

# **Genre Analysis & Cultural Variations: A Comparative Analysis of British & Chinese TEFL/TESL Application Letters**

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Despite the growing concern of many non-native students about the application for postgraduate studies, there had been little research done on postgraduate school application letters. Sixteen TEFL/TESL application letters (eight British samples from Supplementary or Further Information in the Application for Admission Forms and eight Chinese samples from Study Plans or Statements of Purposes) were analysed in terms of exponent moves used for communicative purposes. The results indicated differences in the moves and cultural elements used by each group which might be attributable to cross-cultural variations. Although two categories of most frequently occurred moves: *Explaining Reasons* and *Indicating & Detailing Value of the Candidature* were found in the corpus of all of the application letters, British applicants tended to give more importance to the details of their candidature than Chinese applicants who generally focused more on the explanation of the reasons instead. Most Chinese applicants preferred to describe and evaluate their candidature briefly, but most of the *Explaining Reasons* sections in Chinese TEFL/TESL application letters involved details unlikely to appear in British application letters. In addition, Chinese applicants relied more heavily upon self-glorification, self-degradation and adversary-glorification than British applicants. In comparison, they also consistently displayed a preference for conventionally direct self-glorification and adversary-glorification strategies.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Postgraduate school application letters, attached or enclosed in the Application for Admission Forms, are an integration of academic matters with business presentation. In terms of tactical communication, they are the self-promotional behind the self-representation of applicants. Postgraduate school application letters therefore can, to a certain extent, influence the readers' decision to accept or reject the applicants' application for the course. In spite of the significance in helping to promote the applicants to the readers and distinguish themselves from their rivals, it was surprising to find very little literature on genre analysis in this field. As far as I was aware, there had been no reports of a moves analysis of postgraduate school application letters other than Bhatia's (1993) seven-move promotional genre for job application letters. A survey of a large number of instructional manuals on postgraduate school application yielded only heaps of 'model letters' which ignored the issues of style and content.

The motivation for the study was a need to know how successful Chinese applicants of the TEFL/TESL course were when they are required to write an application letter in English. I was also interested to find out if Chinese TEFL/TESL application letters would address any of the communication problems revealed by this British/Chinese application letter comparison, with the hope of discovering insights for non-native speakers of English elements that contribute to suitable and effective British TEFL/TESL

application letter writing.

The area of concern in this analysis was first to examine how and to what extent Bhatia's moves analysis for promotional genre played a part in postgraduate school, or more specifically TEFL/TESL application letters. Could TEFL/TESL application letters be treated as an instance of a similar genre or sub-genre of the large variety of promotional genres? Was Bhatia's seven-move structural model for interpreting job application letters applicable for TEFL/TESL application letters?

The second area of investigation was to make a comparative study between British and Chinese TEFL/TESL application letters since the ultimate aim of the study was concerned with those aspects of application letter writing where Chinese applicants were communicating differently from British applicants. It also consisted of an investigation into cultural variations between British and Chinese writing in English. How did cultural elements affect the presentation and style of British and Chinese applicants?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Data Formation**

Sixteen application letters (eight British and eight Chinese) for the Master of Arts (MA) in Teaching English as a Foreign or Second Language (TEFL/TESL) were taken for analysis from the student files at the Centre for English Language Studies, University of Birmingham with the permission of the Director. These TEFL/TESL application letters were responses to the requirement of the Application for Admission Form for supplementary or further information of the applicants, who had later been accepted by the Birmingham University. Supplementary or further information, as its name suggested, was a section in the Application for Admission Form where relevant information was required to be given by the applicants; for instance, reasons for applying for the course, relevant language competence, working experience and publications. Chinese applicants, however, preferred to enclose a letter, usually titled Statement of Purpose or Study Plan, in response to this admission requirement.

*[University of Birmingham:  
Application for Postgraduate (and Post-experience) study]*

#### ***Supplementary Information***

*Candidates are invited to include here relevant information for which no provision is made else where on this form. For example, reasons for wishing to take the course applied for, relevant language competence, teaching experience (full details to be given by applicants for MA in Teaching English as a Second/Foreign language), publications.*

Due to the limited availability of British applicants for MA in the TEFL/TESL programme, a sample of only eight British students' Supplementary or Further Information was collected. In fact, their availability was the chief determining factor in

choosing the other eight Statements of Purpose or Study Plans written by the Chinese MA students of the same course. The amount of British and Chinese TEFL/TESL application letters was deliberately identical to facilitate statistical analysis and comparative study. Since the TESL/TEFL course took teaching experience into account when considering the application (at least two years of full-time teaching experience), postgraduate school application letters for programmes other than TESL/TEFL, which were also offered by the Centre for English Language Studies, were outside the scope of this study. In selecting the data every effort was made to try to ensure that the social contexts were similar for the two sets of data. As a result, any variation in register would also be similar, apart from those variations which could be attributed to differences between British and Chinese applicants writing in English. It would therefore be possible to compare the two sets of data and to use the results to highlight which aspects of Chinese TEFL/TESL application letter writing in English are different from British TEFL/TESL application letters.

Grammatical mistakes and inappropriate word choices in TEFL/TESL application letters were ignored as the focus was not on studying the quality of the texts, but on examining the overall text organization in order to identify the moves that occurred in the application letters. To ensure that the cultural study would be as representative as possible, the language of Chinese TEFL/TESL application letters was not changed. The concern of data confidentiality was also dealt with. All the information given in TEFL/TESL application letters would be anonymous.

## **Interviews**

I was able to carry out interviews with four Chinese students who were also the actual writers of four of the Chinese TEFL/TESL application letters in my data. Before the interviews, the interviewees were told about the nature and purpose of the study and reassured that any information given would be totally anonymous. On average I had an hour with each Chinese interviewee and the interviews were tape-recorded to ensure that information was accurately recorded. As the interviewees wished to use their mother tongue to express their views frankly and talk openly when asked searching questions about various aspects of their application letters under study, the interviews were conducted in Mandarin. The use of interviews was to double check the cultural elements (Self-degradation, Self-glorification and Adversary-glorification) I found in Chinese TEFL/TESL application letters against reactions from the Chinese interviewees in order to bring validity to my findings and add psychological reality to my analysis. The interviews also allowed me to build in objectivity and bring in relevant explanation when examining the cultural elements. In addition to this, at a later stage in the analysis, when it became necessary to consider why there were differences between the British and Chinese data, I was able to discuss specific details in the Chinese TEFL/TESL application letters with the four writers themselves. These meetings with the four writers were very useful and productive. I not only received a lot of help in understanding the nature of their texts but also discovered that two of the Chinese TEFL/TESL application letters, C3 and C4, were co-written and corrected by native speakers of English.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Approach to Bhatia's Moves Analysis for Promotional Genre**

The approach taken to the investigation and the main area of research which was referred to was work done in the field of genre analysis, particularly studies in Bhatia's (1993) promotional genre for job application letters. Bhatia's model based on moves analysis for promotional genre should provide a suitable starting base for TEFL/TESL application letters. Bhatia indicated that sales promotion letters and job application letters were two closely related instances of the same promotional genre, as they used the same medium, exploited the same form and their participants had a similar role relationship. Moreover, these two types of documents shared the same communicative purposes where the former promoted the product or service and the latter advertised the applicants themselves. The shared communicative purposes of both sales promotion letters and job application letters had accordingly led to an establishment of a seven-move structural interpretation model:

1. Establishing Credentials
2. Introducing the Offer / Candidature:
  - a) Offering the Product or Service / Candidature
  - b) Essential Detailing of the Offer / Candidature
  - c) Indicating Value of the Offer / Candidature
3. Offering Incentives
4. Enclosing Documents
5. Soliciting Response
6. Using pressure tactics
7. Ending Politely

Upon studying Bhatia's approach to moves analysis and reviewing his model in analysing sales promotion letters and job application letters, it appeared that moves analysis for promotional genre was the most appropriate approach for analysing TESL/TEFL application letters.

### **Approach to Bhatia's Cross-cultural Variations for Promotional Genre**

The second area of investigation would be to make a comparative study between Bhatia's (1993) findings in the area of cross-cultural variations in job application letters written by South Asian applicants and TEFL/TESL application letters written by British and Chinese students. Bhatia analysed 200 job application letters written by applicants from South Asia (India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh) and concluded that, instead of offering self-appraisal to show the strength of their candidature, the applicants preferred to use less effective strategies such as self-glorification, self-degradation and adversary-degradation to persuade their readers to accept their candidature. The main aim of this research would be to report on adaptations made to the aforementioned findings as a result of analysing the TEFL/TESL application letters written by British and Chinese students.

## RESULTS

### Comparison of Moves for Job & TEFL/TESL Application Letters

#### Application of Bhatia's Moves Analysis for Promotional Genre

Bhatia's (1993) seven-move structural model for interpreting sales promotion letters and job application letters was a very useful starting point, but not totally applicable for TEFL/TEFL application letters. A TEFL/TEFL application letter was a similar genre of the genre of a job application letter, but it was a communicative event taking place in a different professional community bound by different constraints. In a case like this, it would be best to regard TEFL/TEFL application letters as a sub-genre to a large category of promotional genres. As a result of that, a new move-structural model for the genre of TEFL/TEFL application letters was deduced upon studying the data:

#### MOVES ANALYSIS

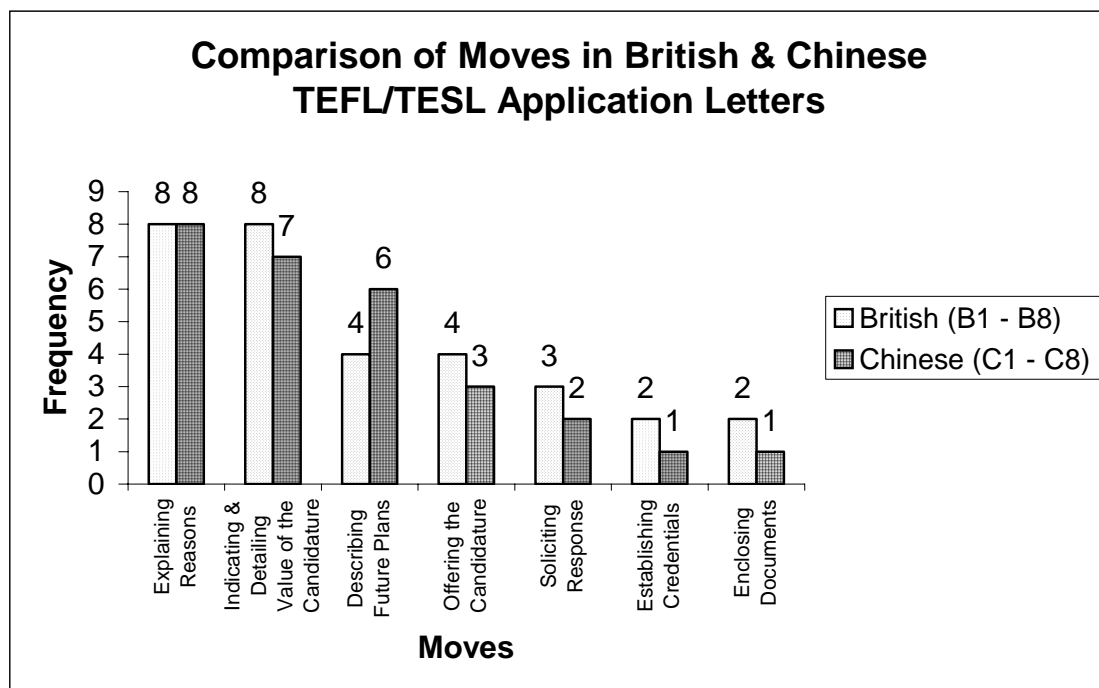
<u>Job Application Letters</u>	<u>TESL/TEFL Application Letters</u>
1. Establishing Credentials	Establishing Credentials
2. Introducing Candidature:	Introducing Candidature
a. Offering the Candidature	Offering the Candidature
b. Essential Detailing of the Candidature	} Indicating & Detailing Value of the Candidature
c. Indicating Value of the Candidature	
3. Offering Incentives	/
4. Enclosing Documents	Enclosing Documents
5. Soliciting Response	Soliciting Response
6. Using Pressure Tactics	/
7. Ending Politely	/
8. /	Explaining Reasons
9. /	Describing Future Plans

The introduction of new or additional considerations in the communicative purposes of TEFL/TEFL application letters changed the genre content and reshaped the internal structure of the seven moves in Bhatia's promotional genre. First of all, *Offering Incentives* was rarely found in both job and TEFL/TEFL application letters as it was not always as evident and clear-cut as offering discount in sales promotion letters. This move was often incorporated and assimilated with *Indicating Value of the Candidature* which could do the same trick of making the offer more attractive in TEFL/TEFL application letters. *Indicating Value of the Candidature*, however, did not always form a distinct unit by itself. Instead, it was scattered throughout the *Essential Detailing of the Candidature* move. Since it was difficult to differentiate which one of the three moves was really intended by the applicants, I therefore combined the three of them to form a new *Indicating & Detailing Value of the Candidature*. Secondly, *Using*

*Pressure Tactics* was missing entirely from TEFL/TESL application letters. In this competitive world of today, the applicants could rarely “claim parity” with their readers, let alone “negotiate from a position of strength” (ibid). The future of the applicants was often in the hands of their readers; therefore, the applicants would not like to appear to be so aggressive as to set a specified deadline and force their readers to make a quick decision as in sales promotional letters. This move was thus abandoned by the applicants in order to make a good impression before their readers. Thirdly, *Explaining Reasons* was a new addition due to the special reader requirement of including the reasons for applying for the course as stated in the University of Birmingham’s Application for Admission Form [*Application for Postgraduate (and Post-experience) Study*]. Finally, as for *Ending Politely*, most writers of TEFL/TESL application letters did not simply say *Thank-you* the way the writers of job application letters put it. The writers of TEFL/TESL application letters preferred to end on either a polite *Soliciting Response* or a pleasant and courteous *Describing Future Plans*.

### Moves for TEFL/TESL Application Letters

The structural interpretation assigned to the previous sixteen TEFL/TESL application letters indicated that the applicants had used the following moves to achieve their communicative purposes:



Using a sample of sixteen texts, it was possible to make predictions about the occurrence of the most frequently occurring moves within British and Chinese application letters. Moreover, the reasons why the applicants would choose certain exponents could also be predicted. *Describing Future Plans, Offering the Candidature, Soliciting Response, Establishing Credentials* and *Enclosing Documents*

were optional moves in my data which helped expand the main two moves: *Explaining Reasons* and *Indicating and Detailing Value of the Candidature*. The optional moves lacked strength in persuasion on their own but when teaming up with the *Explaining Reasons* and *Indicating & Detailing Value of the Candidature* moves, they complemented and reinforced one another to provide a progressive force in achieving the principal communicative purpose of helping the applicants to be admitted to their applied university.

### Comparison of British & Chinese TEFL/TESL Application Letters

Analysis of moves led to tables 1a, 1b, 2a and 2c for British and Chinese TEFL/TESL application letters respectively. These tables helped to check the analysis of the moves but they did not provide information on the sequential tendencies of the moves. Inspection of the tables below also gave an indication of the important cultural elements which exhibited differences between British and Chinese TEFL/TESL application letters.

**Table 1a: Use of Moves in British TEFL/TESL Application Letters**

Moves	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6	B7	B8	Total
Explaining Reasons	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8
Indicating & Detailing Value of the Candidature	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8
Describing Future Plans	✓			✓			✓	✓	4
Offering the Candidature			✓	✓	✓	✓			4
Soliciting Response	✓	✓	✓						3
Establishing Credentials	✓			✓					2
Enclosing Documents	✓		✓						2

**Table 1b: Use of Moves in Chinese TEFL/TESL Application Letters**

Moves	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	Total
Explaining Reasons	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8
Indicating & Detailing Value of the Candidature	(✓)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7(8)
Describing Future Plans		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		6
Offering the Candidature			✓		✓	✓			3
Establishing Credentials	✓					✓			2
Soliciting Response	✓								1
Enclosing Documents	✓								1

**Table 2a: Use of Cultural Variations in British TEFL/TESL Application Letters**

Cross-cultural Elements	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6	B7	B8	Total
Self-Degradation									0
Self-Glorification					✓		✓	✓	3

Adversary-Glorification	✓	✓		✓		✓		4
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**Table 2b: Use of Cultural Variations in Chinese TEFL/TESL Application Letters**

Cross-cultural Elements	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	Total
Self-Degradation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8
Self-Glorification	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8
Adversary-Glorification	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	6

### 1. Explaining Reasons

Taking careful note of the information required by the Application for Admission Form, it was not surprising to find that all of the TEFL/TESL application letters had included some reasons, ranging from one to four types of reasons per letter. In descending order of total occurrences in the corpus, they were:

**Table 3a: Use of Different Types of Reasons in British TEFL/TESL Application Letters**

Types of Reasons	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6	B7	B8	Total
Reasons for applying for the TEFL/TESL course	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8
Reasons for coming to study at Birmingham University		✓							1
Reasons for coming to study in Britain		✓							1
Reasons for teaching English							✓		1
Reasons for learning English							✓		1
Reasons for choosing to come to Birmingham				✓					1

**Table 3b: Use of Different Types of Reasons in Chinese TEFL/TESL Application Letters**

Types of Reasons	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	Total
Reasons for applying for the TEFL/TESL course	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8
Reasons for coming to study at Birmingham University	✓	✓				✓		✓	4
Reasons for coming to study in Britain				✓		✓	✓	✓	4
Reasons for teaching English		✓			✓		✓		3
Reasons for learning English	✓					✓	✓		3
Reasons for choosing to come to Birmingham									0

This move was obligatory in TEFL/TESL application letters where the applicants showed their desire to undertake the course primarily because they felt that the experience would be enjoyable and the consequences rewarding. It usually took more than one paragraph in the main body of Chinese TEFL/TESL application letters. As regards British TEFL/TESL application letters, it was often found sharing the same paragraph with other moves in several cases. As second or foreign language learners of English, Chinese students stated in their application letters more than simply the reasons

for applying for the TEFL/TESL course. Some of them also explained their reasons for learning and teaching of English, while some others touched on the reasons why they chose to come to the UK and to study at Birmingham University. British applicants' reasons were usually brief and undetailed while most of the *Explaining Reasons* sections in Chinese TEFL/TESL application letters involved details unlikely to appear in British TEFL/TESL application letters.

**Table 4a: Percentage of Words for Reasons across British TEFL/TESL Application Letters**

<b>Application Letters</b>	<b>Number of Total Words</b>	<b>Number of Words for Reasons</b>	<b>Percentage of Words for Reasons</b>
B1	262	115	43.89%
B2	218	146	66.97%
B3	289	77	26.64%
B4	309	85	27.51%
B5	435	90	20.69%
B6	164	118	71.95%
B7	376	163	43.35%
B8	406	83	20.44%
<b>Average</b>	<b>2459</b>	<b>877</b>	<b>35.66%</b>

**Table 4b: Percentage of Words for Reasons across Chinese TEFL/TESL Application Letters**

<b>Application Letters</b>	<b>Number of Total Words</b>	<b>Number of Words for Reasons</b>	<b>Percentage of Words for Reasons</b>
C1	372	177	47.58%
C2	407	236	57.98%
C3	318	66	20.75%
C4	406	115	28.32%
C5	785	461	58.73%
C6	470	305	64.89%
C7	737	627	85.07%
C8	736	239	32.47%
<b>Average</b>	<b>3913</b>	<b>2160</b>	<b>57.79%</b>

As seen in tables 4a and 4b (and with further confirmation from the Chinese interviewees), Chinese applicants focused more on the explanation of their reasons than British applicants who usually gave only concise statements of their reasons. Referring to tables 4a and 4b, the average of words for reasons in Chinese TEFL/TESL application letters was 57.79% in comparison with 35.66% in British TEFL/TESL application letters. There were four Chinese application letters which percentage of words for reasons was

higher than 50%, with the highest 85.07% in C7, followed by 64.89% in C6, then 58.73% in C5 and 57.98% in C2. Whereas among British TEFL/TESL application letters, six were found with the percentage of words for reasons lower than 50%. Table 4b presented the lowest percentage of words for reasons in B8 with only 20.44%, B5 with 20.69%, B3 26.64% and B4 27.51%. This statistical analysis of the quantity of words for reasons was useful as it helped providing necessary empirical evidence to confirm the intuitive and impressionistic statements of the interviewer and interviewees about the high incidence of this move in Chinese TEFL/TESL application letters.

The writers of C3 and C4 during the interview revealed that C3 and C4 were in fact corrected and co-written by native speakers of English. This had had a significant influence on the nature of these two particular Chinese TEFL/TESL application letters. The percentage of words for reasons in C3 and C4 were the lowest with only 20.75% and 28.32%, and the highest percentage of words for candidature with 74.21% (C3) and 71.67% (C4) among all Chinese TEFL/TESL application letters. Due to this association, C3 and C4 were less representative of Chinese writing application letter in English. The percentages of words for both reasons and candidature in C3 and C4 were therefore not taken into account in the statistical analysis (shading in tables 4b and 8b).

### **1.1 Reasons for Applying for the TEFL/TESL Course & Self-degradation**

The major difference between British and Chinese applicants' *Reasons for Applying for the TEFL/TESL Course* was the absence of the exponent reason, *Learning new methods for improvement in teaching English*, on the part of British applicants. This perhaps was a natural consequence of dependence on the English-speaking country on the part of Chinese applicants to whom English is a second or foreign language. The native and non-native distance, whether at individual or national level, between the two participants in the application situation was likely to invoke compassion, and Chinese applicants tended to magnify this inequality either by self-degradation or adversary-glorification. Adversary-glorification and self-degradation had the double-sided nature of raising the readers to be treated as superior and the humbling of the applicants themselves. In both cases what was conveyed was that the readers were in a position of power with respect to the applicants.

Self-degradation appeared in the form of depreciation of English language education in the Chinese applicants' respective countries where too much emphasis was placed on teaching grammar, to the neglect of using English in communicative situations. As a result, the students felt that they were unable to communicate competently and the need for providing effective training in communication skills in English had never been greater. Most Chinese applicants identified this problem in learning and teaching English as a second or foreign language, and intended to improve them with solutions they hoped to find in their applied university. Self-degradation was therefore a useful persuasive strategy for applying for the TEFL/TESL course by highlighting the deficiencies in the methods of teaching English in the Chinese applicants' countries as the motivation to join the applied university. More importantly, it served as a problem-solution relationship

when the applicants tried to convince the readers that they had a problem and only their applied university could provide with a best solution to bring about an adjustment (see table 7).

**Table 7: Use of Problem or Problem-Solution in Self-degradation Across the Corpus**

<b>Application letters</b>	<b>Self-degradation</b>	<b>Problem &amp; Solution</b>
C1	<i>...I have also faced many difficulties such as how to use conversation and how to better one's pronunciation. As a result I feel I should return to graduate school to improve my English knowledge and methods of instruction.</i>	<b>Problem-Solution</b>
C2	<i>However, English education at secondary schools in Taiwan tends to put too much emphasis on reading and writing because of National Entrance Examination. After graduating, most of the adults still cannot speak and listen very well due to their rigid learning habits. Therefore, I would like to devote more of my time and efforts about how to apply communicative approach to the practice of teaching techniques.</i>	<b>Problem-Solution</b>
C3	<i>In Taiwan, English education has been criticized for putting too much emphasis on grammar and reading. Many people still cannot speak simple English although they have learned English for 6 years.</i>	<b>Problem</b>
C4	<i>I found that although there is increasing use of instructional media in Taiwan's English teaching field, the training of teachers still leaves much to be desired.</i>	<b>Problem</b>
C5	<i>"Jack of all trades and master of none" is what describes me most suitably. Born in multi-lingual, multi-religious, and multi-racial Malaysia, I often feel like drifting in a sea of Chinese, English and Bahasa Malaysia, shifting from one language to another while struggling to decide which one to hold on to. The path to my English learning is strewn with obstacles and difficulties. The infrequent, clumsy, oral reading of prescribed sentences in my English textbooks could scarcely be called learning to speak a language. What actually happened in so many instances was that I began by writing out sentences on the basis of the grammar rules, before I had half a chance to become acquainted</i>	<b>Problem-Solution</b>

*with the flow of the language. I soon got involved in hundreds of intricate grammatical rules and their exceptions, some of them purely orthographic, and I ended up by hating grammar and detesting the language. But worse of all, I rarely used the language, for though I passed tests so as to graduate, my chance to carry on a conversation in English with a native speaker was almost nil.*

*I have to discover for myself almost everything I learn. I have to create my own opportunities to listen, to comprehend and to speak English. I have come a long way to unlearn some bad habits of pronunciation or intonation, learned in earlier schooling. Perhaps it is the toughness of my early struggle that makes me decide to train my ambition on the target of a teaching career. This is my goal—the ability to speak and to help others to speak easily, naturally and enjoyably in English.*

C6 *I hope they can listen, speak, read and write English actively instead of memorizing stiff grammar rules. They should experience and use English through the language acquisition.*

**Problem-Solution**

*Growing up in the country, I understand the instructional shortcomings. I will put my knowledge into practice and educate my students.*

C7 *From my teaching experience, I realize the weaknesses of Mandarin speaking students in learning English and the obstacles that lie ahead. I know what gives Chinese students the most trouble, for example, tense distinctions and the structure of sentence patterns. And another big problem has to do with the fundamental differences between English and Chinese grammars. To meet this kind of situation, I can only instruct on the basis of my past experience—neither a systematic nor professional method. Therefore, I hope I can pursue further studies in the teaching of methodology, which, I believe, will help surmount this barrier.*

**Problem-Solution**

*In my country, most students complain that even after years of English study, only a very few dare to open their mouth. The most decisive reason for this is that the assigned course work is too difficult to understand, and not practical enough. Next, our tradition emphasizes reading and writing, to the neglect of listening and speaking. I myself, therefore, also hope to learn a reliable method of teaching to use in guiding students to*

*improve their aural and oral abilities.*

- C8      *Since children here have to pass one examination after another to obtain the opportunity of attending public senior high school and university, they are under tremendous pressure when learning any subject, and English is not exception. With the above reason, my task to motivate them seems even more difficult to accomplish. Obviously, lacking the environment of English and practical use in daily conversation is the problem. This could explain the reason why after learning this required subject for over 7 years, a large proportion of college graduates on Taiwan still cannot speak English confidently and fluently.*
- Problem**

## **1.2 Reasons for Applying for Birmingham University & Adversary-glorification**

Both British and Chinese applicants also grasped the opportunities to sing praises to Birmingham University while stating the reasons of their application to indicate their eagerness to join the TEFL/TESL programme at Birmingham University. Most of them showed that the school's curriculum had a unique appeal to them. The demonstration of their appreciation of the school and its curriculum implied a bridge between their outlook and the school's approach to TEFL/TESL. By showing how the school's approach would enable them to achieve their goals, the applicants tactfully tied the TEFL/TESL programme with their future.

A closer examination of British TEFL/TESL application letters revealed that, while demonstrating their appreciation of Birmingham University and its course, British applicants tended to select varying degrees of indirectness to soften the effect of adversary-glorification in order to encourage the readers to accept their reasons more readily. British applicants' adversary-glorification was most evident in statements written to convince the readers that the applicants were *particularly interested* in the course Birmingham University offered, and that the course offered by the university *sounds particularly relevant* or *will be very stimulating* (see the findings below). A comparison of adversary-glorification also revealed that British sentences of adversary-glorification were generally more formal than those written by Chinese applicants:

- B1: *To secure the type of position that will provide a **challenging** future (for example, in institutions of higher education in this country and abroad) I clearly need to gain an accredited qualification. As a Birmingham university alumnus I believe that my university can help me to do this.*
- B2: *The course at Birmingham sounds **particularly relevant** and I am sure that by taking the MA all the skills necessary to be a good teacher and an effective administrator would be enhanced.*

B3: *I am **particularly interested** in the teacher training and ESP options on the course.*

B5: *I'm **particularly interested** in the course Birmingham University offers, since it includes a number of options which are **of special interest** to me.*

B8: *I am sure that the MA course in TEFL/TESL will be **very stimulating** and certainly extend my knowledge enabling me to offer more skills to organizations such as VSO.*

In comparison, Chinese adversary-glorification seemed unlikely to convey the same level of indirectness as those used by British applicants. In fact, Chinese applicants tended to give compliments more directly and explicitly. They also announced their adversary-glorification more dramatically than British applicants. Moreover, they employed a related technique which Bhatia (1993) called "Lexical Boost" to exaggerate facts with intensifying modifiers such as *one of the best, exactly what I need, excellent, your respected institute, your esteemed graduate school and the most wonderful part of my whole studying life*. Chinese applicants' sentences of adversary-glorification therefore often gave the impression of being somewhat personal or impassioned:

C1: *I know your language education is **one of the best**.*

C2: *I have read about the programs offered by the Center for English Language Studies, and I find those courses to be **exactly** what I need.*

C5: *After completing my education, I wish to return to Malaysia and contribute what I have learned in your **respected** institute to establish a better environment for multilingual education in Malaysia.*

C6: *The reason I choose your graduate school is that your institute offers **excellent** courses about ELT and TESOL.*

*In order to advance my academic foundation, I now sincerely wish to be admitted to your **esteemed** graduate school for a master's degree in the field of English Language Teaching.*

C7: *I felt I'd so benefited from the trip that it constantly came to me that my experience of studying in Britain was **the most wonderful part** of my whole studying life.*

C8: *I realize that your school provides **excellent** courses as to effective and latest teaching theory and methods that will bring about improvement in practice.*

British applicants seemed to place a higher value on privacy and individuality, while Chinese applicants tended to emphasize involvement and group relations. Chinese applicants tended to accord the readers a great deal of respect by becoming lyrical about

Birmingham University and the course it offered as a direct result of the Confucian political philosophy of respect for established authority and subordination (Nivison & Wright, 1959). From the Chinese viewpoint, being indirect could be perceived as inappropriate when showing deference and giving compliments to the readers who were in a position of power or authority. When writing to a person in a position of power with respect to the applicants, they usually had to explicitly defer to the readers to show their awareness of the difference in power between them. Furthermore, it might also be the case that explicit expression of needs and feelings was expected in Chinese society where people depended more on each other and/or the personal experience of others than in English-speaking society where greater emphasis was placed on the individual. C8 applicant, for an example, expressed her/his strong desire to be admitted to the university, even to the extent of saying *being accepted to your graduate school will not only be a big step to me but also to many students on Taiwan* (sic). This emphasis on social needs above individual preferences was important as Chinese social structure was conceived and perceived as an extension of the family structure. The individual self was only but a social unit, a part of a larger whole (Murray & Hong, 1994). By saying so, C8 implied that Birmingham University could help her/him to become not only a dedicated teacher, but, more importantly, also a dedicated member of the society. In addition to that, the use of adversary-glorification in direct phrases was also motivated by the need to be explicit and clear, a cultural belief that underlay the need to convey upfront sincerity.

## 2. Indicating & Detailing Value of the Candidature

This move did not necessarily coincide with paragraphs. It took six paragraphs in B8, but it was scattered throughout the *Explaining Reasons* and *Establishing Credentials* moves in C1. It was the central selling point of TEFL/TESL application letters where the applicants attempted to impress the readers with all the academic and professional excellence of their candidature. British applicants tended to give more importance to the details of their candidature. Their candidature tended to be much more elaborated comparing with the Chinese's which was often only a brief summary. This was further illustrated in tables 8a and 8b where the British and Chinese candidature ratio was 58.44% to 33.76%. There were five British TEFL/TESL application letters which percentage of words for candidature was higher than 50%. In descending order of the top five, they were 77.13% in B7, 68.97% in B8, 67.47% in B3, 66.21% B5 and 59.55% B4.

**Table 8a: Percentage of Words for Candidature across British TEFL/TESL Application Letters**

Application Letters	Number of Total Words	Number of Words for Candidature	Percentage of Words for Candidature
B1	262	82	31.3%
B2	218	72	33.03%
B3	289	195	67.47%
B4	309	184	59.55%
B5	435	288	66.21%
B6	164	46	28.05%

B7	376	290	77.13%
B8	406	280	68.97%
<b>Average</b>	<b>2459</b>	<b>1437</b>	<b>58.44%</b>

British applicants tended to present their candidature in a formal and detailed style. Extensive and international features of the teaching experience were highly regarded by them. Their application letters, with the exception of B4 and B6, were full of informative elaborations of their extensive and professional teaching experience at different schools in different countries with different students from a wide variety of ages, backgrounds and educational levels. The applicants' demonstration of their versatility in teaching and other teaching-related fields was to show the readers that they had sufficient qualities and potential in fulfilling the admission requirements satisfactorily.

B3, B5, B7 and B8 were good examples of British applicants arranging their extensive and international candidature in a chronological order. These applicants organized their entire teaching career in a progression which started with their earliest teaching experience and ended with their latest teaching posts. They also specified the duties they were responsible for, described what they had experienced and learned from their jobs, and mentioned solutions used to overcome problems faced. The applicants used their application letters to bring out elements of their experience not discussed elsewhere and reflect back on what they liked and disliked. The pros and cons, ups and downs in the process of their teaching and learning were what contributed to the making of a qualified scholastic image which helped to convince the readers to accept their application. B4 applicant, however, focused only on her/his EFL teacher training experience in China but s/he described it in details about how s/he introduced the new communicative teaching methods and overcame the difficulties s/he encountered in the process. By focusing on specific details and concrete examples as opposed to giving a superficial overview, these applicants wrote memorable and distinct application letters to show their unique qualifications and commitment to postgraduate studies.

Despite their below 50% of words for candidature, extensive and international aspects of their teaching experience with a wide range of students at different schools in different countries were highlighted in B1 (31.3%) and B2 (33.03%). B1 and B2 applicants' expression of joy and enthusiasm for teaching also helped to make up for their low percentages of candidature. On the other hand, although her/his candidature was not presented as extensive as the others, B6 applicant (28.05%) did not forget to include the most essential information of her/his candidature.

**Table 8b: Percentage of Words for Candidature across Chinese TEFL/TESL Application Letters**

<b>Application Letters</b>	<b>Number of Total Words</b>	<b>Number of Words for Candidature</b>	<b>Percentage of Words for Candidature</b>
C1	372	96	25.81%
C2	407	125	30.71%
C3	318	236	74.21%
C4	406	291	71.67%

C5	785	294	37.45%
C6	470	138	29.36%
C7	737	86	11.67%
C8	736	497	67.53%
<b>Average</b>	3913	1527	33.76%

On the contrary, the occurrence of brief candidature was rather high in Chinese TEFL/TESL application letters. Five Chinese application letters were found with the percentage of words for candidature lower than 50%. Table 8b also showed that the lowest percentage of words for candidature was C7 with only 11.67%, followed by C1 with 25.81%, to C6 with 29.36%, C2 30.71% and C5 37.45%. Not all Chinese candidature was short and succinct, a long detailed description of candidature did appear in C3 (74.21%) and C4 (71.67%) which were corrected and co-written by native speakers of English.

Like most of the British candidature, the candidature in C3 (74.21%) was presented in a progressive arrangement starting with her/his earlier educational background, followed by her/his working experience in an export company, to her/his major in English and Literature, and finally her/his full time EFL teaching experience. C3 applicant and her/his native-speaker co-writer tactfully structured the details of the candidature so that all her/his learning and teaching experiences were associated with TEFL/TESL to further strengthen her/his candidature. Apart from EFL teaching experience, C4 applicant also drew on experience and achievements in her/his academic life to support her/his candidature. In addition to that, C4 also shared with the readers what excited and influenced her/him to pursue in the field of TEFL/TESL.

Most Chinese applicants, however, preferred to describe and evaluate their candidature briefly. It could be said that succinct candidature tended to be the Chinese style of writing TEFL/TESL application letters. Although the percentages of words for candidature were rather high in C2 (30.71%), C5 (37.45%) and C6 (29.36%), there was a greater preponderance of *Explaining Reasons* in their application letters. Information about the candidature in C2 was concisely presented without any further illustration of how the applicant undertook her/his duties or what s/he had gained from them. Similarly, the information about candidature provided in C7 was so compact and concise that only extremely concrete examples were given. C7 applicant condensed her/his qualification, TEFL/TESL-related courses and language proficiency in only one sentence. S/he then summarized her/his entire ESL teaching experience in another sentence. The candidature in C1, on the other hand, was scattered throughout the whole letter. Information about the candidature of C1 applicant could be gleaned and pieced together from bits and pieces here and there only after reading the whole letter.

### **Self-glorification**

British applicants preferred to use self-appraisal as the main strategy to persuade the readers to accept the strengths of their candidature. Self-appraisal, as Bhatia pointed out, was an account of the applicants' fictional selves made relevant to the specifications of

the course. Self-appraisal therefore consisted of a relevant and positive description of the candidature of the applicants and a good indication of its potential value to the readers (1993). British applicants generally demonstrated possession of relevant qualities and teaching abilities to establish their relevance to the requirements of the course. Their self-glorification was embedded in different levels of indirectness and appeared to be less assertive, becoming more informative than persuasive.

B5: *...and at present, I'm working in a private language school in Portugal where I am **solely responsible** for the material, syllabus and exam design of a wide variety of classes, in addition to day-to-day teaching.*

B7: *After gaining valuable teaching experiences in Birmingham I decided to offer my services to the developing world. VSO decided that I **would be of most value** teaching English.*

B8: *I did the one month intensive RSA Certificate Course at International House which was **very stimulating and obtained a good grade.***

Findings below showed that Chinese applicants consistently displayed an overwhelming preference for conventionally direct self-glorification strategy. More Chinese than British applicants preferred to praise their own achievements and strengths. Self-glorification appeared in 100% of Chinese letters and in 37.5% of British application letters. Generally, the Chinese sentences of self-glorification appeared to be brief, informal, persuasive and assertive, with the exception of C3 and C4 which had similar linguistic output as the British variation. In addition, Chinese self-glorification was also expressed structurally more directly than the British. By using self-glorification, the applicants pull themselves right into the middle of the events being discussed, thereby intensified their own importance. The exaggeration in examples C1, C2, C6 and C7 seemed to be an element of attempting to increase the applicants' own importance by expressing them dramatically:

C1: *I believe **I would be a valuable addition to any school.***

C2: ***I am now very confident** with my English and teaching skills, **but I am not satisfied yet.***

C3: *I studied hard and graduated with **good grades** in 1996.*

C4: *I often represented my school in speech competitions, **winning first place on two occasions.***

C5: *...I have also been working part-time since May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1995 at Hess Language School. **It is the largest English Educational Organization in Taipei and of high reputation.***

C6: *During my university days, my performance was **pretty good.** The grade*

average of every semester was A.

- C7: *Being an English major, I took many courses related to English literature and language, and acquired a near-native speaker's language proficiency. Hence, I strongly hope that I can take up the profession of an English instructor. Only in this type of position will I feel that I have achieved because I can help others to enrich their lives through an effective use of the tool—English.*
- C8: *Ever since I was in primary school, I had participated in a good many of speech contests and won many prizes. The third prize in National Senior High School Students English Speech contest in 1986, held by the R.O.C. Ministry of Education, and the second prize in National English Speech Contest in 1993 are the ones I am most proud of. I even represented the graduating students to deliver a thankful speech to the school and teachers at commencement. Last year, 1996, owing to my outstanding performance in the past 5 years, my previous school principal recommended me to Taipei Municipal Yung-Chun Senior High School.*

This findings was rather a surprise as, in order to depict a modest candidate, Chinese applicants were not supposed to glorify their achievements and specialties. The interviewees disclosed that they were “expected to show confidence by glorifying their achievements and specialties while writing a postgraduate school application letter in English”. This was perhaps a misinterpretation on the part of the Chinese applicants. Although self-glorification was a good way to capture the attention of the readers and to impress upon them by boasting of the achievements and specialties of the applicants, it was, as Bhatia (1993) indicated, “an unsupported claim of the writer’s own superiority based simply on feelings or desires rather than on rational judgment” which “lacks credibility and is likely to be viewed by the readers as purely subjective” (p.70).

## CONCLUSION

The examination of TEFL/TESL application letters written by British and Chinese students had yielded several interesting observations and suggested that certain generalizations could be made for both British and Chinese application letters. Many of the differences between the two sets of data suggested that many of the problems encountered by Chinese applicants writing in English might be attributable to cross-cultural variations.

It was found that British applicants were generally credited with greater knowledge of the conventionalized language use and internal structure of TEFL/TESL application letters in English than Chinese applicants. Although it was true that British applicants did manage to exploit genre constraints to achieve special effects or private intentions, they still observed rather seriously a broad range of generic rules and established conventions of writing application letter. British TEFL/TESL application letters were generally more formal and less direct than those written by Chinese applicants.

On the other hand, the findings of Chinese TEFL/TESL application letters showed that Chinese applicants tended to begin their application letters with attention-gripping leads that tied into their human interesting stories to keep the readers' attention. The findings also reflected conventionalized local socio-cultural knowledge which had significant influence on the way how Chinese TEFL/TESL application letters were typically and conventionally written. The data from Chinese TEFL/TESL application letters showed sensitivity to politeness strategies, even though their linguistic output was not always within the range of British variation. Generally, Chinese applicants announced their self-glorification and adversary-glorification more directly and explicitly than British applicants.

Although a new description of the cognitive structure was worked out for TEFL/TESL application letters, this study seemed to find support for Bhatia's (1993) findings on the cross-cultural variations. Supporting Bhatia's research, Chinese students tended to restrain from discussing their qualifications extensively. In contrast to British applicants who offered self-appraisal, Chinese applicants chose to present their positive self by using self-glorification, self-degradation and adversary-glorification strategies. The findings in the study suggested that it was not the postgraduate school application letters which presented problems for Chinese applicants, but rather the (British) English postgraduate school application letters. The lack of explicit instructions in writing processes, procedures and strategies in writing (British) English application letters seemed to pose more serious problems. Students should not only be provided with examples of letter layout, Opening and Closing phrases, but also with information and awareness-raising activities which dealt with the relevant cross-cultural variations between native and non-native speakers' application letters. Although genre analysis appeared to be that it might encourage prescription rather than creativity in writing TEFL/TESL application letters, we must realize that we can only be more effectively creative when we are well aware of the rules and conventions of the genre. As Bhatia (1993) pointed out, "Exploiting rules and conventions for the sake of creativity and innovation is good but it is much better to do so after one has developed at least a good awareness of, if not a good mastery over such conventions" (p.40).

All in all, this investigation was intended to identify the tendency rather than to stereotype the structure of TEFL/TESL application letters. I hope this study could be of value in understanding the moves and cross-cultural variations in British and Chinese TEFL/TESL application letters; if not, at least to provide some insights into this sub-genre of the genre of promotional literature.

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