In the Name of God

I hereby grant Yasouj University or its agents the right to archive and to make available my thesis in whole or part in the university libraries in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, subject to the provisions of the copyright Acts. I retain all proprietary rights, such as patent rights. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis.

I have either used no substantial portions of copyright material in my thesis or I have obtained permission to use copyright material; where permission has not been granted, I have applied/will apply for a partial restriction of the digital copy of my thesis.

Signed:

Mohammad Etemadi

October 2013

Uni ایرانه ای **souj**

Faculty of Literature and Humanities

Department of English Language and Literature

MA Thesis in TEFL

A contrastive genre analysis of Persian and English Job application letters

Supervisor:

Ali Kazemi, Ph.D.

By:

Mohammad Etemadi

October 2013

A contrastive genre analysis of Persian and English Job application letters

By:

Mohammad Etemadi

A thesis submitted to the office of the Post-Graduate, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (M.A.)

In

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)

Approved by	Full Name	Signature
Supervisor:	Dr. Ali Kazemi	
Examiner 1:	Dr. Reza Rezvani	
Examine 2:	Dr. Ruhollah Zarei	
Representative of the Post – Graduate office:	Dr. Alireza Fazeli	

October 2013

Dedicated

to

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my greatest gratitude and respect to my supervisor Dr. A. Kazemi for his valuable insights, guidance, and encouragement throughout this research.

Further, I wish to express my deep gratitude to other professors of the Department of English language and Literature in Yasouj University, *Dr. Reza Rezvani*, *Dr. Ruhollah Zarei, and Dr. Mohammad Jafar Jabbari* who have been helpful in every way during my education and final project.

First Name: Mohammad	Last Name: Etemadi
Degree: M.A.	Field of Study: TEFL
Supervisor: Dr. Ali Kazemi	Defense Date: Oct. 8, 2013

A contrastive genre analysis of Persian and English Job application letters

Abstract

Contrastive rhetoricians have consistently argued that the first language and culture affect the rhetorical choices of second language writers. One possible area in which these rhetorical choices manifest themselves is application letters. Drawing on the tenets of genre analysis, we are able to gain insights into conventions of a specific genre, such as application letters. Despite numerous studies into various aspects of genre analysis and contrastive rhetoric, job application letters representing a specific genre have not been contrastively analyzed in Persian and English yet. This study was an attempt to discover whether there are significant differences between the appearance of different 'genre moves' in the two languages. To this end, a corpus of 50 job application letters was randomly chosen from the two languages. In order to tag the moves present in the data, the coding framework developed by Connor, Precht, and Upton (2002) was employed. Running a chi-square test with the level of significance of (0.5) revealed significant differences in parallel employment of Move 4 (i.e., indicating desire for an interview or a desire for further contact) and Move 5 (i.e., Expressing politeness (pleasantries) or appreciation) of the framework across the two languages. Regarding Move 4, Persian letter writers less frequently request an interview. Concerning Move 5, Iranian applicants tend to infrequently include expressions of pleasantries and/or appreciation inside the body of their letters. Although the frequency of employment of Move 3 (i.e., Providing argument, including supporting information, for the job application) does not differ significantly across English and Persian, English writers more frequently make use of 'type b' arguments (i.e., arguments based on what would be good for the hiring company). The findings have implications for writing classes in that equipping student writers with the insights gained is expected to make a difference to the final product of learning.

Kew words: Contrastive rhetoric, Genre analysis, Genre moves

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents	page

ACKNOWLEGMENTS

ABSTRACT

CHAPTER ONE: Preliminaries

CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

CHAPTER THREE: Method

CHAPTER FOUR: Results and Discussion

CHAPTER FIVE: Summary, Conclusion, and Implications

References 56

APPENDICES

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER ONE
Preliminaries

1.1 Introduction

Learning a new language other than one's mother tongue is considered as an asset in our increasingly globalized world. Globalization has given rise to international rather than independent functioning systems. It goes without saying that acquiring language skills is the key to any successful collaborative efforts (Najeeb, 2012).

Writing is an important skill. The way writing proficiency can be developed has always been controversial. Some see writing as a process and some consider it as a product. These have implications for the way in which writing is taught. In recent years, it has been shown that writing conventions are different across languages. Enhancing writing ability by the use of writing conventions has for some time been a major concern among EFL learners and teachers especially in advanced levels and academic contexts.

Writing, in the age of communication, can be considered as one of the main issues in the area of EFL. We communicate successfully, especially in writing, due to having some understanding of "genre". A genre is a type of written layout and organization which is known by members of a "discourse community" who have in common some language customs and norms, such as poets, letter writers, magazine article writers and so on (Harmer, 2007).

Providing students with feedback and giving them input of genres and expectations of a target speech community is considered to be the major role of a

writing instructor of English as a foreign or second Language (EFL or ESL). Given the complexities involved, this is no easy job. It is obvious that writing is a complex skill that entails not only the knowledge of words, syntax and discourse structures but also the knowledge of sociolinguistic rules of a particular target language. In view of the fact that language and culture are complicatedly combined, first language (L1) genre awareness can be either in line with second language genre awareness or can be in a different direction and be problematic for L2 writers (Derahvasht, 2011). Contrastive studies of ESL writers and their native English-speaking counterparts have provided some insights into ESL writing instruction. The awareness of the similarities and differences has enabled ESL teachers to learn about and address ESL writers' special needs. In investigating native and nonnative student writing, the framework of contrastive rhetoric has been employed by a large number of scholars to explain the writing behavior differences and similarities.

The genre chosen in this study is that of job application letters. James, Scholfield, and Ypsiladis, (1994) state that the genre has the communicative purpose of obtaining an interview for a job by highlighting the most relevant information in the applicant's curriculum vitae.

Contrastive rhetoric claims that the first language and culture affect the rhetorical choices of second language writers (Connor, 2003; Kaplan, 1989). The early studies in this area of inquiry were criticized for producing a negative perception of transfer and deprived research design which mainly consisted of cohesion analysis of students' writing compared to that of professional writers. In the early 1980s, this area of inquiry was developed by studies focused primarily on analyzing first language writing produced by professionals for native-speaker readers (Hinds, 1987).

The desire for carrying out genre-specific writing analyses has been generated quite recently in the field of contrastive rhetoric. The influential studies by Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993) have initiated contrastive studies in the genre-analysis tradition. Swales (1990) stated that it is not enough to describe text types (e.g. narrative, argumentative, and descriptive) or situations (i.e. writing in certain discourse communities); researchers need to take into account the particular tasks

and purpose of writing. This insight highlighted the significance of contrastive rhetoric studies that consider the variable of genre. It is based on the idea that members of a community usually have little difficulty in identifying similarities in the texts they frequently use and are able to draw on their repeated experiences with such texts to read, understand, and write relatively easily.

The initiation of genre pedagogies is in response to the still widespread emphasis on a planning-writing-reviewing framework which draws the attention of learners to strategies for writing instead of the linguistic resources needed to express themselves effectively. This discovery-based, inductive approach fails to make clear what is to be learnt and minimizes the social authority of powerful text forms. Giving students the 'freedom' to write may encourage fluency; however, it does not liberate them from the grammar restrictions in constructing social meanings in public contexts. Genre instruction, in contrast, emphasizes that genres be specific to particular cultures, giving language instructors the awareness that their students may not share this knowledge with them and encourages them to go beyond vocabulary, syntactic structures, and composing in order to incorporate into their teaching the ways language is used in particular contexts. It helps students to make use of the expressive potential of society's discourse structures instead of only being manipulated by them.

Genre-based pedagogies give promise of very real advantages for learners as they pull together contexts, content, and language, while providing teachers with a means of presenting students with systematic and explicit explanations of the ways writing operates to communicate.

A genre-based approach can be employed, not merely to teach fixed textual patterns but to assist learners to achieve a richer understanding of the complex relationship between written texts and the social contexts in which they are situated.

Genre analysis can be employed to classify texts on the basis of significant similarities and differences in form, rhetorical purpose, and audience (Dudley-Evans, 1989). It specifically takes into account distinguishing characteristics including language features significant to the particular genre, rhetorical structures and style. It is of paramount importance to novice writers to identify these

language features and the communicative purposes of the texts (Swales, 1990). In that case, learners are capable of exploiting these features themselves (Brett, 1994).

Genre analysis is able to give useful information to novice writers who are not experienced in making use of a genre, by exposing them to the conventions of a specific genre and also the inspiring reasons of such conventions in the social practices of a community (Bhatia, 1997). With this awareness, novice writers should be capable of exploring and producing more complex genres autonomously and creatively.

Another advantage of genre analyses is that they are not prescriptive. Once novice writers have become proficient in using the conventions of a specific genre, they can create their own representations of the genre on the basis of genre exemplars. According to Bhatia (1993:40):

"Exploiting rules and conventions for the sake of creativity and innovation is good but it is much better to do so after one has developed at least a good awareness of, if not a good mastery over, such conventions. Moreover, analysis of generic conventions need not always be used prescriptively."

1.2 Statement of the Problem

It goes without saying that the native language of every learner is a significant factor in the process of performance in a new language. Some of the problems in learning a foreign language are caused by interference from the native language of the learners (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). Though the native language could exercise an interfering effect on the target language, the facilitative effects of the native language are surely as powerful in the process (Brown, 2001). Being unaware of the L1/L2 similarities and differences of written genres could pose serious problems for Iranian EFL writers. Specifically, Iranian writers as EFL learners who need to become familiar with the conventions of writing English application letters are either fully or poorly equipped with the knowledge of writing application letters in Persian. In any case, having a contrastive view of

writing job application letters is highly beneficial. In effect, this can prevent the problems posed by lack of the contrastive awareness.

1.3 The Significance of the Study

Genre analysis focuses on both the linguistic manifestations of discourse and the social context in which the text is generated. Thus it gives learners a comprehensive understanding of particular texts. Once the rules and conventions are made explicit via genre analysis, contrastive rhetoric could then play its role by comparing and contrasting genres across languages. Contrastive rhetorical studies are able to provide teachers and students with knowledge about the desired patterns of writing (Connor, 2003). This is done by uncovering particular rhetorical patterns, which might be specific in terms of culture and context. Such knowledge could provide the basis for explicit strategies which Iranian EFL students might use to comprehend and produce effective English job applications. The communicative aim of Letter of Application as a genre is to obtain an interview for a job. The required self-presenting is achieved through highlighting the most relevant information in the candidate's curriculum vitae. Candidates competing for jobs are entirely aware of the fact that to be short-listed for interviews, they have to put emphasis on their strengths, and de-emphasize, or if possible, conceal their weaknesses.

This study seeks to provide insights from the fields of genre analysis and contrastive rhetoric. This understanding forms the basis for a discussion of the distinctive rhetorical structures found in job applications written in the two languages-English and Persian. Being aware of the similarities and differences in the two languages and predicting the problems posed by them can be of benefit not only to writing teachers but also to syllabus designers, and material developers, who are concerned with students' learning needs. As the starting step to design more appropriate language courses, they can benefit from the findings of the current study.

1.4 Aims and Objectives

This investigation of the genre structure of English and Persian job applications is in terms of moves and steps with the following objectives:

The study seeks to determine whether there is any significant difference between English and Persian job applications in terms of the genre structures of moves and steps. The study also briefly compares the general outline of a few unreal letters provided as models and guidelines for writing English and Persian job applications.

1.5 The Research Questions

The following research question is addressed in the study:

Is there any significant difference between English and Persian job applications in terms of the genre structures of moves and steps?

1.6 Definition of key Terms

In the following section, the key terms which will frequently be used in the study are defined.

- **Genre and move**

Swales (1990) defines genre as follows:

A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style (p. 58)

From a language pedagogy viewpoint, it is beneficial to think of a genre as being made up of a series of moves (Swales, 1990). A move is defined as part of a written or spoken text which achieves a specific purpose within the text. The move helps one to arrive at the overall purpose of the genre. We can also consider some moves as obligatory and some as optional.

The term *strategy* is used to mean how the writer or speaker chooses to execute, or realize the move (Bhatia, 1993, pp. 30-31). For instance, the writer of the central idea (thesis statement) in the introduction of an essay may choose from a variety of rhetorical options how to engage the attention of the reader, for example, by stating a fact, asking a question, or by other means (Henry & Roseberry, 1997). If the move can only be realized by a series of strategies in a specific order then, following Swales (1990), strategies can be thought of as steps.

- **Contrastive rhetoric**

Richards and Schmidt (2002) define contrastive rhetoric as follows:

The study of similarities and differences between writing in a first and second language or between two languages, in order to understand how writing conventions in one language influence how a person writes in another. Writing in a second language is thought to be influenced to some extent by the linguistic and cultural conventions of the writer's first language (p. 119).

In effect, *contrastive rhetoric* shares the same assumption with *contrastive analysis.* They both assume that interferences from the first language cause the main difficulties in learning a new language.

1.7 Outline of the study

This study consists of five chapters. Chapter one includes introduction, statement of the problem, significance of the study, research questions, definition of key terms, and an outline of the study. The second chapter, literature review, consists of reviewing previous studies on intercultural genre analysis, interdisciplinary genre analysis, letter of application as a genre, a multilevel genre analysis, genre analysis in materials development, and teaching genre moves.

The third chapter provides an overview of the design of the study. Specifically, an account will be given of the design of the study, sampling procedure, instruments used to collect the data of the study, and data analysis procedure. The fourth chapter is a combination of the results of the study and a discussion of the findings. And in Chapter Five, as the last chapter of the study, a summary of the

findings of the study will be given, followed by the discussion of the conclusions of the study. Moreover, the pedagogical implications of the study and limitations of the study will be discussed, followed by suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Increasing attention has been given to the notion of genre and its application in language teaching and learning during the last decade or so. Learning to write includes better understandings of how language is formed to accomplish social purposes in particular contexts. By allowing teachers to establish their courses in the texts that learners will need for writing in academic, social, or occupational contexts, they help direct students to participate effectively in the outside world (Hyland, 2007).

Carolyn Miller's (1984) described genre as a recurrent social action which happens in recurrent rhetorical situations in specific discourse communities. Swales (1990) further defined genre as particular forms of discourse with shared ''structure, style, content, and intended audience,'' which are used by a specific discourse community in order to attain certain communicative goals through writing activities. Hyland (2004) writes about the importance of genre approaches to teaching L2 writing by highlighting the role language plays in written communication. Other genre studies emphasize textual regularities, the interpretive process of reading, intertextual linkage through implicit or explicit reference to other texts and background knowledge, socio-cultural and disciplinary contexts, and the dynamics and instability of genre, and the social roles of readers and writers (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1993; Bhatia, 1993; Freedman & Medway, 1994; Miller, 1994; Pare´ & Smart, 1994).

Paltridge discussed the two concepts of context and audience, differentiating between the ''the context of situation'' and ''context of culture'' (Paltridge, 2001).

Swales and Feak (1994) considered genre as a combination of audience, purpose, organization, and presentation, with audience as the most significant factor of the list.

The concept of move (Swales, 1990), defined as a functional unit in a text used for a particular purpose, is used in order to identify the textual regularities in specific genres of writing and to ''describe the functions which particular portions of the text realizes in the relationship to the overall task'' (Connor, Davis, & De Rycker, 1995, p. 463). Playing a role to the achievement of the overall communicative purpose of the genre, moves may vary from one sentence to several paragraphs, (Connor & Mauranen, 1999).

Genre analytic studies have been conducted from different perspectives, scrutinizing different subsystem of language. In this chapter, those studies will be touched upon which lend themselves to the purposes of the current study (i.e., genre analysis of job application letters).

To map out the contents of this chapter, the first section will provide an overview of the studies into intercultural genre analysis, followed by an account of interdisciplinary genre analysis. It will go on to discuss letter of application as a genre, and multilevel genre analysis. Finally, an account will be given of genre analysis in teaching genre moves.

2.2 Intercultural genre analysis

Loi and Ivans (2010) tried to investigate English and Chinese cultural differences in the organization of introductions to research article. The aim of their study was to examine the genre structure with respect to moves and steps and to search for the socio-cultural inferences that came out from the findings.

They tried to find the similarities and differences between English and Chinese research article introductions with respect to the genre structures of moves and steps.