

Genre Analysis and Cultural Variations: A Cognitive Evaluation of Anglo-American Undergraduate Personal Statements

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Abstract This chapter is a contrastive genre study that investigates the rhetorical structure of the British and American personal statements (PSs) written by undergraduate students. The corpus consists of 60 PSs (30 British and 30 American) selected from three different disciplines: Business, Physics and Psychology, and they were collected from four websites. The genre analysis of the collected data has been based on Ding's (2007) model as an analytical framework. This study seeks to test the applicability of this model on the corpus and examine the rhetorical and the linguistic resemblances and variations found between both cultures. Results of the genre analysis indicate that the analysed statements have revealed some rhetorical and linguistic similarities and differences between both corpora. The divergences and convergences between both corpora were attributed to certain socio-cultural and academic factors. The findings of the present study offered valuable insights regarding the genre features of PSs. Further, this research may fill in the gap in the rhetorical studies of the British and American academic genres.

Keywords Contrastive rhetoric • Genre analysis • New rhetoric • Personal statement • Cognitive evaluation

1 Introduction

The pupils' educational assessment can be achieved through the analysis of certain academic genres as they may reflect their rhetorical, linguistic and stylistic abilities. After much research on published academic texts, recent studies in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) have expanded to students' writings, focusing mainly on culminating genres of graduate students such as master's theses and doctoral dissertations, and to a lesser extent on undergraduate writings (Samraj & Monk, 2008).

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Nonetheless, the genre of PSs has not been sufficiently addressed by previous genre research despite its significance in the evaluation process of the students' interests and writing skills. Indeed, analysing such an academic genre helps teachers to identify the kinds of problems students may be having in their writings (Hyland, 2007) and assess to what extent the applicants' interests correspond to the courses provided by the targeted program. In addition, this genre is poor in terms of comparative studies. In fact, no study has been carried out, as far as the literature consulted, to compare and contrast the generic and linguistic features of the British and American PSs. By reviewing the current literature, it is noticeable that there is a remarkable paucity in research on this genre's content and structures.

2 Theoretical Background

Contrastive research investigates differences and similarities in writing styles across cultures and disciplines. "It considers texts not only as static products but also as functional parts of dynamic cultural contexts (Connor, 2002, p. 493)." Kaplan (1966) was the first linguist to examine the rhetorical distinctions in discourse structure in various languages. Based on 600 English essays written by foreign students from various language backgrounds, Kaplan (1966) came to infer four discourse structures that contrast to the English predominantly linear style. He described the Semitic, Oriental, Romance and Russian languages discourse structure respectively by the following rhetorical pattern: Parallel, circular, digressive and parenthetical.

However, CR has come under sharp criticism in recent years and many linguists have proven the invalidity of his hypothesis. Since that time, various contrastive research studies have been conducted on different academic genres such as journal articles, abstracts, book reviews, dissertations conference, grant proposals etc. (...) which have been extensively investigated for their cross cultural and interdisciplinary rhetorical and linguistic features.

Despite their significant role in the school admission and evaluation process, graduate and undergraduate PSs have received little attention from researchers. Nevertheless, there were some studies, which have been made to examine the rhetorical structure and the linguistic realization of some statements in different disciplines and in different contexts. Brown's (2004) research was the pioneering study of the PS genre. In this project, Brown analysed the "T-units" in the school letters of application written for a clinical psychology program. After the rhetorical investigation of the selected PSs, Brown (2004) came out with different results. First, when comparing the successful and unsuccessful clinical PSs, Brown found out that the admitted PSs focused more on the moves describing their research experiences and interests than those that were refused. Second, successful applicants showed how their awareness and familiarization of their target discourse communities

Following Brown's (2004) findings, Ding (2007) conducted another study based on the application essays to medical and dental schools. She identified a rhetorical framework of five moves with three steps for each of the first two moves as the following: Move 1: Reasons for studying, Move 2: Credentials, Move 3: Relevant experiences, Move 4: Future goals and Move 5: Personality.

Samraj and Monk, (2008) conducted another research project based on the genre of PSs. The corpus of this study consisted of some samples of successful statements submitted to three master's programs: Linguistics, business administration and electrical engineering at a U.S university. Similarly, to Ding (2007), they established a rhetorical framework containing four essential moves with different steps. This study did not only utilize move analysis and interviews with the graduate programs chairs like the previous studies of Brown (2004) and Ding (2007), but it included a survey of printed books and websites of PS writing which revealed that information on writing statements for specific master's programs is not consistently available (Samraj & Monk, 2008).

Although the three reviewed studies have shown interesting findings of the genre of PSs, still there are certain deficiencies in some perspectives. First, all the mentioned research projects were based on limited data (from 30 to 35 PSs in each study) and a limited number of disciplines (from 1 to 3). This inadequacy of data and the small variation of disciplines may affect the reliability and generalizability of the findings of these studies. Even Samraj and Monk's (2008) study, though it appeared to choose three different disciplines, it neglected other disciplines worth investigation and analysis such as physics, biology, sociology, etc. (...). In addition, none of the mentioned studies dealt with the linguistic aspect of the genre of PSs. Another limitation of these research projects is that they relied on native speakers' PSs, as their research data. It would be rather interesting to conduct some research on non-native English speakers so that international students get some benefits from the obtained results in their process of application especially with the recent dramatic increase of international students applying for western universities.

In this respect this study aims to investigate the rhetorical structure of the British and American PSs written by undergraduate native speakers collected from three different disciplines: Business, Physics and Psychology. It adopts Ding's (2007) model as an analytical framework. In addition, it intends to deal with the major linguistic signals and strategies. Further, it attempts to answer the following research questions:

- a. What are the rhetorical structures and the linguistic strategies realized in the British and American PSs?
- b. Do the British and American PSs from the different programs conform to a similar rhetorical structure?
- c. What is the role of the socio-cultural or educational backgrounds training in shaping the rhetorical pattern of the PSs?

3 Methodology

The corpus of the present study consisted of 60 personal statements written in English by undergraduate native English students (30 British and 30 American) selected from each of the following disciplines: Physics, Business and Psychology. All the personal statements of the corpora were collected from public websites. The British ones were downloaded from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Services website (UCAS), whereas the American ones were obtained from three different websites due to the absence of one official website like the British counterpart. The physics PSs were chosen from www.alumnus.caltech.edu, the psychology PSs from www.psych.uni.edu and the business ones were downloaded from www.eduers.com and www.essayforum.com.

The general criteria of selection of these letters of application were based on the objectives that this study was trying to achieve. All personal statements have to be written in English: 30 by British applicants and 30 by American ones. They were also supposed to be selected from the three mentioned disciplines: Business, physics and psychology

The method which was applied in the present research is “move analysis”, the purpose of which is to uncover the structure, style, content, and communicative purpose of the genre under investigation (Helal, 2013). As discussed by Ackland (2009), the identification of move strategies and boundaries in research articles was usually accomplished through two approaches. One is content-based called the “top down approach”, and the second is based on the linguistic signals called the “bottom up approach (Li, 2011)”. In this research, the overall organizations and boundaries of moves and sub-moves were identified essentially on the basis of content that is using the “top down approach.” Further, moves were identified relying, partly, on some frequent semantic meanings and linguistic features which were regularly present all through the analysed data set and, partly, on their communicative functions and rhetorical purposes.

After the identification of the main moves and strategies, the researcher analysed the use of the first personal pronoun “I”, together with its possessive form “my,” and their role in enhancing the applicants’ self-promotion. Thereafter, the whole corpus was processed using the software Ant Conc 3.2.4 2011 to conduct some statistical analyses. Some frequent words and linguistic features were identified such as the most frequent hedging and boosting devices.

The linguistic investigation of the collected PSs showed an intensive use of some linguistic elements that consisted mainly in the hedges and boosters. These elements help speakers or writers to express both interpersonal and ideational (or conceptual) information, allowing writers to communicate more precise degrees of accuracy in their truth assessments (Halliday, 1994). The selection of hedging and boosting devices in this study relied on those suggested by Hyland (2000). He noted that hedges and boosters could actually convey the major content of an utterance in carrying authorial judgments.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Rhetorical Analysis

The first move identified in Ding's (2007) model is "explaining reasons to pursue the purposed study." As it was indicated, the role of this move is to introduce the factors behind getting interested in the field. According to her, this move shares similar functions with Swales' (1990) move for article introductions namely, *establishing a territory*. In this move, the student explains the main reasons that motivated him/her to pursue the chosen course. It seems to be obligatory in both British and American PSs. It was present in all the statements and in almost all the disciplines. Indeed, it is noticeable that both groups of students showed a strong tendency to choose M 1 as a strong move in their PSs. In addition, it was present in all American statements (100 %) and in (93.3 %) of the British ones. This proves that both English and American applicants share a strong preference to open their PSs with stating the motivations behind their will to apply for the targeted study or discipline.

Further, even at the level of sentences number and percentage, there was no remarkable difference between both cultures. In the British PSs, the total number of sentences in Move 1 featured approximately 160 sentences in the three disciplines and it constituted around 24.2 %, on average, of the whole statement. In the same way, the statistics of the analysed American data showed no great difference from the British ones. Therefore, it seems clear that both British and American applicants share the same communicative intention in initiating their PSs directly with the same move. This can be explained by the same rhetorical paradigm that Anglo-American writers base their discourses or writings upon (Taylor & Tinguang, 1991).

Still in adherence to Ding's (2007) model, the second most prevalent move is "credentials." In this move, the writer is supposed to create his relevant self to promote the candidature by different strategies. It describes the candidate's academic, research professional and social qualifications and experiences. Further, according to Hsaio (2003), the purpose of this move is to select a relevant, positive and convincing self to persuade the admission committee to offer a place.

Being the core of the PS, this move seems to be of an obligatory nature in the British corpora. Indeed, it was present in almost 90 % of the British PSs. It featured a high frequency in all the disciplines. The importance of this move does not only reside in its high frequency which is marked in almost all the British PSs, but also in its length compared to other moves. It represented 42.3 %, on average, of the whole school application letter, which is certainly a high rate. Such a result is expected in the analysed corpus as it is based on the UCAS guiding instructions, which state that applicants ought to enumerate their academic achievements and professional experiences.

Moving to the U.S corpus, the rhetorical investigation of the PS in the different disciplines showed a slight variation between both cultures. The results showed that

Move 2 is still prominent with a lesser frequency especially in Business and Psychology and with lower average sentences. Further, this move still carries the main weight of the applicant's communicative act, as it occupied, approximately, the 1/3 (34 %) of the PS but with a lower degree when compared to its length in the British corpus. This result confirms what Ding (2007) found in her study conducted on American medical and dental PSs. This suggests that with the high frequency and dominance of M 2 in the native speaker corpora, undergraduate applicants increase their chances of meeting the expectations of the committee members by valuing most of their academic achievements and research qualifications and highlighting their involvement in community services and their high commitment for the field.

The third move mentioned in the used model deals with "relevant life experiences." Indeed, while Move 1 and Move 2 provided the main reasons for applying for the target undergraduate programs and the valuable academic and professional credentials, Move 3 focuses entirely on the most relevant work experiences related to the field and the applicant's community involvement. Furthermore, contrary to the previous moves, which marked high frequency in both cultures, this move seems to be optional, it is present in 50 % of the British and American corpora. In this move, prospective applicants are supposed to describe their previous experiences, and thus their suitability for the field. Starting with the British corpus, the rhetorical findings showed that Move 3 was found only in 60 % of the Physics and Business PSs and 30 % in psychology ones. However, there were some British students who were aware enough of the requirements of the admission process as they opted to include some prior experiences. These findings seem similar to Ding's (2007) results. Indeed, contrary to Move 1 and Move 2, Move 3 featured lower frequency despite the fact that her study is based on graduate PSs. This can be explained by the paucity of the professional experiences in the target discipline among the majority of applicants.

The British findings were similar to the American ones regarding Move 3's frequency. Indeed, the rhetorical investigation indicates that this move appeared only in 50 % of the U.S corpus signifying its optional nature in the three disciplines. This result is expected because both British and American corpora are based on undergraduate statements of purpose. Nonetheless, in the American data we may notice that there is an interdisciplinary gap. In fact, this move occurred in 70 % of Business applications, whereas, it only occurred in 30 % of the physics and 40 % in the psychology applications. This might be attributed to the fact that in the business field there was more reliance on professional experiences, which is highly advocated by the commission members even in the undergraduate level.

The fourth move is "stating goals." This move serves to indicate the applicant's goals in the future study and what s/he aspires to learn. This can serve as a strategy of self-promotion as the candidate is informing the reader that s/he is, to a certain extent, knowledgeable about the field applying for and s/he has well examined the course of the prospective program (Hsaio, 2004). He stated that "the purpose of pointing out the preparation for future study is to make a claim that the applicant has a long term intention and interest in this area and has shown careful

consideration in opting for future study (p. 43).” He added also “Through this move the reader can evaluate how well the applicant’s interests and goals correspond to the courses that the program can provide for him (p. 43).” Further, Ding (2007) claimed that this move portrays the applicant’s intended future career after graduation, which stresses the goal-orientedness and strong motivation of the applicant.

This move was optional and it constituted 5 % of the whole British PS as average. It was present in 60 % of the Business PSs, 70 % of Physics ones. However, it appeared in 20 % of the Psychology letters. We may consider the following example selected from the business program.

Extract 1:

My future aim, after university, is to start up my own successful business and pursue a computing related career with possible geographical/environmental links. (PS 9, Business).

It is clear, from this sample, that in this move, candidates try to show their ability and will to succeed in the target program; hence, persuading the admission committee that they are the applicants they should choose (Callaghan, 2004). Interestingly, in the psychology program, only two out of ten applicants used the *stating goals* move although it is an essential rhetorical element in the statement of purpose according to the UCAS website. This striking paucity of this move in this particular discipline may be explained by, either the students’ unawareness of the genre conventions and requirements, or their uncertainty of their future career in this field.

Regarding the U.S findings, they are not very distinguishable from the British ones, except the psychology field. Indeed, this move appears to be optional in both Business (50 %) and Physics (60 %) but obligatory in psychology (90 %). In fact, this move showed a high frequency in the psychology discipline compared to the other disciplines and compared to all British disciplines. This may suggest that American psychology applicants have clearer future plans and more intentions than their British counter parts.

The last move is “describing personality.” According to Ding’s model (2007), this move serves to explicitly describe or demonstrate the applicant’s unique experience and personality to distinguish him/her from the large pool of applicants. The most striking aspect of this move is that it was totally absent in both the British and American PSs. On the contrary, it was replaced by other moves, which are non-applicable to the employed model in this study. In fact, the British and American PSs seemed to be more preoccupied with explaining the reasons behind application, credentials and their relevant experiences more than stating their personal issues. This move was found in Ding’s (2007) study as an optional move emphasizing the personality strengths.

The variations which were noticed in the American corpus at the rhetorical level may be attributed to the fact that the U.S.A has been a multi-cultural country with multi-cultural minorities speaking various languages. Therefore, it should be expected that these cultural variations would be reflected in the country’s academic genres, which is the case in the genre under investigation. Indeed, it is inferred that

the American writing style in this genre is no longer direct and explicit as it is argued in previous studies (Li, 2011; Mauranen, 1993; Yunxia, 2000). On the contrary, with the presence of the cyclical and additional moves and the use of short stories and long sentences, the U.S writing style appears to be more implicit and digressive, the fact that made it more colloquial and interactive than the British one (Biber, 1987). This can be ascribed to its influence by other minorities (like the Asians, Chinese, French, etc. (...)) who were known for their different and digressive rhetorical patterns. In this context, Pokrivack, Hevesiova, Smileskova and Janecova (2010) argued that “the differences that occurred on American rhetoric can be explained by the fact that the U.S.A has been a country of several cultures speaking various languages (p. 9).” Therefore, earlier hypotheses, which overlooked the stylistic, rhetorical and cultural differences between both countries and considered the Anglo-American society as “one block” need to be questioned and even revised, because this will lead automatically to cultural stereotyping.

4.2 Linguistic Analysis

After the identification of the main moves and rhetorical strategies, the researcher analysed the use of the self-promotion strategy. While the moves and sub-moves were manually identified and counted, the most frequently used words and key features were calculated with the help of Ant con 3.2.4 2011 software. The use of this software has revealed the top most frequent recurring linguistic signals in both corpora such as: The personal pronoun “I” and its possessive form “My” which were used in the self-promotion strategy. This analysis has also shown the presence of other linguistic features such as the boosters and hedges in both corpora.

“I” and “my” appeared to be the highest-ranking lexical items in the British and American corpora. They were present in all the PSs and in all the disciplines, but with different frequencies. Indeed, it is indicated (Appendix 3) that the first personal pronoun “I” tends to be much more frequent than its possessive form “my” within both groups of applicants. In addition, the average of occurrence of “I” in each British PS was approximately 17, whereas it was only 8.3 with “my.” Similarly, in the U.S letters the average of occurrence of “I” featured 16.7 per statement compared to 10.4 for the average of “my.”

The personal pronoun “I” appeared in both corpora with high frequency in the three disciplines. Starting with the British corpus, the use of “I” ranged from seven occurrences (PS 5 psychology) to 40 (PS 2 psychology). Nonetheless, there is a clear variation at the level of disciplines. In fact, this item was most frequently used in the physics discipline (194) but it was least used in Psychology (130), and in Business (188). However, linguistic findings revealed the presence of another linguistic variation at the move level.

The personal pronoun “I” was the most frequent in the first two moves of the PSs in the three disciplines. This could be attributed to the rhetorical nature of this particular genre. Indeed, some moves such as Move 1: *Explaining reasons* and

Move 2: *Credentials* represent the cornerstone of the statement and they are the space where students try to promote and glorify themselves by emphasizing the “I”. Further, despite the variation at the move and discipline levels, the function of “I” did not differ in any of them; In fact, it served to portray the applicants as suitable, competent and well-determined potential students.

Moving to the American corpus, the results showed some statistical variations in the use of “I” in the American PSs. Indeed, this element featured higher presence in the American corpus in the psychology discipline, whereas for the others the average is approximately the same. In addition, similarly to the British PSs, in the American PSs, the personal pronoun “I” was centring in Move 1 and 2 and in some cases in Move 3.

The possessive adjective “*my*” was used by both groups for promoting themselves. It served to demonstrate the applicant’s qualifications, valuable experiences and motivating reasons to pursue the target level. The results prove that this element was intensively present all through the different moves of the statement but with a low rate when compared to the personal pronoun “*I*,” its frequency ranged from 4 (PS2, Business) to 21(PS4, Business).

With respect to disciplines, the adjective “*my*” was most frequent in British business (102) and least frequent in Physics (73). This may be attributed to, as it was shown in the rhetorical analysis section, the paucity of the relevant experiences and qualifications in the physics discipline. Nonetheless, at the move level, similarly to the previous linguistic signal “*I*”, its possessive form “*my*” was highly frequent in the first two moves and with lesser degree in Move 3.

With regards to the American corpus, the linguistic analysis revealed some statistical variations. In fact, it seems clear that “*my*” appeared to be more frequent in the American data than the British one. In addition, contrary to the British corpus, the highest frequency of “*my*” in the U.S PSs was found in Business whereas, the lowest was in psychology. Concerning its frequency of distribution, this feature was essentially present in the first two moves.

The linguistic analysis of the compiled PSs revealed an intensive use of some linguistic devices that consisted mainly in the hedges and boosters. These elements help speakers or writers to express both interpersonal and ideational (or conceptual) information, allowing writers to communicate more precise degrees of accuracy in their truth assessments (Halliday, 1994). Further, Hyland (2000) asserted that hedges and boosters could actually convey the major content of an utterance in carrying authorial judgments. Therefore, it is clear that, in the analysed statements, applicants made use of these linguistic signals for more persuasion of the significance of their qualifications.

The linguistic investigation of the 30 selected PSs from the different disciplines demonstrated that both groups of students showed a strong tendency to use some hedging devices in their writings to convey their intentions appropriately. Nonetheless, the frequency of these devices differed from one statement to another, from one discipline to another, and from one culture to another. Indeed, Swales (1990) assumed that hedges were extensively used in Anglo-American academic writings to project “honesty, modesty, proper caution, and often diplomacy

(p. 174).” The most occurring hedges in both corpora were modal auxiliaries, verbs, adverbs and adjectives. They occurred with different frequency all through the corpus. The modal auxiliaries (*can, may, would*) appeared to be the most frequent in both corpora. Hedging verbs came in a second position (*feel* and *believe*). Whereas, the adverbs and adjectives were the least frequent devices used by British and American applicants.

The three major modal auxiliaries identified during the process of linguistic analysis of the collected PSs were: “*May*”, “*can*” and “*would*.” The linguistic investigation of the data proved a recurrent use of these three devices with the exception of the modal “*may*” which showed very low frequency in the three disciplines. This can be expected because the modal “*may*” generally expresses uncertainty or probability, which is not the aim of the writers in this particular genre. On the contrary, in the genre of personal statements, students are supposed to show certainty and confidence to portray a positive image of themselves. Similarly, the frequency of the modal “*may*” is still low within the American PSs, with a higher occurrence of “*can*” and “*would*”. Both British and American candidates opted to use these two hedging auxiliaries to promote their candidatures and to glorify their abilities.

Verbs were found to be the second hedging features in the analysed corpora. The most frequent ones were: “*Believe*”, “*seem*” and “*feel*.” As was noticed in the British PSs, “*believe*” and “*feel*” showed high frequency and appeared, for the most part, in all the statements and in all the disciplines. Whereas, the introductory verb “*seem*” appeared only once in the British Physics PSs and it was totally absent in Business and Psychology. This can be explained by the fact that this verb expresses uncertainty, which is inappropriate for this genre.

The same results are almost applicable to the American data. In fact, the verb “*seem*” appeared only once in Physics and it was frequently absent in the others. On the contrary, for the verbs “*believe*” and “*feel*,” although they showed higher frequency, their rate is still low, especially with the verb “*feel*” in Physics and Business. The main two hedging adverbs identified in the English PSs, were: “*Likely*” and “*often*”. In both corpora, they were rarely used especially for the adverb “*likely*” which showed no occurrence in both cultures and in all the disciplines. Regarding the adverb “*often*,” it was scarcely present in the British and American corpus in some disciplines. Its frequency ranged from zero to eight.

Hedging adjectives were found to be the fourth hedging element in the selected English PSs. Similarly, to the previous devices (adverbs), adjectives are quantitatively rare; however, the two main hedging adjectives found were “*possible*” and “*probable*”. The adjective “*probable*” showed no presence in both cultures and in all the disciplines. However, the adjective “*possible*” was present in some PSs in all the disciplines and in both cultures. Its occurrence ranged from one to four per discipline.

In light of the above description, it could be inferred that the use of the hedging devices (modal auxiliaries, verbs, adverbs and adjectives) was not really preferred by the British and American applicants. This can be expected since students, when dealing with the genre of PSs, are not supposed to express probability or

uncertainty. They should, instead, minimize their use of the hedging elements to show a certain degree of certainty and self-confidence.

Boosters were recognized as the most frequent devices used in the present corpus to express the student's valuable candidature, high commitment and future plans. Several boosting features were depicted in the compiled corpus. However, the most occurring ones can be categorized as the following: Modal auxiliaries, adverbs and adjectives. The highest presence of boosters was found in the modal auxiliary "will" in both corpora (25 in British psychology, 34 in American physics and psychology), whereas verbs, adverbs and adjectives were the least boosting devices used by the British and American applicants.

The findings of the analysed corpus revealed that the modal auxiliary "will" was the most frequently used in the different disciplines. Besides, the modal auxiliary "must" was also identified as another boosting device in the corpus. However, the linguistic analysis revealed a large difference between both auxiliaries in terms of their frequency. In fact, "will" seems to dominate all the English letters of application, while the modal "must" appeared to be rarely used particularly in the British PSs where it occurred only once. Nonetheless, the modal auxiliary "will" appears to be the most frequent booster not only among the boosting modal auxiliaries but also among all the boosting devices. Indeed, this modal was most found in Move 4: *Stating future goals*, where students gave their potential plans and thus giving the impression of maturity, certainty and self-confidence. In the same context, Murphy (2010) pointed out that speakers generally opt for the use of the modal "will" since it is "a more direct form which expresses confidence and certainty, unlike the modal forms (p. 139)". The boosting modal auxiliary "will" is also found in some additional moves, namely the move of expressing commitment where candidates show their readiness to overcome all the challenges and express their zealous will to excel in the target program.

Nonetheless, unlike its predecessor, the modal auxiliary "must" shows no great presence in the corpora. Indeed, it appeared only once in PS 3 in the British discipline of psychology. In the American data, this modal had few occurrences as well. This noticeable absence might be ascribed to the fact that this modal generally expresses "a strong obligation" (Murphy, 2010, p. 140) which is in sharp contradiction with the requirements of the genre of PSs. Indeed, applicants are supposed to express requests, commitments and polite compliments without showing any imposition or obligation on the reader or the evaluator.

The findings of the analysed data demonstrated that adverbs were intensively used by both groups of applicants as a second boosting strategy. In fact, "very" and "always" were found to be the most frequent boosting elements in the statements. The adverb "very" was the most frequently used adverb in the British and American PSs. It was highly present in all the disciplines. It was always followed by an adjective and it functioned as an intensifier in the different moves of the PS. Nonetheless, the adverb of frequency "always" marked fewer occurrences although it was present in all the disciplines and in both corpora. It did not occur in all the British and American PSs, but it featured higher frequency in the physics discipline, in both cultures, more than the others.

In addition to modal auxiliaries and adverbs, adjectives were employed as a boosting strategy in the British and American PSs. The most frequent boosting adjectives were “*important*” and “*clear*.” The element “*important*” was the most frequent. It occurred in some American disciplines such as Business and psychology, while it was absent in physics. Regarding the British corpus, this adjective showed a higher presence in Business (it occurred 11 times). This boosting feature was employed by both groups of applicants as a self-promotion strategy and for more conviction of their relevant credentials.

The adjective “*clear*,” however, was found to be rarely apparent in all the PSs. Indeed, it was frequently absent in the American corpus, but it appeared only once in a British physics statement. This may be explained by the fact that this genre lacks the aspect of scientific demonstration that is why such adjectives seem to be generally absent.

5 Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

The main findings of this study showed that Ding’s (2007) five-move structural model for interpreting school application letters was a very useful starting point, but not totally applicable for the British and American statements due to certain structural and rhetorical modifications. The rhetorical analysis of the statements under investigation has revealed some similarities and differences between both corpora. In addition, the linguistic analysis has demonstrated the presence of the two main linguistic strategies namely the self-promotion and the use of boosting and hedging strategies. These strategies served mainly to highlight the candidate’s presence and strengthen their positions in the statements. The divergences and convergences between both corpora were attributed to certain socio-cultural and academic factors.

The results of the present study offered valuable implications. From a linguistic perspective, this research is of great importance in understanding the move analysis of the British and American undergraduate university application letters, if not, it provided, at least, some helpful insights about the cognitive structuring of the genre of promotional literature.

Further, the present study may fill in the gap in the rhetorical studies of the British and American academic genres. Indeed, it has shown the main differences and similarities between the British and American writing styles. In addition, it has tackled certain cross cultural and interdisciplinary variations between the statements. These findings may enrich the field of cross-cultural and genre studies.

From a pedagogical point of view, the present study highlights the potential benefits of including the genre of PSs in the classroom activities assessment, particularly in the reading and writing courses for students. Indeed, school teachers need to provide more information of PS writing for both native and non-native undergraduate learners because of the prominence of the PS writing in the student’s academic career. In fact, the inclusion of this type of writing activities in the various

academic and technical writing courses may help to raise the learners' "rhetorical and genre consciousness" (Swales, 1993, as cited in Bhatia, 2002, p. 14). This would help students who are applying for different universities to know the audiences' expectations and thus enhance their chance of being admitted in the target program. By making clear to students, for instance, what teachers expect and value in their writing tasks, applicants would know the criteria of evaluation and success. This may give them greater motivation and confidence to write appropriately (Hyland, 2007).

This study has some limitations which need to be reconsidered for the development of potential follow-up studies. From a methodological perspective, this study has relied merely on "textual approaches" (Hyland, 2009, p. 20) reflected in the genre analysis and corpus analysis of the selected data. Indeed, unlike Brown (2004) and Smaraj and Monk (2008), this research was not able to include "contextual approaches" (Hyland, 2009, p. 20) such as questionnaires or interviews neither with the students nor with the committee admission members, whose "insider views" can yield valuable information regarding expected features in PS writings (Sibo, 2011). Therefore, further studies are needed to focus on the expectations of the admission committee members on the one hand, and the writers' choices and assumptions on the other.

In addition, there is a noticeable lack of cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary comparison in this research due to the limited sources and the difficulties to get access to some reputable online journals. Hence, further studies should explore in depth the cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary variations in this type of genre. It would also be interesting to investigate PSs from different languages and different cultures and examine the socio-cultural factors being behind the rhetorical and linguistic differences or similarities.

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