

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Contrastive Rhetorical Analysis of Business Undergraduates' Sales Email Structure

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ABSTRACT – Understanding the differences in communication styles is becoming increasingly important in business communication as more companies expand their operations to include local and international operations. The purpose of this article is to compare the structural moves employed in the Singaporean and Malaysian promotional genres from the standpoint of moves analysis and comparison. Argument arises on the similarity and dissimilarity of business discourses involving the features of genres between these two neighbouring countries. As a result, a structural linguistics analysis was conducted in order to investigate the variations in communicative purposes as well as the lexical frequency of the sales emails that were written. The comparison between Singaporean sales promotional letter and Malaysian sales emails moves is based on Bhatia's (1993) Singaporean sales promotional letter moves. According to Bhatia's sales letter framework, there are seven moves, whereas in this study, seven moves were identified in Sales Inquiry Emails and nine moves were identified in Sales Reply Emails. Furthermore, Bhatia (1993) classified the moves into two categories: those that were required and those that were optional, based on their frequency of appearance in the text. In terms of communicative patterns, the similarities and differences between the two texts and their respective contexts were discovered. The difference between Singaporean and Malaysian languages, for example, can be explained by the fact that the distribution and sequence of moves differ between the two languages.

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INTRODUCTION

Recent business discourse researches are frequently associated with Bhatia's (1993) sales promotional letter model, which applied moves description analysis on Singaporean sales letters as the research's base. Among other examples of the foundation of Bhatia's (1993) framework are Chaidet and Pupipat (2021) who adopted Bhatia's (1993) to analyse personal care product written online, Fatima et. al. (2021) applied Bhatia (1993) in analysing Pakistan dental brochures, and Singh (2014) who adopted the methodology in analysing engineering work procedures.

The study conducted by Singh (2014) focused on a genre-specific corpus analysis of composing work methodology among engineers in the petroleum industry in Malaysia in order to address certain issues related to the needs and challenges faced by the engineers. The study was essentially focused on the importance of written linguistic requirement and its structural deployment by the engineers. She investigated on the moves used, the frequency of the moves and the structural analysis of the identified linguistic features (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990) by using a combination of random and non-random samplings.

The variations of adaptations in the sales promotion moves into other fields such as tourism, medical and engineering proves the framework is versatile and effective to be adopted in other familiar niches for example business and entrepreneurship, information and technology, as well as research and innovation. Kristina, Aziz and Hariharan (2017) illustrated the multi-dimensional and multi perspective model of analysis focusing on textual, socio-cognitive and ethnographic aspects of Indonesian promotional texts as a contrast to the direct style observed by Bhatia (2004). This is also the model that initiated the present research. Among the most significant difference between these two e-mails styles is the non-utilisation of pressure tactic moves in Indonesian letter. Rather, they used the move of eliciting response which is less direct compared to that of Bhatia's (2004) version.

The purpose of this study is to examine how the schematic structures used in sales emails from two countries differ and to assess the consistency of email conventions across professional sales emails. Using Bhatia's (1993) moves on Singaporean promotional letters, points of difference and similarity were investigated with special attention paid to the corpora of entrepreneurship emails developed by the current researchers. The researchers applied the results of manually tagged moves to different parallel moves adopted from Bhatia (1993) as indicative of regularity in the specific moves and steps, but there were some specific variations in their occurrence.

The above beginnings might in a way indicate a difference in way of command as the Singaporean letter speaks to the point while the Indonesian mentions something seemingly more indirect to initiate response. However, this perception may not be sufficient to explain the differences that the Malaysian sales emails have although they are neighbouring at border. Hence, there may be other notable differences between Singaporean and Malaysian sales letters that extend

beyond the scope of Bhatia's (1993) model, prompting the author to look at additional relevant literature for a more thorough analysis. This paper elaborates a contrastive research on schematic or rhetorical structures in Singaporean and Malaysian sales email.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Corpus and Moves Analysis

With the growing trends of using computer and technology in storing information, processing data and analysing records, corpus linguistics has been a frequent research topic for the past 30 years. The massive popularity gained by corpus is significant because a large and carefully compiled database of learner's language is going to be a beneficial source for anyone who is interested to know how language is acquired, and how the students can be directed to a positive learning experience. This research is established within the perspectives of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) focusing on corpus development context for language learners.

Within ESP, there are wide divisions and extensive branches of ESP, in which it can be considered that there is a greater communicative functions and abilities that should be highlighted and taught in the classroom in order to accommodate the variations and specific areas of ESP. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) regarded ESP as a method of teaching languages in which the goals of the student are taken into consideration at every stage of the process. This view is actually aligned to the perspective of learner corpora by Pravec (2002) who mentioned learner corpora is crucial because it allows for a deviation from the norm to occur and aids researchers to examine theoretical or pedagogical concerns, while educators can address student needs. Significantly, the definition highlights the relation of learner corpora in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approach for an equitable interpretation.

While there are many studies on corpus that have been focusing on moves analysis, the hot pick of the studies is mostly on research articles. Among the parts of research article that were analysed by various researchers are the abstract (Alharbi, 2021; Kosasih, 2018; Noorizadeh-Honami & Chalak, 2018), the introduction (Afrizon et. al., 2019), the result and discussion section (Suherdi et. al., 2020; Lubis, 2019) and the reviewers' reports (Sakran et. al., 2019).

In order to write effective letters that can be considered as having standardised structures in other countries, it is necessary to understand business communication principles, particularly appropriate rhetorical structures specific to that particular country. For the current research, move investigation is chosen for its capacity to perceive distributional patterns of students' sentence structures. Move examination as indicated by Muangsamai (2018) is a method for examining the relationship between a particular type of text and its surrounding context. It is accomplished by breaking down the text into small semantic units known as moves. A variety of communicative goals are shared among community members during each move, and this is reflected in the language used to carry out specific functions during each movement. The combination of moves reveals structural patterns of rhetorical discourse, as well as the sequence in which they are used in relation to the author's communicative objectives. Numerous researchers utilised the terms 'genre analysis' and 'move analysis' reciprocally in their writing.

But, a question arises whether there is any distinction in their definitions and utilisations. For instance, Nodoushan, (2014) noted that lately some researchers published studies in which the findings of genre-/movie-based text analysis investigations were applied to the teaching of writing in the classroom. In the context of this current research, however, the genre will be utilised as reference to more particular elements than those presented previously. The explanation behind this is that the composed assignments written by the undergraduates regularly require a specific form of a text. If a student, for instance, is requested to compose an email or a letter to a director of a company, there is substantially less space for variation than if the student is requested to write in more loosely characterised genres, for example, article or fiction. Nonetheless, comprehending the contrast between a genre and a text type may profit an author by having full control on both goal of a text and language chosen.

Nevertheless, Bhatia (1993), reflected on the interpretation of 'move' as "(it) serves a typical communicative intention which is always subservient to the overall communicative purpose of the genre" (p.75). While Upton and Cohen (2009) in their exploration specified move investigation as the analysis of texts in terms of the functional or communicative structures that typically make up texts in a genre.

Bhatia's (1993) sales promotional letter writing

Bhatia (1993) in his book entitled "Analysing genre: Language use in professional settings," began his analysis of sales promotion letter by describing its communicative purposes. This is done to ensure the genre to be identified accordingly; based on the moves that the writer utilised in the letter. In a much later chapter of the book, Bhatia (1995) also discussed on the development of genre-based approach of Business and Technology, while relating it to the teaching of English language as a second language course for special purposes (ESL / ESP). In his study on the moves, he found that there are seven similar structure interpretations in sales promotion letter (Table 1):

Table 1. Bhatia's (1993) sales promotion letter moves.

Moves	Explanation
1. Establishing credentials	Indicate the effort of impressing the customers with the company's reputation
2. Introducing the offer	
(i) Offering the product or service	Describe the service/ product
(ii) Essential detailing of the offer	What it consists of/ The price/ Benefits
(iii) Indicating value of the offer	Relate it to customer needs
3. Offering incentives	Offer attractive bargains such as discount
4. Enclosing documents	Brochures, leaflets, pamphlets
5. Soliciting response	Initiating/ strengthening business relations
6. Using pressure tactics	Limited offer for half-inclined customers
7. Ending politely	Relational/ Situational ending

There are quite a few studies that utilised Bhatia's (1993) sales promotional letter framework but deviated a little bit in terms of the genres. A study by Shaw and Okamura (1998) on letter of journal submission used this framework and they found out that the letter of submission generally follows the canonical forms of sales letter. The framework was also adopted in analysing scam or fraud letters. Budge (2006) analysed 50 Nigerian scam letters and contrasted them with Bhatia's (1993) sales promotional letter moves in order to find out the significant differences among these two types of genres.

Bhatia (1993) in his analysis of these two types of text, proposed that the communicative purpose of job applications and sales promotion letters is to advertise or to promote. Later, Bhatia (2014) further mentioned that this structure can be extended to the non-promotional content such as "job advertisements and academic introductions" (p. 100). Whereas, these types of correspondence are similar to letter of reference or testimonial that exhibits positive evaluation on the candidate's criterion and background. Thus, promotion genre should not be limitedly viewed as only applicable on sales and purchase correspondence but has a close relation to other genre colonies which include book blurbs and advertisements.

Drori et. al. (2013) further elaborated, promotion does not only concern on product and service, ideas, issues and reports that have marketable values, as attention-grabber language is also common promotional concern. This is especially true when it comes to other unfamiliar genres for example fundraising letters, grant proposals and public campaigns, which on the surface is irrelevant to promotional genre. Bhatia (2014) further touched on that various distinct genres may not appear to be ads in the traditional sense, but they do have a strong promotional concern.

While these genres have been widely studied using quantitative methods from both semantical and syntactical viewpoints, research examining business discourse through generical analysis is limited (Bhatia, 1993). Not only there is dearth of genre specific research in Malaysia, for foreign language students, learning to write in foreign language is already a challenging task (Che Awang et. al, 2021; Luu, 2011), even more having to complete a genre-based writing task. Thus, aside from the lack of command of the language, the undergraduates' unfamiliarity with generic conventions and the expectations of the audience or discourse community are two major factors that may render the sales correspondence ineffective.

They later contributed to the concern that new hires who were unfamiliar with domains (for example, discourse community knowledge – which in most workplaces would include information and understanding about the company) are unlikely to be successful writers (Hollis-Turner & Scholtz, 2010).

Moreover, Osman (2013) shared her perspective that there is probability that these educators are not familiar with the specific genre that the business and entrepreneurship utilised within their field or context. They must be aware of the specialist meanings and the genre-specific restricted values of the professional genres they are teaching in order to be confident in their ability to handle the specialist genres they are teaching in the classroom (Osman, 2013).

Hence, this is what the current study focuses on, to have a contrastive rhetorical analysis on the text and context of business correspondence which are the essence of genre that can aid in the teaching and learning of ESP in Malaysia. Thus, we have collected data from our students' assignment from English for Business, which the students submitted online and compared the moves used in their writing to Bhatia's (1993) promotional sales letter moves. This research study investigates the moves in the entrepreneurial students' writing. More specifically, it addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the significant differences between Bhatia's (1993) sales promotional letter moves and the undergraduates' sales inquiry emails moves?
2. What are the significant differences between Bhatia's (1993) sales promotional letter moves and the undergraduates' sales reply emails moves?

METHODOLOGY

When it comes to this section, the research falls under the mixed method approach, with qualitative methodology being used to analyse and explain the definition of the moves. This method which amalgamates qualitative and quantitative components, is intended to expand and strengthen a study's findings, as well as to contribute to the published literature as a result of the combined findings. In calculating the frequency and percentage of obligatory and non-obligatory moves, the quantitative method was used, while to analyse the moves and comparing them to Bhatia's (1993) moves, qualitative method was applied.

Participants

This research used purposive sampling throughout, as Creswell and Clark (2018) noted that purposive sampling deals with the selection of individuals or groups of individuals who are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest. The data used for this research were sales emails collected from the first year Degree students who have enrolled in Business English class and undergone at least two semesters in Universiti Malaysia Kelantan. All of them have enrolled in Business English class or the subject code name is English II, which is a required course for them to complete before registering themselves in English III class in the following semester.

Research Material

The research materials of the study were 89 emails' scripts collected from eCampus application with 39 students who chose to write Sales Inquiry Emails (SIE) while the rest chose to write Sales Reply Emails (SRE).

Data Collection Procedures

In Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, English II is taught at all three campuses, Bachok, Jeli, and Pengkalan Chepa. Thus, data were obtained from all three campuses and organised according to the campuses where English II is taught. It is necessary for students to complete an email assignment which took place in three parts:

1. Discussion of the homework question in Week 2.
2. Submission of the first draft in Week 8.
3. Due date for assignment submission in Week 11.

The students were required to choose only one out of the two questions where they were asked to write an email as part of the assignment. Their responses should be between 250 and 300 words in length, and written in the proper email format. Students were needed to write a sales inquiry email for Question 1, and they were asked to create a sales reply email for Question 2. The assignments were submitted online through a portal known as e-Campus, and the analysis was developed from them. A hardcopy and a softcopy of the assignment were required to be submitted to the lecturers by the students in order for them to receive credit. The researcher then aggregated all of the assignments and analysed their writing to see if there is some kind of pattern emerging.

DATA ANALYSIS

It has traditionally been the practice of ESP researchers to do careful readings of content with the use of linguistic keys in order to identify moves and steps. Researchers use the move framework to identify and code moves while they do their research. The findings of movement analysis have been successfully applied to the development of instructional and learning resources.

The particular moves in both texts; Sales Reply email and Sales Inquiry email were tagged and later, categorised individually. The researchers identified the rhetorical components in the texts of the corpus, tagging each element for frequency analysis and analysing the occurrences of the sales promotion moves in the sales emails. The email structure, on the other hand, is manually analysed and hand tagged before comparing it to Bhatia's (1993) framework. The structural analysis is vital as it was used to compare and contrast Bhatia's (1993) methodology of writing sales promotion letters.

In order to tag the moves according to specific rhetorical moves, a pre-designed coding scheme was developed and used as operational criteria to provide control for possible variations of coding and to make move identification possible for reliability assessment (Kanoksilapatham, 2003). The coding schemes used for the move analysis was generated by identifying the corresponding core components and the general structure of the sentences in the core components based on Bhatia's (1993) sales promotional model. The moves found were identified as M1, M2 and further while the texts were also coded as SIE for Sales Inquiry Email and SRE for Sales Reply Emails thus the analysis will have SIE1, SIE2, SRE1 and SRE2 marked to indicate the difference. These moves found were given appropriate heading for example M1 in SIE means Designation while M1 in SRE is to indicate interest. The difference in the headings compared to Bhatia's (1993) moves heading are due to the nature of the text (i.e. Reply or Inquiry) and also because of cultural variations in writing.

The errors in students' writing were left unedited. It was necessary to rely upon the original and general structure of the sentences to assign the moves identified as some sentences in different core components reflect a separate move from the one assigned to the component. For example, the following excerpts taken from SIE13 and SIE37 are both reflecting the use of M3 to indicate Incentives despite the difference in the vocabulary chosen:

SIE13 - Next, I would ask for the price list and if you do not mind, I also want to ask about the information pertaining to discounts and credit payment options too. (M3)

SIE37 - Furthermore, about the payment, it is easier to us for using credit payment rather than cash money (M3).

For the purpose of this research, the coding schemes were designed individually for different types of sales email and the variety of moves present in the texts. Some of the coding schemes used for the moves had been further expanded into sub-moves in order to allow appropriate identification of the communicative function of the main moves, for instance M3.1 in the excerpt below is the sub-moves to M3 (responding to the request) where the customer asked for more details of the information;

Firstly, our program will be held on July 2, 2017 and what bring a good news is that are on Sunday, our days off. The program will be start from 9am until 3pm and the venue are at Azalea Room, NAHZ Hotel, Melaka (M3.1).

Guided by the pre-designed coding scheme, each move was marked using the brackets, ‘()’ for opening and closing the tag. For instance (M1), (M2) and so forth. The next section provides results of comparing and contrasting the discourse structures of the two neighbouring countries’ sales correspondences.

Bhatia’s structure of sales promotional letter was applied to the 89 sales promotional emails in the current corpus. To measure the reliability of the moves found in the emails, the data was rated by two credible raters. The first rater is a well experienced lecturer in entrepreneurship university and a PhD holder in Applied Linguistics. The second rater has been teaching the subject for 8 years and has vast experiences in the structure of the undergraduate writing.

In the beginning, a sample of 30 emails was evaluated to ensure a high coefficient of interrater measurement. Two trained researchers worked separately on the agreement of moves identification in their copies of the sample. Their agreement and disagreement were analysed using Cohen’s kappa which is a statistical coefficient that represents the degree of accuracy and reliability. It measures the agreement between the raters who each classify items into mutually exclusive categories. In Table 2 below, Cohen’s kappa interpretation by Landis and Koch (1977) was presented.

Table 2. Cohen’s kappa interpretation (Landis & Koch, 1977).

Rating	Interpretation
0.01 – 0.20	Slight agreement
0.21 – 0.40	Fair agreement
0.41 – 0.60	Moderate agreement
0.61 – 0.80	Substantial agreement
0.81 – 1.00	Almost perfect or perfect agreement

Following the negotiation of differences in the analysis and finalisation of the structure, another 30 samples of email were analysed to test the level of agreement among the raters. After all the discrepancies were negotiated, the other 29 sales emails were put to analysis. Each occurrence of a particular appeal in the emails was identified, coded, and then, manually counted. Lastly, the rated data was analysed using Cohen’s kappa interrater calculation. The result of Cohen’s kappa analysis for the inter-rater agreement levels of this thesis is as summarised by Table 3 below:

Table 3. The result of Cohen’s kappa analysis.

Percentage of agreement	100%
Cohen’s kappa	1
Level of agreement	Perfect agreement

The high level of kappa value is the evidence that the two raters were conceptualising similar moves to similar texts thus reflecting a high level of agreement. The raters agreed to exclude one move and gave suggestion for improvement. Clear instruction and keywords provided to identify moves helped raters to analyse moves found clearly and achieved perfect agreement. Kanoksilapatham (2003) mentioned, a high level of agreement between the raters suggest that there is a significant control over the rating process and that there exist a clear construct of the moves and rating schemes used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data were analysed after a comparison to Bhatia’s (1993) sales promotional letter was made. The results are presented here in frequency. The analysis reveals that most of the emails reflect the influence of the sales letter structure of a promotional genre. The types and codes of moves occurring in the Sales Inquiry Emails are shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4. The Malaysian sales inquiry emails (SIE) moves.

Code of SIE moves	Types of moves
M1: Designation	Indicate designation to establish trust and respect.
M2: Purpose	
• M2.1	Introduce the purpose of writing the email.
• M2.2	Provide essential detailing of product of interest.
• M2.3	Show initiative of getting the info about the company and the product.
M3: Incentives	Inquire for incentives: discount or after-sales service that should come with the product/ service offered.
M4: Inquiry	Inquiry for extra detailing: brochure/ flyers/ payment info
M5: Networking	Solicit further networking: future connection
M6: Pressure	Pressure tactics
M7: Polite ending	Ending politely.

Note. From “Developing a Corpus of Entrepreneurship Emails (COREnE) for Business Courses in Malaysian University Using Integrated Moves Approach” by B. Shauki and M. Singh, 2022, *Sains Humanika*, 14(1), p. 5 (<https://doi.org/10.11113/sh.v14n1.1885>). Adapted with permission.

A total of 7 moves were identified throughout all 39 Sales Inquiry Emails (SIE) following Bhatia’s (1993) approach of sales promotional letter moves Table 2. Two of the moves; M4 and M5 were found in all emails with 100% occurrences meaning the moves occur in all 39 emails without failure. Nonetheless, despite some common writing conventions in business structure applied, some moves discover diversity in some rhetorical genres. Most of the moves in SIE are similar to the sales promotional structure introduced by Bhatia (1993) except for a few, for example most of Malaysian ESL writers tend to compose sales reply emails by giving highlights on product detailing.

Moreover, the students tend not to state their credentials which is different than Singaporean letters where establishing credentials is considered as the way to capture customer’s attention and can be achieved successfully using ‘we’ orientation.

On the other hand, Move 6 which is pressure tactics is highly frequent in the undergraduates’ writing. This is similar to the Singaporean sales letter that deemed the tactic as rewarding especially for the half-inclined customers on deciding to purchase the product or service offered. Nonetheless, this finding is in contrast to another study by Rahim and Arifin (2014) which found that pressure tactics are uncommon in Malaysian setting especially in job application letters due to politeness and respect. This is also supported by a study on sales promotion letters of *batik* company in Indonesia by Kristina (2014) which mentioned that because of cultural constraints, the moves of using pressure tactics were not incorporated in the company’s sales promotion letters.

The percentage of occurrences recorded by M6 (pressure tactics) is 89.74% (35) throughout the analysis. For this particular move, such prompt is used to put pressure for the company to take swift decision regarding the inquiry. Taking into account that an inquiry email is made following the customer’s interest in the product, M6 usually comes right after the incentives are offered. According to Budge (2006) in sales promotional letter, this functional move is supposed to work as a push for the customer who has already decided to buy whatever the sender is offering. Although by definition, this move might be irrelevant in sales inquiry, it is needed when the sender wants immediate attention on their inquiry. Pressure tactics usually occur towards the end of rhetoric of sales emails. Below are the excerpts taken from the samples:

SIE13: Lastly, I would really appreciate if we could go for a visit to the company for further details.

SIE17: I hope that you can take a visit to my company to meet and greet and also to know each other more.

Table 5. The Malaysian sales reply emails (SRE) moves.

Code of SRE Moves	Types of moves
M1: Addressing interest	Addressing customer's interest in the product.
M2: Establishing credentials	Establishing company's credentials
M3: Responding to the request	Responding to customer's requests.
• M3.1	• Providing essential detailing.
• M3.2	• Indicating value of the offer.
M4: Incentive	Offering incentives.
M5: Attachment	Including methods of payment.
M6: Networking	Soliciting networking
M7: Product/ service credentials	Establishing credentials of the product.
M8: Pressure tactics	Using pressure tactics.
M9: Polite ending	Ending politely.

Note. From “Developing a Corpus of Entrepreneurship Emails (COREnE) for Business Courses in Malaysian University Using Integrated Moves Approach” by B. Shauki and M. Singh, 2022, *Sains Humanika*, 14(1), p. 5 (<https://doi.org/10.11113/sh.v14n1.1885>). Adapted with permission.

Nonetheless, a total of 9 moves (Table 5) were identified in 50 Sales Reply Emails (SRE) following Bhatia's (1993) approach of sales promotional letter moves (Table 1). Most of the moves are similar to the sales promotional structure introduced by Bhatia (1993) except for the moves that particularly present in the nature of reply genre.

Only one move; M3.1 which is providing essential detailing of the product/ service were found in every email with 100% (50) occurrences. Move 3.1 refers to the response made by the sender upon request of information made by the customer. Bhatia (1993) divulged that this move is the most fundamental part of the sales effort. This move is regarded as obligatory in the sales promotional genre where the company introduces their product or service to the customer. Thus, in sales reply genre, responding to the customer's request shares the same principle. This move is divided into two; which are M3.1 providing essential detailing of the product or service and M3.2 indicating the value of the offer. M3.1 achieved 100% (50) percentage while M3.2 achieved 78% (39) for the move application. The example below illustrated the respective move:

M3.1

SRE6: The program will be start from 9am until 3pm and the venue are at Azalea Room, NAHZ Hotel, Melaka.

SRE7: Firstly, the date of the workshop is on July 2, 2017 (Sunday) on 9.00 am – 3.00pm.

The Obligatory and Non-obligatory Moves of SRE and SIE

In order to identify a more in-depth frequency of the moves used, table of frequency is provided below together with the discussion on the significant difference that some moves have as compared to Bhatia's (1993) sales promotional letter moves. Other than using the percentage for frequency, the moves will also be labelled with obligatory and non-obligatory moves following discussion by Bhatia (1993) and also the percentage its recorded from the students' writing.

- Obligatory move: If a particular move occurred in each and every sales email in the corpus (100%) or the percentage is higher than (80%), it would be labelled obligatory.
- Non-obligatory move: If a particular move occurred less frequently in sales email in the corpus with the percentage is lower than (80%), it would be labelled non- obligatory.

The moves analysed from SRE and SIE are broken down to its respective frequency and percentage as shown in Table 6 and Table 7:

Table 6. The frequency of SIE moves.

SIE Moves	Percentage
M1	89.74%
M2	
• M2.1	87.17%
• M2.2	66.66%
• M2.3	79.48%
M3	89.74%
M4	100%
M5	100%
M6	89.74
M7	74.35%

Note. From “Developing a Corpus of Entrepreneurship Emails (COREnE) for Business Courses in Malaysian University Using Integrated Moves Approach” by B. Shauki and M. Singh, 2022, *Sains Humanika*, 14(1), p. 6 (<https://doi.org/10.11113/sh.v14n1.1885>). Adapted with permission.

Table 7. The frequency of SRE moves.

SRE Moves	Percentage
M1	86%
M2	56%
M3	
• M3.1	100%
• M3.2	98%
M4	94%
M5	94%
M6	24%
M7	98%
M8	72%
M9	78%

Note. From “Developing a Corpus of Entrepreneurship Emails (COREnE) for Business Courses in Malaysian University Using Integrated Moves Approach” by B. Shauki and M. Singh, 2022, *Sains Humanika*, 14(1), p. 6 (<https://doi.org/10.11113/sh.v14n1.1885>). Adapted with permission.

The results show that most of the sales emails followed similar move sequence as Bhatia’s (1993) sales promotional letter moves but there was a significant difference in the frequency of moves in relation to disciplinary characteristics. For instance, Bhatia (1993) considers establishing credentials as an obligatory move for most companies when writing to their customers. However, only 89.74% utilised the move in SIE and even lower percentage (56%) in SRE.

Nonetheless, as further analysis was done on the data, similarities with Bhatia’s outlined rhetorical structure emerged. The five next moves of *Offering incentives*, *Enclosing documents*, *Soliciting response*, *Using pressure tactics* and *Ending politely* were identified in both SIE and SRE. As it is shown in Table 1 and Table 2, some significant and shared features were found in the sales emails of the two genres. The dominant move pattern for SIE were the moves on attachment and networking while for SRE, M3.1, which is providing essential detailing of the product/ service (100%).

On the other hand, Bhatia (1993) determined offering incentives as a non-obligatory move which is in contrast to the frequency in both genres. SIE recorded 89.74% while SRE 94% indicated most of the students found this move as necessary in their writing. This is later explained by Bhatia (1993) as “it is very commonly used in local sales promotion letters but less so in letters written by multinational concerns” (p. 115). While Todorova (2015) asserted that this move is highly effective in ensuring flash impact from customers.

Another obligatory move suggested by Bhatia is soliciting response as he referred to it as “the next most important move in sales promotion (p. 116)”. For SIE, this move is indicated as soliciting networking by the sender to the company who offers the product. The change from response to networking is motivated by the nature of inquiry genre which is to inquire information thus soliciting response is seen as less appropriate for the genre.

Networking in definition is actions taken to ensure further relationship between companies and it may involve more than exchanging numbers or contact. Studies by researchers such as Bernal et. al. (2002) as well as Talarowska and Tuzinovic (2008) emphasised that networking is when the companies pool together resources and exchanging expertise

for development reasons, hence shows that soliciting networking is a better term in describing further relation in business field.

By establishing networks, businesses can gain a competitive advantage over competitors, reduce costs, and save time when entering complex markets. Thus, relationships are viewed as a strategy to achieve specific goals which permeate as a recent development in the economic field. Details of percentage for obligatory and non-obligatory moves of both genres can be found in Table 8 and Table 9 below.

Table 8. Percentage of obligatory and non-obligatory moves in SIE.

SIE Obligatory Moves	Percentage	SIE Non-Obligatory Moves	Percentage
M1	89.7%	M2.2	66.66%
M2.1	87.1%	M2.3	79.48%
M3	89.7%	M7	74.35%
M4	100%		
M5	100%		
M6	89.7%		

Note. From “Developing a Corpus of Entrepreneurship Emails (COREnE) for Business Courses in Malaysian University Using Integrated Moves Approach” by B. Shauki and M. Singh, 2022, *Sains Humanika*, 14(1), p. 6 (<https://doi.org/10.11113/sh.v14n1.1885>). Adapted with permission.

Table 9. Percentage of obligatory and non-obligatory moves in SRE.

SRE Obligatory Moves	Percentage	SRE Non-Obligatory Moves	Percentage
M1	86%	M2	56%
M3			
• M3.1	100%	M6	24%
• M3.2	98%		
M4	94%	M8	72%
M5	94%	M9	78%
M7	98%		

Note. From “Developing a Corpus of Entrepreneurship Emails (COREnE) for Business Courses in Malaysian University Using Integrated Moves Approach” by B. Shauki and M. Singh, 2022, *Sains Humanika*, 14(1), p. 6 (<https://doi.org/10.11113/sh.v14n1.1885>). Adapted with permission.

Generally, most Malaysian ESL writers tend to compose sales inquiry emails by giving highlights on product detailing. They tend not to state their credentials and Move 6 which is pressure tactics, were almost absent from their writing. As for sales reply emails, it can be seen that Move 6 which is soliciting responses scored the lowest (24%) in the frequency. Soliciting responses which provide company details for further communication seemed to be ignored in the undergraduate writing. This is in contrast with Bhatia’s (1993) promotional letter principle that indicated this move to be obligatory.

CONCLUSION

This study has used the genre analysis approach to compare Singaporean and Malaysian sales writing moves. To be specific, the similarities and dissimilarities in purposes and structures of both genres are the strength of this study. The indirectness in the Malaysian writing moves which portrayed through the absence of credentials in the beginning of the letter and the professionalism of Singaporean sales letter which follows the canonical form of Bhatia’s (1993) sales promotional letter moves are closely related to the choices of the unique moves developed in each genre. The little number of pressure tactic moves in Malaysian sales emails indicate the less stress on the customers while the steady occurrence of credentials establishing gives emphasis on positive relationship and networking building.

The researchers seek to identify the components of a genre by the communicative purposes they serve, in this case, the moves. These communicative purposes must be identified within the context of the genre as well as the social context in which the genre resides. Thus, the most significance task is to recognise varieties of communicative purposes in different forms of genres and to utilise these as a framework in exploring the moves.

Extended research needs to be done to compare Malaysian sales genres across other borders such as Thailand, Indonesia, Brunei and even further regions in order to provide a better picture of cultural factors and business practices that may influence Malaysian sales emails writing structure. Consequently, comparison and empirical data analysis certainly provide more implications in exploring ways of coping with different communication strategies and cultures in order to enhance professionalism in business field.

To summarise, business discourse in contemporary Malaysia has been shaped and reshaped, as a result of ongoing research into moves and rhetorical structures. The presence of studies that compare and contrast variations in the common communicative area of business discourse leads to improved adaptation of writing conventions. The comparison of collected sales promotional emails reveals that, while there are many similarities between Singaporean and Malaysian business writing structures, there are also many differences.

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