

RHETORICAL STRUCTURE OF THE IMO'S THE JAKARTA POST ONLINE

Fitri Budi Suryani, Muria Kudus University, Kudus
fitribudisuryani@gmail.com

Abstract: readers' letters is a kind of rubric that appears in written media. This rubric contains the letters from the readers for the media itself, particular person or company, government, or for readers in general. Besides bridging the relationship between the readers and the media, readers' letters also functions to give the readers a chance to state their opinions. In My Opinion (IMO) in the Jakarta Post is readers' letters in online form where the other readers can comment on the readers' letters online. Thus, they can communicate one another. The way the readers communicate their purposes in the IMO is an interesting phenomenon. This study aims at analysing the rhetorical structures of the IMO in the Jakarta Post on January 2011. Rhetorical structure is the organization of ideas in a text that consists of stages or steps. These stages or steps are usually called Moves. The method used in this study was qualitative method with genre analysis approach. The unit of analysis in this research was Move. A total of 17 readers' letters from IMO rubric of the Jakarta Post formed the data of the study. The result revealed that the rhetorical structure of the readers' letters vary as the purposes also vary. It can be concluded that to achieve different communicative purposes, writers apply different linguistic strategies.

Keywords: rhetorical structure, readers' letters, genre

Background

Genre studies might be done in either one or both levels of the text structure: macro-structure level or micro-structure level. Macro structure level (macro level) analysis describes rhetorical organization of texts. The analysis then reveals the rhetorical or schematic structure of the texts. Meanwhile, the micro-structure level (micro level) analysis describes the detailed linguistic analysis of texts in terms of lexis and syntax. It seeks the grammatical and lexical features of the texts.

Genre studies were firstly pioneered by Swales in 1981 when he analysed the schematic structure of research article called CARS. Since then, the studies of genre flourished and developed not only on the level of the analysis, but also the various field as well as contexts. Bhatia (2004) differentiates genres into the idealized genre and hybridized genres. Idealized genres are usually found in published literature emphasizing the purity of the genres. On the other hand, hybridized genres are found in the real world contexts and might deviate from the pure genres.

Readers' letters are one kind of genres belonging to real world contexts. They usually appear in published newspapers or magazines. However, as the fast development of technology and internet, newspapers and magazines also appear in internet. This brings the consequence for readers' letters to appear in internet as well. The difference between the readers' letters in published newspapers/magazines and ones in online newspapers/magazines is that in online newspapers, the other readers can communicate with the writers of the letters. This phenomenon occurs in The Jakarta Post online newspaper in a rubric named 'In My Opinion' or IMO.

IMO is a public blog that is facilitated by The Jakarta Post. It gives chance to the readers to share their knowledge, criticize or complain or state opinions. Other readers can leave a reply as the respond to it. Therefore, IMO enables the readers to communicate one another.

This study aims at analysing the macro-structure level of IMO in The Jakarta Post online. Therefore, it intends to find out the rhetorical structures of the readers' letters written by the readers of The Jakarta Post online that were uploaded in the IMO.

Literature Review

The term 'genre' is widely used in many fields and areas. As Kroll (2003: 192) notes that "genre is a word that does not easily lend itself to simple definition as its meaning seems to vary enormously by context".

From systemic functional approach, Martin (in Eggins, 1994: 26) explains that genre is "a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members our culture". There are three things that can be noted from Martin's definition of genre: stages, purposes, and culture. In other words, to be called a genre, an activity must have within it some stages, purposes and occur in a context of culture. Only the members of the culture are able to recognize the genres belonging to them. One who does not belong to the culture will find difficulty in recognizing the genre unless she/he has ever contacted with the culture. This is because "genres are cultural specific" (Gerot and Wignell, 1994: 17). Furthermore, they add linguistic features as another feature of genre.

As one characteristic of genre, communicative purpose differentiates one genre from another. This means that what makes communicative events belong to the same genre is the similarity of communicative purposes.

It is explained by Swales (1990: 46) as "the principal criterial feature that turns a collection of communicative events into a genre is some shared set of communicative purposes". Similarly, Bhatia (cited in Safnil, 2000) states that communicative purposes are reliable to be the criterion in determining a genre as well as to distinguish it from other genres. Thus, the communicative purposes are of primary importance in creating a certain genre (Lakic, 2000).

To achieve the communicative purposes of a genre, we need to get through some stages. This is because the goals we want to reach can not be done at once (Eggins, 1994). The stages are called rhetorical or schematic structure.

According to Eggins (1994: 36), rhetorical structure is "the staged, step-by-step organization of the genre". Referring to the same point, Hyland (2002: 62) defines rhetorical or schematic structure as "the prototypical sequences of meanings writers move through in a text to achieve a particular purpose". It can be inferred then that rhetorical structure is the organization of ideas in a text that consists of stages or steps.

Using the most general terms, Eggins (1994) labels the stages of a genre : a Beginning, a Middle, and an End. However, because she feels that the labels are 'empty' and can be found in all genres, Eggins finally suggests that they should be avoided. Instead, the term Move is commonly used for both written and spoken genres to refer to a stage in a genre.

Holmes (cited in Safnil, 2000: 86) explains Move as "a realization of a specific overall communicative purposes through a variety of linguistic strategies". This means that Move is a semantic unit that realizes the communicative purposes. To realize the communicative purpose of a particular Move, a Move may consist of a Step or a series of steps. The presence of Steps normally occurs for long texts such as research article, dissertation, or theses. For short texts, Steps usually do not appear.

To commit a Move analysis, Swales (cited in Kwan, 2006) suggests that "a crucial starting point ... is to consider the purpose of the target genre ...". Similarly, Kwan (2006) states that things to be regarded when identifying the Move structure of a genre are the function of the text group and the contribution of each Move in the structure to the fulfillment of that function.

Dudley-Evans (1994) proposes two techniques to identify a Move: by using linguistic evidence and by understanding the text together with the expectations on the text from the general academic community and the particular discourse community. The latter technique is applied when the linguistic evidence seems to be unclear.

Those two techniques are principally similar to Nwogu's techniques, i.e. inferencing from the context of the text and relying on linguistic clues in the discourse. In addition, linguistic clues referred by Nwogu are fixed or formulaic expressions, specific lexical items and cohesive markers (cited in Safnil, 2000).

Methodology

The method used in this study was qualitative method with genre analysis approach. The analysis was done only on macro level because the objective of this study was to find out the rhetorical structure of the IMO's The Jakarta Post online. The unit of analysis in this research was Move. Meanwhile, a total of 17 readers' letters from IMO rubric of the Jakarta Post on January 2011 formed the data of the study. The data were collected through documents. To analyse the data, the techniques from Dudley-Evans (1994) were used. They were using linguistic evidence and understanding the text together with the expectations on the text from the particular discourse community.

Findings and Discussions

From the seventeen (17) letters in IMO rubric of The Jakarta Post online on January 2011, it was found out that there were four (4) communicative purposes with their various rhetorical structure. The findings are presented in the following table.

Table 1. The Genre Analysis of IMO

No	Communicative Purpose	Rhetorical Structure	The Number of Readers' Letters	Percentage
1	To persuade readers that something should/ should not be the case	Issue Arguments for (Arguments against) Reinforcement of statement of position	11	64,7%
2	To describe a phenomenon or a place	Identifying the phenomenon/place Describing the characteristics, parts, and qualities Reinforcement	2	11,8%
3	To persuade and gather help from readers on something	Issue Arguments Statement of asking for help	1	5,9%
4	To explain why something is the case	Issues Explanation of the issues Statement of position	3	17,5%

From the finding, it can be seen that most of the readers' letters have communicative purposes to persuade other readers that something should/ should not be the case as it is shown by the highest percentage 64,7%. Though they have the same communicative purposes, they reveal various rhetorical structure as indicated by the brackets meaning their optional appearance. However, the main rhetorical structure consists of three (3) Moves, i.e. issue, arguments for, and reinforcement of statement of position. The Move arguments againsts appear only in some readers' letters.

The second communicative purpose is to describe a phenomenon or a place. The rhetorical structure consists of three Moves. They are identifying the phenomenon or place, describing the characteristics, parts, and qualities of the phenomenon or place, and reinforcement.

The third communicative purpose resembles the first in the first two Moves (Issue and Arguments), but differs for the third Move that is Statement of asking for help. That's why the

communicative purpose is not only to persuade the readers on something, but also asking for help from the readers. So, in the rhetorical structure, the reinforcement of statement of position does not appear. The writer of the readers' letters does not state her/his position. Instead, she/he asks for help to find her/his position as shown by the Move statement of asking for help.

The last communicative purpose is to explain why something is the case. As the purpose is only explaining, thus there is no arguments like ones in persuading, but replaced by some explanations. The rhetorical structure comprises of three Moves: Issues, Explanation of the issues, and Statement of position.

The communicative purposes found out in the readers' letters are actually similar to those of the published literature or so called by Bhatia (2004) idealized genres. However, the rhetorical structures of those readers' letters deviate from the idealized genres even though some of them still present similar Moves.

In published literature, the first communicative purpose belongs to exposition. Since the Move arguments against also appears, it resembles the discussion genre. Therefore, it seems that the rhetorical structure are the combination of both exposition and discussion genres. Meanwhile the communicative purpose of describing a phenomenon refers to descriptive genre. However, in idealized genre, the Move reinforcement never appears as this study reveals. The third communicative purpose also shows the deviation from the idealized genre, that is exposition. Not only does the communicative purpose persuade the readers, but it also seeks for help from the readers.

The findings indicate that readers letters have the characteristics of hybridized genres. It can be seen from the contexts of readers' letters where they exist in the real world of discourse, not published literature. Thus, they possibly deviate from the idealized genres. As the result of the study reveals, readers' letters of IMO The Jakarta Post online resemble some communicative purposes as well as rhetorical structures of those the idealized genres, i.e. expositon, discussion, and descriptive. However, as the readers' letters belong to the real world of discourse, the deviation from the idealized genres occur. It is shown in the variation of communicative purpose and some new Moves that are present.

In conclusion, the rhetorical structures of the readers' letters vary as the purposes also vary. Moreover, readers' letters belong to hybridized genres in real world contexts. In the real world of discourse, genres are more dynamic and might always change depending on the communicative purposes the writers/speakers want to convey. The dynamicity of genres thus becomes one of the characteristics of genres found in real world contexts.

References

- Bhatia, Vijay K. (2004). *Worlds of Written Discourse*. Continuum: London.
- Dudley-Evans. (1997). Genre Models for the Teaching of Academic Writing to Second Language Speakers: Advantages and Disadvantages. In Tom Miller (ed.), *Functional Approaches to Written Text: Classroom Applications* (pp. 150-159). Washington: ELP US Information Agency.
- Eggs, Suzanne. (1994). *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*. London: Pinters Publisher.
- Gerot, Linda and Peter Wignell. (1994). *Making Sense of Functional Grammar*. Sydney: Gerd Stabler.
- Kroll, Barbara. (2003). *Exploring the Dynamics of Second Language Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kwan, Becky S. C. (2006). *The Schematic Structure of Literature Reviews in Doctoral Theses of Applied Linguistics*. Retrieved June 23rd 2007 from www.sciencedirect.com.
- Lacic, Igor. (2000). *Genre Analysis of Article Introduction in Economics*. Retrieved June 23rd 2007 from <http://academic.brooklyn.cury.edu/education/jlemke/theories.htm>.
- Safnil. (2000). *Rhetorical Structure Analysis of the Indonesian Reserach Articles*. Unpublished Ph. D's Dissertation. Australian National University, Australia.