Characterizing the language features and rhetorical moves of argumentative essays written by Filipino ESL senior high school writers

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Abstract

This study presents the Filipino ESL senior high school students’ strengths and weaknesses in writing an argumentative essay. In the context of an institution in the Philippines where English is used as a second language by learners with varied L1, and the learners are required to write in academic English, the aim of this study is to identify the language features and the rhetorical moves of the argumentative essays using Hyland’s model (1990). Analyzing the students’ essays as a requirement in the academe across disciplines could provide appropriate scaffolding in guiding the Filipino ESL writers. The original essays written within an hour by 51 (from 108) Filipino ESL senior high school writers were encoded and processed using the Antconc software to identify the language features that characterize the essays. The essays were coded by the researcher and an inter-coder verified the analysis in relation to the stages/parts and the rhetorical moves found in the essays. The top three most commonly used verbs in the argumentative essays of the Filipino ESL writers of English are non-action verbs–is, are, have.

In writing argumentative essays, the Filipino ESL senior high school writers of English lack lexical verbs in the lexical level, and the thesis and conclusion parts in the discourse level. They were familiar with the argument part, but lack citation as support to their claims.

Keywords: language features, rhetorical moves, argumentative essay, corpus analysis

Introduction

The primacy of English as seen in its application and impact around the world has been felt for several decades “for international communication” (Graddol, 2006, p. 3), as a “global language” (Rohmah, 2005; Crystal, 2003), as the lingua franca (McIntosh, Connor, & Gokpinar-Shelton, 2017; Jenkins, 2015; Yano, 2001), and as an international language (Rostan, 2011). The academe is one domain in which English is very influential. Learning English as a second or foreign language is imperative in our globalized world (Hashemnejad, 2015). This makes English language teaching (ELT) prestigious through the years. However, although ELT assumed a monolingual context, the majority of ELT contexts at present are multilingual and multicultural (McKay, 2012) which shows that English has not confined itself to the areas of the native speakers. Rather, it has expanded its territory to reach the ends of the earth.

The English language has remained vibrant and so has the dynamism of English language Teaching (ELT) (Renandya & Widodo, 2016; Jenkins, 2015). With the increase of both the native and non-native users from all over the world, the use of English has become more diverse to include more functions and more varied contexts, including the academic...
arena. Renandya and Widodo added to the complexity of English and ELT underscoring the emergence of new varieties of English as shown in Kachru’s (2006; 1985, 1997) world Englishes. As a result, debates as to the inclusion of these new varieties in the second language classroom have arisen.

The introduction of K-12 curriculum in the Philippines as the government’s action to address the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) integration in 2015 and the call for Education for All (EFA) by the United Nations in 2015 (Madrunio, Martin, & Plata, 2016), has posed a number of challenges to teachers, especially in the Senior High School. Writing, as a basic skill and a gauge for literacy, has challenged the teachers to facilitate writing among nonnative speakers and writers of English (or Filipino multilinguals). One basic requirement in writing is the argumentative essay that poses several challenges to L2 writers (Kanestion, Singh, Shamsudin, Isam, Kaur & Singh, 2016; Matsuda, 2015, 1998, 1997; Imtiaz & Mahmood, 2014; Connor, 2002, 1984; Hyland, 1990). The difficulty in writing could result from “inadequate understanding of how texts are organized” (Hyland, 1990, p. 66). Hence, the discourse features could facilitate the organization and consequently, the understanding of the written texts. Writing for the past decades has been affected by the perceived norms in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (McIntosh, Connor & Gokpinar-Shelton, 2017). Research has shown that genre has become a common point of reference in writing. Describing patterns of organization of a text has been utilized in analyzing a genre. Studies have found and supported the existence of a certain order or arrangement in every text. According to Hyland (2004), knowledge of the order or structure of a text facilitates one’s reading of the text. Results of studies on organizational moves can be used in teaching writing, especially among L2 writers like the Filipinos (Hyland, 2004; Swales, 1990). Though a number of genres have been studied to include academic and non-academic texts, the more common concern in the academic context is still the essay which is a primary written requirement in school. With the foregoing, the present paper, aiming to describe the language and rhetorical features of argumentative essays written in English by Filipino ESL writers, is deemed with great relevance to the present context. It may add to the literature of non-native and ESL writers of English as well as to studies in academic writing.

Specifically, the study aimed to answer the following questions: (1) What language features characterize argumentative essays of Filipino ESL senior high school writers?; and (2) What rhetorical moves are reflected in the various parts of the argumentative essays of Filipino ESL senior high school writers?

**Argumentative Writing of Non-native Writers of English**

Several studies can be cited that focused on the argumentative writings of ESL. The field of Contrastive Rhetoric (more commonly known now as Intercultural Rhetoric) was pioneered by Kaplan in 1966 when he conducted studies on the organizational structures of essays written by non-native writers of English. This was followed by Connor’s (1990; 2002) with her studies focusing on a comparison of ESL and native speaker writings and Hyland’s (1990) study that outlined a framework in analyzing the parts and moves of an argumentative essay. Other studies followed which include Lorenzo’s (2007) on the argumentative writings of Filipino, Spanish and American writers and Salazar and Verdaguer’s study in 2009 which focused on polysemous verbs such as feel and modality. Korean studies were conducted by Kang and Oh (2011) on the possible impact of language and proficiency level in Korean argumentative writing, by Park (2013) on the use of conjunctive adverbials, and by Huh and Lee (2019) on possible culture-related patterns in Korean argumentative writing. Whereas
Mitchell and Pessoa (2017) studied how a Qatari and a Korean were supported in their writing in English, Abdulaziz (2013) dealt with Pakistani writing of learners in multiple levels, and Imtiaz and Mahmood (2014) with a genre-based approach. Other studies focused on identity and voice especially among Japanese writers such as the one by Matsuda (2015). Malaysian writing was likewise examined by Kanestion, Singh, Shamsudin, Isam, Kaur and Singh (2016) with the aim of helping pre-university Malaysian students to write. Kanestion, Singh and Shamsudin’s (2017) did another study this time to identify a framework for the Malaysian students’ writing skill. Ho and Li (2018) studied the argumentative essays of college freshmen by analyzing the students’ use of metadiscourse patterns focusing on the interpersonal aspect. Finally, Wu and Zhang (2017) took a more liberal and progressive perspective to focus on the impact of language-environments on second-year Chinese graduate students' English writing perceptions (using a self-designed 80-item questionnaire) and performance (in the two tasks: letter-writing and argumentative essay).

As regards local studies, Tarrayo and Duque (2011) explored the argumentation of Filipinos in newspaper editorials while Gustilo (2016) analyzed argumentative essays of ESL college students in characterizing the less proficient and more proficient ESL writers. Results of her study indicated significant differences between the two groups in many aspects. Pablo and Lasaten (2018) analyzed the academic essays of Filipino senior high school students.

**Linguistic Features**

With respect to research focusing on linguistic and syntactic features, worth mentioning is the study of Liu and Deng (2017) that investigated the *N-be-that* construction in popular and professional science articles. Cai (2016) explored on the pedagogical aspect of groups of words also known as formulaic sequences, the sets of words that co-occur or co-exist with some specific words known as clusters (Hyland, 2008) or lexical phrases (Nattinger & De Carrico, 1992 in Cai, 2016), or lexical bundles (Salazar, 2014). Hajibayova and Jacob (2016) conducted a study that advanced a method to understand abstract ideas on the most familiar groups of concrete nouns in English. Another study worth citing is the study of Kanestion, Singh, Shamsudin, Isam, Kaur and Singh (2016) which investigated lexical verbs in Malaysian writing. Four types of lexical verbs surfaced in the essays - past tense, ‘ing’ form, past participle and –s form. The –s form was the most common. Lorenzo, in her study conducted in 2007 found that the Filipino, Spanish and American writers used more modal verbs and adverbs with limited use of lexical verbs, adjectives and nouns. An interesting finding of Abdulaziz (2017) in her multi-dimensional analysis of Pakistani learner essay is the frequent use of the verb “have” among others. As for the study of Salazar and Verdaguer (2009), they analyzed lexical verbs with multiple meanings. They concluded that the non-native (Filipino and Spaniard) writers lacked full grasp of the meaning of lexical verbs. Finally, an earlier study of Ringbom (1998) focused on high-frequency verbs in the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE) corpus from which he was able to compare argumentative essays of learners from America and Britain, Holland, France, Germany, Sweden, Finland and Spain. Ringbom found that the non-native speakers of English generally used high frequency words that are function words. In terms of verbs, the most common verbs they used were *be, have, will, can and do* which were generally used as auxiliaries.

As regards studies in the local context, Tarrayo and Duque (2011) concluded in their paper that linguistic resources found in discourse structure and textual metadiscourse influence a writer’s argumentation. Tibordo, Aceron, Sapungan, and Bañez (2018) investigated on the linguistic features of Filipino graduate theses focusing on verb tense-aspect, voice and
dependent clause. Their study revealed that all the Filipino writers generally use present tense in the introduction and results and discussion sections. They, however, use simple past in the method section.

In this section, it is imperative to mention the two earlier studies in the Philippines that ventured on discourse and linguistic features of Filipino writings. These are the studies of Bautista (2004) and Mojica (2002). Whereas the study of Bautista considered codeswitching (Taglish) a part of the discourse and a linguistic resource of Filipinos, advancing the idea that it may be a form of resistance to globalization, Mojica explored syntactic patterns in compliment-giving among Filipinos. Mojica’s study found possible variations in style of complimenting or non-complimenting that can be attributed to Filipino culture.

**Rhetorical Moves**

It is to be noted that studies related to form and structure in writing are related to rhetorical moves and patterns. Some of these recent studies include Moreno and Swales (2018) who recalled the primary purpose of move analysis as a text analytical approach that was first developed by John Swales in 1981. They investigated the underlying generic structure of research articles (RAs) in terms of moves and steps for pedagogical purposes. Kawase (2018) analyzed the organizational patterns of 20 doctoral paper introductions in the area of applied linguistics. Compared to other disciplines, the writers in applied linguistics tend not to focus on problems and needs. They have longer discussions of introductions and shorter method descriptions. Such findings are considered discipline-related. Jiang and Hyland (2017) investigated the crucial role of the metadiscursive nouns in research article abstracts using corpus analysis. The results of their study showed that such nouns are frequently used to frame and establish coherence in their arguments while they aid the writers ascertain legitimacy and relevance to their study. Similarly, Tanko (2017) described the move structure of the literary research article abstracts from four international journals. Tanko found moves with their linguistic representations. The texts were examined manually and through the use of a software program. The analysis resulted in the identification of an eight-move structure.

The need for non-native writers of English to organize their written discourse (Hyland, 1990; Matsuda, 1997, 1998; Gustilo, 2016) suggests knowledge on text structure and text organization. As regards rhetorical moves, Tibordo, Acreron, Sapungan, and Bañez, (2018) found that the Filipino writers follow distinctive rhetorical moves in writing the article format of their theses. Kanesion, Singh and Shamsudin (2017) explored the rhetorical move patterns used in Malaysian argumentative essays using Hyland’s (1990) framework. Significant findings from the study include the presence of moves basic for the three parts or phases of the essay. However, not all moves suggested by Hyland were present. Pakistani argumentative writing was examined by Imtiaz and Mahmood (2014). Hyland's model (1990) was used to analyze the moves structure of the essays. In most of the argumentative essays, the three stages with the obligatory moves were followed although some new moves were also identified. Among the local studies cited, it was the paper of Gustilo that proposed the expansion of knowledge in composing including content, structure, and text organization. Another local study that ventured on moves analysis is Tarrayo and Duque’s (2011) who analyzed newspaper editorials and forwarded the importance of rhetorical moves in effective writing. They found that the common move used in the two Philippine broadsheets was the two-move pattern in the three parts of a newspaper (Orientation - orientation/focusing; Exposition - inquiry/response; Summation - rounding off/final stance). Finally, Tibordo, Acreron, Sapungan and Bañez (2018) claim that rhetorical structures reveal the identity of the authors.
Clearly, the trend of the studies on rhetorical moves is to advance a possible pattern that could facilitate writing especially among second language writers. The same aim is adapted in the present study using argumentative essays.

Framework of the Study

Many linguists and language educators recognize ESL learners’ need for sufficient and ‘appropriate grammar’ and lexis to write an academic text such as the argumentative essay (Gustilo, 2016; Hyland, 2004; Lorenzo, 2007). Hyland further suggests the importance of the principle of form and function to facilitate the teaching and learning of writing. By identifying specific forms for specific communicative functions, writing and communicating the intended meaning are assisted. Hence, the traditional functional approach to language teaching still finds relevance in L2 writing. Teaching, for instance, the elements of a verb phrase to include the meanings and uses of tenses aside from the other elements may be beneficial to L2 pedagogy. The study further adopts the model of Hyland (2009; 1990) to describe the rhetorical moves of the argumentative essays of Filipino ESL writers. A move functions as a unit that provides the general aim of a text (Swales, 1990). A logical connection exists in each move. At least one proposition is found in each move. A clause, a sentence, a paragraph or even several paragraphs can be considered a move. Hyland provides moves in each of the three parts/phases of the argumentative writing (Theses part – (1) gambit, (2) information, (3) proposition, (4) evaluation, (5) marker; Argument part – (1) marker, (2) restatement, (3) claim, (4) support; Conclusion part – (1) marker, (2) consolidation, (3) affirmation, (4) close.

Methods

Participants

The present study included 51 ESL Grade 11 senior high school students from the Grade 11 English class in a private non-sectarian institution in the northern part of the Philippines. The sample set was randomly selected from nine small senior high schools (with less than 500 students) for the preliminary study of a bigger research. (Note: Grade 12 students were out during the gathering because of their on-the-job immersion). The sample is composed of Filipino students, 25 males and 26 females. The majority of students have been schooled from elementary years in Philippine schools whose medium of instruction in most subjects is Filipino with the aid of Ilocano, the lingua franca. With the inclusion of English subjects from elementary to Junior High School, the average number of years of English language learning exposure of the students is 10 years.

Instruments and Data Sets

Argumentative writing task. The task given the students was to write an argumentative essay in an hour, on a given topic using a writing prompt. The writing prompt included a brief background of a national issue in the Philippines at that time – Extra Judicial Killing (EJK). Aside from the prompt, three statements on EJK were given. The students were asked to write an argumentative essay of at least 1000 words that would present their stand on EJK. They were supposed to use the given statements as guide in their discussions. Said task was facilitated by the subject teacher who administered the writing activity. The task served as a typical class activity. The task was administered during the first quarter of 2019 in which the school participant was towards its end of school year. It is to be noted that one of the
requirements in the senior high school includes the writing of an argumentative essay. The written essays included basic profile information such as name, sex, and age. The student’s profile which included the student’s address was verified from the teacher. The address was necessary to ensure that the students come from the same province or city. The address could help approximate the language school experience of the students. In the case of the sample school, all the students come from the same province.

**Procedure**

The English teacher played a special role in the data gathering because she made the task a common task. That means there was no need to create an abnormal atmosphere. The task was administered within an hour after giving the students preliminary instructions and information such as the consent form. After the essays were written and collected, they were encoded as is. No editing or revision was done on grammar mistakes, spelling, and mechanics. The data were then processed using Antconc, a free software that facilitates word count. Since the content words found in the top rank were verbs, and considering the value of verbs in utterances, this study focused on the verbs as well as verb tense that are most commonly used. Hyland’s classification of moves was likewise employed in analyzing the argumentative essays as regards their parts and the rhetorical moves used. The essays were coded by the researchers. An inter-coder identified the parts of the argumentative essay and the moves found in the essays. In instances when the codes varied, the researchers and inter-coder discussed the disparity in their findings and arrived at a consensus.

**Unit of analysis**

This study adopts the model of Hyland (1990) in analyzing argumentative essay. In Hyland’s model, the main unit being described is the text and its genre as argumentative essay. Thus, the argumentative essay is analyzed in relation to its purpose which is for the writer to persuade readers towards his/her stand on an issue. As regards its organization, this genre follows “the three-stage structure of Thesis, Argument and Conclusion” (Hyland, 1990, p. 68). In each stage, a structure is presented using moves. A move is identified based on a sense of connected ideas that reinforce the writer’s stand in the issue. A move is expressed in varied ways and levels. A move could be realized at the lexical and at the grammatical level.

In this study, the unit of analysis for the linguistic features was the sentence. According to Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (1985), the sentence is generally considered “the highest-ranking unit of grammar” (p.47). Hence, descriptive grammar could be based on any possible analysis of the sentence (Quirk et al.). The linguistic features, on which the sentences of the argumentative essays were based, are the following: (1) the simple sentence, which is considered the core of grammar, is composed of an independent clause; and (2) the multiple sentence, which is composed of more than one clause, could either be complex (consisting of one independent clause and at least one dependent clause) or compound (consisting of at least two independent clauses and connected by coordinators). Analysis of the sentence included identifying the elements of the clause (independent or dependent) and identifying the sentence patterns. The basic sentence patterns used are: S-LV-C (subject-linking verb-complement) and S-TV-DO (subject-linking verb- object/direct object). In analyzing the elements of the clause structure, the relevance of considering the “central and peripheral elements” (Quirk et al., 1985) is necessary in identifying what to focus on. Adopting the idea of Quirk et al. as regards the clause structure, “the verb element (V) is the most important or the 'central' element” (p. 50).
As regards the organizational moves, the unit of analysis was the paragraph in as much as the existence of moves (and sub-moves) can only be examined as they appear in a paragraph. As cited earlier, a move functions as a unit that provides the general aim of a text (Swales, 1990). A logical connection exists in each move. At least one proposition is found in each move. The moves were classified according to their function in each of the stages in the essay as suggested by Hyland (1990). Then the moves are further classified into two types: the obligatory and non-obligatory/optional. Using Kanoksilapatham (2005) definition of obligatory moves, moves are obligatory based on the cut-off frequency of 60 percent occurrence as a measure of move stability.

The frequency of occurrence of the linguistic features and organization moves were tallied. Extracts were likewise presented to support the findings.

Results and Discussion

After careful analysis of the 51 essays, below are the results in terms of verbs and verb tenses employed:

Most common verbs and verb tenses used

There are three auxiliary verbs commonly used in the argumentative essays. Table 1 below reveals these findings.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>is</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>27.42</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>14.99</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>7.41</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The percentage is taken from the word type frequency (e.g. is = f [322]) in the wordlist of Antconc divided by the total number of word types (1174) multiplied by 100%.

In the Antconc word list, the word “is” ranked third as the commonly used word with “the” as the first and “to” as the second. Among the verbs, “is” ranked first as the most commonly used verb in the essays followed by the verb “are” although it ranked 11th in the Antconc list. The other words before “are” except “is” were non-verbs. The third verb that was used most in the essays was “have” although it ranked 27th in the Antconc word list. The top three most commonly used verbs in the argumentative essays were non-action verbs. This may suggest the need to train the writers to use more substantive verbs that could clarify their arguments. This finding could further be explained by using the study of Ringbom (1998) who found that the non-native speakers of English generally used high frequency words that are function words. In terms of verbs, the most common verbs they used were be, have, will, can and do which were generally used as auxiliaries. As stated in the study, the top five verbs used by the non-native speakers of English were not the common verbs of the Americans and British learners. For Ringbom, the use of the non-native English speakers of the high-frequency verbs could be attributed to their limited vocabulary in English. Ringbom also considers the overuse of the high-frequency verbs as a manifestation of L1 transfer although the verbs were not used.
ungrammatically. As regards the present study, the Filipino learners who are non-native speakers of English used the non-substantive verbs more often as possibly a manifestation of their L1 and for some, as a manifestation of lack of vocabulary. These inferences need further investigation.

From the top three most commonly used verbs is, are and have, the present tense can be inferred as the commonly used tense in the argumentative essays. The use of the present tense of the verb suggests the writers’ intention to show the factuality of their argument. In the absence of proof or evidence which may be explained from the lack of readings of the writers to present evidence on their claims, the use of present tense may have been the writers’ alternative to highlight the facts in their arguments. This, however, needs further investigation.

Some examples of sentences where the verbs is, are and have were used are given in Extract 1.

Extract 1
Examples of unedited sentences using the verb is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. This battlecry against criminality EJK is a bad means to put back social order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. In the bible, it says there that killing is a big sin in front of God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The drug war is a cornerstone of Duterte’s domestic policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Before they kill, [they should] make sure that the person is a drug lord or a criminal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. EJK is a good [means] to stop or decrease crime to put back social order in the country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. As a student, this battlecry against criminality is a good means to put back social order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. As a student, for me, EJK is a good means to put back social order.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The samples in Extract 1 show a common structure in the essays which is the subject, linking verb and compliment (S-LV-C) pattern. The verb is is generally followed by an adjective or a noun. The verb is is translated “ay” in Filipino which is a common verb among the Filipinos. However, the Filipino word “ay” is not always used as a verb because it can also function as a compliment marker as shown in the study of Mojica (2002) and possibly a conjunction such as in the case of the utterance, “Ay naku” [Oh gosh] … (Bautista, 2004, p.227). The verb “ay” such as in the statement, “Ang EJK ay masama” (EJK is bad) may be used but it must be noted that the given statement does not follow the natural order of utterance in Filipino and even in Ilocano, the lingua franca in the northern part of the Philippines. The Filipino word “ay” (Filipino-English Dictionary, 2019) is translated as the “be” verb in English which could be is, are, was and were. Furthermore, “ay” (Tagalog-English Dictionary, n.d.) is also given more meanings. The dictionary explains that “ay” is often translated as is, are or am such as in the statements: Ako ay babae. (I am a woman); Ikaw ay lalaki. (You are a man); Sila ay nars. (They are nurses). However, it also says that for everyday usage, most Filipinos use the inverted structure. Thus, the “ay” is removed such as in the following: Babae ako. (I am a woman); Lalaki ka. (You are a man); Nars sila. (They are nurses). These second set of structures in Filipino are by the way considered the natural order (tuwirang ayos). Aside from the discussions given, the dictionary further includes the meaning of “ay” as an interjection when someone expresses a strong emotion and says “Ay!”. From the foregoing, possible implication of transliteration needs further investigation.

It is also worthy to mention that most of the students chose to follow some structures or sentences and parts of the sentences that were given in the prompt. This could partly explain the common use of the S-LV-C pattern.
Extract 2
Examples of unedited sentences using the verb are:

1. ...therefore if you kill a person then you are a sinner...
2. ...people attempt to use drugs because they are afraid to die early.
3. We are all (sic) victims of hypocrite people.
4. In our generation today, many people in our country are addicted to drugs.
5. And many of the people/Filipinos are addicted to illegal drugs either as drug pushers or drug users.
6. EJK is a violation of human rights because some innocent people are affected from this case of war on drugs.
7. ... teenagers and [children] are being rape.

The samples in Extract 2 contain varied structures following the verb are. The first three sentences used the S-LV-C pattern. Sentences 4, 5, 6 and 7 used compound verbs in which are functions as a helping verb. It is also observed that not all the sentences in Extract 2 where the verb are is found are simple. Regardless of the third, fourth and fifth sentences, sentences 1, 2 and 6 are complex.

Extract 3
Examples of unedited sentences using the verb have:

1. We all know that drugs have a bad impact in (sic) our health.
2. Drug users or pushers have a chance to change their life.
3. Even though you have a high position …
4. because we have a (sic) laws that are intended to focus on …
5. All human [beings] have a right or chance to change, …
6. … the people who [are] killed by the other people have a right to speak or to fight …
7. … we all have [a] chance to change our life…

The samples in Extract 3 all follow the subject-transitive verb-object (S-TV-O) pattern or clause structure. This shows that the writers have ample knowledge on the use of structures that enabled them to produce their compositions. The samples in Extract 3 all follow the subject-transitive verb-object (S-TV-O) pattern or clause structure. This shows that the writers have ample knowledge on the use of structures that enabled them to produce their compositions. Whether or not the student writers were aware of the acceptable and meaningful structures they produced, one thing is evident: that the structures facilitated the writing of the argumentative essays. Thus, the need to teach structures such as the ones mentioned above is relevant in teaching writing especially among ESL learners. The finding of Abdulaziz (2017) as regards the frequent use of the verb “have” suggests a need to explore on possible comparisons of Filipino and Pakistani writing.
Rhetorical moves in the argumentative essays

An analysis of the rhetorical moves is another essential feature of argumentative essays. Table 3 summarizes the parts and the rhetorical moves that were reflected in the essays. Although all the essays manifested the use of the most important part of the argumentative essay which is the argument containing the obligatory moves *claim* and *support*, the other parts of the argumentative essay were absent in almost all the essays. The absence of the two parts, *thesis* and *conclusion*, make the argumentative essays lacking or incomplete.

Some significant findings on the rhetorical moves in the essays grouped according to the essay parts are found in Table 3 below.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases/Parts</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>Rhetorical moves</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1. Thesis</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Gambit</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Proposition</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marker</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2. Argument</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>Marker</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Restatement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Claim</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49.51</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 3. Conclusion</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Marker</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Consolidation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Affirmation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Close</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 51 essays

Note: The percentage is the result of the frequency of occurrence per classification of the rhetorical moves divided by the total number of occurrences per phase/part.

Table 3 shows that in phase one, *gambit* and *evaluation* were rarely used. Though Hyland (1990) considers *proposition* obligatory, it was rarely used in the Filipino essays. The move with the most frequent occurrence is *information* even if it is optional. *Evaluation* and *marker* were not used. The result of this study is similar to that of Imtiaz and Mahmood (2014) on Pakistani writers. Imtiaz and Mahmood found that among the four moves, the most commonly used move was information which was used by all the Pakistani writers. Contrary to the results of this study, the study of Kanestion, Singh and Shamsudin (2017) on Malaysian writers found that all the moves were used except *marker*.

In phase 2, almost fifty percent of the written essays by the Filipinos exhibited the use of the obligatory moves which are *argument* and *support*. This means that some though not all of the Filipino writers know the most important moves in an argument essay. Compared with the Pakistani writers in the study of Imtiaz and Mahmood (2014), the Filipino writers seem less
knowledgeable of the moves in the argument phase because the majority of the Pakistani writers used the argument move (96.9%) and the support move (93.9%). As with the Malaysian writers, the argument and the support moves were also used but not the marker and restatement moves (Kanestion, Singh and Shamsudin, 2017).

In phase 3, consolidation is obligatory (Hyland, 1990), but nobody used it in the essay. The optional marker was used by only two. Incidentally, only eighteen percent of the Pakistani writers were able to use consolidation (Imtiaz and Mahmood, 2014). Though a few Pakistani writers used consolidation, the study concluded the need to teach the move. Similarly, the move needs to be taught to the Filipinos who did not use it at all. In the case of the Malaysian writers, all the moves were used (Kanestion, Singh and Shamsudin, 2017) though their terms for the moves were slightly modified such as “consolidating the argument, affirming the position and recommending an action” (p.45).

Table 4 presents the general picture of the students’ use of the rhetorical moves in percentage and according to the specific classification.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Parts of the Argumentative Essay</th>
<th>Percentage of Frequency of Occurrence in General (%)</th>
<th>Rhetorical Moves</th>
<th>Percentage of Frequency of Occurrence in General (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thesis</td>
<td>8.70</td>
<td>1. Gambit</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Information</td>
<td>6.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Proposition</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Evaluation</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Marker</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argument</td>
<td>89.56</td>
<td>1. Marker</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Restatement</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Claim</td>
<td>44.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Support</td>
<td>44.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>1. Marker</td>
<td>1.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Consolidation</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Affirmation</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Close</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall total (N= 115) 100%

Note: The percentage is the result of the frequency of occurrence per classification of the rhetorical moves divided by the total number of occurrences of all moves.

The finding affirms that one of the difficulties ESL writers face in writing is the lack of knowledge and understanding on how the text is organized (Hyland, 1990; Gustillo, 2016).
Though the main purpose of the argumentative essay, to present the argument regarding a given topic or issue, seems evident in the essays, the absence of the other parts of the essay made the writings appear wanting and hanging. The absence of the *proposition* in the *thesis* part and the *consolidation* in the *conclusion* part presents the need for reinforcement for the students to make their writing holistic, more vivid, and comprehensible. Compared with the writings of Malaysian learners (Kanestion, Singh and Shamsudin, 2017) and Pakistani learners (Imtiaz and Mahmood, 2014), the Filipino writings seem wanting.

The result suggests a number of pedagogical implications such as: 1.) the need to reinforce the moves and steps in the thesis part; 2.) the need to find whether the students are familiar or not with the steps; and 3.) the need to clarify the reasons of the students for not using the other moves and steps in the thesis part.

Among the 51 essays, only one manifested the use of the *proposition* which is considered by Hyland (1990) as an obligatory move in the thesis part. However, using the framework of Kanoksilapatham (2005) on what is obligatory that requires at least 60% use, the single use of *proposition* disqualifies it to be obligatory among the Filipino ESL writers. Below is the sample extract from essay 24, showing the *proposition* move.

**Extract 4**
Sample proposition in the argumentative essay with the *proposition* move:

```plaintext
We can change our country by doing much better good (sic) and not killing people without giving him/her (sic) a chance to change and learn from [their] mistakes.
```

The statement in Extract 4 is considered a *proposition* since it furnishes the writer’s intention in the essay. Found at the beginning of the sentence, the *proposition* directs the readers what to expect further in the essay.

Another move in the *thesis* that may be used to begin the essay is the use of *gambit*. Below is an example:

**Extract 5**
Example of a sentence using a *gambit*

```plaintext
I think this battlecry against criminality (EJK) is not hidden to our knowledge because this is the biggest issue that we are facing for (sic).
```

Since the extract above presupposes that everybody knows extra judicial killings (EJK), the statement intends to encourage everyone to be concerned and to motivate the reader to read further the essay. Although a *gambit* has the intention of encouraging the readers to pay full attention, it does not have the function of the *proposition* that guides the reader as to the flow of the essay. Thus, the *thesis* can have both a *gambit* and a *proposition* since each functions differently. Since the results show a lack of awareness of the student writers regarding the use of *gambit* and *proposition* in the *thesis* part of an argumentative essay, it is imperative that the role of the thesis and its moves be taught and highlighted so that essays produced by student writers in the SHS will be more logical and comprehensible to readers.

Another move in the thesis part of argumentative essay is the *information* which is intended to present a background of the topic or issue being discussed in the essay. This move
seems more popular to the students since it was observed in eight essays. The function of the move seems more natural for the student writers who used it before the presentation of their argument. The evaluation move is another move found in the thesis part. It presents the positive reaction or comment of the writer to the given argument. Following the evaluation move is the marker move that signals the direction of the essay.

Below are sample extracts illustrating the information move.

Extract 6
Examples of unedited extracts with the thesis part of the essays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Samples</th>
<th>Extracts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>President Duterte’s War on Drugs, Extra-Judicial Killings or Execution also known as EJK is (sic) have a bad effects on (sic) our country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Extra-Judicial Killing is killing a person by government authorities w/out (sic) judicial proceeding or legal process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Nowadays, in our society many people are died because of illegal drugs some of them are user and pusher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The extracts illustrate the thesis part of the essays. All three show samples of the information move. However, the last two moves, evaluation and marker, were not observed when they should be present to prepare the readers for the argument to be raised. The absence of use of the two moves could mean that the writers did not consider it necessary or it could also suggest that the writers are not familiar with it.

The following are samples of unedited extracts from the essays illustrating argument that exhibit the use of the claim and support moves.

Extract 7
First example illustrating an argument that exhibits the use of the claim and support moves

For me as a student, this battlecry against criminality is a good means to put back social order in the country. Because of EJK, the percentage of drug pusher and user is getting low and nearly extinct. This operation can make our country drug free.

The unedited extract immediately presents the writer’s argument. Following the claim in the first sentence is the support marked by the word because.

Extract 8
Second example illustrating an argument that exhibits the use of the claim and support moves

EJK is a violation of human rights because the police can kill a people with or without evidence and without knowing if that person is really involve in that crime because if they see a person that looks suspicious they can kill him/her without hesitations and killing just to prevent addicts in not healthy to our society because according to bible killing is strictly prohibited and it is written in ten commandments even if EJK has a good purpose, this law still kill a innocent people and this law does not give them the right to depend themselves because this law do not process a procedure.
The extract above is a short composition composed of 106 words. It starts directly with the writer’s *claim* on EJK, that it “is a violation of human rights”. After the clause on the *claim* follows the *support*, although the *support* is composed of run-on sentences, presenting a number of reasons to support the claim. Despite the brevity of the composition, the purpose to present an argument regarding EJK was made evident. However, the purpose could have been achieved better if the other two parts of the essay – the thesis and the conclusion - were present.

The same extract is another example of a short text in which the only part present is the *argument with one claim* followed by a number of *supports*.

**Extract 9**
Third example illustrating an argument that exhibits the use of the claim and support moves

> This battlecry against criminality (EJK) is a bad means to put back social order in the country because even if they are drug pushers or drug users it is wrong to kill people. If a drug is illegal, killing is illegal too. Killing is not the only solution in that issue there are many ways. Because of the Extra Judicial killings (EJK) there are many innocent people affected on that issue. Because of Extra-Judicial killings the President give a freedom to kill an individual that’s why that is wrong. There’s no people rights to kill anybody, because only Jesus Christ has a right to get the life he given to us.

Similar to extract 8, extract 9 is also a short composition of 111 words that directly starts with the *argument* consisting of a *claim* and a number of *supports*. No matter how short the composition is, it is able to present its intention and position on EJK.

The samples showing the second part of the argumentative essay present the *claim* and *support*, but none of the support seems “credible” because of lack of citation of sources. Citation is a key in supporting a *claim*. The ability to cite an evidence or a proof with a valid source strengthens the argument. The ability to cite sources, however, presupposes the ability to read and store in one’s memory what was read. In the absence of materials on hand, the opinions serve as support to the writers’ claims.

Almost all the essays focused on the use of *claim* and *support* in the argument part except for the extract below which attempted to use the *restatement* move.

In Extract 10, the last paragraph starts with a restatement of the first sentence that shows the claim on EJK. The sentences mean the same thing, that is, EJK is not a “good program…” or “not a solution…”. The paragraph or even the last sentence, however, does not show the conclusion of the essay. The restatement reinforces the point of the writer.

**Extract 10**
Sample extract with the *restatement* of the argument

> Extra Judicial Killing is not a good program to put back social order in our country. Our government authorities are using it and taking advantage of it to kill some of the politician that is aspiring the same position like them. Many youth are being shot just because they are suspected using drugs. I disagree to EJK to be more implemented here in our country because innocent citizen (sic) are being traumatize (sic) of what is happening in our country
> EJK brings even more fear to people to go out from their houses, knowing that when they step-out of their door they are going to shot by authorities just because they are suspected use of drugs.
> EJK is not a solution to bring peace in our country. There are still many solutions out their (sic) to try. It is just like mathematics, trial and error, improving our country specially the peace and order is one of the best gift of every Filipino to our past and something that we are proud or in the future.
The unedited extract in Extract 11 shows an example of the marker, “in short” that signals the synthesis or the end of the composition. Through this marker, the reader is directly informed that the composition is to come to a close.

Extract 11
On the use of “in short”

…In this generation, many people use their power, richness, and many factors to win their side and poor people that have no capability to reach justice will lost. In short, Extra Judicial Killing can [be] control (sic) by money and power...

Another example of a marker used towards the end is seen in this extract that was copied verbatim from the essay: “…EJK is the best way to decrease of (sic) drug-users and drug-addict (sic)…. so, EJK is the best to (sic) our country …” The extract uses the conjunction so, implying the end of the composition. So also signals a consequence of the previous statements. Despite the ungrammatical structures in the composition, the conjunction so provides continuity of thought as it clarifies the stand of the writer on the issue.

In general, the essays used the simple present tense of the verb be (is and are) and have. According to Quirk et al. (1985), the simple present tense in English is used to indicate habitual actions and events that are generally true. In academic writing, the present tense is used to indicate current knowledge such as in citations which are usually found in generalizations (Swales, 1990a cited in Hinkel, 2002). The use of the present tense in reported information suggests the closeness of the writer’s ideas and perspectives to the reported information (Swales & Feak, 1994). McCarthy and Carter (1994) found the same use of the present tense in citing sources that they consider relevant at the present context. From the foregoing, it could be inferred that the students considered their statements or claims true or factual or at least, they perceive EJK and the things they described as factual. In relation to the study of Kanestion, Singh, Shamsudin, Isam, Kaur and Singh (2016) on Malaysian writing that resulted in the most common use of the –s form of the verb or the present form, the result of the present study needs further investigation for possible comparisons.

As regards the parts and rhetorical moves of the argumentative essays of the Filipino ESL senior high school writers, all the essays manifested the argument part, but not the thesis and the conclusion parts. As Hyland (1990) states: ESL writers find difficulty in writing because of lack of understanding of the organizational structure of the genre they are writing (p.66). It could also indicate the student’s lack of knowledge of the genre of argumentative essay because as Hyland (2009) states: For one to participate in a communicative event, it is necessary for the participant to know the genre he/she is involved in (p. 67). He further cites Rothery (1986) and Martin et al. (1987) who showed in their study the positive impact of teaching the generic structure to children in the primary level especially the narrative text. Indeed, teaching the organizational structure of the argumentative essays to facilitate writing among L2 writers is recommended (Hyland, 2009; Gustilo, 2016).

Conclusion

The study affirms the great challenge posed to language writers especially to the English as a second language (ESL) writers. The results of the study further support the necessity of grammar and vocabulary in writing. Furthermore, the relevance of rhetorical moves in writing
is affirmed. The writer’s knowledge of discourse and genre can facilitate the organization of his/her essay. Students are knowledgeable of the need to establish the issue in an argumentative essay but they tend to have inadequate support to their claims. Citation or use of support is an essential part of an argument that Filipino ESL writers need to learn. The thesis and conclusion parts need to be taught as well since the sample essays did not manifest the use of these moves. Although the limited time could explain in part the absence of the conclusion part, the absence of the consolidation move which is obligatory implies the students’ need for further training in writing. The genre of argumentative essay is a common academic requirement; hence, it needs further reinforcement to students. Exposure to writing an argumentative essay as an academic discourse may enable the students to practice the rhetorical moves, steps and patterns that are obligatory in the genre. The present form of argumentative essay is obligatory to reinforce factual claims and evidence. On the lexical level, the Filipino senior high school ESL writers use similar verbs (is, are and have) which are commonly used for descriptions than for argumentation. Like the moves, it is imperative that lexical verbs be taught to the student-writers so that they are given alternatives to use and for them to assess when it is best to employ such language features.

This paper is limited in scope as it is a preliminary paper. Further studies need to consider more data especially in relation to the linguistic features. It is also recommended that more participants and inter-coders be involved to arrive at a more conclusive result. Other topics related to profile variables, and other topics related to writing an argumentative essay such as culture, voice and identity can enrich the present study. Comparisons of written outputs with other cultures could extend contributions to ESL and/or EFL writing in English. However, its strengths can be attributed to the benefits of corpus-based approaches to learning. Analyzing the students’ essays as a requirement in the academy across disciplines could provide appropriate scaffolding in guiding the Filipino ESL writers. Encoding the students’ outputs for analysis with their permission is rigorous and laborious, but the benefits of actual outputs produced in a setting that is closest to what is de facto are very rewarding.

References


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