

THE DISCOURSE ORGANIZATION OF LETTERS OF COMPLAINT TO EDITORS IN PHILIPPINE ENGLISH AND SINGAPORE ENGLISH

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This paper presents an analysis of Philippine and Singaporean letters of complaint to editors published over a period of three months from July to August 2002. Eighty complaint letters from Philippine Daily Inquirer and The Straits Times, leading newspapers in the Philippines and Singapore, respectively, were examined in terms of their discourse structure. Textual analysis was used as a method of identifying the organizational moves.

The t-test revealed that both Philippine and Singaporean samples employed the same number of moves: introduction, background, complaint, request for redress, suggestion, justification for suggestion, and conclusion. No significant differences were found in the frequency of occurrence of these moves except for introduction. However, a significant difference was found between the two samples as regards length of letters. It is then concluded that Philippine English and Singapore English do not differ at all in terms of discourse structure.

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of World Englishes is a reality in language development widely accepted all over the world. The existence of World Englishes or New Englishes presupposes that there are varieties and that they can be differentiated in terms of grammar, lexis, and phonology.

Due to language expansion, English spreads and inevitable changes are bound to occur. For instance, grammar and lexis may be affected but the standards of intelligibility are not sacrificed. As Prator (cited in Kachru, 1976, p. 228) says: "The problem is not necessarily one of intelligibility between the speakers of the native varieties of English and the non-native varieties of English. Rather, the question is one of recognizing that there is a cline in intelligibility among the members of the speech community who speak in different varieties." In the case of non-native speakers, the higher a person is on the cline of bilingualism, the higher intelligibility s/he attains with a person of identical background and education. This refutes what some claim that if the

English language disperses into different forms, then it no longer serves its purpose as a means of international communication. This is because *Standard English* undergoes a process of modification and adjustment to suit changing circumstances, and therefore, relies on nonconformity to existing conventions.

Two legitimate varieties of Southeast Asian English are Philippine English and Singapore English which have nuances of their own. Similarities may be deduced from these varieties in terms of how English was introduced to these countries. As Platt, Weber and Ho (1984) mentioned, in both countries, English was introduced during the colonial era, but were at first spoken and used mainly by native speakers of English from Britain and America. Since there was a need for employees in government and business offices, schools were established and English became the medium of instruction. At first, the teachers were from Britain and America, but with the increase in enrolment and number of schools established, teachers who were not native speakers of English were employed. Although these teachers tried to use the English of the textbooks, their English differed significantly from the English of the native speakers. Gonzalez (1985) pointed out that in the Philippines, with the Post-War Period, there has been a progressive disappearance of native English speakers in the country serving as models and critics and there has been a change in the character of English competence as it is used in the Philippines. Thus, it has evolved into a new variety as it is spoken and used in the country.

In examining these varieties of English, discourse analysis and contrastive linguistics can be employed. Since discourse analysis does not only call for a description of the language in use, an investigation of how and why these varieties of English occur is significant. Thus, an analysis of the functions of these varieties is indispensable.

McCarthy (1991) states that discourse analysis encompasses both the written and spoken discourse. Written discourse may take the form of newspaper articles, letters, stories, notices and so on. Considering that the written discourse may be classified into different genres, it therefore takes on varied functions such as giving information, establishing social relationships and eliciting an action from the listener or reader. Further, he claims that with such functions as request, instruction or exemplification, the focus is on what the language does and how the listener/reader should react. For these reasons, they are called *speech acts*.

Inasmuch as written discourse is utilized to accomplish varied functions, it is also essential to note the context in which the text is being written, i.e. what is being communicated and to whom it is being communicated. McCarthy (1991) mentions that letters are a good example of a discourse type where the receiver is usually a specified individual or group, but that there are also cross-cultural problems concerning business letters. Jenkins and Hinds (1987 cited in McCarthy, 1991, p.152) found significant differences in orientation between American, French and Japanese business letters; the American letters in their

data were generally more informal and *reader-oriented*, with the writer strongly projecting the reader's needs and assumed purposes. The French data were *writer-oriented*, with the writer intent upon protecting his/her position and remaining more formal. The Japanese texts were oriented towards the mid-ground, the relationship between writer and reader.

It may be that cross-cultural variation in spoken and written discourse exists and cross-cultural factors do affect genre analysis.

It is in this light that this paper was conceptualized. The researchers, acknowledging the fact that there is still the need to cultivate this area, decided to conduct the study dealing with a comparison of two types of Southeast Asian English. This paper was therefore an attempt to analyze the discourse organization of complaint letters to editors in Philippine English and Singapore English. Specifically, it aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the organizational moves in the Philippine and Singaporean letters of complaint to editors? How do these organizational moves differ in both samples?
2. Are there significant differences in the organizational patterns of Philippine and Singaporean complaint letters? Is there a significant difference between the two samples in terms of length?

Thus, the null hypotheses for the study are the following: (1) There are no significant differences between Philippine and Singaporean complaint letters in terms of organizational moves, and (2) There are no significant differences between Philippine and Singaporean complaint letters in terms of length.

2. Methodology

2.1 The Data

Forty complaint letters to the editor from *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (henceforth, PDI) and 40 complaint letters to the editor from *The Straits Times* (henceforth, ST) published over a period of three months (July-August 2002), constituted the corpus of the study. Textual analysis was employed in examining the organizational moves followed by an examination of significant differences between the two samples using the *t*-test.

2.2 Framework for Analysis

It is to be noted that this paper was inspired by the study of Mahboob and Hartford (2001), which looked at the discourse organization of complaint letters to editors employed by letter-writers in Pakistani English and Nepalese English. However, whereas Mahboob and Hartford's study focused on countries belonging to different circles - Pakistan to the *Outer Circle* and Nepal to the *Expanding Circle*, this paper focuses on the shared and unshared features of

two varieties belonging to the same circle – the Outer Circle in Kachru’s (1996) framework. In both the Philippines and Singapore, English is used as a second language.

3. Results

3.1 Organizational Moves in Philippine and Singaporean Letters of Complaint

The first part of this paper discusses the findings that answer the following questions: *What are the organizational moves in the Philippine and Singaporean Letters of Complaint to Editors? How are the organizational moves in these letters similar to and different from each other?*

In analyzing the complaint letters, Mahboob and Hartford’s (2001) model was used. The nine organizational moves found in the model were the following: *introduction, praise, attention-getter, background, complaint, appeal to the editor, request for redress, suggestion, and justification for request/suggestion.*

The complaint letters from PDI and ST revealed that, based on Mahboob and Hartford’s model, there were six moves involved in this particular genre: *introduction, background, complaint, request for redress, suggestion and justification for suggestion.* However, not all are obligatory moves as proven by the data that follow. *Conclusion*, which was not part of Mahboob and Hartford’s model, was found to be present and is therefore considered the seventh move in the list.

To clearly illustrate these moves, examples are provided below. Note that some of the descriptions given by Mahboob and Hartford have been adopted and modified to operationally define these moves.

Introduction. Apart from creating an environment in which the complaint is situated (Mahboob & Hartford, 2001, p.4), this move also attempts to gain the attention of the readers by taking various forms such as the use of a startling/shocking statement, use of a question, use of a greeting and use of the *lead-in*. Note that the techniques startling/shocking statement and *lead-in* are found in both Philippine and Singaporean samples. Whereas question as a technique is found only in Singaporean letters, greeting as an opening strategy is found only in Philippine letters.

Below are the various techniques employed in writing the introduction of the complaint letters, their description and corresponding examples:

Startling Statement – a dramatic, extraordinary, surprising or shocking statement.

In practically all the major newspapers last Sept. 9, 2002, Meralco president Jesus Francisco claimed his company's return-on-rate base (RORB) could go down to 2.8 percent this year. (PDI # 34)

There is a silver lining in this economic downturn. (ST # 16)

Rhetorical Question – a query to induce the readers to think.

The article, "How long before suspect sees lawyer?" (ST, Sept. 11), raises questions like "How democratic, fair and updated are our laws in general, and those relating to the questioning of suspects in particular?" (ST # 32)

Greeting – a form of salutation.

Greetings from Saudi Arabia. (PDI # 19)

Lead-in – a statement that opens the topic which usually uses the "I refer to" structure for Singaporean letters. The *lead-in* consists of only one sentence.

I would like to comment on the article saying that we need smarter drivers to make the Sydney Coordinated Adoptive Traffic Signal System (SCATSS) work. (PDI # 6)

I refer to Mr. Lau Weng Seong's letter, "Is somebody listening to us?" (ST, July 4), and the article, "Youths have their say on education, race and apathy (ST, July 4). (ST # 3)

PDI #6 begins by stating that the writer wants to make his pronouncement based on his observation, while ST #3 informs the reader of the title of the article the writer wishes to react to.

Background. The context, circumstances, and events necessary to a full understanding of a particular problem.

I am an ordinary government employee, a member of the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) for the past 23 years and have been paying my premiums religiously. Unfortunately, I got sick and had to have an emergency incisional hernia operation last April 24. I incurred huge debts due to the operation and the ongoing medication. So, I applied for the sickness income benefit claim (employees' compensation) hoping it would be granted. But it was disapproved because as a certain Dr. Teano explained, an earlier surgical operation I had in 1992 (total hysterectomy) was not properly done so my abdominal muscles had weakened. I don't contradict her medical evaluation but, are there no other reasons to be considered aside from that?
(PDI # 2)

Our company van was involved in a traffic accident last Monday evening. We sent the van to Vicom Assessment Centre at Sin Ming Drive the next morning.

The officer attending to us was unable to give us an immediate assessment as he could not open the van's engine compartment. We were told that we had to wait one or two days for their mechanics to be free.

On Wednesday, we called to check and were told that the assessment had been done and they were now waiting for NTUC to assign a workshop for the van to be sent for repairs there.

We were told the same story the next two days.

On Friday morning, we sent an e-mail to NTUC, and followed it with a call at 4 pm.

At the end of the day, we had still not received a reply.

Before the introduction of the Independent Damage Assessment Centre (Idac) scheme, we did not experience such delays in claiming insurance with NTUC.

Now, after four working days, our company van is still sitting at the assessment centre... (ST # 25)

It is noteworthy at this point that *background* as a move can also be implicit in that a letter may not employ the move at all, but it still makes the reader ponder on the circumstances or incidents leading to the complaint. However, this type of background only occurs in Singaporean letters, as exemplified below.

I refer to the letter' "Bus lanes still most efficient use of roads" (ST, Sept. 27).

To increase the usage of bus lanes, could taxis be allowed to use them?

Taxis are a form of public transport too.

This move may give other vehicles more space during peak hours. (ST LC 40)

The example above obviously does not employ a *background* move, so the reader is left to decode for himself/herself the circumstances leading to the implicit complaint. By doing so, the reader will be able to relate it to the suggestion given by the writer.

Since this feature overlaps with the other features of the Singaporean letters, there will be further discussion of this point in Section 3.2.

Complaint. Part of the discourse organization of complaint letters which is the main proposition, central to the speech event, commonly known as the *head act*. The addressees of the complaint are groups of people who have the power to make new policies to change the current situation. The complaint may be in the form of a question or a statement which on the surface may appear to be a simple description but whose illocutionary force is nevertheless that of a complaint (Mahboob & Hartford, 2001, p. 7).

Mahboob and Hartford cite Boxer's definition (1993) of complaint in that it is addressed to the person deemed responsible for the undesirable action, from gripes, addressed to persons who have no responsibility for the action, about non-present third persons who are responsible (2001, p. 2).

Further, since the letters to the editor do not fall directly under either category, such letters are usually written by an author who is not complaining as an individual, but as a self-appointed representative of some wronged group. The complaint is usually about some public problem and the actual redressive action is left rather vague. Mahboob and Hartford therefore take the view that complaint and gripe merge in letters to the editor (2001, pp. 2-3).

Aside from Mahboob and Hartford's definition which these researchers adopt, the definition of Rader is also applied since it explicates Mahboob and Hartford's description. This move is defined by Rader as an utterance or sets of utterances that identify a problem or trouble source and seek remediation, either from the person responsible for the problem or from a third person who has the power to affect the situation (cited in Boxer, 1993, p. 107).

Complaint appears in two forms: direct and indirect. With direct complaint, the problem is explicitly expressed by the writer in a definite manner. On the other hand, indirect complaint comes in two types. The first makes the problem implicitly stated with the use of a question. The second is inferred by the reader since with the absence of the *complaint* move, the reader has to deduce for himself/herself, the writer's grievances. It is assumed by this researcher that a complaint always exists in a complaint letter even if the move is not employed. Thus, with this type, the complaint does not become immediate or is not obviously aimed at. Below are examples of complaint directly and indirectly expressed:

Direct Complaint

...We Southpeak homeowners, as well as the no less than 10,000 families in the adjoining villages, have been having problems with air pollution and swarms of flies coming from the large-scale commercial piggery operations whose waste finds its way into the creek that cuts across the middle of Southpeak and ultimately to Laguna de Bay. (PDI # 15)

...Idac has contributed to more delays and slow repairs. (ST # 25)

Indirect Complaint

...What has the MMDA done about a previous statement made by then MMDA Chair Ben Abalos that there are at least 400 buses plying the Edsa route that are illegal or do not have the proper permits from the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board?...

Why penalize motorists by making them take longer drives on narrow roads that are just as congested and badly maintained...? (PDI #7)

Does "innocent until proven guilty" or "guilty until proven innocent" characterize our perceptions of suspects?

Ironically, if the police must charge or release a suspect within 48 hours of his arrest, why is there a two-week delay in allowing legal access? (ST # 32)

It is to be observed that the indirect complaints above are successive in form. Some letters, however, cite only one complaint. Such forms can also be found in direct complaints.

It is also noteworthy that the *complaint* move may be interspersed with background such that the structure *background+complaint* appears in the same paragraph.

Background + Complaint

(N.B. In the three examples that follow sentences constituting the background move are in boldface type and those constituting the complaint move are in normal type.)

Dubbing the plan to further open the local market to imported rice as a safety net program for farmers is exceedingly outrageous. There is an apparent desire to mislead the small rice farmers and consumers. Why would farmers want to import the same commodity that has been their major source of livelihood for many years? The government explains that the tariffs to be collected from the planned importation of rice would be used for programs to develop the local rice sector. This is bordering on the ridiculous. Why source the funds to develop the rice sector from a scheme that may eventually spell the death of the local rice industry itself? (PDI # 1)

What's the cost to taxpayers?

The Infocomm Development Authority (IDA) has decided not to appeal against the Sing Tel compensation ruling.

Several questions arise:

* Apart from losing the case, IDA has to bear the full costs.

Considering the high legal costs involved, what is the full cost taxpayers have to bear in this battle of giants?

* Could this unnecessary waste of public funds have been avoided?

* Was this just a battle of bruised egos? (ST # 2)

The examples above used the pattern *background+complaint*. In the first example, the reader is first furnished with some background information on the subject, then moves on to the complaint which is indirect. In the second example, the first paragraph obviously provides the background, while the second paragraph expresses the complaints which were enumerated and also indirectly expressed.

Finally, complaint is found to be repeated in the succeeding paragraphs of the complaint letter for reiteration. Below is an example:

We write to tell of our deep concern for the poor people who are driven from their vending places, though the government gives them no place to go. They are suddenly without income. We are also concerned about the 30,000 poor families who will be evicted from the banks of the Pasig River and other waterways for a 10-meter easement that makes little sense and for flood control.

Like all citizens we want a cleaner, safer, healthier city, but not one built on the sacrifices of the poor. Why can't the passion for cleaning sidewalks and riverbanks also be used to help the poor?

We are, however, most of all concerned about what these actions mean for President Macapagal-Arroyo's relationship with the poor. Is Bayani Fernando a symbol of how she will deal with the urban poor in the future? Has she changed her approach from one that favored poor people to one that treats them like so much trash? Does she want him to break the loan agreement with the Asian Development Bank that promised security and a decent living place for families on the banks of the Pasig River? **She told us on Jan. 31 at the National Government Center and later on June 25 in Malacañang that she was opposed to distant relocation.** Has she changed her mind? Does she now support the distant relocation Fernando proposes, though it takes five years for poor families to recover economically from such a relocation, and people relocated in 1999-2000 still lack water, classrooms and health facilities? (PDI # 31)

As seen in the example, the background and complaint are expressed in the first and second paragraphs, but complaint is repeated in the last two sentences of the third paragraph for reiteration. The complaints expressed in the first and last parts of the third paragraph are indirectly expressed. Note, too, that the complaint is interspersed with background in the third and last paragraph.

Request for Redress. To draw the line between *request for redress* and *suggestion*, only those statements that ask for a possibility of seeking a remedy to the problem are classified under *request for redress*. Thus, in contrast to *suggestion* which specifies possible steps to be undertaken, the *request for redress* is done in a general manner.

Requests for redress may be direct or indirect. In some cases, a combination of direct and indirect statements make up the *request for redress*. With direct *requests for redress*, the reader immediately recognizes the request of the writer. With indirect *requests for redress*, the request is not clearly and fully expressed; therefore, there is the writer's use of questions.

Examples of these types are the following:

Direct Request for Redress

We hope that the bank officials concerned will ensure that this incident will not be repeated, and that the MRT management will take more aggressive action to protect consumers in matters like this. (PDI # 18)

The relevant authorities here should ensure that the rights of consumers are enforced and protected from exploitation by unscrupulous retailers who prey on ignorant and ill-formed buyers. (ST # 20)

Indirect Request for Redress

What is the Civil Service Commission doing about this problem? (PDI # 40)
Can the ministry please clarify the discrepancy between the article and its reply? (ST # 13)

Also worth noting is a combination of direct and indirect requests. For instance, a writer after requesting for redress from the concerned party in a direct manner, follows it up with an indirect request.

Below is an example of this method from one Singaporean letter:

Direct/Indirect Requests for Redress

The HDB should do more to improve security and maintenance now that it is demanding higher payment for the use of its carparks.

It should assume greater responsibility instead of just shrugging the matter off by posting a sign stating that the owners of vehicles park at its facilities at their own risk.

Would the HDB care to comment on what steps have been taken to improve the security of its carparks? (ST # 220)

Suggestion. To draw the line between *suggestion* and *request for redress*, only those statements that point out a definite step or those that enumerate clear-cut measures to resolve the problem will be categorized under *suggestion*. Thus, in contrast to *request for redress* which asks for a possibility of seeking a remedy to a problem in a general manner, the *suggestion* move offers unequivocal details to resolve the situation.

Note that *suggestion* may be single or successive and direct or indirect or a combination of the two. *Suggestion* may also be juxtaposed to other moves, thus the patterns *suggestion* + *background/background* + *suggestion* and *suggestion* + *complaint* emerge.

With single suggestion, it is obvious that only one distinct proposal is offered while two or more suggestions are proposed if the move is successive. Whereas the recommendation given is definite for direct suggestion, the recommendation is only insinuated in an indirect suggestion, putting it in the form of a question. With the direct/indirect types of suggestion which can also be successive in nature, a suggestion/s is/are made explicit followed by implied suggestion/s in the form of a question or vice-versa.

Examples of these types are found below:

Single Suggestion (Direct Method)

Lastly, the GSIS should inform me of the kinds of sickness that are compensable on the day documents are handed in... (PDI # 2)

In fact, in line with the current trend of "remaking Singapore", we should have more well-designed billboards in areas where they can be erected. (ST # 39)

Successive Suggestions (Direct Method)

...In the meantime, the government agency should inform the public who the manufacturer was and the brand of the water heater which caused the death of the ambassador as well as the maker of the defective plastic chairs.

The DTI should also lose no time in determining the safety of those imported gadgets that heat water by immersing it directly in water. It should also check on the cheap fluorescent tubes openly sold in sidewalks to prevent fire. If found to be violating safety standards, they should also be confiscated. (PDI # 29)

EZ-Link should allow users to make requests for refunds over the Internet.

It should set up a website that enables users to key in all information necessary for the company to process a refund.

Both e-mail address and contact number should be compulsory fields, so it can contact users should it require any further information.

Secondly, refunds should be allowed via the ez-link top-up system.

A user could go to the "more options" menu and select the bus route he was on when he forgot to tap his card.

The system could then require him to submit details about his journey such as the stops at which he boarded and alighted the bus. (ST # 26)

Direct/Indirect Suggestions

There is really no need to increase the present contribution rate of 8.4 percent to 16 percent. Instead, why doesn't the SSS reduce the fat salaries of its officials and employees? (PDI # 5)

I would argue that to measure how good it is, we should not go by the level of care given at the highest and most expensive level.

Rather, it should be measured by the quality of care given to the poorest of our citizens.

Should health care be seen as a public service or as a commercial enterprise?

Pursuing both involves a conflict of interests, and care must be taken so as to arrive at a workable middle path. (ST # 35)

As cited earlier, it is to be observed that *suggestion* may be interspersed with other moves such that the following patterns may be noted: *suggestion+background/ background+suggestion* and *suggestion+complaint*.

Examples are found below:

Suggestion + Background

(N.B. In the extracts that follow the background move is in boldface type and the suggestion move in normal type.)

But fair is fair, Fernando should also turn his attention to the cars parked on sidewalks and the need for traffic management in Metro Manila. **Our traffic is getting worse because the number of cars is increasing daily and there is no apparent traffic planning. Many residents do not have parking spaces and more and more car owners are using the**

streets as their garages. Buildings too do not provide adequate parking spaces. (PDI # 39)

The example above shows that after a direct suggestion was made in the first sentence, the succeeding sentences all contain the reasons why there is worsening traffic in Metro Manila.

Background + Suggestion

Were it not for the strong opposition from farmers' groups, the government would have undoubtedly pushed through with the plan. It is incumbent upon small rice farmers to push the government to heed their demand for a full review of our trade commitments, and the implementation of measures to protect our local rice sector... (PDI # 1)

In its present form, the insurance scheme benefits no one, rich or poor. If the Government and the insurance companies are serious about getting more to participate in the scheme, they will have to redesign it. (ST # 18)

PDI # 1 from PDI presents the background in the first sentence followed by a single, direct suggestion in the second sentence. Likewise, #18 from ST provides the reader with a background on the insurance scheme benefiting no one. This is followed by a single, direct suggestion from the writer that the scheme has to be redesigned.

Suggestion + Complaint

(In the example below the suggestion move is in boldface type and the complaint move is in normal type.)

I honestly believe that the solution to the traffic problem on Edsa is not the no-left turn rule. Why not revive the yellow bus lane and enforce it strictly? What has the MMDA done about a previous statement made by then MMDA Chair Ben Abalos that there are at least 400 buses plying the Edsa route that are illegal or do not have the proper permits from the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board? **I believe there will be no need for the no-left turn rule if all colorum and out-of-line buses are removed from Edsa and buses stick to the yellow lane.**

Why penalize motorists by making them take longer drives on narrow roads that are just as congested and badly maintained...? (PDI # 7)

It can be deduced from the example that while suggestions are being proposed, a complaint may be cited in the middle of such suggestions. In the example above, the first paragraph contains two suggestions, one direct and the other implied, after which an indirect complaint follows. The indirect complaint is followed by another suggestion which is direct after which another indirect complaint follows in the next paragraph.

Justification for Request/Suggestion. In this move, the writers provide reasons why the suggestions/requests they have made are valid and how they would work to fix the problem (Mahboob & Hartford, 2001, p. 9).

A close examination of this move reveals that *justification for suggestion* may occur within or after the suggestion sentence.

Examples are the following:

Within the Suggestion Sentence

(In the extracts below the suggestion move is in boldface type and the justification for suggestion move is in normal type.)

Lastly, the GSIS should inform me of the kinds of sickness that are compensable on the day documents required are handed in, to eliminate long days (almost two weeks) of waiting and the tedious process of following-up claims. (PDI # 2)

This means the authorities concerned must produce facts and figures to convince the critics as well as those who are affected by the reduction in CPF contribution that it is a wise decision. (ST # 9)

In both instances, the *justification for suggestion* move immediately follows the *suggestion* move signaled by the infinitival *to*.

After the Suggestion Sentence

Chairman Buhain should put a stop to this illegal spending of people's money by sports officials by reducing to half the P30 million financial aid he committed to the POC and utilize the remaining amount to procure sports equipment for school physical education and intramural programs. We cannot afford to have junketeers at a time when the government is in dire financial straits. (PDI # 14)

...However, the Government could take the lead by allowing female MPs to prove themselves at the executive level. This would show that women can juggle the expectations of both home and office well, with a supportive family. (ST # 14)

The *justification for suggestion* in PDI #14 also immediately follows the *suggestion* move, only, it occurs after the suggestion sentence but within the same paragraph. This is signaled by the reference *we*.

In ST #14, *justification for suggestion* follows the *suggestion* move but is also found within the same paragraph. This is signaled by the pronoun *this*.

Finally, it is to be noted that *justification for suggestion* may be interspersed with other moves such that the following patterns emerge: *justification for suggestion/suggestion + justification for suggestion, background + suggestion + justification for suggestion, suggestion + justification for suggestion + complaint/complaint + suggestion + justification for suggestion, suggestion + background + justification for suggestion + suggestion.*

Following are examples of these patterns:

Suggestion + Justification for Suggestion

Monitoring the motorists is good, but I don't think they would truly appreciate the system if they do not fully understand the need for it. *The government's investment in the system would all go to waste if drivers are not disciplined and educated properly because the system would then suffer glitches. I believe that with the right education and this new system, traffic in Metro Manila will be much better and more tolerable. (PDI # 6)*

EZ-Link should allow users to make requests for refunds over the Internet.

It should set up a website that enables users to key in all information necessary for the company to process a refund.

Both e-mail address and contact number should be compulsory fields, so it can contact users should it require any further information.

Secondly, refunds should be allowed via the ez-link top-up system.

A user could go to the "more options" menu and select the bus route he was on when he forgot to tap his card.

The system could then require him to submit details about his journey such as the stops at which he boarded and alighted the bus.

Allowing users to request for refunds in the above ways would not only be more convenient for users, it would also help EZ-Link to cut costs as the company would no longer have to employ so many telephonists.

(ST # 26)

In both examples, it is obvious that the recommendations proposed are acceptable because of the rationale behind such proposals.

Background + Suggestion + Justification for Suggestion

(N.B. In the examples below the background move is in boldface type, the suggestion move in normal type, and the justification for suggestion move in italics.)

Were it not for the strong opposition from farmers' groups, the government would have undoubtedly pushed through with the plan. Instead, it postponed implementation of the plan. *It is incumbent upon small rice farmers to push the government to heed their demand for a full review of our trade commitments, and the implementation of measures to protect our local rice sector. Only through their collective action can they expect a redirection of the government's rice policies. (PDI # 1)*

The first two sentences give the reader the background of the topic. The letter then shifts to the *suggestion* move in the third sentence though it also gives its *justification* in the same sentence. The last sentence further justifies the suggestion made. It is noteworthy that this structure occurs only in Philippine letters. This may be attributed to the fact that Filipino writers, in general, deem it necessary to offer suggestions to the addressees of the complaint to induce them to action and to resolve the problem immediately.

Complaint + Suggestion + Justification for Suggestion/Suggestion + Justification for Suggestion + Complaint

(N.B. In the excerpts that follow complaint is in boldface type, suggestion in normal type, and justification for suggestion in italics.)

Why penalize motorists by making them take longer drives in narrow roads that are just as congested and badly maintained, when a proper management of the bus operations on Edsa *can tremendously reduce the traffic problem, especially now that the MRT is in full operation?* (PDI # 7)

Okay, granting that Sison et al., retire, I suggest that they retire to Cuba *to be with the true revolutionary himself – Fidel Castro. While in retirement they can help Castro's peasants harvest sugar cane.* **Why enjoy the democratic/capitalistic government of the Netherlands, the likes of which they abhor?** They should be called **“plastic revolutionaries.”** (PDI # 19)

From the first example given, it can be seen that all three moves are found in only one sentence: the indirect *complaint* precedes the other moves, followed by *suggestion*, then the *justification for the suggestion*. As regards the second example, the *suggestion* comes first followed by the *justification for the suggestion*. The indirect *complaint* comes last in the series of moves.

Akin to the preceding pattern, this structure is found only in Philippine letters. This may be attributed to the fact that Singaporean writers, in general, do not prefer to offer suggestions and justify them after a complaint has been stated, hence the absence of this structure in the Singaporean sample.

Suggestion + Background + Justification for Suggestion + Suggestion

(N.B. In the excerpt that follows suggestion is in boldface type, background in normal type, and justification for suggestion in italics.)

The first is the removal of buses that illegally ply Edsa. There are hundreds of these as reported in the papers and although they are apprehended and impounded, they are back again on the streets the following day. These buses cause traffic because most of the time, they are half empty and they spend their time stalling and blocking the road in order to wait for passengers. *This removal is only fair to those with a license to operate on Edsa and will result in the reduction of traffic as well as air pollution.* **An iron hand is needed to implement this and I believe Fernando can do this.** (PDI # 11)

From the example above, it may be gleaned that *background* also helps in clarifying the *suggestion* as well as the *justification for suggestion*. It can be seen that after the *suggestion* is made, *background* follows to highlight the prevailing condition. This is followed by *justification for suggestion* to validate the accuracy of the suggestion made. The paragraph ends with another *suggestion* which is no longer justified. Similar to the preceding patterns, this example is found only in Philippine letters of complaint.

Conclusion. The move which signals the end of the letter. *Conclusion* may take the following forms: *challenge*, *compliment*, *quotation* and *striking statement*.

Challenge - a statement that induces a person to perform some action. Note that this method is found only in Philippine letters.

Everybody hopes that the MMDA chair will succeed in solving this gargantuan problem of pollution and traffic for health, aesthetic and economic benefits. (PDI # 11)

Compliment – a statement that expresses commendation or positive criticism.

Contrary to Mr. Banal’s statements, Emirates crew members are fully trained professionals. They are carefully selected from all over the world, including the Philippines. They represent 85 different nationalities and are trained in techniques and procedures on service and safety. (PDI # 12)

To Li, Zhang Jing, as well as Tan Paey Fern, I say: Well done! You have done your country proud. (ST # 15)

Quotation - a saying or passage used to summarize the writer’s thoughts. Note that this method appears only in Philippine letters.

We have a saying in Tagalog “*Mabuti pa na ikaw ay manakawan, huwag lang masunugan.*” (Better be robbed than lose all everything to a blaze). Truly fires impoverish families and nations. (PDI # 30)

Striking Statement – a remarkable statement that attracts the reader’s attention or interest because of its serious tone, thereby leaving the reader to ponder on the writer’s thoughts.

I am appalled that no less than the city government has allowed this illegal act to oppress so many. (PDI # 4)

Win or lose is immaterial, but doing so with pride is far more important. (ST # 12)

3.1.1 Features of the Organizational Moves in Philippine Letters of Complaint

One feature found in the organizational moves in Philippine letters of complaint was the use of *background + complaint* and *background + suggestion* patterns. Thus, in Philippine complaint letters, there were instances when only two moves were employed. However, with the *background + suggestion* pattern, *complaint* was assessed to be implicit. As regards the maximum number of moves, there were five, but the moves were employed in diverse patterns: (1) *background + complaint + suggestion + request for redress + conclusion*, (2) *introduction + background + complaint + suggestion + justification for suggestion + (suggestion) + (justification for suggestion)*, and (3) *background + (implicit) complaint + request for redress*

+ *suggestion* + (*background*) + (*suggestion*) + *justification for suggestion*. Note that some moves have been employed twice in the structure such as *suggestion* as evidenced by the second and third patterns, *justification for suggestion* in the second pattern and *background* as proven by the third pattern. Moves employed twice in the structure have been enclosed in parentheses.

Following is an example of a complaint letter with the maximum number of moves and the pattern it represents:

Background + Implicit Complaint + Request for Redress + Suggestion + (Background) + (Suggestion) + Justification for Suggestion

(In the example that follows background is in boldface type, request for redress in normal type, suggestion in italics, and justification for suggestion underlined.)

Time to speak up, be heard

This is an appeal to members of the silent majority to start speaking up. There are many in this group who are good, upright, productive citizens who do not raise their voices unless the issues are big and they are driven to the point of exasperation. It is the small vociferous minority that holds way in the media.

A case in point is the issue of the vendors being driven out of the sidewalks and streets by the MMDA Chair. Many people I have talked to support Bayani Fernando's efforts to return the sidewalks to the pedestrians and the streets to the motorists.

Of course, one cannot quarrel with the noble objective of helping the poor. But let us help them raise themselves to a higher economic level. Let us not allow them to pull us down.

But fair is fair, Fernando should also turn his attention to the cars parked on sidewalks and the need for traffic management in Metro Manila. Our traffic is getting worse because the number of cars is increasing daily and there is no apparent traffic planning. Many residents do not have parking spaces and more and more car owners are using the streets as their garages. Buildings too do not provide adequate parking spaces.

Every problem has a solution. There are many measures we can adopt to ease the situation such as:

1. *One-side parking on some not too busy streets.*
2. *Absolute ban on parking on certain streets.*
3. *The planning of traffic flow and a system on one-ways.*
4. *Strict enforcement of traffic rules especially on passenger loading areas.*

Barangays should be consulted in traffic planning and they can help in traffic enforcement.

I urge the people to voice out their complaints and suggestions to impress on public servants that we citizens cannot be taken for granted. (PDI # 39)

The letter begins with the *background* of the topic, but this move also implicitly expresses the *complaint*. Thus, the writer's grievance is implicitly expressed in that it is embedded in the *background* move. The third paragraph contains the *request for redress* followed by the *suggestion* move in the fourth paragraph. However, in the same paragraph, *background* as a move is employed again. This is followed by the *suggestion* move in the next paragraph employed for the second time. *Suggestion* is extended up to the last paragraph but shifts to the *justification for suggestion* move.

A close examination of the moves in the 40 letters revealed that out of the seven moves cited, three were predominant: *background*, *complaint*, and *suggestion*. Out of the 40 letters, all 40 employed the moves *background* and *complaint* (direct/indirect) and 28 employed the *suggestion* move. Thus, 100% of the total sample used the moves *background* and *complaint* and 72.5% of the total sample used the *suggestion* move. *Suggestion* ranked third in the list while *justification for suggestion* ranked fourth but only 37.5%, a figure which was not even half of the total sample involved.

Table 1 shows the frequency of occurrence of these organizational moves.

Table 1. Frequency of Occurrence of the Organizational Moves in PDI Complaint Letters

| Move | Frequency of Occurrence | Percentage | Rank |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|------------|------|
| Introduction | 10 | 25% | 6 |
| Background | 40 | 100% | 1 |
| Complaint | 40 | 100% | 1 |
| Request for Redress | 14 | 35% | 5 |
| Suggestion | 29 | 72.5% | 3 |
| Justification for Suggestion | 15 | 37.5% | 4 |
| Conclusion | 6 | 15% | 7 |

It seems obvious that *background* and *complaint* ranked first for PDI since the genre involved is a complaint letter. *Background* as a move furnishes the reader with the needed information to understand the nature of the complaint. The *complaint*, being the main proposition of the letter, is addressed to a person or a group who is expected to effect a change, a policy, or a solution to the problem on hand.

The analysis of PDI letters also showed that after a complaint has been expressed, the writer typically gives suggestions. This implies that the addressee is already provided by the writer with possible solutions to induce the former to action or, at least, for the addressee to consider as one of the most viable answers to the problem.

Ranking fourth is *justification for suggestion* followed by *request for redress* with 37.5% and 35%, respectively. *Introduction* comes next with 25%, followed by *conclusion* with 15%. *Justification for suggestion/request* was seldom employed perhaps because the writers found no need to point out the validity of their suggestion. *Request for redress* was likewise seldom employed for it is understood that with the suggestion made, the writer is implicitly requesting that action be taken to address the problem. It is to be noted that some writers also prefer to

begin their letters by immediately providing the reader with background information essential to understanding the complaint rather than creating an environment that will leave the reader a good impression of the writer.

Finally, conclusion ranked seventh in the list. This move is the least employed in Philippine letters in that, generally, complaint letters are not expected to end in a graceful manner considering that the writer's tone is marked by disgust, disappointment, and disagreement. Perhaps this is also the reason why Mahboob and Hartford have not included this move as part of their model. Perhaps, too, Filipino writers are less polite in their tone with the infrequent employment of *conclusion* as a move.

It appears then that the obligatory moves in a Philippine complaint letter are *background*, *complaint*, and *suggestion*. Note that moves to be classified as obligatory should occur in at least 50% of the letters.

3.1.2 Features of the Organizational Moves in Singaporean Letters of Complaint

The analysis of the discourse organization of 40 letters of complaint from ST revealed one feature of Singaporean letters: the use of the moves *background* and *complaint* only. This led to the structure *background* + *complaint*, making it the shortest pattern employed and the most widely used, the structure being found in at least four of the letters analyzed. *Suggestion* + *justification for suggestion* was also another short pattern found; however, it was assumed by this researcher that background and complaint were implicitly expressed in that a suggestion would not be offered if the situation were favorable. Thus, similar to Philippine letters, there were instances when only two moves were used. With respect to the maximum number of moves, there were six that were employed but akin to the Philippine letters, they were also used in diverse patterns. The moves employed in one instance were the following: *introduction*, *background*, *complaint*, *request for redress*, *suggestion* and *justification for suggestion*. In another instance, the moves used were *introduction*, *background*, *complaint*, *suggestion*, *justification for suggestion*, and *conclusion*. A third instance employed the moves *introduction*, *background*, *complaint*, *suggestion*, *request for redress* and *justification for request*. The patterns used were the following: (1) *introduction* + *background* + *complaint* + (*background*) + *request for redress* + *suggestion* + *justification for suggestion* + (*background*) + (*suggestion*), and (2) *introduction* + *background* + *complaint* + (*background*) + *suggestion* + *justification for suggestion* + (*suggestion*) + (*justification for suggestion*) + (*suggestion*) + (*justification for suggestion*) + (*suggestion*) + (*background*) + (*suggestion*) + (*background*) + *conclusion*. Note that the moves employed twice or more have been enclosed in parenthesis.

Following is an example of a letter with the maximum number of moves and the pattern it represents:

Introduction + **Background** + **Complaint** + (**Background**) + **Suggestion** + **Justification for Suggestion** + (**Suggestion**) + (**Justification for Suggestion**) + (**Suggestion**) + (**Justification for Suggestion**) + (**Suggestion**) + (**Background**) + (**Suggestion**) + (**Background**) + **Conclusion**

(N.B. In the example below the introduction is in boldface type, background is in normal type, complaint in italics, suggestion underlined, justification for suggestion in square brackets [], and conclusion in curly brackets { }.)

Give women MPs a chance to lead

I refer to the letter, "Women still face uneven playing field," by Ms. Tisa Ng, president of the Association of Women for Action and Research (Aware) (ST, July 24).

Two policies which I am uncomfortable with are: the cap on female students in the medical faculty at National University of Singapore, and the additional amount incorporated into the salaries of men who had served national service.

It is true that nobody is denied the right or opportunity to higher education in Singapore (excluding the cap on female medical undergraduates). *Yet, it perplexes me that some equally-qualified women are paid less than their male counterparts when they are contributing a similar amount, if not more.*

Like Aware, I am also looking forward to the day when we have more female MPs in Parliament, with some of them eventually appointed as ministers.

In today's society, women are expected to focus primarily on the home, with a secondary role at the office. Although men do help out at home or with the marketing, society's perception has always been that it would be a bonus if husbands help out occasionally at home.

Should such a mindset persist and influence male children, we might witness a growing bunch of male chauvinists in the coming years.

Mindsets are never easy to change. However, the Government could take the lead by allowing female MPs to prove themselves at the executive level. [This would show that women can juggle the expectations of both home and office well, with a supportive family.]

I disagree with setting a quota for the number of female MPs or ministers, [which might lead critics to argue that these are selected based on their gender and not their capabilities.]

However, if we do not have a quota, [the Government's explanation might be that it could not find the desired number of female candidates willing to enter the political arena.]

As such, it would be best left to the Government to decide if it should invite a smaller number of committed and capable female candidates or select a wider pool.

Since the first sitting of the new Parliament, I have heard several good speeches from many of the newer MPs, such as Madam Ho Geok Choo, Ms. Irene Ng and Dr. Amy Khor. Together with more experienced female MPs like Dr. Lily Neo, I believe we have a few female MPs in Parliament with ministerial calibre. I urge Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong to consider appointing some of them as acting parliamentary secretaries or ministers of state for two to three years to test them.

Meritocracy is a concept well applied in Singapore, and has served us well over the years. However, in some fields, including politics, merits are pretty subjective. I am certain that

the People's Action would consider candidates of any race, religion or sex, as long as they are committed and capable.

{What is missing could just be giving female MPs the chance to prove themselves in leading the nation, together with their male counterparts.} (ST # 14)

ST # 14 begins with a *lead-in* that introduces the topic on women MPs. The second paragraph furnishes the reader with the *background* which leads to the *complaint* in the second half of the third paragraph up to the fourth paragraph. *Background* is employed for the second time in the fifth and sixth paragraphs and first half of the seventh paragraph, while *suggestion* and *justification for suggestion* are employed in the seventh, eighth and ninth paragraphs. The tenth paragraph cites another *suggestion*, while the eleventh paragraph furnishes the reader with another *background* and another *suggestion*. The twelfth paragraph provides the reader with more *background* before it finally ends with a *conclusion* in the last paragraph using a striking statement.

It is to be noted that # 14 employs the longest pattern having six different moves, with *background* being used four times, *suggestion* five times and *justification for suggestion* three times. Thus, a total of 15 moves have been used inclusive of the repeated moves.

A close examination of the Singaporean complaint letters revealed that there were four predominant moves in this type of discourse: *background*, *complaint*, *introduction* and *suggestion*. Out of the 40 letters, all 40 employed the moves *background* and *complaint* (direct/indirect). Thirty letters employed the move *introduction*, while 25 employed *suggestion*. Thus, 100% of the total sample used *background* and *complaint*, 75% of the total sample used *introduction*, while 62.5% of the total sample used *suggestion*.

It appears then that the obligatory moves in the Singaporean complaint letters are background, complaint, introduction, and suggestion. Note that the moves to be classified as obligatory should occur in at least 50% of the letters.

Table 2 below shows the frequency of occurrence of these organizational moves:

Table 2. Frequency of Occurrence of the Organizational Moves in ST Complaint Letters

| Move | Frequency of Occurrence | Percentage | Rank |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|------------|------|
| Introduction | 30 | 75% | 3 |
| Background | 40 | 100% | 1 |
| Complaint | 40 | 100% | 1 |
| Request for Redress | 12 | 30% | 6 |
| Suggestion | 25 | 62.5% | 4 |
| Justification for Suggestion | 16 | 40% | 5 |
| Conclusion | 6 | 15% | 7 |

Similar to the Philippine letters of complaint, the moves that ranked first on the list were those of *background* and *complaint* since the genre involved is a complaint letter. Directly or indirectly, all letters employed the *background* move because of its essential nature in providing the reader some important information leading to a clear understanding of the complaint. Directly or indirectly, all letters employed the *complaint* move for obvious reasons. However, it should be noted that third in ranking was *introduction*. It is interesting to note that 30 of the 40 letters or 75% of the total sample employed the “I refer to” structure or the *lead-in* at the beginning of the discourse to introduce the topic on hand. Since the Forum Section of *The Straits Times* publishes a good number of complaint letters daily with a maximum of three full pages, this structure makes it easy for the reader to follow through the reactions/comments of the writers. Moreover, writers who complain, more often than not, get responses from the recipient of the complaint with the responses also published in the same newspaper.

Fourth in ranking is *suggestion* with 62.5% of the total sample using this move. However, it appears that Singaporeans do not always see the need to provide the addressee options to find solutions to the problem. It appears that

the parties concerned are also expected to think for themselves, to plan carefully, and to arrive at the most appropriate solution to the problem.

Ranking fifth and sixth are *justification for suggestion* with 40% and *request for redress* with 30%, respectively. This finding implies that these moves are seldom used by Singaporeans. It follows that since *suggestion* as a move is not always used in complaint letters, then *request for redress* and *justification for suggestion* are not also employed for these three moves are closely related. The move least employed is *conclusion* with 15%. This suggests that though Singaporean writers often have the *introduction* in their complaint letters, generally, they see no need to end their letter gracefully to leave a good impression on the reader. What seems to be more important is that they have successfully conveyed to the party concerned their grievance/s for immediate action. It appears then that Singaporean writers are less polite in their tone by not employing *conclusion* as a move in many of their letters.

3.2 Divergence in terms of Organizational Structure of Philippine and Singaporean Complaint Letters

The second part of this paper discusses the findings that answer the following questions: (1) Are there significant differences in the organizational patterns of Philippine and Singaporean complaint letters? and (2) Is there a significant difference between the two samples in terms of length? The null hypothesis therefore is *There are no significant differences between Philippine and Singaporean letters in terms of length.*

After a close scrutiny of the data involved, it has become apparent that one point of divergence lies in the frequency of occurrence of the organizational moves present in Philippine and Singaporean letters of complaint.

To arrive at a clear comparison of the moves, Table 3 below combines the total frequency of occurrence of the organizational moves in PDI and ST, to arrive at their corresponding percentages and ranking.

Table 3. Total Frequency of Occurrence of the Organizational Moves in PDI and ST, their Percentages and Ranking

| Move | PDI | % | Rank | ST | % | Rank | Total Freq. | % | Rank |
|------------------------------|-----|------|------|----|------|------|-------------|-------|------|
| Introduction | 10 | 25 | 6 | 30 | 75 | 3 | 40 | 50 | 4 |
| Background | 40 | 100 | 1 | 40 | 100 | 1 | 80 | 100 | 1 |
| Complaint | 40 | 100 | 1 | 40 | 100 | 1 | 80 | 100 | 1 |
| Request for Redress | 14 | 35 | 5 | 12 | 30 | 6 | 26 | 32.5 | 6 |
| Suggestion | 29 | 72.5 | 3 | 25 | 62.5 | 4 | 54 | 67.5 | 3 |
| Justification for Suggestion | 15 | 37.5 | 4 | 16 | 40 | 5 | 31 | 38.75 | 5 |
| Conclusion | 6 | 15 | 7 | 6 | 15 | 7 | 12 | 15 | 7 |

The list below shows the organizational moves employed by complaint letters from PDI and ST in the order of frequency:

| PDI | ST |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Background/Complaint | Background/Complaint |
| Suggestion | Suggestion |
| Justification for Suggestion | Introduction |
| Request for Redress | Justification for Suggestion |
| Introduction | Request for Redress |
| Conclusion | Conclusion |

Looking at the comparison, one can notice that differences are obvious in the third, fourth, and fifth slots. While *justification for suggestion* comes in third for PDI, it comes in fourth for ST. While *request for redress* comes in fourth for PDI, it ranks fifth in ST. Whereas *introduction* ranks fifth in PDI, it ranks third in ST.

To find the significant differences in the moves employed in the Philippine and Singaporean samples, the *t*-test was employed. Based on the comparison made above, only four moves have been tested (*introduction, request for redress, suggestion, and justification for suggestion*). It is obvious that no test should be employed for the moves *background, complaint* and *conclusion* since both samples have the same raw data, i.e. *background* and *complaint* (40) and *conclusion* (6).

Findings revealed that no significant differences were found in the moves tested except for *introduction*.

Tables 4 and 5 show the findings for the move *introduction*.

Table 4. Difference in the Means of PDI and ST Samples in Terms of Introduction

| Sample | Mean |
|--------------|------|
| PDI | .25 |
| ST | .75 |
| Difference = | |
| | .50 |

Table 5. Result of the *t*-test as regards the Comparison of the Means of PDI and ST Samples in Terms of Introduction

| Factor | F-Ratio | Probability | df of LSD | LSD |
|--------|---------|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| A | 26 | .0000311 | 78 | .09805807 |
| | | | | ≈ .0981 |

Based on the *t*-test for the two sample means, there is a significant difference between the means of PDI and ST letters in terms of the *introduction* move since the computed *p*-value (.0000311) is far less than the critical *p*-value of 0.05. Moreover, the absolute value of the difference (0.50) is greater than the LSD (.0981), which means that the means of the two samples differ.

With the results presented above, it is assumed that Filipino writers do not see the need to introduce the topic and instead, immediately begin their letter with the *background* move which is the exact opposite for Singaporean writers.

With regard to *request for redress* and *suggestion*, there is no significant difference between the two groups and may imply the possibility that *request for redress* and *suggestion* may also be employed by Singaporean writers as frequently as Filipino writers do. With regard to *justification for suggestion*, no significant difference exists between the two groups and may suggest the possibility that Filipino writers may employ this move as often as Singaporean writers do.

Another point of divergence lies in the length of Philippine and Singaporean letters of complaint. Table 6 shows the number of words used in each complaint letter from PDI and ST from the longest to the shortest complaint letter.

Table 6. Number of Words Found in each Complaint Letter from PDI and ST

| Letter of Complaint | PDI | Letter of Complaint | ST | |
|---------------------|-----------|---------------------|-----------|--------------|
| 26 | 542 | 14 | 513 | |
| 37 | 537 | 35 | 412 | |
| 34 | 536 | 1 | 351 | |
| 20 | 515 | 28 | 344 | |
| 1 | 487 | 18 | 337 | |
| 9 | 435 | 8 | 324 | |
| 16 | 421 | 38 | 322 | |
| 21 | 396 | 24 | 313 | |
| 12 | 392 | 27 | 278 | |
| 27 | 357 | 23 | 273 | |
| 7 | 348 | 13 | 257 | |
| 28 | 328 | 11 | 244 | |
| 8 | 319 | 6 | 234 | |
| 14 | 315 | 9 | 230 | |
| 33 | 311 | 25 | 229 | |
| 39 | 301 | 36 | 223 | |
| 32 | 300 | 31 | 216 | |
| 11 | 276 | 3 | 214 | |
| 17 | 260 | 12 | 205 | |
| 31 | 259 | 39 | 204 | |
| 18 | 242 | 15 | 199 | |
| 23 | 225 | 10 | 194 | |
| 22 | 221 | 37 | 188 | |
| 29 | 216 | 32 | 185 | |
| 4 | 215 | 22 | 177 | |
| 3 | 210 | 29 | 175 | |
| 6 | 205 | 5 | 167 | |
| 36 | 201 | 17 | 165 | |
| 2 | 187 | 26 | 151 | |
| 5 | 187 | 21 | 133 | |
| 10 | 177 | 34 | 132 | |
| 30 | 165 | 7 | 127 | |
| 19 | 163 | 20 | 120 | |
| 13 | 155 | 19 | 117 | |
| 35 | 153 | 16 | 105 | |
| 25 | 147 | 30 | 96 | |
| 24 | 140 | 33 | 70 | |
| 40 | 129 | 2 | 69 | |
| 15 | 128 | 4 | 56 | |
| 38 | 123 | 40 | 49 | |
| Total | 40 | 11,224 | 40 | 8,398 |

Note: LC 2 and LC 5 from PDI have the same number of words used which totaled 187.

Data reveal that Philippine letters, in general, are longer than Singaporean letters (see Table 7 for the average length). The Philippine sample

totaled 11,224, while the Singaporean sample totaled 8,398. The longest letter in the Philippine sample (# 26) totaled 542 in contrast to the longest letter in the Singaporean sample (# 14) which totaled 513. In terms of the shortest complaint letter in the Philippine corpus (# 38), the words used totaled 123, in contrast to the shortest letter in the Singaporean corpus (# 40) which totaled only 49 words.

Tables 7 and 8 below prove that there exists a significant difference between the two samples as regards length of letters.

Table 7. Difference in the Means of PDI and ST Letters in Terms of Length

| Sample | Mean |
|--------------------|--------|
| PDI | 280.6 |
| ST | 209.95 |
| Difference = 70.65 | |

Table 8. Result of the *t*-test as Regards the Comparison of the Means of PDI and ST Samples in Terms of Length

| Factor | F-Ratio | Probability | df of LSD | LSD |
|--------|---------|-------------|-----------|---------|
| A | 7.708 | .0069121 | 78 | 25.4468 |

The mean number of words of the PDI letters is 280.6, while that of ST letters is 209.95. A difference of 70.65 words is computed in favor of the Philippine sample.

t-test shows that the 70.65 difference in the number of words in the two sets of letters is significant since the computed p-value (.0069121) is less than 0.05. Moreover, the difference of 70.65 is greater than the computed value of the LSD (25.446) which implies that the two means differ. Hence, PDI letters are longer than ST complaint letters.

With these results, a number of reasons may be cited. One explanation is that all 40 letters employed the *background* move. There was never an instance when background was left to be figured out by the reader. It appears that Filipino writers find it necessary to explicate the events surrounding the complaint for a better understanding of the problem. Besides, the *background* move has been employed twice or more in at least 20 letters in the Philippine sample.

Finally, these results accept the first null hypothesis which states that *There are no significant differences between Philippine and Singaporean letters in terms of organizational moves* since no significant difference was found in the majority of the moves. Conversely, the second null hypothesis which states that *There is no significant difference between Philippine and Singaporean complaint letters in terms of length* is rejected since a marked difference was assessed between the two samples as regards length of letters.

4. Discussion

As cited earlier in Mahboob and Hartford's model, the letter of complaint had the following moves: *introduction, praise, attention-getter, background, complaint, appeal to the editor, request for redress, suggestion and justification for request/suggestion*. However, in the samples analyzed, the moves *praise, attention-getter* and *appeal to the editor* did not appear. In all 80 letters, no writer ever praised the newspaper in which the letter was published. No writer gave a description of the intended target of the complaint. No writer requested the editor of the newspaper to publish his/her letter. This may imply that Filipinos and Singaporeans prefer to employ the move *praise* for letters expressing commendations rather than in complaint letters. Perhaps, it may also be a cultural practice among Filipino and Singaporean writers when writing letters of complaint. As regards *attention-getter*, it is likely that the writers do not have considerable knowledge about the individual/s who should answer the complaint. With respect to *appeal to the editor*, this move was never employed at all since Filipino and Singaporean writers may assume that *Philippine Daily Inquirer* and *The Straits Times*, being the English language newspapers of largest circulation in the Philippines and Singapore, respectively, and being labeled as "fair and impartial" (with *Inquirer* adhering to its slogan of "balanced news, fearless views") do cater to the implicit request of the writers to have their letters published. Moreover, not employing this move may also be another cultural practice among Filipino and Singaporean writers when writing complaint letters. It may not be accurate to say that the newspaper editor routinely excises the sections on *praise, attention-getter, and appeal to the editor*. According to Mr. Raul Palabrica of the Reader's Advocate Section of *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, in a telephone interview conducted on 20 December 2002, complaint letters are edited only to make them presentable, accurate in information, not libelous, and to ensure that the letter writers follow the grammar of newspapers. Likewise, the editorial policy of *The Straits Times*, as communicated via the internet, indicates that the newspaper company reserves the right to edit any letter for publication but has not specified that sections on *praise, attention-getter, and appeal to the editor* are automatically omitted from the letters before they are published.

Philippine and Singaporean complaint letters, being reader-oriented, focus more on the readers' understanding of the texts. This also probably accounts for the fact that *praise*, *attention-getter*, and *appeal to the editor* have not been employed as moves. These letters may have been intended first and foremost for the general public. On the other hand, the letters analyzed by Mahboob and Hartford may have been intended first and foremost for the editor and later for the public. Thus, there is the presence of *praise*, *attention-getter* and *appeal to the editor* in Mahboob and Hartford's model.

Conclusion, the last of the series of moves which was not part of Mahboob and Hartford's sample, is found to be present in at least several letters from PDI and ST samples. The *conclusion* takes several forms: use of a striking statement, quotation, challenge and compliment. The use of a striking statement or a quotation provokes the reader to ponder on the writer's thoughts. The use of a challenging statement induces the addressee to action and the use of a compliment informs the reader of the subject's favorable deeds.

It may also be gleaned that the employment of *conclusion* as a move to end the complaint letter is a softening mechanism employed by Filipino and Singaporean writers in place of *praise* and *appeal to the editor*. The use of compliment and quotation serves as softening devices contributing to the decrease in the illocutionary force of speech act of complaint in writing this particular genre.

Finally, it is to be noted that there is the employment of discontinuous moves for *background*, *complaint*, *suggestion* and *justification for suggestion* in Philippine and Singaporean letters of complaint. This indicates that some Filipino and Singaporean writers find it important to provide the reader some background information every time they make a claim to ensure that the reader understands the nature of the complaint. It also implies that since some letters provide brief background information in some parts of the letters, they find the need to employ the move repeatedly to supplement and complete the brief background they have earlier provided. As regards the *suggestion* move, some Filipino writers offer suggestions at intervals since it is also acceptable that for every stated complaint come a suggestion and the justification for such suggestion. For some Singaporean writers, the recommendations given at intervals for a complaint may imply that better alternatives are offered. The presence of discontinuous *complaint* in Philippine and Singaporean letters implies that some writers opt to express their complaints at intervals so as to reduce the humiliation it would cause the addressee. It is to be noted that when complaints come one after the other, the degree of embarrassment such complaints would inflict on the addressee would be greater than if they were stated at intervals. Moreover, this strategy would also reduce the impact of the so-called *Face-Threatening Acts* (Brown & Levinson, 1999).

5. Conclusion

We have looked at the discourse organization of Philippine and Singaporean complaint letters. We have found that similarities outweigh the differences. Differences, however, are slight as in the case of the use of *introduction* as an organizational move and the length of letters.

One generalization attributed to this finding is that complaint letters belonging to one type of genre may really observe a certain structure. Common to this genre are the *background* and, of course, *complaint* moves. As such, these moves are obligatory as they help the readers reach a full understanding of the text. Other moves may or may not be part of the structure depending on the writer's interest in employing such moves. Thus, they may be optional. Another point to consider is the preference of the writer for a simple or elaborate writing style. Perhaps, a more simple writing style would call for the use of lesser moves and an elaborate writing style for more moves. From the examples given and the data presented, it may then be concluded that Filipino letter-writers do employ a more indirect writing style and therefore elaborate, as compared to Singaporean letter-writers who employ a more direct writing style and therefore, curt and simple.

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