THE RHETORICAL STRUCTURE OF RACHEL CHLOE'S UCAS PERSONAL STATEMENT: A GENRE ANALYSIS

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisis sebuah personal statement *dari layanan penerimaan universitas dan perguruan tinggi (University and College Admissions Service/UCAS), dengan fokus pada identifikasi strategi retoris yang digunakan.* Personal statement *merupakan jenis tulisan promosi akademik yang umumnya dibutuhkan dalam aplikasi untuk melanjutkan studi ke jenjang universitas atau pendidikan tinggi. Data dalam penelitian ini berupa* personal statement *yang ditulis oleh Rachel Chloe, seorang mahasiswa asal Indonesia yang berhasil diterima di lima (5) universitas di Inggris Raya (UK) untuk masing-masing program sarjana yang ia lamar. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dan pendekatan* genre analysis *(GA). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya tiga* move *yang teridentifikasi dalam struktur umum: pengantar, penetapan kredibilitas, dan promosi diri. Selain itu, ditemukan pula beberapa strategi retoris dalam setiap* move *tersebut. Manfaat dari penelitian ini adalah memberikan penjelasan kepada calon mahasiswa mengenai metode ilmiah dalam menulis* personal statement*, yang merupakan salah satu persyaratan penting untuk mendaftar ke universitas di luar negeri.*

Kata kunci: *analisis genre, genre akademik,* personal statement, *struktur retoris, UCAS.*

Abstract

This study analyzed a University and College Admissions Service (UCAS) 's personal statement, focusing on identifying its rhetorical strategies. A personal statement is an academic promotional genre usually required in University or higher study applications. The data used in this research was a personal statement written by Rachel Chloe. She was an Indonesian student who succeeded in being accepted by 5 (five) universities in the United Kingdom (UK) with each undergraduate course to which she had applied. This study applied the qualitative method and genre analysis (GA) approach. The result showed three moves identified in the generic structure: the introduction, establishing credibilities, and self-promoting. In addition, some rhetorical strategies were also found in every move. The benefit of this research is that it explains to prospective students the scientific method of writing a personal statement, which is one of the requirements for applying to universities abroad.

Keywords: academic genre, genre analysis, personal statement, rhetorical structure, UCAS.

1. Introduction

A personal statement is one of the essential application documents for higher education, especially in the US and UK universities. It is an inherent self-promotional intent to gain admission to the target program (Li & Deng, 2019). It has also been referred to as a type of academic promotional genre in entries (Brown, 2005, cited in Chiu, 2015). As Barton & Brown (2004) claimed, the personal statement can reveal how personal narratives can help initiate a writer into an academic community. Hence, it deserves scholarly attention.

In writing personal statements, applicants must present themselves as unique and competent candidates. However, their essays must consider rhetorical choices to construct such identities. In addition, the personal statement often poses a challenge to most applicants because of their unfamiliarity with the conventions of the genre, its discourse community, and its audience expectations, which may lead to confusion in outlining the essay (Ding, 2007).

One of the successful personal statements was written by Rachel Chloe. She is an Indonesian student who succeeded in being accepted into 5 (five) universities in the United Kingdom (UK). The universities were Information Management at University College London (UCL), Digital Culture at King's College London (KCL), Management Information Strategy and Entrepreneurship at the University of Manchester, and Business Management at the University of Warwick and the University of Leeds. She is now a first-year Information Management student at UCL. Chloe shares her experiences and advises students worldwide through her YouTube channel '*rachwaddles*', where she posts videos about her journey to study abroad and other exciting things. She also allows other students' personal statements to be reviewed by her, whose UCAS personal statement is insightful and considered top-tier by her viewers.

Due to Cloe's success in the personal statement that made her accepted into 5 (five) universities in the United Kingdom, the researchers felt intrigued to analyze her personal statement, focusing on identifying the rhetorical strategies using genre analysis (GA). Swales (1981 & 1990) defined GA as the study of how language is used within a particular setting, and it focuses on such issues as rhetorical styles and discourse types. In line with this, Paltridge (2012) stated that GA is an approach to understanding the discourse structure of texts.

Historically, Carolyn Miller's essay, published in 1984, is believed to have had a profound impact and is a defining treatise of the present genre theory (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Ding, 2007). In the essay, the genre was viewed as an understanding that affects texts to social actions instead of simple categorizations of text types. This view of the genre then developed

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into the popular genre analysis by the significant contribution of Swales' monographs in 1981 and 1990 on '*Aspects of Article Introduction*', followed by his groundbreaking book '*Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*'.

Due to this evolvement in GA, the attempt to offer a grounded description of the language in educational, academic, and professional settings gained significant popularity in recent years. In line with this, Bhatia (2004) discussed that genres focus on social actions embedded within disciplinary, professional, and other institutional practices. Following Swales' definition of genre analysis, Bhatia (2004) further summarized genre orientations from other linguists as studying situated linguistic behavior in institutionalized academic or professional settings. Although Swales' *Genre Analysis* is not the only theory for analyzing genres in discourse, it is still considered the most influential work in genre analysis. It is specifically popular in ESP research and the 'occluded genres', including personal statements.

Genre Analysis research is widely applied to review discourse structures in academic texts such as undergraduate theses, dissertations, and journal articles. This approach helps reveal how academic texts are systematically structured to fulfil certain communicative functions. In this context, GA identifies structural patterns such as introduction, methods, results, and discussion (IMRAD) and examines the rhetorical strategies authors use to convey arguments, justify research, and build scientific credibility. These studies are useful for understanding differences in academic writing structures and styles across disciplines and cross-cultural contexts.

Although many studies have been conducted on academic texts such as undergraduate theses, dissertations, and journal articles using the GA approach, there is still an important gap that has not been widely touched by researchers, namely the personal statement genre.

Personal statement texts, which are generally written by prospective students when applying to postgraduate programs or scholarships, are a form of academic communication that is highly personal but still has strong institutional and rhetorical purposes. This text is a medium for writers to display academic identity, detail achievements, and position themselves strategically in front of readers who have selection authority.

However, because of the relationship between the personal and academic realms, personal statements tend to be neglected in conventional genre studies. Not many studies systematically examine the rhetorical structure in this text, even though a deep understanding of personal statements is very important to help novice writers, especially second language speakers, in composing effective and convincing academic narratives. Thus, research on the

personal statement genre can fill a significant gap in the GA literature. The results of this study is expected to help applicants prepare a UCAS personal statement by adapting the structure used in the successful essay to theirs. Thus, the same communicative purpose and the desired outcome can be obtained.

Accordingly, as a guide for this study, the following two research questions were formulated:

1) What is the generic structure of Cloe's personal statement?
2) What is the structure of rhetorical strategies used in her personal statement?

Bhatia (2004) and Hyland (2012) state that rhetorical structure refers to the ways text is structured. Simply put, it is claimed to be a part of creating rhetorical choices. However, the rhetorical structure appears in different versions and various forms. Bhatia (2004), inspired by Hoey (1983), states that the rhetorical structure functions to describe a problem-solution structure. Meanwhile, Paltridge (2012) argues that it is realized as a rhetorical type that occurs within a text and relates to the text's generic structure. However, in the *Genre Analysis,* Swales tends to view the rhetorical structure as a part of rhetorical elements that shape a text's rhetorical choices, which is realized by the *moves* and *steps* in his phenomenal analysis on Research Article Introductions. Accordingly, Bawarshi and Reiff (2010) discuss that the rhetorical structure is often characterized by the rhetorical 'moves' it undertakes. Bhatia (2004) then claims the study of move structure refers to how a text has been structured or organized.

Swales (1990) uses the term of moves to describe the discourse structure of texts. Specifically, the move is defined as a functional unit in a text used for some identifiable purpose, and it is often used to identify textual regularities in specific writing genres (Ding, 2007). On the other hand, Swales and Feak (1994) define the move as a bounded communicative act to achieve one main communicative objective of the genre. The notion is further explained by Upton and Cohen (2009). They view that each move represents a stretch of text serving a particular communicative function. According to Bawarshi and Reiff (2010), rhetorical moves are usually realized by textual and linguistic features: style, tone, voice, grammar, and syntax.

Conversely, a step or some use the term 'strategy' is defined as varied approaches to realize a broader move or the rhetorical function of the moves (see Chiu, 2015). Meanwhile, Maswana et al. (2015) state that the step is the smaller rhetorical segments that compose a move. Previously, Connor & Mauranen (1999, p. 51) also argue that moves can vary in length and size from several paragraphs to one sentence but typically contain one proposition.

Although the notion of *moves* and *steps* is much applied in the analysis of the academic genre such as research articles, it is still highly flexible and beneficial to be adapted to other genres such as personal statements as a promotional genre and occluded genre (Ding, 2007; Chiu, 2015; Li and Deng, 2017).

A personal statement is one of the essential documents for higher education, especially in the US and UK universities. It serves as an inherent self-promotional intent of gaining admission to the target program (Li & Deng, 2019). In the personal statement, applicants need to elaborate relevant and robust points about their personal and professional background, experiences andachievements, and any credibilities they have to justify why admission tutors should considerthem as qualified candidates.

However, the UK university application system is different from the US. UK university applications focus on the applicants' desire to study a particular subject without mentioning which universities they are applying to. Then, the applications get sent via UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service). Meanwhile, in the US, the applications are tailored to each university they apply to, in which the personal statements are usually a detailed explanation that is either university-focused ordepartment-focused. The UK personal statement is often considered less complicated than the US one. However, the UK personal statements give a different challenge for the applicants because it's commonly required to be no more than 4,000 characters and 47 lines, but must cover all the key traits and be subject-focused. (Julie, 2020).

The personal statement has been referred to as an academic promotional genre in admissions (Brown, 2005). Ding (2007) explains that the personal statement captures readers' attention, establishes writer competence, appeals to readers' needs and expectations, and demonstrates the fit between the writer and the field they are applying. However, a concrete format of a personal statement is rarely found. The US personal statement usually follows varieties of writing guidelines from each university, while the UK personal statement follows the writing guideline from the UCAS that divides the content into three sections approach in a question form:

- Section 1 : why do you want to study the course?
- Section 2 : what have you done that makes you suitable for the course?
- Section 3 : what else have you done that makes you suitable for the course?

The other guide provided by the UCAS gives a design that divides the content into 5 (five) main points; writing about the course, skills and achievements, hobbies and interests, work experience, and plans. These divisions can also be regarded as the generic structure of an

academic essay, i.e., the introduction, body, and conclusion.

2. Methodology

Method

This study applied the qualitative method and genre analysis (GA) approach.

Data Collection Technique

The data used in this research is a personal statement written and submitted by Rachel Chloe in 2019. She is an Indonesian who succeeded in being accepted by 5 (five) universities in the UK with each different undergraduate course to which she had applied. Her personal statement was provided electronically in one of her Youtube videos entitled '*Reading the Personal Statement that got me into UCL, KCL, Warwick, Manchester, Leeds*' posted on August 24, 2020.

Data Analysis Technique

The personal statement used in this research was analyzed through Swales' (1981 and 1990) move analysis. The moves analysis in this research is mainly concerned with the rhetorical function of the moves. Meanwhile, the analysis process the researchers used in this research has adapted the work of Chiu (2015), which starts by (1) identifying the moves and steps by reading the text carefully, (2) determining rhetorical function of text segments, and (3) moving back and forth between the data and the ongoing move-step classifications to identify and define functional units which represented a particular communicative purpose. The use of move analysis also aligns with Ding's (2007) statement that move analysis is a helpful tool in genre studies since moves are semantic and functional units of texts, which can be identified because of their communicative purposes and linguistic boundaries.

3. Findings and Discussion

After analyzing the data, the researchers have revealed the three moves and their steps in Rachel Chloe's UCAS personal statement. The three moves, along with the steps included in each move, are listed in the table below:

Table 1. Structure of Generic and Rhetorical Strategies in Chloe's personal statement

Part	Generic Structure	Structure of Rhetorical Strategies	Description
A	Introduction	1-A: explaining interests	The writer implicitly explains her interests that related to each course
		2-A: stating understanding about each field	The writer describes several cases that influenced her field interests

		3-A: describing the motivation	The writer states how the cases inspired her to study in the related field
	(in this move, the writer provides a background of her interests in the field)		
B	**Establishing credentials** (In this move, the writer establishes credentials related to the courses she chose)	1-B: reviewing research experience	The writer describes the relevant research she conducted related to the course
		2-B: listing academic achievements and experiences	The writer explains academic activities with the achievements from each experience
		3-B: listing professional experiences	The writer lists professional experiences that related to the courses and experiences that give positive personal development
C	**Self-promoting** (In this move, the writer promotes herself by stating her qualities)	1-C: describing personality	The writer implicitly describes her personality through her purposes of pursuing the study in the field she desires
		2-C: restating goals	The writer restates her purposes of pursuing the study in the field

3.1 Move 1 (Introduction) and its Steps

The introduction of a personal statement commonly has an attention grabber or a 'hook' that aims to grab the reader's attention. In Chloe's personal statement, three rhetorical strategies or steps are used to make the hook. In this first move, Chloe implicitly shows her interests in the field of digital culture, entrepreneurship, and business in terms of economics (step 1-A), which can be seen in the first paragraph:

(i) Living in Indonesia I am fascinated by the rapid development of its "startup culture". One of our unicorn startups, 'GO-JEK", a digital ride hailing service, has been one of my inspirations to become a socially responsible digital entrepreneur. It revolutionized our nation's mobility, logistic convenience, and even payment methods. However, as I developed a broader perspective from other fields such as Economics, I also became aware of some challenges this digital disruption has caused; GO-JEK has increased traffic congestion, caused unemployment among traditional taxi drivers, and replaced them with unregulated and insecure jobs (Chloe, 2019).

In this move, Chloe didn't explicitly state that she has a particular interest in the field of the courses. Chloe described the startup phenomenon in her home country, which inspired her to be a digital entrepreneur, using the adjectival phrase 'socially responsible', which added value to the statement. As for the business field, Chloe shows her interest by observing the digital disruption caused by the phenomenon. In this section, Chloe also indicates her understanding of the issue related to the fields by using her observation of the phenomenon

(see step 2-A). Then, Chloe ends the introduction part by stating her motivation that was influenced by the phenomenon she observed:

(ii) This revelation strongly influenced my choice of course at university, as I am inspired to learn the skills that will enable me to contribute to positive change in the world through intelligent management. (Chloe, 2019)

However, in this step, Chloe no longer implies but explicitly states that the revelation influenced her course choice. Chloe also said what she wants to do with the motivation and what outcome she desired (step 3-A).

Generally speaking, the use of the hook made a perfect beginning for the personal statement. Chloe might have acknowledged that the introduction is a crucial part of her personal statement, and it is where she leaves the first impression on the readers of her personal statement, as stated by Li & Deng (2019) and Ishop (2008).

3.2 Move 2 (Establishing Credentials) and its steps

The move of establishing credentials related to the field of the pursued study in a personal statement also is the most important move. It describes the applicants' qualifications and the related experiences valued by the fields of course chosen by applicants, according to Ding (2007). In Chloe's personal statement, two steps are used to describe the points needed. In this second move, Chloe stated her recent research in an essay in a concise explanation of what it discusses and what makes it related to the courses she chose, namely business management and information management (step 1- B).

(iii) I chose to write my IB Extended Essay on World Studies, where I took an inter-disciplinary approach of Business Management, Economics and Environmental Systems and Societies. I considered the conflict between MNCs' contribution to economic growth and ecological damage. I also applied the principle of the 'circular economy' to come up with a proposal to clean up one of the most polluted rivers in the world close to my hometown of Jakarta, the Citarum River, which was partly caused by the textile industry boom. I learned much from independently researching and writing this piece including research skills, deductive reasoning, forming my own opinions and drawing my own conclusions, and combining various subject disciplines to address a problem (Chloe, 2019).

In the next paragraph, Chloe mainly focused on listing her academic activities with

achievements or positive values from each activity. They are two summer course school programs in two years related to the courses she applied to in the personal statement (step 2-B).

(iv) In 2018 I had the opportunity to apply and extend my current capabilities at the 'Youth Entrepreneurship and Leadership' summer course at the University of Berkeley, California. Here,Ipresented a business plan for virtual reality driving lessons for people with driving anxiety. I learnt how to communicate my ideas effectively and attract investors. By attending the 'Business of Entertainment, Media and Sports' summer course at UCLA in 2019, I learnt how to analyze a complex case study about NBC Universal from Harvard Business Review I also learned how to apply a number of business theories to a specific real case, including the marketing mix and financial ratios.

To further support the academic achievements, Chloe continues by listing her professional experience in highly or closely related fields to the skill needed in fulfilling the course candidates criteria (step 3-B). Chloe also briefly described how her personality positively developed from the experiences. The experiences she listed included being a speaker in TedxYouth event, a worldwide popular seminar event wherein she talked, hosted art therapy at a cancer foundation in Indonesia, and an internship at Kuark, an innovative educational company.

(v) I believe that executing innovative business ideas requires skilled leadership, communication and empathy. After three rounds of auditions, I was selected as one of the speakers for a 'TEDxYouth' talk where I spoke on the theme of managing stress and anxiety. This encouraged me to pursue my idea of improving the mental health of pediatric cancer patients through art therapy at the Pediatric Cancer Foundation, Indonesia from 2018 till now. This provided first-hand experience of leading a group of four people to manage fund-raising activities … These skills helped me secure an internship at Kuark in 2019, a company producing children's science comics. Through this Ihave gained valuable insight into the inner-workings of an innovative educational company (Chloe, 2019)

In this section, unlike the previous sections, Chloe uses a thesis statement that consists of three key traits inexecuting innovative business; skilled leadership, communication, and empathy. She later explained each in detail and the work she did to fulfill the key traits. Chloe later finished this section by addressing that she "have gained the valuable insight" from the

internship she did.

3.3 Move 3 (Self-promoting) and its steps

Chloe uses this last move to conclude the part of the essay. In this move, two steps were identified. Although Chloe has described her personality in the previous sections of the essay, she restated it implicitly by using a sentence covering the personalities she has shown before.

(vi) My various experiences in recent years have enabled me to relate closely with some of the less privileged and fortunate members of our contemporary society. This has provided a powerful sense of purpose to my desire to work in the field of information and digital management, not only to enable me to pursue a career in a field that excites me, but also to apply my skills in this area to the advancement of society as a whole (Chloe, 2019).

In the extract above, Chloe implied that she is an empathetic person through the restatement that her experiences relate her closely to the less fortunate members of the society (step 1-C). Then, Chloe continued by restating her reason and goal of studying the courses she chose (step 2-C), which is "to apply the skills to the advancement of society as a whole." Chloe then finished the personal statement by stating her confidence in making a positive contribution to any universities that will offer her the opportunity.

(vii) I am truly excited about the prospect of studying in the UK and I am confident that I will make a positive contribution to any university that will offer me the opportunity (Chloe, 2019).

The ending statement from the extract above reveals that Chloe used a persuasive statement by using "make a positive contribution" as an offer to convince the universities to accept her application.

4. Conclusion

This study has examined and explained the rhetorical structure of a UCAS-designed personal statement for an undergraduate application that appeared to be successfully written by Rachel Chloe. Chloe is an Indonesian student that succeeded in being accepted by 5 (five) universities in the UK with each different undergraduate course to where she had applied.

After analyzing the data, the researchers have revealed the three moves and their steps in Chloe's UCAS personal statement. The moves identified were *Introduction, Establishing*

credentials, and *Self-promoting*, along with the steps or strategies in each rhetorical move.

From the analysis, the researchers could conclude that Chloe's rhetorical structures were considered as an essential point in sketching her personal statement, especially the UCAS format one that she wrote. Furthermore, the rhetorical structure in Chloe's personal statement had helped her arrange a concise text that serves different communicative purposes without concerning much about the amount of information that must be included in the personal statement. Generally speaking, Chloe had constructed the credibility she needed to build in the personal statement, most likely her competence and outstanding skill in management and digital culture.

Furthermore, a future study about Chloe's personal statement is needed to make a much better in-depth analysis. For that reason, the researchers recommend extending this study's scope by analyzing the text's linguistic features focusing on the process choices (transitivity) in each move to add values to the analysis.

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APPENDIX

Rachel Chloe's personal statement

 Living in Indonesia I am fascinated by the rapid development of its "startup culture'. One of our unicorn startups, 'GO-JEK", a digital ride hailing service, has been one of my inspirations to become a socially responsible digital entrepreneur. It revolutionized our nation's mobility, logistic convenience, and even payment methods.

However, as I developed a broader perspective from other fields such as Economics, I also became aware of some challenges this digital disruption has caused; GO-JEK has increased traffic congestion, caused unemployment among traditional taxi drivers, and replaced them with unregulated and insecure jobs.

This revelation strongly influenced my choice of course at university, as I am inspired to learn the skills that will enable me to contribute to positive change in the world through intelligent management.

I chose to write my IB Extended Essay on World Studies, where I took an inter-disciplinary approach of Business Management, Economics and Environmental Systems and Societies. I considered the conflict between MNCs' contribution to economic growth and ecological damage. I also applied the principle of the 'circular economy' to come up with a proposal to clean up one of the most polluted rivers in the world close to my hometown of Jakarta, the Citarum River, which was partly caused by the textile industry boom. I learned much from independently researching and writing this piece including research skills, deductive reasoning, forming my own opinions and drawing my own conclusions, and combining various subject disciplines to address a problem.

 In 2018 I had the opportunity to apply and extend my current capabilities at the 'Youth

Entrepreneurship and Leadership' summer course at the University of Berkeley, California. Here, I presented a business plan for virtual reality driving lessons for people with driving anxiety. I learnt how to communicate my ideas effectively and attract investors. By attending

the 'Business of Entertainment, Media and Sports' summer course at UCLA in 2019, I learnt how to analyze a complex case study about NBC Universal from Harvard Business Review. I also learned how to apply a number of business theories to a specific real case, including the marketing mix and financial ratios.

I believe that executing innovative business ideas requires skilled leadership, communication and empathy. After three rounds of auditions, I was selected as one of the speakers for a 'TEDxYouth' talk where I spoke on the theme of managing stress and anxiety caused by academic and social pressure. In preparing for the talk I taught myself different styles of speech and body language to capture attention. The positive feedback I received after the TED talk significantly boosted my own confidence in my ability to influence and inspire others.

This encouraged me to pursue my idea of improving the mental health of pediatric cancer patients through art therapy at the Pediatric Cancer Foundation, Indonesia from 2018 till now. This provided first-hand experience of leading a group of four people to manage fund-raising activities and host arts and crafts events. We promoted our project through social media marketing and content creation. These skills helped me secure an internship at Kuark in 2019, a company producing children's science comics. Through this I have gained valuable insight into the inner-workings of an innovative educational company.

My various experiences in recent years have enabled me to relate closely with some of the less privileged and fortunate members of our contemporary society. This has provided a powerful sense of purpose to my desire to work in the field of information and digital management, not only to enable me to pursue a career in a field that excites me, but also to apply my skills in this area to the advancement of society as a whole.

I am truly exited about the prospect of studying in the UK and I am confident that I will make a positive contribution to any university that will offer me the opportunity.