Cognitive Structuring of Personal Statements in Philippine English

A move-step analysis of graduate application essays written by prospective Filipino graduate students

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Abstract—**That graduate application essay plays a vital role in any graduate admission process in most universities in the Philippines and that little is known about its nature—both structure and function, this descriptive-exploratory study zeroed in on unearthing the underlying cognitive structure of personal statements written in Philippine English by Filipino graduate students of a graduate school in the Philippines, its possible recognition as a legitimate genre of inquiry and instruction. Using the hand-tagged method in genre analysis under the move-step framework pioneered by Swales (1990), cognitive structuring model of Hopkins and Dudley-Evans (1998), and Bhatia's (1993) model of genre analysis, the study identified five recurring moves, namely *stating purpose/s and explaining reason/s for pursuing graduate studies*, *indicating research interest*, *enumerating personal attributes*, *stating career expectations* and *explaining social contribution*. The study likewise revealed that Filipino graduate students tend to discuss their reason for pursuing a graduate degree more than to enumerate their qualities in establishing themselves as an ideal candidate for the program. These results proved to be valuable in considering personal statement a legitimate academic genre worthy of inclusion in any undergraduate academic writing course.**

Index Terms-cognitive structuring, genre analysis personal statement, Philippine English

I. INTRODUCTION

Globalization makes changes in all aspects of human life imperative, and education is of no exception. Changes, globally speaking, are widely viewed as a desirable result of the advancements of technology and the so-called knowledge explosion. Thus, many education systems of today, particularly the tertiary education landscape, are coping with the demands of these drastic changes that this brave new world has brought forth. One of these is the constant and never-ending pursuit for higher leaning of various people involved in the education sector, particularly, the teachers. This global trend is likewise upheld here in the Philippines; many universities in the country are keen in meeting these demands to be globally recognized, thus sending their faculty members to the finest graduate schools in the country.

Pursuing a graduate degree is an arduous task which requires careful reflection from applicants seeking for admission in a graduate school. Deciding for the right program to take, choosing the best school to enroll in, preparing for higher academic tasks, and ensuring financial stability are just few of the many things they consider before applying for their chosen field of interest, not to mention the many documentary requirements (i.e. transcript of records, honorable dismissal and certificate of graduation) graduate schools necessitate from their applicants. Among these required documents is the personal statement (PS) or in layman's term an application letter. Personal statement according to Ding (2007) is one of the most important pieces of documentary requirements in graduate school admission process for it exposes the applicant's writing ability, "evidence of disciplinary knowledge and tentative proposal of future research" (Wright, 2010, Abstract). Personal statement, therefore, provides the door for admission evaluators of graduate schools to examine further and to go deeper into the applicants' personal and academic preparedness (things which are of prime consideration in determining an applicant's fitness for the target program) which no other documentary requirements could provide. Different graduate schools (i.e., De La Salle University, Ateneo de Manila University and University of the Philippines) can attest to this for most of them require personal statement as a major documentary requirement for admission, thus signifying its weight in their respective graduate admission procedure. Personal statement which is technically an essay in form is a concoction of different language functions both self-promotional and self-representation (Wright, 2010). In its very nature, it is both descriptive and persuasive in approach for it recounts one's personal experience and reasons in pursuing a graduate course to convince their reader in considering them for the program. Therefore, if properly written, it, to a certain extent, can spell success on the applicant's acceptance to his/her chosen graduate program. In spite of its importance in the admission process, little is known about its nature, its distinct characteristics as a promotional genre and the communicative purposes it served for most studies in genre analysis in the past decades focused on research abstracts, argumentative essays, and job application letters (Swales 1990; Bhatia, 1993; Hopkins & Dudley-Evans; Mercado, 2007; Hyland, 1990). However, personal statement differs in many ways from the aforementioned genres as identified by Ding (2007) in his genre analysis of personal statements in the US. According to him PS lacks "prescriptive guidelines"; thus it paves way for "creativity and individuality" providing "space for narratives and stories" which aims "to inform and persuade" its audience (p. 370). Halliday (1994 in Hyland, 2003) explains this and pointed out that "people write to accomplish different

purposes in different contexts and this involves variation in the ways they use language…" (p. 19). However, this variation particularly the undefined boundaries of the essay posses difficulty to the applicants because of their "unfamiliarity with the conventions of the genre" including the expectations of their evaluators (Ding, 2007, p. 371). Hyland (2008) emphasized that "the process of writing involves creating a text that the writer assumes the reader will recognize and expect. And the process of reading involves drawing on assumptions about what the writer is trying to do" (p. 544). For him, "what is considered good writing… does not depend on mastery of universal processes, but varies from one community context to the next" (p. 25). This problem brings out the gap between the writer (applicant) and its readers (evaluators). The former being a novice and a stranger to the academic territory where he/she is seeking an admission and who barely has a clue of the readers' expectations, and the latter who is an expert in the field looking for the right qualities of the writer judging from a set of criteria unknown to the writer he/she has set forth. Applicants are, therefore, set in a battle knowing only the enemy's persona but not its hidden ability, consequently giving the applicant a slim chance of winning it.

A. Framework of the Study

Genre analysis during its first stages of development as a legitimate area of linguistic inquiry is primarily concerned on unearthing the underlying structure of a text, how social contexts influence the writer instead of the notion that text is individually constructed. Having this as a premise, study on genre analyses made use of the move analysis pioneered by Swales (1990). His CARS (Create-A-Research-Space) model has been influential in the world of genre analysis not only in analyzing research articles and abstracts but also in examining various genres across disciplines and cross-cultural variations which legitimized these genres in the world of academic and technical writing (Bhatia, 2002). It likewise made an impressive and useful contribution to the field of applied linguistics, specifically in the development of innovative and responsive writing pedagogies across various disciplines. Thus, it is also the intention of this study to seek for pedagogical implications. In the United States, personal statement draws the attention of various researchers (Asher, 2000; Curry, 1991; Ding, 2007; Mumby, 1997; Stewart, 1996; Wright, 2010) resulting in various publications aimed at guiding future graduate school applicants in writing a good and acceptable personal statement to win an entry in their chosen university. This study hopes to bring out certain issues that would bring light to this so called "occluded genre," its possible recognition as a legitimate genre of study and instruction aiming for description not prescription (Wright, 2010, Abstract). Also, this study made used of the cognitive structuring model of Hopkins and Dudley-Evans (1998); and Bhatia's (1993) model of genre analysis.

B. Objectives of the Study

This study is primarily an attempt to analyze the rhetorical move-step structure of personal statements written by non-native speakers of English (Filipinos) who are students of a graduate school in the Philippines.

Particularly, it aimed to answer the following research questions:
1. What are the moves-steps used in the personal statements of the writers?
2. Which of these moves-steps seem to be obligatory and optional?
3. Which of these moves-steps were given more emphasis in terms of the lengthy discussion given by the writers?

II. METHODS

A. Research Design

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed in conducting the study for both are particularly helpful in any corpus-based analysis and are known for bringing a better and holistic understanding of the topic. In particular, the descriptive-exploratory approach was utilized.

B. The corpus of the study

This study made use of ten (10) personal statements which were personally obtained with permission from the master's students enrolled in the various programs (i.e. Master of Arts in English Language Education and Master of Arts in Teaching English Language) offered by the Department of English and Applied Linguistics of De La Salle University-Manila. Due to its confidential nature, obtaining personal statements from the authorities of the graduate admission of the university was not taken into consideration; instead personal communication from the subjects of the study was done.

C. Data Analysis

In categorizing the moves and steps present in the corpus, the hand-tagged method of analysis pioneered by Swales (1990) in his CARS (Create-a-Research-Space) model in analyzing research articles was employed. Similarly, the studies of Ding (2007) provide the rhetorical objectives of personal statement which are influential in its cognitive structuring, thus affecting its lexico-grammatical and rhetorical features. He stated that the main objective of being admitted to the program is by "demonstrating one's academic background, professional qualifications, and personal strengths" which will be the benchmark of moves and steps analysis (p. 374). Furthermore, "text divisions" which are explicitly indicated and shown in the personal statements paved way in the easy identification of the moves and steps; the text division present in the corpus is the "paragraph division" which served as a primary guide in identifying the moves in the corpus (p.374). However, Flowerdew (1998 in Ding, 2007) pointed out that corpus-based analysis should not be confined on analyzing the lexico-grammatical patterns of the text alone but should likewise consider the "functional, rhetorical, pragmatic and textlinguistic levels" (p. 375). Thus, this suggestion of Flowerdew was also considered in the

analysis of the moves and steps present in the personal statements.

The guide questions in writing the personal statements published in the official website of De La Salle University (DLSU) also served as a good premise in the analysis of the move structure of the corpus. These questions are particularly helpful for students in organizing their ideas to create meaningful rhetorical units. This organization is explained by Bhatia's (1993) concept of cognitive structuring; he posited that it is "the conventional and standardized organization" of a written text (p.26). This also served as a point of reference in analyzing the rhetorical moves in the corpus.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. The identified moves and steps

Table 1 shows the identified moves and steps exhibited by the corpus of the study along with their respective rhetorical functions. As can be seen from the table, the researcher opted not to label these moves and steps in the manner as they appear in the texts for a simple reason that the pattern of each personal statement does not follow a uniform fashion which is similarly observed by Hopkins and Dudley-Evans (1988) in their study of the cognitive structure of the results and discussion section of research articles. They observed that these "moves occur in cycle in which the writer chooses an appropriate sequence of moves" (p. 20). Swales (1990, in Hyland, 2003) supported this claim saying that "variations is just as important as similarity because texts spread along a continuum of approximation to core genre examples with varying options and restrictions operating in particular cases" (p. 23).

TABLE I THE IDENTIFIED MOVES AND STEPS

rhetorical structure that each personal statement follows will be shown and discussed in the latter part of this chapter.

Similar to the results shown in Ding's (2007) study, five moves were identified and they are as follows:

1. Stating purpose/s and explaining reason/s for pursuing graduate studies (GS)-accounts the primary motivation of the students in seeking a graduate degree. This is the same to that of the identified Move 1 of Ding's (2007) investigation of personal statements of dental and medical applicants in the US. Its function is similar to Swales (1990), that is, establishing a territory. Under this move are three recurring steps, namely **(a.) citing professional and academic reasons -**allows applicants to enumerate what professional and academic purpose will a graduate degree do to them; **(b.) citing possible promotion and/or improvement in their employment status-**shows the writers' employment improvement as their motivation for pursuing a graduate degree; and **(c.) improvement of their abilities as a person-**indicates the help a graduate degree can do in honing their competence.

For illustration, the following excerpts exhibit the abovementioned steps:
(a.) Citing professional and academic reasons
Graduate studies will contribute a lot to my professional growth-being a teacher; I will be knowledgeable about the latest methodologies in teaching as well as the curricular changes which may take place in the Philippine educational setting.
(b.) Citing possible promotion and/or improvement in their employment status
Practically, I will take my Master's degree because this will surely make me capable of being reputable in gaining higher educational posts in the future.
(c.) Improvement of their abilities as a person
Moreover, formally learning the English language

MOVES and STEPS	DEFINITION
Stating purpose/explaining reason	The writer explains his purpose/s and reasons for applying for GS
professional and academic advancement	The student cites professional growth as a reason for pursuing GS
employment status/promotional purposes	The student cites improvement of his/her employment status
personal improvement	The student gives personal upliftment as a reason for pursuing GS
Explaining social contribution	The student enumerates possible societal contribution of finishing GS
stating positive influence to others	The student expresses positive influence to others
stating personal commitment	The student states commitment in the upliftment of education of others
sharing gained knowledge	The student states imparting expertise and gained knowledge to others
stating one's role in the educational mainstream	The student expresses awareness of his/her role in the mainstream education
Indicating research interest	The student states his/her field of research interest
Personal attributes/qualities	The student enumerates personal qualities
Career expectations	The student predicts future plans after finishing GS

Also, as a unique feature of personal statement, its lack of prescribed rules in writing paved way for this variation (Ding, 2007). Hyland (2003) posited that "genres are not overbearing structures which impose uniformity on users" (p. 23). The

will help me improve my speaking and writing skills.
2. Explaining social contribution-is the second move identified in the corpus signifying the various contributions the students perceived they can do after finishing their

graduate studies. This particular move exhibited four steps which are as follows:

(a.) Stating positive influence to others-states the students' constructive way of influencing the people around them; **(b.) stating personal commitment-**shows the writers' zeal and passion in serving the community and the clientele; **(c.)** in **sharing gained knowledge-**the writers express their intention of imparting their learned knowledge and expertise to those who needed them; **(d.) stating one's role in the educational mainstream-**emphasizes the writers chosen niche in the field of language teaching explaining their responsibilities as scholars and reputable members of the academe.

The excerpts below are samples of the identified steps in Move 2:

(a.)   Stating positive influence to others

After I finish my graduate studies, I'll be more of a leader and will train young minds to be a leader to produce creative individuals who are able to adjust to the changing times after all this society just need a leader who is smart enough to influence others.

(b.)   Stating personal commitment

I promised to myself and to the teaching profession that I should develop my full potential so that I can serve my students to the best of my abilities. This is my commitment not only to my students nor to the teaching profession alone but more importantly to our country.

(c.)   Sharing gained knowledge

As a social combatant, I believe that we teachers are shapers of the nation for we hone the young generations, our county's hope. I want to be an agent of this social transformation by developing these young people to their full potential and in return become the productive members of this nation. This for me is the least that I can do for our motherland.

(d.)   Stating one's role in the educational mainstream

I will be knowledgeable about the latest methodologies in teaching as well as the curricular changes which may take place in the Philippine educational setting. Moreover, graduate studies may also be helpful tool for me to become more eligible contributor in the field of education which I hopefully aspire to be beneficent in the development of the society.

3. *Indicating research interest* mentions the area of inquiry the students' want to undertake once they have been admitted to the program. The students' also made mention why such inquiry is needed sighting problematic issues about the chosen topic. The following examples exemplify this move:

If I would be admitted to the program, I would want to explore, among others, the psychological and linguistic issues in first and second language learning, especially in Philippine setting. I also want to probe into the root cause of the fear of many Filipinos of learning and using English in verbal and written communication.

4. *Personal attributes* enumerates the character traits of the students. This part also mentions the students' preparedness to take the graduate program by citing professional experience and academic background. Over all, this part describes the personality of the students.

When I was in college, I was chosen to be one of the Professional Student Teachers (PST) who teaches English to foreign students such as, Japanese, Chinese, Koreans and Taiwanese. This experience hones my abilities to adapt to different cultures and understand the importance of flexibility. I am optimistic and diligent in pursuing my goals and I aim to improve my skills in English.

5. *Career expectations* are predictions of career plans the students want to achieve in the near future. This move emphasizes the students' wishes, hopes and aspirations in their professional career. In summary, this move discusses the future endeavors the students want to take in their professional journey.

Five years from now, I see myself being able to carry out the English needs of different groups of college students – pre-service tourist guides, aviators, mariners, and the like. By then, I am teaching the language necessary for them to function in the workplace.

Aside from the moves mentioned above the following moves were also identified which are considered either relatively relevant or irrelevant to the questions being asked in the personal statement guide stipulated by the university:

1. *Personal background and history* recounts life experiences of the students ranging from their professional experience and college dreams and aspirations.

Ever since college I always keep on thinking of my future career as a teacher. I always ask myself, where will I be after graduation, what will I become and who will I become in the years ahead. At that a time I do not know yet, I do have plans, in fact many plans but they always seem vague and indefinite until I came to my final year of study in our university. I was a practice teacher then when I realized that I should lay down my plans so that I will have a direction to follow. So I came up with my career path, a simple chronology of events of who I want to be in the coming years. I wrote there as my first goal after graduation, I will pass the licensure examination for teachers, apply for a teaching post and immediately enroll in a master's program.

2. *Seeking scholarship grants* provides the students intention of being considered for a scholarship grant the university is offering.

I sincerely believe that I deserve the chance to be considered in the scholarship program of DLSU because I understand what it means to have very little in this life. I am appreciative and grateful for whatever good thing comes my way, and if I would be fortunate enough to be granted a scholarship, I would take full advantage of it and give back to society through teaching.

3. *Citing educational issues* mentions the current problems of the education system of the country which for the

TABLE II THE RECURRENCE OF THE IDENTIFIED MOVES

MOVES	PERSONAL STATEMENTS										ƒ	%
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J		
Stating purpose/explaining reason	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	10	100
Indicating research interest	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	10	100
Personal attributes/qualities	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	10	100
Career expectations	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	O	9	90
Explaining social contribution	O	O	O	O	X	O	O	X	O	O	8	80
Personal background and history	O	O	O	O	X	O	X	X	O	X	6	60
Stating personal educational belief	X	O	X	X	X	X	X	O	X	X	2	20
Citing educational issues	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	O	1	10
Seeking scholarship grant	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	O	1	10

students seem to be relevant to include in establishing themselves as a knowledgeable candidate for the program.

The English-language proficiency in the country, although still superior compared with other South East Asian nations, is said to have been deteriorating gradually over the recent decades. This countrywide issue is being witnessed in the declining English aptitude among local schools as well as in the workforce. I believe that now, arguably more than ever, English is a critical element in the progress of the Philippines.
4. Stating personal educational belief states the students own educational philosophy.

Being an educator will not mean doing the talking all the time but in order to share the best of what you have, be the best of what you can be, don't just stay inside the four-walled classroom be in it and explore it.

B. Moves present in each personal statement

Table 2 shows the hand-tagged moves in each personal statement. As shown in the table, three moves are present in all personal statements namely, ***stating purpose/s and explaining reason/s for pursuing graduate studies***, ***indicating research interest***, ***personal attributes*** while two other moves were present in eight and nine personal statements specifically ***career expectations*** and ***explaining social contribution*** respectively.

These five moves can be regarded as obligatory because of their known presence in almost all PS. This can be attributed to the questions stipulated in the application procedure by DLSU which guided the students in writing their personal statements. The students felt that these questions should be properly addressed and answered in accordance with the instructions, hence obliging them to include these answers in their personal statements. Notice that the five moves that topped the list are answers to these questions which are as follows:

1. How do you see yourself professionally five (5) years from now?
2. Why are you interested to take up graduate studies? What purpose does a graduate degree serve in your long-term professional goal?
3. In what way would your graduate studies contribute to the development of society in general?
4. What qualities do you possess that make you deserving to be admitted to the program?
5. If you are admitted to the program, what area (s) do you wish to investigate in your research/ thesis?
(www.dlsu.edu.ph)

It is also noteworthy that there are four other moves that were identified namely ***citing educational issues, seeking scholarship grant, stating personal educational belief*** and ***personal background and history***. Their presence, though outside the five guide questions can be explained by these characteristics of personal statement observed by Ding (2007) in his study of PS in the US: "allowance for creativity and individuality" and "space for narratives and stories" (p. 370).

Because of their little presence in the corpus, they can be regarded as optional moves. The students may have confined themselves in the corners of the five guide questions, thus leading to the five recurring moves.

C. The Recurring Steps in the Moves

Table 3 shows the frequently used steps the writers used in discussing and in expounding the moves. Note that only two of the five recognized moves, namely **stating purpose/explaining reason** and **explaining social contribution** have illustrated some identified steps. This can be explained by the lengthy discussion given by the writers on the said moves (See Table 5). Meanwhile, ***professional and academic advancement*** under stating purpose/explaining reason move is present in almost all the PS signifying its obligatory nature. This can give us the impression that the primary reason for most students why they pursue a graduate degree is to improve their professional and academic standing.

TABLE III THE RECURRING STEPS IN THE MOVES

STEPS in the MOVES	PERSONAL STATEMENTS										f	%
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J		
Stating purpose/explaining reason												
professional and academic advancement	O	O	O	O	O	X	O	O	O	O	9	90
employment status/promotional	O	X	X	X	X	O	X	X	O	X	3	30
personal improvement	X	X	O	X	X	X	X	X	O	X	2	20
Explaining social contribution												
stating one's role in the educational mainstream	O	X	X	O	X	O	O	X	O	O	6	60
stating positive influence to others	O	O	O	X	X	O	O	X	X	X	5	50
sharing gained knowledge	O	X	X	X	X	O	X	X	O	X	3	30
stating personal commitment	O	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	O	2	20

On the other hand, three students frankly admitted that pursuing and finishing a graduate degree means improving their employment condition and the other two openly stated it is for their own personal well-being. Because of their little presence in the personal statements, these two steps can be considered as optional steps.

This result is no longer a surprise for many institutions today, particularly, the higher education institutions (HEI); both private and public are encouraging their faculty members, as well as their non-teaching personnel to pursue graduate studies to improve their academic and professional standing therefore getting a better chance for promotion. This clamor for higher learning can be credited to the educational reforms that our government agencies (i.e. Commission on Higher Education, Civil Service Commission) had set into place mandating master's degree as the minimum educational qualification for teachers in HEIs. Also, the institutionalization of the continuing professional education (CPE) as a key tool in the progress of our system of education had been widely accepted, thus making its way in the new teacher education curriculum known as the National Competency-Based Teacher Standards (NCBTS). The NCBTS included CPE in the framework of the career path a modern Filipino teacher should follow.

In explaining their contribution to the bigger society once they have finished their graduate degree, more than half of the students stressed their *key involvement in the mainstream education* saying that their significant role as molders of the youth plays a vital function in improving the society as a whole. See this excerpt from one of personal statements:

As a social combatant, I believe that we teachers are shapers of the nation for we hone the young generations, our county's hope. I want to be an agent of this social transformation by developing these young people to their full potential and in return become the productive members of this nation.

This simply means that many graduate students are aware of their duty as educators not only to their clientele (the students) but in its broader sense, to the society as well.

Stating their positive influence to others is also regarded by half of the students as their contribution to the society. They explained that their graduate degree can help them to become positive catalyst in creating a lasting impact in the mind hearts of their students in the years ahead as shown by this example:

After I finish my graduate studies, I'll be more of a leader and will train young minds to be a leader to produce creative individuals who are able to adjust to the changing times after all this society just need a leader who is smart enough to influence others.

Because of their minimal presence in the corpus both are considered quasi-obligatory steps. The remaining identified steps namely, *sharing gained knowledge* and *stating personal commitment* which got little share can be considered as optional steps.

D. Move pattern of personal statements

Table 4 shows the pattern that each personal statement follows. As can be seen from the table most of the students employ different move patterns. As explained earlier, because of the lack of prescriptive guidelines, personal statements provide space for the writers' style in writing, thus creating varied move patterns (Ding, 2007). Also, Hyland (2003) supports this idea of Ding (2003) in his metaphor of writing explaining that "while writing, like dancing, allows for creativity and the unexpected, established patterns often form the basis of any variations" (p. 150). The exploitation of the members of the community likewise contributes to these variations, Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995 in Bhatia, 2002) explain this saying that "we often find typical textualisation patterns, yet we know expert members of professional communities exploit them to create novel patterns" (p.7). It is also noteworthy that almost all the students started their personal statements by stating personal history and background which is outside the five questions stipulated by the De La Salle University. What is also surprising is the fact that more than half of the students share the same moves as far

TABLE IV THE MOVE PATTERN OF EACH PS

MOVES	PERSONAL STATEMENTS										_f_	%
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J		
Personal background and history	M1	M1	M1	M1		M1			M1		6	100
Career expectations	M6	M2	M2	M2	M1	M2	M1	M2		M1	5	55.6
Stating purpose/explaining reason	M2	M3	M3	M3	M2	M3	M2	M3	M2	M2	5	50
Explaining social contribution	M4	M4	M4	M4		M4	M3		M3	M4	6	75
Personal attributes/qualities	M5	M5	M5	M5	M3	M5	M5	M5	M4	M5	8	80
Indicating research interest	M3	M6	M6	M6	M4	M6	M4	M4	M5	M7	4	40
Stating personal belief about education		M7						M1			2	20
Citing educational issues										M3	1	10
Seeking scholarship grant										M6	1	10

as the logical or chronological arrangement of moves is concerned.

However, it is surprising that four PS (i.e. B, C, D & F) follow the same move pattern starting their personal statement with a personal background and history followed by their career plans in the future, and then stating their purpose and reason why they are pursuing a graduate degree. After this, they then mention their possible contribution to the society once they finished their graduate program and finally ending their personal statement by enumerating their personal qualities. This agreement among the four personal statements is an exemplar of the idea of "discourse community" whereby a certain group of people sharing commonalities, (i.e., academic or professional interest, work environment, specialty or expertise) likewise share similarities on the ways how they use language.

Herzberg (1986 in Swales, 1990) explains this in his idea of "discourse community" saying (p. 21):

… "discourse community" testifies to the increasingly common assumption that discourse operates within conventions defined by communities, be they academic disciplines or social groups…English now use the notion of "discourse communities" to signify a cluster of ideas: that knowledge use in a group is form of social behavior, that discourse is a means of maintaining and extending the group's knowledge and of initiating new members into the group, and that discourse is epistemic or constructive of the group's knowledge (p. 21).

Swales (1990) expounds this idea stating that "a discourse community has developed and continues to develop a discoursal expectations. These may involve appropriacy of topics, the form, function and positioning of discoursal elements, and roles texts play in the operation of the discourse community" (p. 26). Furthermore, this agreement of move pattern among four PS can be explained by the assumption that language is socially embedded therefore people who belong to the same social background will likely share the same use of language (Hyland, 2003).

E. Average Length of Identified Moves

Table 5 shows the number of words each identified moves has and their average length. As can be seen in the table below, the moves that topped that list are the answers to the five questions stipulated in personal statement guide promulgated by DLSU. Stating purpose/explaining reason topped the list covering an average length of almost a quarter of the entire personal statement. This simply suggests that the students put more emphasis in explaining their reason and stating why they are pursuing a graduate degree. The students may have regarded it as the most important topic to expound in establishing themselves towards the eye of the evaluator for them to be considered in the graduate program. This result is similar to the findings of Sii (n.d.) on the genre analysis and cross-cultural variation between British and Chinese graduate school applicants. She found out that Chinese students tend to put more importance on their reason for graduate study rather than their own candidature which their British counterparts emphasize more. This similarity seems to suggest that Chinese and Filipino graduate student applicants share the same cultural propensity in establishing and presenting themselves to their readers. This, for me, is no longer a surprise for, as far as history and geography are concerned, these two nationalities somehow share some cultural connections- both being Asians. Coming in on second is the students' explanation and enumeration of their possible contributions to the society posting an average length of a little over 15% of the personal statements and is relatively close to the third move which is indicating the research interests of the students with almost 15% on average length. It is surprising to see that despite the self-representation and self-promotion nature of personal statement, Filipino graduate applicants tend to give little attention on discussing their personal qualities. This is explained by its little discussion shown by the average length of this move consisting of about 14% landing on the fourth spot on the list.

TABLE V THE AVERAGE LENGTH OF IDENTIFIED MOVES

IDENTIFIED MOVES	Average Word	%
Stating purpose/explaining reason	97.1	**23.1**
Explaining social contribution	77.8	**16.4**
Indicating research interest	62.7	**14.7**
Personal attributes/qualities	59.2	**14.1**
Career expectations	44.8	**11.2**
Personal background and history	49.3	**10.2**
Citing educational issues	18.3	**3.55**
Stating personal belief about education	10.7	**2.83**
Seeking scholarship grant	6.8	**1.32**
	Average Length	**435**

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This descriptive-exploratory study only aimed to unearth some possible insights about personal statement—it being an important tool in the graduate admission process in most universities in the country offering graduate programs. In particular, it aimed to reveal the secret genre of personal statements (as far as the Philippines is concerned), its cognitive structuring with the purpose of describing rather than prescribing.

The findings of the study showed that the personal statements of some of the graduate students of Department of English and Applied Linguistics of De La Salle University-Manila (though some showed some variations) are mainly products of the five guide questions stipulated by the university; these questions guided the students in their construction of their personal statements which likely affected their cognitive structuring of the text, thus revealing the five recurring moves present in them, such as stating purpose/explaining reason, indicating research interest/personal attributes/qualities, career expectations, and explaining social contribution. The recurrence of these moves in almost all the personal statements indicated its obligatory nature. The study likewise revealed that Filipino graduate student applicants tend to discuss their reason for pursuing a graduate degree more than establishing themselves (by enumerating their personal attributes) as an ideal candidate for the program.

The intriguing results of the study should also arouse the interest of other researchers to delve into more adept investigations like cross-cultural variations between and among graduate applicants with different nationalities or between and among applicants coming from different fields of interests which will eventually lead to the legitimization and recognition of this occluded genre in the field of academic writing, thus drawing pedagogical implications in the writing instruction across disciplines, particularly its possible inclusion in the various academic and technical writing courses offered by many universities to raise the "rhetorical and genre consciousness" of the learners (Swales, 1993 in Bhatia, 2002). This, I believe, would help many students who are aspiring to pursue a graduate degree in increasing their chances on being admitted to the program. As what Hyland (2007) pointed out in his paper: "by making explicit what is to be learnt, providing a coherent framework for studying both language and contexts…and creating the resources for students to understand and challenge valued discourses, genre approaches provide an effective writing pedagogy" (p.149).

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