

RHETORICAL STRUCTURES IN FEATURE ARTICLES OF LOCAL AND NATIONAL PAPERS

Dr. Carmel Vip Conejos Derasin

Department of Languages and Literature, College of Arts and Sciences, Cebu Normal University, Cebu City, Cebu, Philippines

Abstract - *This study analyzed the rhetorical structures of selected feature articles printed in local and national newspapers. The study employed the qualitative research method which focused on the textual and interpretative analysis of the data. The texts were analyzed to determine the dominant rhetorical structures employed by the writers. These six texts were representatives of the different types of feature articles namely: human interest story, travelogue, personality sketch, entertainment, informative, and practical guidance. It is revealed that varied techniques were utilized in the introduction and the conclusion. The travelogue and entertainment articles had the same introductory technique while the personality sketch and the informative article had the same concluding technique. Description was the most common method used in developing the body of these articles, although purposes and topics were varied. As to rhetorical structures, in writing the different feature articles, there were many techniques and methods that can be employed in order to achieve effective writing. Moreover, the descriptive method in writing was found to be dominant in the representative features, which suggests that more activities along descriptive writing be given emphasis in the language classrooms. It was also found out that the scope, purpose and style employed in feature writing were remarkably varied as reflected in the techniques and methods used by the writers. This suggests a degree of freedom on the part of the students to choose their topics which are suited to their purpose. This also leads to the idea that writing essays could be easier if learners adhere to the guidelines and suggestions advocated by writing experts and authorities.*

Keywords: *rhetorical structures, feature articles, national and local papers*

Introduction

The convergence of media and technology has in many ways benefited the educational system of the Philippines. In terms of materials used in aiding teaching techniques and providing language-learning situations, the media have tremendously contributed to the system. According to Heinich (1996), there is an array of media formats and quality materials available to teachers and the number is increasing dramatically. The teacher must be prepared to choose the best tools for the students, who are in diverse situations and pursuing different sources of learning goals. Newspapers and magazines are print materials of mass readership in the country. In the Philippines, there are a good number of national papers, local dailies and weeklies that are circulating, and the majority of these papers are in English. The articles in these papers are often used as samples for journalism and writing classes to supplement the study of writing news, opinions, and features.

The common observation among journalism teachers and advisers of school papers indicates that the inclination of student writers is more on writing features than news or editorials. This can be attributed to the fact that most of these students want to express what they think without the hassles of using journalese or the technical terms used by journalists as in the case of news writing.

The research assumes that this inclination to feature writing among students has a significant implication to language teaching. It is making the student writer recognize the responsibility of providing the readers a venue for understanding the text and even beyond it. As Brown (in Ramirez, 1989) pointed out, the difficulty of print media lies in making the information instantly comprehensible to a large number of people. He claimed that the purpose of writing is not simply to delight with clever phrases, to charm with mellifluous flow of language, or to transport the readers beyond the real world to an imagined one but to transmit pieces of information in a clean and systematic way of presenting the stories.

However, there are prevailing problems confronting the use of English in the Philippines. The quality of the spoken and written English in the country does not satisfy the needs of the time. Sibayan (1996) [18] observes that English has deteriorated and that many job opportunities are denied or are beyond the reach of the great majority. This is also an observation in schools and even in the universities, where college students are found to be deficient of the English language skills. It is not surprising anymore to find English major students who write incoherent and ungrammatical essays.

Institutions of higher learning are also confronted by this problem. The English curriculum for both general education and the field of specialization has been realigned to answer the knowledge and skill requirements of the world of work. The academe needs to broaden its curricular offerings that should be relevant to the changing needs of society. Similarly, school publication advisers are also confronted with the problems of ungrammatical sentences of the articles submitted by student staff writers and contributors to the school paper. For them, it becomes a frustrating job to edit these works before they are ready to be printed. They also complain about incoherent and unorganized thoughts of the writers.

This is quite an unpleasant scenario for a country where English dominates all-important domains of society. English is the language of government, law, church, school, business, and media. This means that it is used for internal communication aside from being official language in the curriculum and also as international language of business, finance, and technology.

This research assumes that one preparation to become skilful in communication, can be done within the context of writing. In this study of discourse analysis, which is a way of describing and understanding how language functions in specific situations, practical insights can be offered to language instructors in developing the writing skills of their students.

It is along the aforementioned insights and scenarios that a study on the rhetorical structures of feature articles is conceived of.

Materials and Method

This study employed the qualitative research method in analyzing the discourse structure of feature articles. This requires an intensive analysis of the structure used in the articles. The representative features analyzed in this study would exemplify the different types of feature articles in local and national newspapers. Specifically, these stories were printed in the weekend issues of the newspapers. The national papers were The Philippine Daily Inquirer and

The Manila Bulletin while the local sources were The Sunstar Daily and The Freeman. The features represent the six different types namely; human interest story, travelogue, personality sketch, entertainment article, informative article, and practical guideline article. The feature articles in this study are as follows: Playing Santa and Other Causes, a human interest story from The Philippine Daily Inquirer; Hakuna Matata, the Southern Coast of Brighton, a travelogue from The Freeman; Will and Grace, a personality sketch from The Philippine Daily Inquirer; they Love Cecile, an entertainment article from The Manila Bulletin; Tea Drinkers May have Lower Skin Cancer Risk, an informative article from the Sunstar Daily; and Preparing for School, a practical guidance article from The Freeman.

In the process of selecting the authentic texts, all weekend issues of the four newspapers were gathered and the stories were classified as to type. In order to narrow down the choices, a particular month was randomly paired to a type of feature. All the titles were classified representing each month per newspaper. These features were reviewed by faculty members of the university who are teaching in the English Studies and Other Languages Department and are experts in the field of writing and discourse analysis. Finally, the six articles for analysis were chosen.

The rhetorical analysis of the text was done by classifying the parts of the articles into three, namely: introduction, body, and conclusion. On the right column, comments were written in phrases. The standards of good writing advocated by McCrimmon, Adelstein, and Pival, (1995), Pangilinan (1998), Malinao (2003), and Ramirez (1998) were utilized. The text and analysis were tabled and a thorough discussion followed after the table.

Results and Discussion

For exemplification of the analysis and interpretation of data, the following is one of the six tables presented with the analysis and its discussion which follows after the tabular presentation.

Table 1: Rhetorical Structure in the Human-Interest Article

Discourse Text	Rhetorical parts
IRISHMAN Patrick Murray does not look like Santa Claus. He has no big belly, no white beard and doesn't even wear the white-trimmed red suit. But for a group of underprivileged children in Oton on the outskirts of Iloilo City, Murray has been a real Santa for the past 15 years. Since 1987, the guy has been delivering from London candies, toys vitamins, clothes, and even books to the town's children, who welcome him with open arms.	Introduction <i>a contrast lead by alluding a literary/mythical character</i>
Murray, 62, a former postal worker who has made THE Philippines his retirement home since 2002, blushes when he's compared to Jolly St. Nick. He'd rather be called a volunteer, which has been his lifelong advocacy. "My work had been tough, blood, sweat, and tears," he recalls. His annual pilgrimage begins as early as September when he collects gifts, packs them, and sends them from England. By Christmas, he flies in to distribute the gifts himself.	Body <i>a description about the subject in the content of narration direct quotation to support the narration</i>
A native of Cork, Ireland, Murray found at a very young age the inspiration "to help the needy, the deprived, and the underprivileged" from then on Lord Mayor Pat Kerrigan, whose "mayoralty was devoted to those ends." At 17, Murray pioneered the bed-push as a fundraising activity, pushing a bed through the streets so people could donate money, clothes, medicines, or food. At first, it was only for the sick, which he encountered at a local hospital. When he moved to London, his voluntary work intensified. He did his most ambitious works in 1982 when he bed-pushed for more than 500 miles and raised funds for bone marrow research.	<i>background about the subject's life and work narration of salient events related to his life and advocacy</i>
Aside from the usual bed-push, Murray also fast. The famous Tower of London and the London Bridge have played hosts to his 48 hours of self-imposed abstinences for a cause. On another occasion, he spent roughly 75 hours at the Hammersmith Bridge in freezing and rainy weather with only water and biscuits for sustenance. He succeeded in getting donations for the surgery of Ellen Ramirez, a 4-year-old baby in the Philippines suffering from a congenital brain abnormality.	<i>More details about the subject focusing on unique events using narration</i>
But it was his first visit to the Philippines in 1987 with his wife Tarcie, a nurse he met in London, that he was shocked to see "pure poverty." There and then, he decided to help the children of Oton.	<i>more details about the subject by using emotive description</i>
His benevolence has not gone unnoticed. In October 2002, Daily Mail, one of England's most widely read newspapers, declared him one of the country's Unsung Heroes. He was honored for having "taken food, medicine and books to children in deprived areas of the Philippines." He personally received the award from Prince Charles.	<i>narration and description of his deeds and the rewards using causal-effect development</i>
What makes Murray special is his ability to single-handedly do voluntary work without the backing of the government or any philanthropic organizations. "Let's not have the talk, let's have actions and deeds. I'm interested in the doers and nit the talkers," he points out.	<i>analysis of the subject's character using direct quotation</i>
In his lifelong mission, Murray has shown that voluntary work is not only for the holiday season. His selfless sacrifices in helping others have made him live the Christmas spirit all year round. "We all have to look after our fellow human beings, especially those less fortunate than ourselves."	Conclusion <i>a further evaluation of his character using direct quotation</i>

This human-interest story of eight paragraphs starts with a contrasting lead. The differences in terms of physical aspects between the character Patrick Murray and Santa Claus are aptly expressed using "no" and "not". The subject and his deeds are alluded to Santa Claus, a mythical figure in literature. The second paragraph describes his generous advocacy-giving gifts to the underprivileged during Christmas. The time-frame, Christmas, suggests a consistent development of his deeds. The Santa-like personality is carried over to this paragraph.

The background of the character's work is narrated here in the third paragraph. Sentences are logically organized from beginning to end, all of which contribute to the message. From his birthplace, the person who inspired him, to his bed-push fundraising activity – all of these complete the information needed in order to develop the human-interest touch of the article. Through narration, the unique and even extreme ways of making people aware and raising funds for the needy are elaborated in the fourth paragraph. This is building up the events that make the story more interesting to the readers. The turning point of the subject's life is cited in the 5th paragraph. This is indicated by the clause "... that he was shocked to see pure poverty." This establishes the major point, the apex of the "interest" element in the article. Paragraph 6 carries the idea presented in the previous paragraphs. Here the subject's deeds "had not gone unnoticed" This leads to the notion of rewards and honor which is an exemplification of the cause-effect method of developing the topic.

The penultimate paragraph is an analysis of the subject's work. This is reinforced by a quotation from Murray himself; "Let's not have the talk, let's have actions and deeds." The concluding paragraph enhances the idea of why Murray is special as explained in the previous paragraph. This is an evaluation of the person's work and its unique characteristics. The wholeness of

the human-interest story is achieved by the connection of “living the Christmas spirit all year round to the contrast and allusion lead of “Santa Claus” at the beginning of the article. This article dominantly uses the description and narration methods. In the context of developing the writing skills of students, descriptive writing would develop a more discriminating sense of language by appropriately using the qualities of words in specific writing situations. McCrimmon (1984) notes that in essays, narration is a method to make a point; it is an abbreviated form to illustrate a complicated subject. The students in the writing class therefore can be trained to become selective of the plots in narratives like arranging them according to meaningful and dramatic sequence of action in order to make a point in the topics of their human-interest story

Table 2: Commonalities and Differences in the Rhetorical Structures of the Six Feature Articles

Article Titles	Rhetorical Structures		
	Introduction	Body	Conclusion
1. Playing Santa and Other Causes	Contrast lead using allusion	Description Narration	Direct quotation
2. "Hakuna Matata" The Southern Coast	Striking statement	Description of a place	Forecasting the future
3. Will and Grace (Personality Sketch)	Direct quotation	Description of a person	Echoes opening paragraph through a situation
4. They Love Cecile (Entertainment)	Striking statement	Description of an event	Emotive anticipation
5. Tea Drinker May Have Lower Skin Cancer Risk (Informative Article)	General statement which is a reference to a current issue	Exposition through casual analysis	Restatement of the thesis
6. Preparing for School (Practical Guidance)	A direct address	Classification and Explanation	Summary of main points

From these six articles which compose the six types of feature stories, it can be gleaned that there are varied introductory and concluding techniques used by the writers. And this would largely depend on the type of feature article, the topic, and the purpose of writing. These paragraphs are referred to by Mc Crimmon (1984) as special paragraphs. The introduction serves as a lead to readers into the essay and the conclusion brings the whole essay to the climax. Furthermore, the researcher observes that there is a common method used in developing the body of these essays, and this is description.

The use of different techniques in the introduction such as contrast, striking statement, direct quotation, direct address, and a general statement shows varied styles by feature writers. It can be implied that feature writing is varied in style and scope. These introductory paragraphs expressed through attention-getting devices are suggestions of what the writers intend to discuss in whole article. This is also true in the concluding paragraphs. Six different techniques are used, all of which have made one point, summarizing the thesis in a few sentences.

It is significant to note that the most common method of developing the body of these articles is description. This pattern slightly varies according to the type of feature and topic. Four of this use description, and two use exposition through casual analysis and classification.

Findings

The most varied techniques used are seen in the introductory part. These feature leads range from contrast, striking statement, and direct address to direct quotation and general statement. It is important to note, though, that the travelogue and entertainment articles employ the same introductory technique, which is a striking statement. Furthermore, the most common method of development utilized in these six articles is description, although they vary in terms of purpose and topic.

Implications and Recommendations

In the teaching-learning situation, guiding students to develop their writing skills is not a short cut method. In order to achieve effective writing, all parts of the essay should be planned, organized, revised, and refined carefully. Another important implication that can be derived from this study is the predominance of description. According to Adelstein and Pival (1986), the purpose of descriptive writing is to share with readers some object, scene, activity, person, or mood that the writer has experienced. In the classroom, therefore, descriptive skills among students can be developed through observation and research and that more topics can be written using this method and these would range from personal, expository, to argumentative and even critical articles.

It is also further implied based on the data that there are certain methods which are appropriate for certain types of feature articles like the informative and practical guidance articles whose main methods of development are exposition and classification. Hence, it can be said that these methods and techniques can be applied differently according to topic, purpose, style and type of feature article. Finally, since learning to write, like learning practically any other skill, involves three components which are instruction, practice, and criticism, it is best to do all of them in the classroom.

References

1. Abiabi E (2001). Linguistic Analysis of Representative Literary Genres: Basis for Language Teaching in the Philippines Philippine Journal for Language Teaching.
2. Adelstein M. (1986) Jean Pival. The Writing Commitment. USA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc, 1986.
3. Brown, D. (2001). Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy. 2nd ed New York Addison Wesley Longman, Inc.
4. Cappon, R. 1982). The World: An Associated Press Guide to Good News Writing. New York: Associated Press.
5. Caturza R. (2002) Discourse Analysis of Variant English in Cebu-Based Newspapers. Cebu City: Cebu Normal University.
6. Cobile, F. (198). Linguistic Structures in Common Science Textbooks For Level I, II, III In common Paramedical Courses: An Analysis. Cebu City. Cebu Normal University, 1998.
7. Cohen, A. (1984) Assessing Language Ability in the Classroom. University of Minnesota, USA: Heinle & Heinle Publishers, 1994.
8. Galleon, J. (2004)l. Discourse Analysis of DepEd Memoranda Schoolyear 2002-2003: Proposed Guidelines for Memoranda Writing. Cebu City. Cebu Normal University.
9. Halliday MAK. (1973) Explorations in Language Study. London: Edward Arnold Massachusetts: Grimm and Company.
10. Hedge, T. (1990). Writing. New York: Oxford University Press.
11. Hedge T. (1995) Resource Book for Teachers. New York: Oxford University Press, .
12. Itule, B. D., Anderson, D., & Simon, J. (2006). News writing and reporting for today's media. Simon, James.
13. McCrimmon, James M. (1994). Writing with a Purpose. U.S.A.: Houghton and Mifflin Company.
14. Malinao A. (1988). Journalism for Filipinos. Mandaluyong City: National Bookstore,
15. Pangilinan E. (1988) Journalism Handbook. Quezon City: National Bookstore, 1988.

16. Pesirla A. (2004) *Qualitative Research: Descriptions of Reality in Natural Language*. The Graduate School Manual Cebu Normal University, 2000.
17. Sajulan E. (199). *Morpho-Syntactic Analysis Analyses for Fourth year Commerce and Computer Science Textbooks: Bases for ESP Instructional Materials*. Cebu City: Cebu Normal University.
18. Sibayan B. (1988). *Issues and Dilemmas in Language and Language Teaching in the Philippines* Philippine Journal for Language Teaching.