

Shared Identities: Our Interweaving Threads

Enhancing business language skills through editorial reading: A genre analysis approach

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Business newspapers provide a rich source of authentic materials that demonstrate specific linguistic structure and content knowledge. In recent years, growing attention has been drawn to Teaching Chinese as a Second Language (TCSL). Similar to the problem in business English, the shortage of teaching materials has affected the development of business Chinese. For this study, authors analyzed 50 editorials culled from two major Taiwanese business newspapers, the *Economic Daily News* and the *Commercial Times*, and a leading English business newspaper, the *Financial Times*. Both the theory of *Generic Structure Potential* (Halliday & Hasan, 1989) and Bhatia's (1993) *Genre Analysis* model were employed to investigate the business editorial genre. In addition, the word analysis software Wordsmith 5.0, created by Mike Scott, was used to probe the linguistic features of the genre. Pedagogical suggestions regarding the teaching of business Chinese and business English to advanced learners are given through this contrastive study.

経済新聞は事実に基づく情報を豊富に提供する情報源であり、特定の言語構造を有し、内容に関する知識を提供する。近年、第二言語としての中国語教育(TCSL)の分野に対する注目が高まっている。それにもかかわらず、ビジネス中国語教育に関する研究努力があまりされていない。この研究に、作者は台湾の代表的な経済新聞である経済日刊紙とコマーシャル・タイムズ紙の二紙、およびイギリスの代表的な経済新聞であるフィナンシャル・タイムズ紙から選定された合計50の社説を分析した。共通構造潜在性(Halliday & Hasan, 1989)の理論とBhatiaの(1993)ジャンル分析モデルの両方が、経済社説ジャンルを調査するために使われた。さらに、ジャンルの言語学の特徴を調べるため単語解析ソフトウェアである文筆家5.0(Scott, 2007)が使用された。この対照研究によって職場環境での学習者へのビジネス中国語教育とビジネス英語教育に関する教育法を提案する。



There is no denying that critical and logical thinking are important in business language learning. Nevertheless, the training of such argumentative skills is often inadequate. During the past decade, numerous studies have been done to explore ways to improve students' argumentative skills (e.g. Nussbaum, 2002; Osborne, 2004). However, the lack of timely and practical teaching materials has affected the development of both business English and business Chinese. This study was intended to promote the reading of editorials to business language learners through a genre analysis procedure, in which both English and Chinese language editorials in business newspapers are analyzed.

Bhatia (1993) considered newspaper editorials an important resource for language teaching:

The editorial page offers views and opinions of the newspaper. The editorial is generally regarded as the newspaper's analysis, discussion, opinion or verdict on the issues of the day.... The most significant aspect of this genre is the way the editorial writer makes use of linguistic resources to create favorable or unfavorable bias in his arguments. (p. 170)

In addition, Connor (1996) also recommended the use of editorials in language classes. He claimed that "good editorials are some of the best examples of persuasive writing in all countries." (p. 144) Since editorials are rhetorical by nature, making it a daily habit to read editorials should not only benefit students' writing skills but also promote their critical and logical thinking.

Unlike English-language editorial writing, which is a popular course in US schools, Chinese-language editorial writing is designed exclusively for journalism majors. In fact, Chinese newspaper editorials are rarely studied. The database of theses and dissertations written in Taiwan from 1965 to 2006 reveals that only 22 are related to editorials. Besides, most of them focus only on the study of political content rather than linguistic and rhetorical features of the language.

In general, newspaper editorials can be categorized into five major types: explaining and interpreting an action or situation; evaluating an action; persuading readers to support an action; provoking discussion; and calling for action. However, in terms of contrastive rhetoric, it is believed that each culture has individual rhetorical patterns, and that those patterns may influence the manner in which people acquire their language(s) (Kaplan, 2001). According to Weintraut (n.d.), an editorial has:

1. an introduction, body, and conclusion
2. an objective explanation of the issue
3. a timely news angle
4. opinions from the opposing viewpoint
5. opinions of the writer delivered in a professional manner
6. alternative solutions to the problem or issue being criticized
7. a solid and concise conclusion

Chinese newspaper editorial writing has also been considered a kind of argumentative writing. Lessons given on Chinese essay writing often elaborate on the organization of *qi-cheng-jujhu-an-he*, which refers to the following components:

1. introduction
2. supporting opinions
3. discussing from other perspectives
4. conclusion

Generally speaking, the argumentative writing skills are very similar in both cultures.

As most business English courses taught at universities in Taiwan cover only basic communication skills, the authors intended to promote the reading of editorials to business language learners. To find out university students' perception towards newspaper editorials, a survey was conducted to 64 seniors majoring in international business at a university in northern Taiwan in a business English class. Each student was assigned two editorials to read, one from an English-language business newspaper and the other from a Chinese-language business newspaper. The semi-structured questionnaire survey revealed the following:

1. Most students think editorial reading can improve their argumentative skills.
2. Approximately 3% (n= 2) of the students have ever read editorials in English business newspapers.

3. Approximately 4% (n= 3) of the students have ever read Chinese business editorials voluntarily.
4. Most students think English-language editorials are different from Chinese-language editorials in writing.
5. Most students think business editorials are different from generic editorials.

Since genre analysis has long been recommended to enhance language learners' understanding of language use in professional settings (Bhatia, 1993), it was employed in this study to motivate business students to read editorials through a contrastive study of English and Chinese business editorials. To do so, 50 editorials were collected, 25 in Chinese and the other 25 in English. The students collaborated with the teacher to explore the following questions:

1. Are editorials in Chinese business newspapers different from those in English business newspapers in terms of linguistic structure?
2. Are editorials in Chinese business newspapers different from those in English business newspapers in terms of rhetorical features?

Literature review

Reviews of move structures in English language editorials

According to Eggins and Martin (1997), different genres are different ways of using language to achieve different

culturally established tasks, and texts of different genres can achieve different purposes in the culture. In past decades, many studies on newspaper editorials have been conducted. Based on the concept of Generic Structure Potential (GSP) (Halliday & Hasan, 1989), Ansary and Babaii (2005) analyzed editorials and found that some generic prototypical patterns exist universally. They identified a series of optional and obligatory macro-structural elements sequenced in a specific order and that “the obligatory elements define the genre to which a text belongs.” (p. 62)

Editorials contain all the features of an essay, which mainly includes introduction, thesis, supporting ideas, and conclusion. Bhatia (1997) found that editorials have a four-move structure, namely: case, argument, verdict, and action, which is slightly different from either van Dijk’s (1993) or Bolivar’s (1994) analyses. The former claimed that editorials include three major moves: introduction section (description of critical situation), intermediate section (reasons, evidence, examples, and solutions), and coda (conclusion and moral), while the latter proposed three turns or elements: lead, follow, and evaluate, serving distinct functions of initiation, follow-up, and valuation. Table 1 shows the variations of move-structure identified by different researchers.

Bhatia also found that lexical selection and the use of nominal expressions are distinct in the editorials.

Reviews of contrastive studies on editorials

Several contrastive studies have found variations in editorials in different languages. Tirkkonen-Condit and Lieflander-Koistinen (1989) compared the strength and placement of

Table 1. Move structure in essay/editorial writing

	Move 1	Move 2	Move 3	Move 4
Essay	Introduction	Thesis	Supporting ideas	Conclusion
Bhatia (1997)	Case	Argument	Verdict	Action
Van Dijk (1993)	Introduction section (event, critical situation)	Intermediate section (reasons, evidence, examples), Solution		Coda (moral& conclusion)
Bolivar (1994)	Lead	Follow		Evaluate

the main claim or argument in Finnish, English, and German editorials. They found that Finnish editorials did not always argue a point of view but rather provided information to their readers, while the German editorials placed the argument statement at the beginning of the editorials more often than the English newspapers did. Sugiura (1996) analyzed the structural and rhetorical organization of editorials. She identified the differences in the use of passive voice in description and lexical cohesion such as repetition, synonyms, and lexical density in addition to the differences in rhetorical features such as clause relations, and information/thematic structures. In another contrastive study, Zoltan (2002) found that English and Hungarian articles have similar rhetorical structures except that the Hungarian editorials are longer and include more information than English editorials. Moreover, Ansary and Babarii (2005) analyzed English newspaper editorials taken from three English newspapers published in three different socio-cultural environments by native speakers of English (the

Washington Times), and non-native speakers (the *Iran News*, and *Pakistan Today*) and found that there is “statistically no significant difference between English editorials written by (non) native editorial writers, in whatever socio-cultural and socio-political context they are produced and disseminated.” (p. 10)

Many researchers have examined writings by Chinese students (e.g. Kirkpatrick, 1997) and conducted contrastive studies trying to explore the cultural differences in argumentative writing. One of the pioneering studies was done by Strevens (1987), who investigated English as a Second Language (ESL) college students’ writings in a composition class and found that in terms of argumentative writing, Asians prefer “gaining merit by literary style,” while Americans prefer “logical argument” (p. 21). Later, Choi (1988) examined text structure of argumentative writing in English by Korean speakers, native speakers’ writing in Korean, and native speakers’ writing in English. The text analysis revealed that English essays have a clear structural pattern that the Korean essays lacked. Nevertheless, a recent study about the placement of thesis statements in the writings of contemporary Chinese foreign language school students revealed that their argumentative writing is closer to the “Anglo-American” rhetorical style than previously assumed (Liu, 2007).

In order to enhance students’ argumentative skills in business communication, the authors guided the learners to study both the Chinese and English newspaper editorials. By doing their own analyses, the learners should become aware of the rhetorical functions and linguistic features that have been said to cultivate the skills of logical and

critical thinking, reasoning, organizing skills, and effective presentation of arguments both in favor of and in opposition to a proposition.

Methodology

Data collection

Fifty editorials were collected from Chinese and English business newspapers. The Chinese editorials were obtained from two major business newspapers in Taiwan, the *Economic Daily News* (EDN) and the *Commercial Times* (CT). EDN claims to have a circulation of 368,000 copies daily in Taiwan, southeastern Asia, northeastern Asia, America, and Europe. The English editorials were downloaded from the electronic version of the *Financial Times* (FT), a leading British business newspaper which has a circulation of more than half a million around the world.

Analytical framework

Systemic Functional (SF) theory views language as a social semiotic resource people use to accomplish their purposes by expressing meanings in context (Chapelle, 1998). The smallest unit in SF analysis is the text, and the study of texts is typically performed by examining elements of the lexicogrammar and phonology. Ansary and Babaii (2005) adopted Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) model of text analysis as a workable theoretical framework for the analysis of editorials. In addition, they defined the editorial genre based on the concept of Generic Structure Potential (GSP) proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1989) to identify the obligatory and optional moves in editorials.

According to Halliday and Hasan (1989), to study the GSP of a specific genre, a set of similar texts should be examined, and the obligatory and optional rhetorical elements of the texts which define the genre to which the texts belong can be identified.

In this study, an integrated framework was employed which encompasses various perspectives in text analysis to investigate both English and Chinese editorials in business newspapers. This includes the analysis of the moves structure of the editorials and the linguistic features which include the lexical selection, the verb tense, the nominal expressions, and the use of pronouns in the corpus.

With the development of word analysis software, linguistic features can be easily identified in any specific corpus. Wordsmith, created by Mike Scott in 1996, was one of the pioneering tools for text analysis. Wordsmith 5.0, the most advanced version, was used in this study. The main function of Wordsmith is to examine how words behave in a given corpus or text. Wordlist, concordance, and keywords can be easily created through the software.

Data coding

The authors are two experienced writing teachers in English and Chinese, respectively. Another colleague, also a writing teacher, was consulted in the coding process. Two rounds of discussions were conducted to reach consensus in coding and identifying the boundaries of each move.

Results and findings

Generic structure

The analysis of the move structures of editorials in both English and Chinese business newspapers revealed the following: (1) headline (H), (2) thesis statement or writer's stance (TS), (3) supporting information (SI), e.g., evidence, reasons, or examples for the claim, (4) arousing awareness (AA), (5) possible solutions (PS), (6) conclusion or summary (CS), and (7) moral (M), with which writers often appealed to history or to personal experience to end their claims. Table 2 illustrates the appearance of each move in those two groups of editorials.

Table 2. Move-structure in editorials

Move Language	H run- on	TS	SI	AA	PS	CS	M
Chinese	10 40%	25 100%	25 100%	13 52%	14 56%	25 100%	10 40%
English	20 80%	25 100%	25 100%	25 100%	22 86%	25 100%	11 44%

Headline (H)

Run-on headlines (or noun phrases) were common in English newspapers. The following are some examples:

- (1). *Biofuel for thought* (*The Financial Times*, July 7, 2008)

- (2). *Monetary minefield* (*The Financial Times*, July 16, 2008)

However, fewer than half of the Chinese editorial headlines were noun phrases or run-on sentences. The finding also differed from Ansary and Babaii's (2005) study, in which all the editorial headlines were run-on sentences. This may be due to the fact that most Chinese editorials tended to express the writer's stance. Using the editorial on sub-prime loans as an example, the headline of the English language editorial is:

- (3). *Fannie and Freddie* (*The Financial Times*, July 23, 2008)

However, the headline for the Chinese language editorial on the same issue is:

- (4). *The crisis of Fannie and Freddie eases temporarily, but caution should be taken to avoid making the same mistake* (*The Commercial Times*, August 1, 2008, translated)

Arousing awareness (AA)

In order to arouse readers' awareness of a specific issue, writers often gave the warnings of possible dangers by using "could be", "are most likely to", "will surely", and "is almost certain". While such words/phrases occurred in just over half of the English-language editorials (52%), all Chinese-language editorials in the corpus contained the equivalent words.

Moral (M)

It is common for editorials to carry a moral purpose. The study showed that around 40% of the editorials contained morals. In other words, writers of editorials tended to appeal to history or to well-known incidents to support their stance. The following are some examples:

- (5). *This is the root of it all: the scale of advance the region needs is not possible while despotism persists.* (*The Financial Times*, June 3, 2008)
- (6). *It is useless for the pot to call the kettle black.* (*The Economic Daily News*, July 16, 2008, translated)

Writing strategies

Similar to any forms of essay, both English and Chinese editorials contained an introduction, supporting ideas, and a conclusion. The study indicated that "background of the claim," "supporting evidence, reasons, or examples," and "conclusion" were obligatory moves in editorials. Besides, the introduction often "provided background of the claim" or "described a critical event or situation" as identified by van Dijk. (1993, p. 265) The writing of supporting ideas was also similar in both Chinese and English editorials, in which evidence, reasons, or examples were often used to support writer's claims. Moreover, the thesis statements of both Chinese and English editorials were often placed in the first paragraph.

Chinese-language editorials tended to start with "description of event" or "quotation," neither of which is

significant in English-language editorials. Table 3 shows the results of a numerical analysis on introduction writing.

Table 3. Strategies for writing the introduction

Strategy	English	Chinese
Direct question	1	0
Description of event	6	22
Quotation	5	0
Alarming statistics	8	4
Thesis statement	25	25

In addition, metaphors were commonly found in editorials. Students identified 22 metaphors in the English-language editorials and 18 in the Chinese-language editorials.

Linguistic features

The study shows that English-language editorials were significantly shorter than Chinese-language editorials. The average number of words in a Chinese-language editorial was 1,511 while it was 414 in an English-language editorial. The linguistic structure of the English-language editorials was analyzed using the word analysis software, WordSmith 5.0. Table 4 lists the details of the analytical results. In analyzing linguistic features of the Chinese-language editorials, manual calculation was used due to the lack of Chinese analytical software. In addition, since Chinese is not an inflected language, only the uses of pronouns and tenses are discussed in this study.

Lexical density

Based on Halliday and Hasan (1989), the lexical density is the proportion of lexical items (content words) to the total discourse. The density level of the English corpus was 23.57. In other words, the texts are easy to comprehend. (Any texts with a lexical density level under 40 are generally considered fairly easy to understand.)

Table 4. Linguistic features of English language editorials

Total number of tokens	11441
Distinct words	2697
Total number of sentences	563
Mean sentence length	20.32
Lexical Density	23.57

Frequently used words

The software also identified the most frequently occurring content words in those English editorials. Table 5 lists the top ten words.

Table 5. The 10 most frequently occurring content words in English editorials

inflation	47 (0.41%)	July	32 (0.28%)
banks	44 (0.38%)	Government	31 (0.27%)
last	38 (0.33%)	Dollars	29 (0.25%)
year	35 (0.31%)	oil	26 (0.23%)
May	34 (0.30%)	Price	26 (0.23%)

Pronouns

Pronouns were rarely used in Chinese-language editorials. While “it” occurred 105 times (=61%) in English-language editorials, none of the Chinese-language editorials contained “it.” The Chinese-language editorials often criticized the performance of the government as well as government policy. The writers tended to identify themselves as constituents of the readers and used the pronoun “we” so as to be more persuasive in calling for action. The uses of pronouns in both the English and Chinese business editorials are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Comparison of the use of pronouns in editorials

Pronoun	frequency (percentage)	
	English	Chinese
it	105 (61%)	0 (0%)
they	45 (26%)	5 (20%)
he	13 (8%)	1 (4%)
you	5 (3%)	0 (0%)
we	4 (2.3%)	19 (76%)

Verb tenses

In the English-language editorials, the present tense was dominant. Among the 25 editorials, 86.1% of the verbs were in the present tense. A similar finding occurred in the Chinese-language editorials, in which nearly 57% of the verbs were in the simple present tense. Since editorials often target current events, it is justifiable that the present tense

occurred more often in the examples studied.

Table 7. Comparison of the use of tenses in editorials

Tense	frequency (percentage)	
	English	Chinese
Simple present	485 (86.1%)	174 (57%)
Present perfect	45 (8%)	19 (6%)
Past	23 (4.1%)	95 (31%)
Future	10 (1.8%)	18 (6%)
Total	563 (100%)	306 (100%)

Business vocabulary

Since business editorials are mainly about the economy, it is not surprising that the analysis revealed a corpus of business key words in the editorials. Among the 50 most frequently used words in business editorials, the top five were money related. They are listed in Table 8.

Table 8. The frequency of money related words in English editorials

Word	frequency	percentage
1. inflation	47	0.41%
2. banks	44	0.38%
3. dollar	29	0.25%
4. bank	26	0.23%
5. price	26	0.23%

Conclusion

Even though the corpus for this study consisted of only 50 editorials, the results have demonstrated that editorials in both Chinese and English business newspapers shared a very similar generic structure. In this study, seven moves were identified in editorials of both Chinese and English business newspapers, among which were four obligatory moves, namely, the headline, the background of the claim, the supporting evidence, reasons, or examples, and a conclusion. The three optional moves were: arousing awareness, the solutions, and a moral. Other findings are listed as follows:

1. Chinese-language editorials (average 1,511 words each) were in general longer than English-language editorials (average 414 words each)
2. The thesis statements in both the Chinese and English editorials were placed in the first paragraph
3. Chinese-language editorials used quotations and direct questions in introductions more often than English-language editorials
4. Both Chinese and English editorials employed metaphors

Pedagogical implications

As language and writing are cultural phenomena, different languages may have their own specific and culturally bound conventions and patterns of writing (Kaplan, 1966). However, as Taiwan is a highly westernized country, under the influence of mass media, the writing style of editorials

may be affected accordingly. Therefore, the purpose of this contrastive study is not to focus on the differences between the two groups of editorials, but to motivate language learners to pay attention to the language in use.

Genre studies have been found to be effective in enhancing language learners' awareness of the linguistic and rhetorical features of the specific genre. In this study, the training in business language skills is in fact a method of self-study which enables learners to look into the profundity of business language.

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Appendix 1

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