A Move Analysis of the "About Us" Page on University Engineering Websites

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Abstract

This study investigated the rhetorical structure of the "About Us" page on North American universities' engineering website based on move analysis developed by Swales (1990). Promotional genres tend to promote products for potential audiences as communicative purposes. The university "About Us" page is considered as one type of promotional genres (Bhatia, 2004). It aims at attracting future students who are interested in studying engineering by providing a variety of information and therefore promotes its professional image. The samples of the "About Us" page were collected from the top 20 engineering websites in North American universities listed on the QS Top University's World University Ranking 2013 by Engineering and Technology. Two coders, the researcher and a graduate student, hand-coded the "About Us" pages and identified a seven-move structure. They are Self-promotion, Mission statement, Status quo of college, Vision statement, Source of consultation, Invitation, and Giving extra details of college.

Keywords: (move analysis, North America, "About Us", promotional genres, engineering Website)

Introduction

Globalization and internationalization have led higher educational institutions (HEIs) to strengthen their marketing and recruiting strategies in order to stay internationally competitive for potential students (Yang, 2013). In countries such as Canada, the USA, Australia and the UK where English is the major language, the higher education (HE) market is already instituted as a global phenomenon (Yang, 2013). A common way for HEIs to promote themselves is by marketization strategies in hopes to reach a larger international HE market (Hemsley-Brown, 2006). Therefore, HE is now seen as a product – tailor-made, commercially publicized and sold to students, their prospective customers (Fairclough, 1993). This transition has transformed the way language is used in both public and academic settings (Yang, 2013). Additionally, it means that language researchers must also be concerned about how marketization and promotional culture can impact HE discourse(Xiong, 2012).

'Promotional' or 'consumer' culture, as pointed out by (Wernick, 1991) and (Featherstone, 1991), is the primary trait of contemporary culture. This culture could be realized in discursive practices as sticky with an obvious communicative function, i.e. to promote (Yang, 2013). This is because of the salience of promotion increasingly as a communicative function (Yang, 2013). Moreover, multi-functioned genre-mixing, for example, combining the purposes of information, persuasion and promotion can occur appropriately without misinterpreting the communication role (Yang, 2013). Therefore, it is now common to see advertising elements in academic settings. An area of discourse that has become the most versatile and rapidly developing among promotional genres is promotional language (Bhatia, 2005).

This study investigated the rhetorical structure of the "About Us" page on North American universities' engineering website based on move analysis developed by Swales (1990) They usually use this page to give briefly introduction to the future students to promote their own college. They offer their advantages and outstanding performances to capture future students' attention.

Literature review

Move analysis
Swales (1990) defined move analysis as a functional unit in a content for an identifiable purpose, and it is commonly used to find the textual regularities in particular genres of writing and also to explain the functions that certain parts of the

content realizes in the relationship to the whole task (Connor, Davis, & De Rycker, 1995). Move types that occur more frequently than others in a genre can be classified as conventional, while moves that occur not as frequently can be classified as optional. Moves may include various elements, and are realized when these elements come together in some combination. According to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), a 'move' is a unit that connects the writer's purpose and the extent that the writer desires to communicate; a 'step' is a text unit that is lower in level than the move that gives an elaborate view on the choices the writer has to start the moves in the introduction . In short, moves serve as semantic and functional units of texts, and they have their own specific communicative purposes.

Promotional genre

The university prospectus is a corporate genre in academic institutions (Fairclough, 1993). Respectively, apart from offering information on the heart of the business of the educational institution, (i.e. the academic programs), the prospectus contains information on other features of the EI. Through critical discourse analysis of prospectuses from a collection of British EIs, Fairclough states that these EIs began publicizing their programs due to an increase in pressure to function similar to other businesses that are competing to sell their merchandise to consumers. The university prospectus is becoming a 'genre of client advertising colonizing professional and social service structure of discourse on a large scope, producing many hybrid promotional genre partially ' (Fairclough, 1993).

Promotional leaflets (Osman, 2005) are published and circulated in academic institutions in Malaysia, especially before a new academic year starts, to advertise their academic programs to potential students. These leaflets are colorful and interesting, and no longer plain or boring information sheets. This research agrees with Askehave and Swales (2001) that corporate brochures operate as promotional brochures beyond projecting the image of the corporate and offering information. Therefore, the purpose of this article attempted to examine and explain the strategies that understand the promotional functions in this kind of brochure in EIs.
Additionally, Osman (2008) investigated the rhetorical structure of university brochures. Osman used Bhatia's (1993) genre analytical framework lead by sociolinguistic perspectives to study the communication strategies in university brochures. She also agrees with Askehave and Swales (2001) point that a more communicative function of the brochure is to promote the self aside from the axiomatic functions of offering information and projecting pictures. Furthermore,

Osman (2008) stated that there is a lack of research examining the promotional genres of EIs and requests for more of such studies. She identified ten moves in university brochures, 1) Identifying the service; 2) Attracting reader attention; 3) Targeting the market; 4) Establishing credentials; 5) Location the service; 6) Describing the service; 7) Justifying the service; 8) Indicating the value of service; 9) Endorsing the value of service; 10) Soliciting response. Between brochures and "About Us" page has overlapping communicative purpose. The function of these moves makes it as a promotional genre; however, in "About Us" page as well.

In this study, "About Us" section of college of Engineering belongs to promotional genre. The goal for "About Us" section promoted by colleges themselves, and they used text in "About Us" to attract future students to choose their university in the future. However, in promotional genres, few researchers investigate "About Us" section in website of college of Engineering and Technology in North America. The research questions in this study are:

1) What is the rhetorical structure of the "About Us" page of college of Engineering website?
2) How is the rhetorical structure of the "About Us" page of college of Engineering website patterned in terms of move types?

Methodology

Date collection
The data collected 20 "About Us" pages in College of Engineering websites in North America Universities. The 20 pages were selected from QS World University Rankings by Faculty 2013 - Engineering and Technology. Colleges use different ways to display their "About Us" page using prose, lists (e.g., Harvard University: *http://www.seas.harvard.edu/about-seas*), links (e.g., University of Florida: *http://www.eng.ufl.edu/about*), or the Dean's message (e.g., Princeton University: *http://www.princeton.edu/engineering/about/deans-note/*). But we only selected prose as the form – all details in one web page – to analyze "About Us". However, the other forms (i.e., lists, links and Dean's message) did not offer enough descriptions; hence, we excluded them. Furthermore, each college may chose a different name for their "About Us" page, such as "Introduction", "Overview", "About" or "About Us". These page names are all recognized as "About Us" in this paper.

Data Analysis Procedure

This study was examined by move analysis, and used functional approach to analyze calls for cognitive judgment. In addition, it identified the rhetorical structures and investigated communicative purpose of each move.

In this study, a structural move analysis was coded by two coders, including the author. The other coder was a graduate student in the same department with the author. Before coding, the author trained the other coder to understand the coding definition; therefore, allowing two coders to be able to obtain better agreement. Two coders hand-coded twenty "About Us" pages separately, and identified the moves and steps. The two coders had three meetings to negotiate to get higher agreement. We used percent agreement to calculate the inter-rater reliability. The result of the inter-rater reliability is 82.3%.

Rasmeenin (2006) divided the frequency of moves into three parts, obligatory, conventional, or optional. He also classified the percentage for each move type: *Obligatory move, 100%; Conventional move, 66-99%; and Optional move, below 66 %.* Nodoushan (2012) also used Rasmeenin's rational to identify the frequency of move in the book review genre. Furthermore, Kanoksilapatham (2005) identified the rhetorical move in biochemistry research articles, and he also determined the frequencies of each move. However, he only applied two classifications, *conventional move, 60%* and *optional, below 60%.*

In these studies I reviewed, I did not find any particular standard rational built in the past. In addition, in their rational, the range of each move frequency seemed a little broad; therefore, we made an adjustment to specify the frequency of move percentage and use more appropriate frequency to investigate our data in this study. Hence, I adjusted the frequency range based on the normal distribution curve. It may avoid human bias and the result will be more reliable.

The definition of these three classifications were used

- *Obligatory move:* 97.8% to 100%
- *Higher-Conventional move*: 84.2% to 97.7%
- *Lower-Conventional move:* 50% to 84.1%
- *Optional move:* less than 50%

Table 1 displays that Framework for the analysis of move of the "About Us" page in the College of Engineering website in North America Universities.

Move/ Step	Definition
Move 1: Self-promotion	Using impressive advantages to catch future student's attention
Step 1. Short background/ history of college	Giving brief introduction of college
Step 2. Show distinctive feature of college	Showing extraordinary features of the college to future students to impress them to choose their college.
Move 2: Mission statement	Giving purpose of the college and gives specific goals
Step 1. Show the purpose of college	Understanding what exactly the college does and offers
Step 2. Illustrate the ability they will train to the future student	Assuring future students the education and skills they will acquire at college
Step 3. Give specific goals	Providing clear details about what future students will learn.
Move 3: Status quo of college	Understanding the situation of the college
Step1. Fact & Figure (E.g. Members, ranking, equipment and programs)	Providing more detailed information about the college
Move 4: Vision statement	Showing the attitude and skills of the college
Step 1. Show the professional skills of college	Showing the college is qualified to train their students
Step 2. Show the contribution of college to industry	Showing cooperation with other industries
Step 3. Give more testimony	Identifying the college as competent
Move 5: Source of consultation	Showing strong human resources of the college
Move 6: Giving extra details of college	Giving links to link information about the college
Move 7: Invitation	Inviting students to join their college

Results and Discussion

This study serves to bridge the gap discussed above by examining the contexts and the rhetorical features of the genre of "About Us". "About Us" shares something in common with other promotional genres such as brochures (Hu & Soong, 2007), corporate advertising (Osman, 2008) and academic posts(Xiong, 2012).

This study identified a seven move structure. Move 1 is high-conventional. Move 2 to Move 4 are low-conventional. Move 5 to Move 7 are optional. To facilitate understanding and discussion of the results in the subsequent sections, the following examples and frequency of occurrence (Table 2) for each move and step are described:

Table 2 The Frequency of Move & Step

Move/ Step	Frequency of occurrence (%)		Numbers of occurrence
Move 1. Self-promotion		**90%**	**N=18**
Step 1. Short background/ history of college	58%		
Step 2. Show distinctive feature of college	42%		
Move 2. Mission statement	**70%**		**N=14**
Step 1. Show the purpose of college	38%		
Step 2. Illustrate the abilities they will train to future students	38%		
Step 3. Give specific goals	25%		
Move 3. Status quo of college	**60%**		**N=12**
Move 4. Vision statement	**50%**		**N=10**
Step 1. Show the professional skills of college	43%		
Step 2. Show the contribution of college to Industry	38%		
Step 3. Give more testimony	19%		
Move 5. Source of consultation	**20%**		**N=4**
Move 6. Give extra details of college	**30%**		**N=6**
Move 7. Invitation	**20%**		**N=4**

Note: N=20

Move 1: Self-promotion shows their advantages and impressive history to attract the attention of future students. In this study the frequency of occurrence in Move 1is 90%. Move Classification identified is higher-conventional.

Step 1 Short background/ history of college gives brief introduction of college.

Move 1, Step 1: Short background/ history of college

> *"Berkeley Engineering is a community that is dedicated to creating tomorrow's leaders and supporting today's pioneers. Students and researchers from around the world are drawn to Berkeley by its outstanding reputation, its internationally recognized faculty and its strong tradition of impact in research and teaching."*

Step 2 Show distinctive feature of college shows extraordinary features of the college to future students to impress them to choose their college.

Move 1, Step 2: Show distinctive feature of college

> *"The faculty, students and alumni of Stanford Engineering have established thousands of companies and laid the technological and business foundations for Silicon Valley."*

> *"Earlier Berkeley engineers brought water to California's great agricultural lands, pioneered the microelectronics that seeded Silicon Valley and helped build the unbuildable in structures like Hoover Dam and the Golden Gate Bridge. Today, Berkeley engineers in every field remain at the center of technological innovation worldwide."*

The results indicated that the frequency of occurrence in Move 1 is 90% which is the highest frequency in "About Us"; hence, the move classification identified is higher-conventional. As mentioned before, Bhatia (1993) pointed out the communicative purpose of promoting a product or service to a potential customer. The texts in Move 1*Self-promotion* aims to promote the college as a product to persuade future students to join them, and to be part of them. In this move, two important features were found. Colleges provide 1) a short background/history of college and 2) distinctive features of college. The frequency of Step 1 (58%) seems a little higher than Step 2 (42%). Colleges usually give a short background to readers to

introduce themselves, and allow readers to know who they are in advance. Therefore, colleges will add more distinctive features to attract future students to notice their other achievements. In this way, colleges are given an opportunity to promote themselves and impress their readers. In Move 1, they use a lot of self-promotion skills to show how outstanding they are. Move 1 mostly appears in the first paragraph to capture the readers' attentions. Therefore, Move 1 *Self-promotion* is a key move in this study to make "About Us" as a genre.

Move 2: Mission Statement shows the purpose of the college and gives specific goals. In this study the frequency of occurrence in Move 2 is 70%. Move Classification identified is low-conventional.

Move 2, Step1 Show the purpose of college gives their purpose to allow future students to understand what exactly the college does and offers.

> *"Our mission is to seek solutions to important global problems and educate leaders who will make the world a better place by using the power of engineering principles, techniques and systems"*

> *"Our students have dozens of opportunities for hands-on, interdisciplinary technological research that give them an opportunity to work alongside renowned faculty on meaningful projects with real human benefits."*

Move 2, Step 2 Illustrate the abilities they will train to future students assures future students the education and skills they will acquire at college.

> *"We believe it is essential to educate engineers who possess not only deep technical excellence, but the creativity, cultural awareness and entrepreneurial skills that come from exposure to the liberal arts, business, medicine and other disciplines that are an integral part of the Stanford experience."*

> *"Our engineering students, immersed in this atmosphere of discovery, learn from and work with faculty members who are pioneering new knowledge at the forefront of engineering sciences."*

Move 2, Step 3 Give specific goals provide clear details about what future students will learn.

> *"Our key goals are to: Conduct curiosity-driven and problem-driven research that generates new knowledge and produces discoveries that provide the foundations for future engineered systems"*

Move 2 *Mission statement* aims to draw the purpose and specific goal of the college. A mission statement provides information about what type of organization it is and what it does (Falsey, 1989). Most colleges have a mission statement on their website to allow future students or other guests to know more about the institution and the atmosphere it holds. There are three features in Move 2: Step 1 shows the purpose of college; Step 2 illustrates the abilities they will train to future students and; Step 3 gives specific goals. Step 1 and Step 2 happened equally (38%) in "About Us" page. The reason might be because these two are the major factors in the mission statement, so most colleges mentioned them quite often. On the contrary, Step 3 occurred less frequently (25%) in Move 2. It may be because colleges think that Step 1 and Step 2 are sufficient in providing the information they want to convey. Therefore, they might think giving more specific goals is unnecessary. The frequency of occurrence in Move 2 is 70% and the classification identified is low-conventional. Even though the frequency percentage was not as high as obligatory, the mission statement still occurs quite frequently. Therefore, Move 2 still has an important position in "About Us" page.

Move 3: Status quo of college allows future students to understand the situation of the college.

Move 3, Step 1 Facts & Figures provides more detailed information about the college to future students, such as student numbers, ranking, equipment, programs and other relative information. In this study the frequency of occurrence in Move 3 is 60%. Move Classification identified is conventional.

Move 3, Step 1 Facts & Figures

- *"About 5,000 students"*
- *"More than 250 faculty members"*
- *"Three No. 1 department rankings, and all departments in the top 6"*
- *"More than 80 labs, centers and affiliate programs involving students in research"*

Move 4: Vision statement shows the attitude and skills of the college to allow future students to realize the future goals that the college plans to achieve. In this study the frequency of occurrence in Move 4 is 50%. Move Classification identified is conventional.

Move 4, Step 1 Show the professional skills of college shows that the college is qualified to train their students.

"Adding to the capabilities of specialized laboratory and research facilities across the Engineering Quad, the College of Engineering has recently opened Duffield Hall, one of the country's most sophisticated research and teaching facilities for nanoscience and nano"

Move 4, Step 2 Show the contribution of college to industry shows cooperation with other industries, and the college provides more resources to students that are outside of the school.

> *"Our close collaboration with other schools on campus and with industry strengthens our academic programs. Our successes in education and research have not only trained generations of leaders and created new knowledge but also have helped revolutionize technology, medicine, business and many other fields."*

Move 4, Step 3 Give more testimony identifies their college as competent.

> **"***The school's history is one of pioneering innovations in research, transferring discoveries to the broader community, and educating tomorrow's leaders and entrepreneurs."*

Both Move 3 and Move 4 are identified as low-conventional. Move 3 *Status quo of college* allows future students to understand the situation of the college. There is one important feature in this move, fact & figure, and it includes student numbers, ranking, equipment, programs, faculty and other information related to the college. This is one of the ways to promote the colleges as well. Colleges provide real facts about the college, and it allows people to know how big the scope of the college is. Future students or people outside of the school will consider whether this is the college they will choose in the future. Move 3 happens quite frequently in "About Us", and the frequency of occurrence in Move 3 is 60% and the classification identified is low-conventional.

Move 4 *Vision statement* shows the attitude and skills of the college to allow future students to realize the future goals that the college plans to achieve. There are three features that allow colleges to connect with future students. 1) Show the professional skills of the college 2) Show the contribution of the college to industries 3) Give more testimony to identify the college is competent. Step 1 in Move 4 occurred quite often (43%). Colleges usually show readers what professional skills they have, allowing readers to understand what skill they will learn, and if these skills are what they want. Step 2 might not happen often (38%), but this is also a factor to make Move 4 as a move. Last, Step 3 occurred less frequently (19%) in Move 4. The reason being that Step 3 might be unnecessary; it might just be like a supplement to show more performances in their college. In this study the frequency of occurrence in Move 4 is 50% which happens quite frequently as well, and the classification identified is low-conventional.

Move 5: Source of consultation shows strong human resources of the college allowing future students to have access to more faculty sources to help in the future or if they have any questions before entering college. In this study the frequency of occurrence in Move 5 is 20%. Move Classification identified is optional.

> "*Meet the leadership*: *Dean Shankar Sastry and the College's associate deans, department chairs and organized research unit directors.*"
> *Current and Past Department Chairs*

- *Professor Frank Chang (2010-present)*
- *Professor Ali H. Sayed (2005-2010)*
- *Professor Yahya Rahmat-Samii (2000-2005)*

Move 6: Giving extra details of college gives links to link information about the college, and allow future students to have a deeper understanding of the college. In this study the frequency of occurrence in Move 6 is 30%. Move Classification identified is optional. The realization of Move 6 is illustrated in examples .

"To find out more about Purdue Engineering, check out the rest of this Web site. You can also contact us, or please come for a visit to see what Purdue and you can do together."

"The pages of this website will allow you to explore several aspects of our Faculty, from our achievements and news headlines, to some of our groundbreaking research"

Move 7: Invitation is to invite students to join their college. In this study the frequency of occurrence in Move 7 is 20%. Move Classification identified is optional. The realization of Move 7 is illustrated in examples.

"We invite you to explore Cornell Engineering, both online and in person."

"Welcome to the Faculty of Applied Science & Engineering."

The classifications of Move 5 to Move 7 identified are optional. Move 5 *Source of consultation* aims to show strong human resources of the college, allowing future students to have more faculty sources to seek help in the future or before entering the college. However, not every college offers their source of consultation on the website. If future students want to gain more information, they might need to link to other links to find what they need. In this study the frequency of occurrence in Move 5 is 20%. Move 6 *Giving extra details of college* provides links to link information about the college, and allows future students have a deeper understanding. In this study the frequency of occurrence in Move 6 is 30%. Move 7 *Invitation* is to invite students to join their college. In this study the frequency of occurrence in Move 7 is 20%.

Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to examine the rhetorical structure of "About Us" page and the author treated move as obligatory, high-conventional, low-conventional and optional based on normal distribution. It was found that the seven moves have their own communicative purpose, especially Move 1 *Self-promotion,* which is high-conventional, and *Mission statement, Status quo of college and Vision statement* are low-conventional. Move 1 to Move 4 play an important role in "About Us" page. The rest of the Moves: *Source of consultation, Invitation, and Giving extra details of college* are optional in the "About Us" page.

The limitation in this present study is that the sample could be more equal. The topic was decided in North America; however, the samples from Canada only included three samples, so we could add more samples from Canada and expand our samples in the future. Furthermore, this study is small scale, so it cannot represent the whole sample. Further research is needed to expand the sample size and also to compare the differences in rhetorical structures of "About Us" page in different countries. Lastly, this study can analyze lexico-grammaticality to investigate the kind of syntactical functions that often appear in "About Us" page. The limitations offered above can be improved in future studies.

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