát triển nhiều hơn nữa trong lĩnh vực phục vụ khách hàng. (*I am dynamic, self-confident and highly accountable and wish to have more opportunity in working in customer service*) [M6]
Về trình độ vi tính mà quý công ty yêu cầu, tôi rất tiếc là chưa làm quen với phần mềm FRONTPAGE, và FLASH, tuy nhiên tôi tin rằng với nỗ lực và trình độ của mình, tôi sẽ nắm được cách sử dụng các ứng dụng này trong thời gian ngắn nhất (*With regard to the IT requirement, I regret that I have not worked with FRONTPAGE, and FLASH software. However, I trust that, with my effort and qualifications, I will be familiar with them in a shortest time*) .[New move 2]
Tôi cho rằng mình sẽ phù hợp với doanh nghiệp có môi trường kinh doanh năng động và quy định lương bổng phù hợp với năng lực bỏ ra. (*I think that I will be fit for your dynamic working environment with suitable policy in salary*). [M7]

Tôi mong rằng quý công ti sẽ chấp nhận nguyện vọng của tôi và tôi xin hứa nếu được vào làm sẽ thực hiện xuất sắc mọi công tác được giao. (*I hope you will find my wish acceptable and if so I will try to complete well all the work assigned*) [New move 3]

Tôi chân thành cảm ơn (*Thank you for your attention*) [M10] và kính chúc quý công ti làm ăn ngày càng thịnh vượng (*and wish your company every success*) .[New move 4]

Trân trọng kính chào (Yours faithfully) [M11]

Discussion:

- For new move 1: This wording is often laid out at the beginning of a letter, giving praises to employers with a communicative purpose of attracting attention from employers. This phenomenon is very common in Vietnam, where the congratulations and appreciations to readers are used to demonstrate writers' goodwill to readers. Bhatia (1993) called it *"Glorifying employers"*

- For new move 2: The communicative purpose of this move is to express writers' sincerity, honesty to call for concessions. Bhatia (1993) found that quite a few Asian candidates use this move as a strategy to persuade their employers for job recruitment. He named this move as Self-glorification, Adversary glorification or Self-degradation, which is an "*unsupported claim of the writer's own superiority based simply on feelings for desires rather than on national judgment*" (1993, p.70). Pham (2007) also claimed that for effective communication in correspondence, Vietnamese writers try to express their sincerity, or modesty which are considered as an important value to bring positive attitudes to readers. As a result, the label of ***Self-glorification*** should be given to this move.

- For new move 3: This move carries a purpose of giving a promise or commitment to a potential employer with an aim of winning an employer's confidence. This move is rather common in Vietnam where most traditional application letters call for a promise by the readers to demonstrate writers' determination to their long-term employment with their employers' business (Pham, 2007). Therefore, this move should be labeled as ***Demonstrating promises***.

New move 4: This move is often laid at the end of a letter with a purpose of creating a good relationship with readers by sending wishes. This strategy is often applied by Vietnamese writers especially in case they ask for a favor from readers (Pham, 2007). This move should be labeled as "***Conveying wishes***"

The following table will give examples and indicate the communicative purposes of the new moves discussed above.

Table 2 New moves in Vietnamese job application letters

New move	Example	Communicative purpose	New label
New move 1	*- I appreciate your offer of favorable conditions for whom they are looking for a more attractive, challenging and interesting job.(Letter1)* *- First, I would like to wish for your company always to be successful and more prosperous. (Letter 3)*	Praising employers to attract attention	Glorifying employers
New move 2	*- With regard to the IT requirement, I regret that I have not worked with FRONTPAGE, and FLASH software. However, I trust that, with my effort and qualifications, I will be familiar with them in a shortest time"* (Letter 1) *- Regarding the experience of working in the field of team management that you requested, I regret not having done this, however, I believe that, with my qualifications and efforts, I will soon adapt to the requirements. his request. (Letter 5)*	Indicating honesty or sincerity	adversary glorification
New move 3	*- If accepted, I promise to contribute my best to the success of your company. (Letter 9)* *- If I get a job, I will always try to be humble, actively study, and come up with many initiatives to bring development to the company. Give me a chance and I'll bring you a surprise. (Letter 15)*	Giving promises, commitments	Demonstrating commitment
New move 4	*- Finally, I wish your company all success in your business.(Letter 14)* *- Wish your company always develop (Letter 15)*	Creating good relationship	Conveying wishes

On the basis of the data analyzed, and the occurrence of new moves, we have the following table, specifying the differences between Vietnamese and English job letters concerning their type of moves:

Table 3: The differences in a move structure between Vietnamese and English job application letters

Move	Label	Number of move in Vietnamese letters: (N=15)	Frequency (N=15%)	Type of move in Vietnamese letters	Type of move in English letters (Suggested by Henry and Roseberry, 2001)
M1	Opening (Salutation)	15	100%	Obligatory	Obligatory

M2 (New move)	Glorifying employers	9	60%	Optional	Φ
M3	Job advertisement	10	67%	Optional	Optional
M4	Offering candidate	15	100%	Obligatory	Obligatory
M5	Stating the reason for writing	14	93%	Obligatory	Obligatory
M6	Stating the availability for an interview	10	67%	Optional	Optional
M7	Promoting the candidate	15	100%	Obligatory	Obligatory
* **M8** (New move)	Adversary glorification	5	33%	Optional	Φ
M9	Describing working terms and conditions	4	27%	Optional	Optional
M10	Naming the referee	2	13%	Optional	Optional
M11	Enclosing documents	7	47%	Optional	Optional
* **M12** (New move)	Demonstrating commitment	7	47%	Optional	Φ
M13	Polite ending	15	100%	Obligatory	Obligatory
* **M14** (New move)	Conveying wishes	5	33%	Optional	Φ
M15	Signing off	15	100%	Obligatory	Obligatory

(Note: The mark Φ means not available)

The above table has indicated the following differences:
- Against 11 moves in English letters, Vietnamese ones consist of 15 moves. (04 new moves have been added)
- Of the total 15 moves in Vietnamese letters, 07 of which are obligatory- the same number with English letters, and the balance of 08 moves are optional in Vietnamese letters, while this number in English is 04.

Discussion

        The dissimilarity in the number and types of move (obligatory or optional) between English and Vietnamese job application letters above can be seen as a result of the differences in communicative purpose between Western and Eastern cultures. According to Laurent, A. (1986), in European countries, employers often justify their candidate subject ot their abilities or capacity which are closely related to the job offer. This is why English letters tend to be written in a linear style, pointing out all factors directly connected to the job offer in order to meet this communicative purpose. On the contrary, Asian employers, when justifying their candidates, give more priority to their candidates' values such as loyalty, sincerity, honesty…to see if they can be loyal or faithful enough to their companies (Möller, K., & Svahn, S., 2004). This is why Vietnamese letters tend to be longer in accordance with circular thinking which indicates candidates' willingness, positive attitudes, or sincerity to meet such a communicative purpose.

VI.   Pedagogical Implications

        In view of the above-mentioned result, the following pedagogical method for teaching writing and translating business correspondence.

First, for writing a business letter in both L1 or L2, teachers should perform the following tasks:
- familiarize students with the textual genre
- help students identify the move structure of the textual genre.
- explain the move types (obligatory or optional)
- provide students with conventionalized expressions to build a move
- help students to produce the whole text.

        To make their students familiar with the textual genre, teachers should give their students sample letters of a particular genre so that they can be enlightened about a letter layout, structure and linguistic features. Then, teachers should help them to identify the communicative purpose of the whole text, as well as that of each move in the letter so that they can grasp a model of a move structure. Then teachers should provide them with necessary conventionalized expressions which will help them to build up a move. Finally, students should be given a similar communicative case so that they can practice their own writings. The practice of writing a business letter in this way will make it easy for them to produce correct full letters.

Second, to apply the genre-based approach in teaching translation, the following tasks should be done by teachers.

- explain the models of a move structure of both source and target texts.
- point out the differences between two models.(in the number of moves, types of move)
- remove any move in the source texts not relevant in the target texts.
- add any move, which is obligatory and missing in the source text, into the target text.
- provide students with necessary conventionalized expressions in the target language to produce a translated version.

For example, when translating a Vietnamese job application letter into English, if any of the four moves discussed above (Glorifying employer, Adversary glorification, Stating commitment or Conveying wishes) occur in Vietnamese version, such move(s) should be removed because it is inappropriate in the English genre. In this case, the translation of such moves into English will no doubt create an ineffective version, because Western readers will find it unfamiliar and unconventional in their communication.

VII.   Conclusion

This current research has been done to explore the resemblances and dissimilarities in a move structure between English and Vietnamese job application letters under genre theory and give some suggestions to the application of the genre-based approach for teaching business correspondence. It is acknowledged that this approach has proved to be most helpful in researching and teaching genres within the sphere of language for specific purposes, especially in the case of teaching and translating business correspondence in both L1 and L2.

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