

**A Contrastive Rhetoric Analysis of Job Application Letters  
in Philippine English and American English**

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**Abstract**

This study investigates the physical elements, surface features, readability, rhetorical moves, and politeness strategies employed in job application letters written by Filipino and American teacher-applicants using the lens of contrastive rhetoric analysis. The study analyzed 30 authentic Filipino and American job application letters written from 2001 to 2015, which comprised the entire corpora, using Upton and Connor's (2001) Coding Scheme and Brown and Levison's (1987) politeness strategies as frameworks for analysis. The results revealed that the Philippine corpus does not strictly observe the needed physical elements in a job application letter, while the American corpus has consistently adhered to all the required elements. In terms of the surface features of the corpora, Filipino teachers include less words and shorter sentences that are more lexically dense. Meanwhile, American teachers write more words and longer sentences that are less lexically dense. As regards the corpora's readability, measures of lexical density revealed that American job application letters are more intelligible than those of the Filipinos. However, both of the corpora fall under acceptable ranges of readability based on the Gunning-Fog index. In terms of the rhetorical moves, Filipino teachers follow a more personalized and unconventional way of presenting details in their application letters, while American teachers are more structured and tend to conform to standards in representing each move in their letters. Finally, the preferences of both Filipino and American teachers for politeness strategies show no apparent difference. Filipinos observe direct and nonstandard ways of expressing respect to their addressees. On the other hand, American teachers generally prefer positive politeness strategies and are more indirect, formal, and conventional in expressing congenial statements in their letters. Based on the results, implications for establishing an ESP writing class for teachers are provided.

**Keywords:** Contrastive analysis, genre-based writing, job application letters, move analysis, ESP

**1. Introduction**

The critical argument of Kaplan (1966), which posits that every culture ushers in distinctive patterns of thinking that significantly influence the organizational structure of writing, is one of the earliest in Contrastive Rhetoric (CR). As a field in applied linguistics, CR has paved ways for rhetoric studies that highlighted

contrastive analysis, error analysis, and relevant investigations on the influence of L1 to L2 learning.

In her historical review of CR, Connor (2002) affirms CR's development toward a context-sensitive research approach that includes studying the social context, local situatedness, writing process as well as written products themselves, and history and social structures of a particular culture. From being delimited

to L1 and L2 learners' writing, CR studies have advanced into integrating authentic writing samples or discipline-specific corpus with multidimensional analytical frameworks for cross-cultural linguistic analyses. These include studying rhetorical or moves-analysis theories governing various writings in professional and academic contexts. Hence, the need for genre-based analysis originated.

The regularities in texts in terms of shared communicative purposes within discourse communities are embodied in genre analysis, which gives light to various research concerning structures and conventions of written outputs from different professional and academic contexts. In presenting the definition of a genre in relation to English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Swales (1990) underscores that a genre shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains the choice of content and style. His study of genres in terms of rhetorical moves has sought to operationalize a text into particular segments, which originated from the educational objective of supporting the teaching of academic writing and reading for nonnative speakers of English (Benjamins, 2010).

Recent studies in CR have centered on texts for specific genres such as research articles, editorials, grant proposals, theses, and texts for professional purposes (Lintao & Erfe, 2012). Such new directions in CR consider texts not merely as static products but as functional parts of dynamic cultural contexts (Connor, 1990). Moreover, recent research in academic and professional writing across cultures forms part of the domains of investigation in contrastive studies. Contrastive studies on professional and academic writings conducted in milieus outside the Anglo-American context recommend that CR be pursued according to varying aims and methods within different institutions and universities and in EFL situations (Enkvist, 1997). Hence, several research that highlight CR relevant to academic and professional settings have been undertaken in Europe, Middle East, and Asia.

In reviewing current literature, English writing based on a task for real-world purposes poses interests among CR researchers. Consequently, genre-based investigations on business letter writing have penetrated the research scene. One of them is specifically connected to writing cover letters for a job application.

### **1.1 Job Application Cover Letters**

Writing a cover letter has been a household requirement for one to land on a desired job. It is typical for an applicant to take advantage of the utility of a job application letter to be considered for almost any position. In the United States, 91% of executives who joined in an online survey agreed that cover letters are valuable when evaluating job candidates (Half, 2012). Also, 71% of the managers, who participated in the said survey, affirmed that they anticipate receiving cover letters even when applicants submit their resumes online. In general, the application letter can supplement and enrich the information present in the rest of the application (Hope College, 2002). Thus, writing a good job application letter may be a crucial factor whether the application will be accepted or not.

In Western culture, the main function of a job application letter is to provide a self-appraisal that includes strategies such as enhancing qualifications and experiences of the applicant and demonstrating such an interest in a specific position (Li, 2011). Among countries in Asia, styles and conventions toward writing an application letter are different. In fact, in Taiwan, application letters are not an essential component for job application documents in business communities. In another study of cross-cultural variations in job application letters among people in South Asia, Bhatia (1993) found that application letters from South Asian countries do not reflect similar promotional features as those from Western countries. On a relative note, Connor, Davis, and De Rycker (1995) concluded in their study of job application letters across cultures that the Flemish group resembled Bhatia's (1993) South Asian group, which is to say that they do not use the cover letter as a sales instrument for self-promotion. As a part and parcel of professional discourse, similarities and differences between or among cover letters written by native and nonnative speakers of English could be functionally explored.

One of the schemes developed for such an investigation is genre analysis in writing application letters to help applicants realize forms, conventions, and effective communicative writing to the hiring committee. Although there are hundreds of websites providing applicants with samples and guidelines, a genre analysis based on linguistic approaches is still needed to help applicants understand how to achieve

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the communicative purposes of the application letter through move structures, linguistic features, and pragmatics (Hsaio, 2004). Researchers within and outside the inner circle of World Englishes have apparently arrived at these differences and similarities in rhetorical features of job application letters.

The study of Upton and Connor (2001) identified cross-cultural differences that may influence effectiveness of the application letters written by American and European undergraduate students by analyzing a corpus covering a ten-year period. They concluded that letters written in early years showed greater differences in style between cultural groups as compared with letters written in later years. They further observed that the style of application letters has become more homogenized in the global business environment (Li, 2011). Their study, thus, resulted in the investigation on the use of politeness strategies in letter writing.

Maier (1992) conducted a study on cross-cultural job application letter analyses and found out that native speakers use more positive polite strategies, such as being indirect in deferring to the reader. Upton and Connor (2001) also reported that American and non-American applicants operate politeness strategies differently in cover letters but do not follow particular patterns. As mentioned in the study of Li (2011), the differences might be attributed to cultural variations in the audience's expectation and interpretation of reader-writer relationships and the writer's concepts of how politeness is expressed. As such, the variations in writing job application letters do not only encompass form, content, and style but politeness strategies as well.

Several years after the emergence of important studies on cover letter writing as a genre, many researchers endeavored to widen its scope by including other elements and venturing on other genres within the context of business correspondence. Few of these studies focused on rhetorical moves applied among application essays for graduate school, contrastive rhetoric analysis of business letters written by native and nonnative speakers, and contrastive studies dealing with internship application letters involving students subjected to extensive English language instruction.

In 2006, Arvani conducted a discourse analysis of business letters written by native English speaking and nonnative Iranian communicators. Using Halliday's (1985) notion of lexical density, the number of lexical and grammatical words was computed. Then, on the

basis of the model of schematic structure, the "moves" and "steps" of letters were specified, and finally, the politeness strategies used in the letters were analyzed. The findings showed that Iranian business letter-writers mostly focused on the surface linguistic aspects of the English language while the pragmatic aspects of language, such as using politeness strategies, were ignored in their letter writing. This significantly links to the inevitability of capitalizing on the use of both the linguistic and the pragmatic features when analyzing business letters.

Li (2011) analyzed the English cover letters written by Taiwanese and Canadian Hospitality Management majors for their internship applications. Using a move-based analysis, the researcher found out that there are significant differences in length, lexical density, and descriptions of desire for applying for the job; providing arguments in benefits for the company; and politeness expressions between Taiwanese and Canadian students' cover letters. The study's implications for the teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) among students applying for internships may give light to the strategy of considering discourse features of letters to guide student-applicants toward getting the jobs they desire.

In the Philippines, would-be employees have to be acquainted with the basics of job application letter writing. In a country where jobs are outnumbered by the number of applicants, standing out from the rest through the aid of a cover letter must be considered. One of the professions that breed a lot of applicants every year in the country is teaching. Based on the report of the Education Department, public schools in the Philippines will need 81,000 teachers for the commencement of its Senior High School Program in 2016. This means that more teachers will be filling in teaching positions among public schools that offer basic education. What would make them more employable is their readiness to produce effective job application letters. Since Philippine English traditionally follows the standard American English, it is also crucial to study the way Filipino teachers write their job application letters as founded on the conventions used by the Americans. Since the use of English has been part of almost all proceedings in the Philippines such as those in the academe and the business world, it is a permissible truth that Americans have influenced the way Filipinos think and write (Famy, 2004). Hence,

in writing cover letters, one could also see traces of American elements among the writings of Filipinos in the said genre. Their comparability is, therefore, geared toward a specific professional purpose for teachers.

A move analysis on job application letters written by both American and Filipino teachers is, thus, relevant to this study. Although several contrastive studies have already revealed differences in rhetorical moves in cover letters across cultures, no study has been conducted to investigate the structure and, more importantly, the moves used by both Filipino and American teachers as they draft their application letters for a teaching position. The linguistic features that determine complexity and readability of a text, including the positive and negative politeness strategies that could possibly be entrenched in the corpora of cover letters used in the study, may also provide a concrete picture of the cultural and rhetorical differences between Americans and Filipinos despite adhering to the same standards in using English for written communication. Ultimately, this paper would shed light as to how teachers could improve the way they write business correspondence such as job application letters, particularly addressing their writing needs and helping them meet the criteria of effective cover letter writing.

## **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

This contrastive rhetoric study focuses on job application letters written by Filipino and American teacher-applicants by comparing their physical elements, surface structures, readability features, rhetorical moves, and politeness strategies. Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What physical elements of an application letter are present in the corpora of Filipino and American teachers' job application letters? How do the two differ in terms of their physical elements?;
2. What are the similarities and differences between the job application letters of Filipino and American teacher-applicants in terms of the letters' surface features and readability?;
3. What are the rhetorical moves found in the job application letters of Filipino

and American teacher-applicants? How do they distinctly employ such moves?; and

4. What politeness strategies are used in both Filipino and American teachers' job application letters? Is there a difference between the preferences for politeness strategies of the Filipinos and Americans?

## **1.3 Frameworks of the Study**

### **1.3.1 Upton and Connor's Coding Scheme**

Coding schemes are ways of categorizing behavior so that one can code what is observed in terms of how often a type of behavior appears. This is a coding scheme for corpus of application letters based on the concept of Swalesian (Swales, 1990) genre moves categorized by the communicative purpose of individual rhetorical units. Upton and Connor's (2001) seven-move coding scheme made two modifications on the scheme originally developed by Connor, Davis, and De Rycker (1995). The moves "describe the functions (or communicative intentions) which particular portions of the text realize in relationship to the overall task of applying for... an overseas internship" (Connor, Davis, & De Rycker, as cited in Upton & Connor, 2001, p. 463.). These two move alterations from the original were an extension of Move 4 (originally, "Indicate desire for an interview.") and addition of a seventh move ("Reference attached resume.") from the initial total of six. Upton and Connor further clarify that the moves are obligatory or essential.

This coding scheme is, thus, adapted in this study, for it focuses on the rhetorical moves applied in writing job application letters. Although the present study deals with cover letters of teachers, this framework is still applicable since it encompasses features equally observed in application letters written for a teaching position. However, to make the coding scheme befitting with the objectives of the study, some words were modified and were aligned with terms common for a job application letter for teaching.

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**Table 1. Upton and Connor’s coding scheme (2001, p. 318)**

1	Identify the source of information (Explain how and where you learned of the position).
2	Apply for the position (State desire for consideration).
3	Provide argument, including supporting information, for the job application.
	a. Implicit argument based on neutral evidence or information about background and experience.
	b. Argument based on what would be good for the hiring company.
	c. Argument based on what would be good for the applicant.
4	Indicate desire for an interview or a desire for further contact, or specify means of further communication/how to be contacted.
5	Express politeness (pleasantries) or appreciation at the end of the letter.
6	Offer to provide more information.
7	Reference attached resume.

### 1.3.2 Politeness Strategies

In writing a cover letter, the need to be modest and teachable on the part of applicants must be expressed. Hence, the use of politeness strategies helps the applicants on how to maintain a balance between advertising themselves and presenting themselves as respectful and teachable. Lakoff’s (1973) classic paper describes the sociocultural function of politeness as helping people to alleviate and avoid the risks associated with interaction conflict. Politeness makes the interaction less abrasive and hurtful as a result of using indirectness, softeners, or mitigators.

Politeness strategies are classified into positive and negative politeness. Positive politeness strategies include directness and being optimistic, while negative politeness strategies focus on the use of modals and formulaic expressions. Negative politeness strategies are intended to reinforce the speakers’ respect for the addressees, showing that the speakers acknowledge the addressees’ independence and freedom of action (Brown & Levison, 1987). Such politeness strategies are connected with the use of modals and formulaic expressions. On the other hand, positive politeness strategies are employed to emphasize the shared goals and common ground between the speaker and the addressee. The strategies are most effective when both

the speaker and the addressee see themselves as equals (Li, 2011). According to Upton and Connor (2001), the directness of the speaker and the use of optimism are identified as positive politeness.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Study Corpus

The data analyzed in this study include two sets of job application letters written by Filipino and American teachers. The first set includes 15 letters of application written in English by Filipino teachers applying in public and private elementary and secondary schools in the Philippines. The job application letters were submitted to school heads of their respective institutions from 2000-2014. On the other hand, 15 samples of job application letters were downloaded from different websites of American universities, which showcase sample authentic cover letters of teachers applying for a teaching position in both public and private elementary and high schools across the United States. The job application letters written by Americans were composed from 2003-2015. The difference in the years when the cover letters were written was assumed to have no relative impact on the results since similar structures and patterns were observed from the two sets of corpora.

The comparability of the job application letters written by both Filipino and American teachers links with the varieties of World Englishes across the globe as presented by Y. Kachru (1997). The Philippines is associated with the outer circle where English is learned as a second language. On the other hand, the United States belongs to the inner circle along with United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand – countries where English is used as a first language.

### 2.2 Procedure

The elements present in each group of job application letters were identified as represented through the number of occurrences or frequencies. Quantitative analyses of the physical elements and surface features of the letters, such as the total word count, number of sentences, average sentence length, number of paragraphs and hard words, and

lexical densities including their readability levels, were computed using an online text analyzer from *UsingEnglish.com*, a website that provides free text content analysis and accurate statistics. On the other hand, to analyze the genre moves of the job application letters, Upton and Connor's (2001) Coding Scheme for Learner Application Letter was adapted as framework for analysis. All the sample letters were encoded and converted to computer files. The help of an intercoder who is a Ph.D. in Linguistics degree holder and has been teaching language courses in a state university for 23 years was, therefore, sought in order to ensure the reliability of the study results. Careful identification and categorization of the moves used in the job application letters written by Filipinos and Americans seeking for teaching jobs were then employed. Consequently, the politeness strategies (Brown & Levison, 1987) used in Moves 4 and 5 of the Filipino and American cover letters were likewise discussed and compared.

In analyzing how the respondents employed the moves in Upton and Connor's scheme in writing their application letters, a move is considered obligatory if its percentage of occurrences is 60% above. Thus, it is qualified as obligatory if it appears at least once in nine (9) out of the 15 job application letters evaluated. On the other hand, a move is considered optional if its percentage of occurrences is below 60% – that is, equivalent to 0-8 times of appearance among the 15 job application letters under study.

### **2.3 Data Analysis**

The text analyzer used in the study examines text content and gives statistics about a text including word count, unique words, number of sentences, average words per sentence, lexical density, and the Gunning-Fog readability index. The study used an online text analyzer to determine the physical features of sample job application letters produced by Filipinos and Americans and to identify each letter's readability based on how lexically dense each sample is and on the number of hard words crucial for computing for the Gunning-Fog readability index. The text analyzer is a free program from *UsingEnglish.com*.

The said text analyzer determined the physical features of the corpora of letters as to the total number of words, sentences, paragraphs, and hard words collectively. The measures of lexical density and

readability of the sample job application letters are based on the said features. The lexical density of a text tries to measure the proportion of the content (lexical) words over the total words. Texts with a lower density are more easily understood. Lexically dense texts have a lexical density of around 60-70%, and those that are not have a lower lexical density measure of around 40-50%. Similarly, the Gunning-Fog index aims to identify the readability of a text. It gives the number of years of education that a reader hypothetically needs to understand the paragraph or text. The index formula implies that short sentences written in plain English achieve a better score than long sentences written in complicated language. For instance, the *New York Times* has an average Fog index of 11-12 and the *Time Magazine* about 11. Typically, technical documentation has a Fog index between 10 and 15, and professional prose almost never exceeds 18 (*UsingEnglish.com*).

Meanwhile, the politeness strategies employed in both corpora of Filipino and American job application letters were analyzed based on the use of formulaic expressions and modal auxiliaries that may reveal positive and negative pleasantries. These elements show speech acts, express concern for others, and minimize threats to self-esteem (Nordquist, 2009).

## **3. Results and Discussion**

A job application letter fulfills a communicative purpose that links the applicant with his or her prospective employer. Hence, the physical, linguistic, and pragmatic features of a cover letter have to be considered to ensure the letter's communicability. The following results and discussion reveal the comparability that exists between the ways Filipino and American teachers use the distinct features of their cover letters such as how they observe the parts of a business letter, the number of content and hard words that lead to their letters' readability, and the inclusion of politeness strategies as a pragmatic element in cover letter writing.

### **3.1 Physical Elements Included in Filipino and American Teachers' Job Application Letters**

One of the basics in writing a job application letter is the knowledge of its essential parts. The

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Writing Center @ University of Wisconsin–Madison (2014) notes that the use of conventional business correspondence form in cover letter writing is highly needed, and knowledge of the structure of an effective job application letter would favor an applicant in any job or work desired.

According to the Northern Michigan University (2011), a business letter is a formal letter with six parts. These include the *heading*, which contains the return address with the date on the last line; the *recipient's address* containing the address of the one the letter is sent; the *salutation* or the greeting; the *body of the letter*, which serves as the letter's meat; the *complimentary close*, which is a short and a polite remark that ends the letter; the *signature line*; and the *enclosures*, written if there is any enclosed or attached document such as a resume. These elements are then deemed to be obligatory in business correspondence that include job application letters. Table 2 presents the important elements found in the corpora of job application letters written by Filipino and American teachers.

**Table 2. Physical comparison of the elements contained in Filipino and American teachers' job application letters**

	<b>Filipino Teachers' Job Application Letters</b>	<b>American Teachers' Job Application Letters</b>
Heading	5	15
Recipient's Address	12	15
Salutation	14	15
Body	15	15
Complimentary Close	14	15
Signature	15	15
Enclosures	9	15

Apparent differences can be seen on the way Filipino and American teacher-applicants follow conventions in application letter writing such as the observance of necessary elements of a letter. Among the corpus of Filipino teachers' application letters, only five (5) out of 15 included a heading; 12 included the recipient's address; 14 have salutation; all of them have body of the letter; 14 have complimentary close; all have signature line; and nine (9) from the letter samples provide an enclosures or attachments referring to other

pertinent documents. On the other hand, the corpus of American teachers' application letters shows that all the essential parts of a business letter are strictly followed.

The inconsistency in the observance of the said essential elements among the samples of letters from Filipino teacher-applicants may be attributed to their lack of training and awareness of technical writing conventions. As reported by Thomas (2011), ESL learners tend to commit errors when structuring formal letters and curriculum vitae. This was seconded by Sanders (2011) when he reported that a lot of applicants forget to include a cover letter whenever they go through finding a job. In the Philippines, a resume is more popular than a cover letter. This may be due to the reason that Filipino applicants do not see the need to write an application letter as compared with the perceived importance of a resume. Moreover, among Americans and those whose native language is English, adhering to standards is extremely important. This was proved in the study of Li (2011) when he found out that the samples of Canadian internship letters contain all the elements of a cover letter. The same observation was ascertained among the internship letters of Taiwanese students who have had at least seven years of formal instruction in English and who were exchange students in Canada. Some of them, however, failed to provide correct information of other elements such as those relative to the recipients' and the salutation.

### 3.2 Surface Features and Readability of Filipino and American Teachers' Job Application Letters

The differences in words, sentences, and paragraph structures between the two corpora of Filipino and American job application letters were also analyzed. Table 3 shows the total length and lexical densities of each corpus of job application letters written by Filipinos and Americans, respectively, that led to the identification of their corresponding extents of readability.

Based on the surface-level analysis of the two corpora of job application letters written by Filipino and American teachers, the corpus from American teacher-applicants use of more words (4,003) and sentences (193) than those of the Filipino teachers' job application letters, which have a total of 2,871 and 167 sentences. In terms of the average length of

sentences, American job application letters have 21.09, while those written by Filipinos have 17.12. This posits that American teachers write more lengthy sentences in their cover letters whereas Filipino teachers write shorter ones. Conversely, the American job application letters encompass more paragraphs (68) than those of the Filipinos' (65). The following extracts from the corpora of job application letters further show the aforesaid variability:

**(FTAP #12)** *I may not be a graduate of an Education course, but I am certain that the Professional Education subjects that I took and the trainings and seminars I attended relative to technical skills development had equipped me with enough knowledge and skills to teach Technology and Livelihood Education and Technical-Vocational subjects. (51 words)*

**(ATAP #11)** *Over the past five years, I have had the wonderful opportunity to instruct a diverse group of middle school students, and as a result, I have developed highly effective teaching techniques and instructional methods, which have allowed me to educate all styles of learners, and foster a fun and engaging learning environment that effectively teaches art appreciation, promotes creativity, and encourages growing independence. (63 words)*

**Table 3. Comparative summary of the surface features and readability of Filipino and American teachers' job application letters**

	<b>Filipino Teachers' Job Application Letters</b>	<b>American Teachers' Job Application Letters</b>
Total Word Count	2,871	4,003
Number of Sentences	167	193
Average Sentence Length	17.12	21.09
Number of Paragraphs	68	65
Hard Words	25.24 (14.27%)	45.2 (16.75%)
Lexical Density	62.31%	60.95%
Fog Index	12.55	15.14

The two extracts confirm the difference between the lengths of sentences written in both Filipino and American job application letters of teachers. Although both employed compound-complex sentence structures,

the variance goes with the number of words that complete one full sentence. In the case of the American job application letters, the longest sentence consists of 63 words as compared with the longest sentence among the Filipino job application letters, which has a total of 51 words. This discrepancy is consistent with the results from the studies of Li (2011) and Arvani (2006) as they contrastively analyzed internship letters written by native speakers and Taiwanese students and business letters produced by American and Iranian students, respectively. It was also found out that native speakers tend to write longer sentences in business correspondence letters than foreign language and second language speakers of English.

Determining the readability levels of the samples of job application letters of teachers was also covered in this study. Pikulski (2002) defines "readability" as the level of ease or difficulty with which a text material can be understood by a particular reader who is reading that text for a specific purpose. In this regard, readability or comprehensibility has to be achieved by the cover letter in order to be considered by the hiring company or the hiring school if the applicant is seeking for a teaching position. In this study, two readability tests were employed on the contents of the bodies of both Filipino and American job application letters. The first one was through calculating the letters' lexical densities, and the second was done by measuring their Gunning-Fog indices or the average of the number of words per sentence pertaining to the readability of a text.

Based on the calculations done through an online text analyzer, the corpus of Filipino job application letters written by teacher-applicants has an overall lexical density and Fog index of 62.31% and 12.55, respectively. On the other hand, the corpus of American job application letters of teachers received a lexical density of 60.95% and a Fog Index of 15.14. The results show that in terms of the first readability test, samples of Filipino job application letters are more lexically dense than those written by Americans. As regards the readability measured by the Gunning-Fog index, the American job application letters have higher index than those written by Filipinos. These reveal that based on the lexical density test, readability is more apparent in the samples of application letters from American teachers. This could be attributed to the number of content or lexical items (i.e., nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) embedded in the Filipino teachers' cover



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letters that made them more difficult to read. On the basis of the Fog index, both corpora of job application letters satisfy the range of index for technical texts or documents. However, the higher index attributed to the corpus of American job application letters underscores the use of more hard words (i.e., words having three or more syllables), which is a primary factor in computing for the Fog index. The following extracts intend to further illustrate the readability of both Filipino and American cover letters in terms of the use of content words and hard words:

- On the number of content (lexical) words in every paragraph

**(FTAP #9)** *My application as Mathematics teacher in this prestigious school has been initiated by DOST Region III. I finished my Bachelor's degree in Secondary Education major in Mathematics in 2013 as magna cum laude and DOST-SEI scholar. My LET rating is 87.80%. I finished my Master's degree in Education major in Mathematics and currently enrolled in my Doctor of Education degree major in Mathematics. I also ranked first in the recently conducted hiring for teacher I positions in the Schools Division of Tarlac City. **(44 content words)***

**(ATAP #6)** *It is with great anticipation that I am applying for the position of elementary teacher's assistant currently posted on Southbay's website. My education and experience make me an excellent candidate for this position and my dream of becoming a third grade teacher makes me extremely excited about the opportunity to learn more and gain additional experience by participating in the district's new summer learning program. **(36 content words)***

- On the number of hard words (words with three or more syllables) in every paragraph

**(FTAP #3)** *I am hearing a lot of good feedbacks from my sister and other teachers about the quality "life" education and training that Tarlac Montessori School*

*has been giving to its students and teachers respectively. As a would-be educator, it will be a great privilege for me to have my first teaching experience in your school and be one of its competent teachers. I am not yet a seasoned teacher, but my passion towards the craft and my aim to imbue to my future students what real-life education is make me one. **(9 hard words)***

**(ATAP #11)** *The enclosed resume will highlight my career accomplishments and demonstrate my solid, creative, instructional and leadership capabilities. Over the past five years, I have had the wonderful opportunity to instruct a diverse group of middle school students, and as a result, I have developed highly effective teaching techniques and instructional methods, which have allowed me to educate all styles of learners, and foster a fun and engaging learning environment that effectively teaches art appreciation, promotes creativity, and encourages growing independence. **(21 hard words)***

The extracts from Filipino and American job application letters show the strong preferences of Filipino teacher-applicants on the use of content or lexical words as instituted from the total 44 content words found in the extracted paragraph of one of the sample Filipino application letters. The said number of words is higher as compared with the 36 content words from the extracted paragraph of an American application letter. Conversely, American teacher-applicants tend to include more hard words than those written by Filipino teacher-applicants. This is justified by the total number of hard words embedded in each of the two extracted paragraphs from the two corpora, that is, nine (9) from the sample Filipino job application letters and 21 from that of the Americans.

In the study of Li (2011), Canadian students tend to write more lexically dense internship letters than Taiwanese students. Such a result is associated with the current study since a comparison was made on the basis of job application letters written by nonnative speakers of English (Filipinos) and native speakers of the said language (Americans). In a comparative study of Salazar

(2008), it was found that when writing argumentative essays, Filipinos and Spanish students prefer the use of lexical verbs and adverbs than their counterpart American students. The modality on the use of lexical words in writing is more apparent among ESL learners such as Filipinos and Spanish students. The use of hard words or words that exceed more than two syllables is in contrast with the aim of making writing outputs achieve clarity, simplicity, and parsimony, which are specifically encouraged by several American authors (Oppenheimer, 2005). Such employment of more hard words by American teacher-applicants may then be attributed to the conventions followed in technical writing such as in business letter writing. The usage of complex word items was also observed in the samples of Filipino job application letters since Filipinos follow technical writing standards from American English. However, a higher extent of preference for hard words is more observable among the analyzed cover letters written by American teacher-applicants.

### 3.3 Move Analysis of Filipino and American Teachers' Job Application Letters

To analyze the move structures of the corpora of job application letters used in this study, the coding scheme for application letters developed by Upton and Connor (2001) was adapted. The moves described are as follows: *Move 1 – Identify the source of information (Explain how and where you learned of the position); Move 2 – Apply for the position (State desire for consideration); Move 3 – Provide argument, including supporting information about background and experience (3a – Implicit argument based on neutral evidence or information about background and experience; 3b – Argument based on what would be good for the hiring company; 3c – Argument based on what would be good for the applicant); Move 4 – Indicate desire for an interview or a desire for further contact, or specify means of further communication/how to be contacted; Move 5 – Express politeness strategies (pleasantries) or appreciation at the end of the letter; Move 6 – Offer to provide more information; and Move 7 – Reference attached resume.* Tables 4 and

**Table 4. Moves identified in Filipino teachers' job application letters**

Filipino Teacher-Applicant Number	Moves								
	M1	M2	M3			M4	M5	M6	M7
			a	b	c				
FTAP #1		1	1			1	1		1
FTAP #2		1	1	1		1	1		1
FTAP #3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
FTAP #4		1	1	1		1		1	1
FTAP #5			1	1		1	1		
FTAP #6		1	1	1		1	1		1
FTAP #7		1	1	1		1	1		1
FTAP #8		1	1	1	1	1			
FTAP #9	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		
FTAP #10		1	1	1			1		1
FTAP #11	1	1	1	1			1		1
FTAP #12	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
FTAP #13	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		
FTAP #14		1	1	1		1	1		
FTAP #15	1	1	1	1		1	1		1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>

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5 illustrate the moves employed in both Filipino and American teachers' job application letters.

The results of the study are congruent with the findings of other researchers who also investigated the same genre. Filipino teachers have the propensity to observe the moves indicated in Upton and Connor's (2001) Coding Scheme for Learner Application Letter. Specifics about the position applied for were also seen as obligatory in the study of Miciano (2014). This is identified as Offering Candidature (OC) in the rhetorical moves established by Henry and Roseberry (2001). However, M2 in the coding scheme used is not identified in the proposed rhetorical moves of both Bathia (1993) and Henry and Roseberry (2001). Move 3a, on the one hand, is consistently observed in the corpus of job application letters written by Filipino teachers. Thus, the need to provide background information and experience on the part of the teacher-applicant is seen as enforced details in cover letters.

As one of the obligatory moves identified, M3b or stating arguments based on what the applicant could contribute to the hiring school is also a required element for Filipino teacher-applicants. According to the NC State University Career Center (2010), the first and second paragraphs of a cover letter must contain statements about the specific position being applied for and arguments relative to the candidate's qualifications and skills that could benefit the hiring company. Consequently, these moves are contributory to the possibility of capturing the attention of an employer.

For M4 and M5, necessary details about the interview process and polite statements or pleasantries are also considered requirements based on the sample job application letters written by Filipino teachers. The importance of letting the employer know the applicant's desire for an interview has to be underscored in the application letter. The connection between the employer and the job seeker is built through the interview process. Thus, asking for an interview helps job seekers to present their skills and acquire a desired position on merit. Further, politeness strategies as socially and culturally practiced (Watts, 2003) are used as a way to respectfully deal with people. As part of Filipino idiosyncrasies, politeness could be observed in the way Filipinos communicate both in oral and written discourses. As cited in the study of Gan, David, and Dumanig (2015), culture is seen as an important factor that influences the address and request forms of Filipinos.

For the other moves, M1 (Identify the source of information), M3c (Argument based on what is good for the applicant), and M6 (Offer to provide more information) are all identified as optional moves. These moves occurred less than 60% in the corpus of job application letters written by Filipino teacher-applicants.

In the study of Miciano (2014), the said moves were not considered optional but as statements generally embedded among the corpus of Filipino job application letters analyzed. In the principles of a good cover letter introduced by Blinn College–Bryan Writing Center (n.d.), one of the do's in writing a cover letter is to identify the sources of information for the application. However, it is emphasized that source information may or may not be included; it depends whether the application is solicited or unsolicited. Thus, if it is unsolicited, it is suggested that asking if a position is available will do. On a relative note, statements expressing an applicant's potential benefits when hired are not essentially emphasized in cover letter writing. What count as an important part of the application letter are the arguments stating the benefits the institution could have out of considering the application. Writing a cover letter is like advertising oneself to be considered by an employer; and in doing so, an applicant presents himself in such a way that his qualifications are contributory to the hiring company. As highlighted by Gallo (2014), an applicant must emphasize his or her personal value, not the personal satisfactions to be derived from the company. Also, offering to provide more information is not consistently observed among the corpus of Filipino job application letters in this study. The aforementioned move is not also seen as obligatory in the study of Miciano (2014). Although there are letters in the study that include statements to further provide information, such are overpowered by the applicants' statements expressing their desire for an interview. Hence, among the job application letters written by Filipino teachers, M6 is just secondary or at times, goes hand-in-hand with M4 (Indicate desire for interview or further contact).

The following extracts represent the obligatory and optional moves in the corpora of job application letters written by Filipino teachers:

- Obligatory Move – M3a (Implicit argument based on neutral evidence or information about background and experience)

**Table 5. Obligatory and optional moves identified in American teachers' job application letters**

Samples	Upton and Connor's (2001) Coding Scheme for Learner Application Letter								
	M1	M2	M3			M4	M5	M6	M7
			a	b	c				
ATAP #1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1	1
ATAP #2		1	1	1		1	1	1	1
ATAP #3		1			1	1		1	1
ATAP #4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
ATAP #5	1	1	1	1		1	1	1	1
ATAP #6	1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1
ATAP #7		1	1	1		1	1	1	1
ATAP #8		1	1	1		1	1	1	1
ATAP #9		1	1	1		1	1		1
ATAP #10		1	1	1	1	1	1		1
ATAP #11		1	1	1		1	1		1
ATAP #12		1	1	1		1	1		1
ATAP #13		1	1	1		1	1		1
ATAP #14		1	1	1		1	1		1
ATAP #15	1	1	1	1		1		1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>15</b>

**(FTAP # 1)** *I graduated last March 31, 2000, as a Cum laude at Republic Central Colleges with a Degree of Bachelor of Secondary Education, major in Filipino. I successfully passed the Licensure Examination for teachers last August 27, 2000.*

• Optional Move – M6 (Offer to provide more information)

**(FTAP #3)** *Shall the need for further details of my personal background arise; I am more than willing to mail them upon your request.*

The move analysis done among samples of American teachers' job application letters reveals that M2 (Apply for the position), M3a (Implicit argument based on neutral evidence or information about background and experience), M3b (Argument based on what would be good for the hiring company), M4 (Indicate desire for an interview or a desire for further contact, or specify means of further communication/how to be contacted),

M5 (Express politeness or pleasantries), M6 (Offer to provide more information), and M7 (Reference attached resume) are all obligatory moves.

Both M2 and M7 are deemed necessary by the American teacher-applicants; and these findings are in accordance with the studies of Li (2011) and Connor et al. (1995), respectively. The former found out that Canadian students use different strategies in presenting their desires to apply for an internship position. This is relevant to the current study since Americans and Canadians belong to the Inner Circle of World Englishes, thus, having similar preferences in cover letter writing. On the other hand, the latter contrastively analyzed job application letters written by Finnish, Flemish, and American applicants and found out that Americans tend to draw the readers' attention to the enclosed resume.

Significantly, M3a and M3b, including M4, are concerned with how American teacher-applicants present themselves and provide arguments as to how their qualifications would benefit the hiring school and the applicant's desire to be interviewed. In the genre-based study of Hsiao (2004), 100% of the university application letters of American graduate

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students employed a move identified as “promoting the candidate,” which qualifies such a finding that M3a is an obligatory move in the current study. American teacher-applicants provide more arguments relative to M3b (presenting arguments on the possible benefits of the hiring school) in the present study. Connor et al. (1995) concluded in their study that a typical US applicant provides more supporting arguments about the benefits of the employer. The inclusion of details about an applicant’s desire for interview is found out to be indirect and unintended among American teachers. This is evident in the number of politeness strategies presented in the sample application letters, thus, making M5 as another obligatory move in the American corpus. This may be attributed to the tendency of Americans to not perform the face-threatening act of requesting and to be more particular with deferring to the readers (Connor et al., 1995).

The use of M6 can also be considered an obligatory move among American application letters. However, in the study of Li (2011), both the native and the nonnative participants who were asked to write internship application letters did not include M6 in the closing paragraphs of their letters. Instead, most of the participants paid much attention to indicating desire for an interview or desire for further contact. It is then apparent among the corpus of American application letters from the current study that along with the aim of expressing desire for an interview is the need to provide more information.

Significantly, the moves that are least observed among the application letters of Americans are M1 and M3c. The moves present the identified sources of information and on providing arguments good for the applicant. As found in the study of Connor et al. (1995), Flemish applicants provide more sources of

information in their job application letters than their American counterparts. This shows the directness of the Americans when starting their letters of application. They go directly to M2, which states their application for the position desired. Finally, providing arguments for the benefits of the applicants is not seen as necessary among the American application letters. Although it is observed in some of the letters, it is not as frequent as M2 and M7. On the contrary, the results of the current study differ with those of Connor et al. (1995). As mentioned, a typical US applicant provides more arguments to discuss the benefits of the employer as well as the applicant himself. Such a distinction may be attributed to the emphasis given by the American teachers on the qualifications that would make them employable in the school they are applying in more than the personal benefits they could derive out of teaching in their target institution.

The following extracts represent the obligatory and optional moves in the corpora of job application letters written by American teachers:

- Obligatory Move – M2 (Apply for the position)

**(ATAP #1)** I am interested in applying for the elementary teaching position posted on the OLAS website.

- Optional Move – M1 (Identify the source of information)

**(ATAP #4)** *Please accept my letter of application for the mathematics teacher position at Warren High School. I learned about this opening through the Nashville Metropolitan Public Schools website.*

**Table 6. Similarities and differences in the rhetorical moves employed in Filipino and American teachers’ job application letters**

Samples	Moves								
	M1	M2	M3			M4	M5	M6	M7
			a	b	c				
Filipino Teachers' Job Application Letters	6	14	15	14	5	13	13	3	10
American Teachers' Job Application Letters	5	15	14	14	4	14	13	9	15

Based on the summary of the rhetorical moves employed in both job application letters written by Filipino and American teachers, no further differences in the occurrences of each move in the given corpora can be established. However, there are some moves where discrepancies are slightly apparent. These include M6 (Provide more information) where there are three (3) letters observing the said move and nine (9) from the Americans. Another one is in M7 (Reference attached resume) where only ten (10) Filipino application letters conformed. Consequently, all the sample American application letters observed the said move. With the comparable rhetorical moves in the application letters of Filipino and American teachers, a deeper analysis of how they construct and present the moves is discussed.

For M1, Filipino teacher-applicants acknowledge the sources of information at the onset of their application letters before stating their application for the given position, while American teachers suspend first such details by stating first their interest or desire for their applications to be accepted by the hiring school or educational institution. Another observation is that all sources of information from Filipino application letters were taken from print references such as magazines and from people's words of mouth. On the other hand, Americans get sources of information from the Internet, specifically from websites providing teaching employment. These distinctions can be observed in the following extracts:

**(FTAP #12)** *I was informed by a colleague that you are in need of Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE) teachers for this coming academic year.*

**(ATAP #1)** *I am interested in applying for the elementary teaching position posted on OLAS website.*

M2 is also presented differently from the corpora of job application letters written by Filipino and American teachers. It was found out that Filipino teachers employ different strategies in presenting their desire to apply for a teaching position. The details are, therefore, representative of Filipinos' way of framing their introductory paragraphs for their application letters where Move 2 is included. The Filipino teachers presented the said detail through the

use of interrogative sentences, which is the same with those used in advertisements. This may signify that the teacher-applicant was not aware of the vacancy she was applying for. Others presented first their qualifications before the details about their application, and some provided introductory sentences about the importance of schools. In addition, there were application letters that expressed commendations for the school; others used politeness strategies in their introductory paragraphs, while few sounded direct in their approach. The following extracts show the different strategies employed by Filipino teachers in the corpus of job application letters used in the study:

**(FTAP #1)** *Are you in need of a competent teacher? Please consider me an applicant for that position.*

**(FTAP #8)** *I am Ms. Aireen U. Bambalan, a licensed teacher at Tarlac Montessori School, Tarlac City. In line with the need of our public schools for teachers, I would like to apply for a position in your school as a grade school teacher.*

In contrast, a majority of the corpus of American teachers' job application letters shows that they prefer a more direct way of providing details about their teaching job application. There are few letters which, on the other hand, utilized different ways of presenting the desire to apply. These include using politeness strategies and presenting qualifications suited to what the school is looking for. However, though more direct in manner, one formulaic expression was found out as to how American teachers directly present their candidacy as job seekers. They always include framed sentences such as, "I am writing to apply...", "I am writing to express...", "It is with great pleasure that...", and "It is with great anticipation that..." The following extracts illustrate the said strategies:

**(ATAP #4)** *Please accept my letter of application for the mathematics teacher position at Warren High School.*

**(ATAP #14)** *With over 20 years of hands-on, successful teaching experience, I am confident in my ability and passion to*

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*become a positive addition to your school community as a High School Mathematics Teacher.*

For M3, which is further divided into M3a, M3b, and M3c, both of the Filipino and American corpora of job application letters provide supporting arguments about the applicants' background and experience and on the details that provide urgings on what is good for the hiring school or institution. Based on the number of occurrences, it can be noted that both Filipino and American corpora do not frequently observe M3c when structuring arguments in providing supporting information. It is, therefore, important to note that in establishing background and experience, the Filipino teachers emphasize more the positive qualities they possess, which they consider beneficial for the schools they are applying in. Conversely, the American teachers put accent on their relevant pedagogical experiences and achievements as educators. Such a distinction is based on affective and cognitive professional characteristics of the applicants. To give details about the said preferences, the following extracts are presented:

**(FTAP #2)** *As you will note I am very flexible in response to changing demands. With my creativity I can work well and give my best solitary or collaboratively.*

**(ATAP #4)** *Through the secondary education program at Vanderbilt, I have had opportunities to gain experience at many schools that serve a variety of populations. In addition to student teaching, I have several years of experience working with children in various settings.*

Under M4, the Filipino and American teachers also differ. The preference for a direct expression of their desire for an interview is prevalent among Filipino teachers. Such an interview is requested to provide further details about the applicant's qualifications and any other background information. On the other hand, the American teachers formulate the said move differently. All the American letters do not directly ask for an interview but rather indirectly ask for a possible meet up with the employer. Another difference goes

with the propensity of American teachers to follow up their requests, specifying the way they can be further contacted either through phone or e-mail. This observation is not common among the samples of Filipino job application letters. As cited in Connor et al. (1995), US applicants were not as direct in asking for an interview. Significantly, both corpora of job application letters share a comparable level of politeness when asking for an interview or further contact. To show such differences, the following extracts are presented:

**(FTAP #3)** *An interview at your most convenient time will be a great favor for me.*

**(ATAP #8)** *In closing, I look forward to meeting with you to discuss in greater detail how can I contribute to the continued success of your music program.*

In relation to the use of pleasantries or politeness strategies in M5, both Filipinos and Americans use them sparingly. A separate discussion on the politeness strategies utilized in the two sets of corpora is presented in the next section.

On the other hand, both of the corpora do not frequently employ M6. However, Americans observe it more than the Filipinos. This may be attributed to the fact that American teacher-applicants accompany their desire to be further contacted to provide more information about themselves and their qualifications. With the way they present such details, both have the same frames. Both samples of letters use M6 in order to further present their qualifications, background, and suitability for the job geared toward winning the favor of employers. The similarities of the two corpora of job application letters are presented in the following extracts:

**(FTAP #2)** *I welcome the opportunity to meet you to discuss how my extensive experience and skills would benefit your academic program.*

**(ATAP #2)** *I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience to further discuss my qualifications as a secondary English teacher in your district.*

**Table 7. Negative politeness strategies employed in Filipino and American teachers' job application letters**

Formulaic Expressions Used in Filipino Job Application Letters (Negative Politeness Strategies)	f	Formulaic Expressions Used in American Job Application Letters (Negative Politeness Strategies)	f
I am more than willing...	7	I would appreciate the opportunity...	2
Thank you for your time and consideration...	3	I welcome the opportunity...	2
Your consideration will be much gratified...	1	I would enjoy the opportunity...	2
Thank you...	1	I would welcome the chance...	1
Thank you very much...	6	Thank you for your consideration...	2
Thank you and more power...	1	Thank you for your time and consideration...	10
May the Lord of the Harvest bless you...	1		
I would like an opportunity...	1		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>19</b>

For the last move (M7 Reference attached move), the Filipino and American teacher-applicants differ in the way they include other documents such as their resumes in their letters. The Filipinos include the information about the attached resume in paragraphs – a presentation that goes with the other rhetorical moves. On the other hand, the Americans just simply write the word “Enclosures” at the end of the letter, immediately after the signature line.

### 3.4 Politeness Strategies Used in Filipino and American Teachers' Job Application Letters

The following tables and discussions relate to both the negative and the positive politeness strategies employed in the application letters under study.

#### 3.4.1 Negative Politeness Strategies

Negative politeness strategies are used to reinforce the speakers' respect for the addressees, showing that the speakers acknowledge the addressees' independence and freedom of action (Brown & Levison, 1987). Such politeness strategies are connected with the use of modals and formulaic expressions. Table 7 following table shows the negative politeness strategies utilized in M4 and M5 of both sets of job application letters written by Filipino and American teachers.

The results of the analysis reveal similarities and differences in the use of negative politeness strategies in the said corpora. Both corpora of job application letters use a number of negative pleasantries through the inclusion of formulaic expressions. Examine these

extracts:

**(FTAP#5)** *Your consideration will be much gratified.* (negative politeness strategy)

**(ATAP #1)** *I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss how my skills and experience can meet the needs of your students.* (negative politeness strategy)

Also, the most frequent formulaic expressions from both sets of letters are relative in conveying gratifying messages to employers by stating the congenial clauses, “*Thank you very much...*” and “*Thank you for your time and consideration...*” The use of such expressions is, therefore, significant with the purpose of employing negative politeness strategies in letters – that is, for the applicants to give respect to the addressees and be modest as possible by acknowledging the latter's independence and freedom of action (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Conversely, both Filipinos and Americans do not have apparent differences when using formulaic expressions for negative pleasantries as shown by the minimal two-point difference of the two sets of corpora. However, it is evident that the Filipino teacher-applicants have more varied formulaic expressions compared with those produced by the Americans. This means that though both of the corpora observe negative politeness strategies, the Filipino teachers seem to be more aware of the need to express respect toward their prospective employers and be modest as possible. However, when it comes to the use of modals, the



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**Table 8. Positive politeness strategies employed in Filipino and American teachers' job application letters**

Formulaic Expressions Used in Filipino Job Application Letters (Negative Politeness Strategies)	f	Formulaic Expressions Used in American Job Application Letters (Positive Politeness Strategies)	f
I look forward to hearing from you soon...	2	I look forward to hearing from you...	4
I hope I would satisfy...	3	You can reach me at...	1
May I look forward to the accommodation...	1	I hope you will consider me...	1
You may contact me...	1	I may be contacted at...	1
Hoping for your favorable response...	1	Please consider this resume...	1
You can contact me at...	1	I may be reached at...	1
I have hopes that...	1	I will contact you in one week...	1
I can be contacted at...	1	Please contact me at...	3
I am hoping with great anticipation...	1	I look forward to meeting with you...	1
Please contact me at...	1		
I look forward to meeting with you...	1		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>14</b>

American teachers utilize more “social-interactional” modals (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999) or qualifying modals such as *would* and *may*. Among the sample American application letters, the use of *would* to qualify statements is more prevalent. For the Filipino corpus of application letters, the modals used are either *would* or *may* but on a fewer occurrence when compared with the American corpus. The results on the use of qualifying modals are consequently relevant to the results of Li’s (2011) study, which revealed that Canadian students use more modals in their internship cover letters than their Taiwanese counterparts.

Another significant finding in the analysis of the letters’ negative politeness strategies is that Americans appear to use more structured or patterned expressions than the Filipinos. It can, therefore, be noticed from Table 7 that the Filipino teachers have varying formulaic expressions as compared with those produced by their American counterparts. As concluded in the study of Upton and Connor (2001), Americans tend to be more patterned or even formulaic with their politeness strategies. In the present study, the formulaic expressions of Filipinos are more heterogeneous and personal. Ultimately, the Filipinos’ tendency to use more expressions of thanks (*Thank you...*) in their application letters’ goodwill close is justified in the study of Bernardo (2010) about the hybrid rhetoric employed in Filipino and American parents’ letters of excuse. Bernardo clarified that saying “Thank you” has become a generic goodwill close for Filipino parents’

excuse letters, which is comparable with the way the Filipino applicants end their cover letters.

### 3.4.2 Positive Politeness Strategies

Positive politeness strategies are employed to emphasize the shared goals and common ground between the speaker and the addressee. The strategies are most effective when both the speaker and the addressee see themselves as equals (Li, 2011). According to Upton and Connor (2001), the directness of the speaker and the use of optimism are identified as positive politeness. Table 8 shows the politeness strategies employed by both Filipino and American teachers in their cover letters.

The table shows the matching preferences for positive politeness strategies found in the corpora. The Filipino and American teachers utilize the same number of expressions related to the said politeness strategies. In support to this claim, Maier (1992) found in her study that native speakers used more deferential politeness strategies than nonnative speakers. She also added that the natives mitigated their requests by using more modals and indirect expressions.

As cited in the study of Li (2011), positive politeness strategies may be in the form of common sentence structures such as “You can...” or the phrase, “Please + action verb.” Politeness strategies could also show the applicant’s optimism through formulaic expressions such as “look forward to” and “hope”

(Upton & Connor, 2001). The function of such phrases is to minimize the distance between the speaker and the addressee and to reach common goals.

From among the samples of Filipino job application letters, it can be observed that formulaic expressions are more varied and personalized. Directness and the tendency to become uncommon with positive politeness strategies are also evident in the Filipino corpus. The following sample extracts prove such an observation:

**(FTAP #5)** *May I look forward to the accommodation you can give for the position you have at a moment.* (directness of politeness expression)

**(FTAP #14)** *I am hoping with great anticipation to discussing with you many ways in which I can make a significant contribution to your school district.* (uncommon politeness strategy)

Also, the use of phrases that would incur optimism is not consistent among Filipinos, for there are only two occurrences of the said phrases in the corpus. This may be relevant to the results of the study of Maier (1992), which indicated that nonnative speakers used more potentially-risky positive politeness strategies and were more informal and direct than the native speakers.

**(FTAP #9)** *You can contact me at 09328903877. Thanking you for considering me for this position.* (positive politeness strategy)

**(ATAP #2)** *I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience to further discuss my qualifications as a secondary English teacher in your district.* (positive politeness strategy)

On the other hand, the American teachers' use of modals make their expressions less direct and more formal. The occurrences of phrases that express the applicant's optimism are also consistent with the Americans more than the Filipinos. The use of phrases that begin with "Please...", "I hope...", and "I look

forward..." are more frequent than the expressions utilized in the job application letters of Filipino teachers. Such an observation is the same with Maier's (1992) study, which found that native speakers, like US applicants, mitigated their polite requests by using more modals and indirect expressions.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The study puts forward the similarities and differences between the ways Filipino and American teacher-applicants write job application letters. The objectives of the study are, therefore, geared toward identifying the features unique to both corpora of job application letters and examining the conventions in cover letter writing observed by Filipinos and Americans. The following conclusions may be drawn from this study:

First, job application letter writing has to adhere with certain rules and conventions. Observing the necessary elements of a cover letter links the applicant's readiness for the job and his chance to be called for an interview. Likewise, writing an effective cover letter is not a simple task. It requires thought, knowledge, and understanding. Hence, a cover letter needs as much attention and skill in the preparation as the resume. Such a skill includes knowing how to maneuver the letter using some linguistic features and rhetorical elements. Linguistic properties, such as the length of the letter and its level of readability that includes lexical density, could make the evaluator or the employer delve into what the applicant wants to convey in his job application letter. As mentioned by Connor et al. (1995), written applications constitute a business genre in which communicative success (or lack of it) partially depends on observed writing skills; hence, textualization, according to these researchers, is positively correlated with the prospective employer's evaluation. It can, therefore, be concluded that the formal and functional features of a cover letter could stand out as particularly powerful determinants of communicative success.

Second, contrastively analyzing job application letters of Filipino and American teachers brings in a revelation of the two discourse communities' cultural relativities. The propensity of Filipino teacher-applicants to write shorter but more lexically dense

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sentences compared with the longer but less lexically dense sentences of their American counterparts underscores distinct genre-based writing practices. This leads to the deduction that American teacher-applicants may be accustomed toward presenting in detail their qualifications for the teaching position desired for as compared with the limited details provided among job application letters of Filipino teacher-applicants. The difference, thus, lies on the readability of the letters in which the ones produced by the Americans are seen as more comprehensive. However, this was contradicted in the study of Li (2011). He made a conclusion that the differences in letters' linguistic features may not be considered as a significant factor in creating barriers for communication. Instead, he advocated for the consideration of the letters' pragmatic features.

Lastly, the rhetorical moves identified show the discourse community that is more acquainted with the rudiments of cover letter writing. Americans are more consistent in observing the parts of a job application letter and its moves. Filipinos tend to be more unconventional and inconsistent in observing the parts of a letter and in presenting necessary details. This can be seen, for example, in the distinct use of politeness strategies between the two. Americans are more formulaic while Filipinos include more varied expressions. In the study of Connor et al. (1995), it was found out that US cover letters not only provide more information but also show a greater concern for semantic precision.

On a relative note, the limited number of corpora of job application letters analyzed in this study may not be considered as entirely representative of the way Filipinos and Americans write job application letters. Hence, using a larger corpus for the same study may effectively validate or justify the conclusions made.

### Establishing an ESP Writing Class for Teachers

A job application letter has to be written in a tone or style that could win the favor of the readers, particularly the persons who will grant the application. Therefore, teachers who wish to be called for a teaching job interview could take refuge on the advantages an effectively written cover letter gives. Teachers should then be cognizant of the rhetorical elements of job application letters. This could be optimized through

subjecting teachers in EOP (English for Occupational Purposes) classes. This variation of ESP is, therefore, taught in such a situation in which learners need to use English as part of their work or profession (Kennedy & Bolitho, 1984). Hence, the competencies involving the use of English for a work-related purpose, such as those linked to technical writing for professionals, are embedded in EOP. The results of the current study are, therefore, deemed significant as to how teachers in particular could be taught the rudiments of effective job application letter writing. In technical writing courses, students are geared toward enhancing their marketability by learning about workplace writing. Thus, helping teachers develop a good way to land on teaching positions capitalizing on documents, e.g., application letters, must be one of the priorities in an ESP writing class. Knowing the conventions, such as the right format, the length of the letter's content, and the way the content itself is presented, would enable an applicant to successfully win the approval of his future employer.

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