

# From Résumé to Rhetoric: A Genre-Based Analysis and Pedagogical Application of English Job Application Letters

Ian Hart

Center for Global Education and Exchange

Toyo University

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## Abstract

This article explores the application of a genre-based approach to the analysis of English Job Application Letters (EJALs), with a particular focus on Japanese university students and graduates preparing for international studies or business careers. The aim of the study is to examine the move-step structures and linguistic features of EJALs in order to provide pedagogical insights for English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Using a corpus of 15 authentic solicited letters, the analysis has revealed that most of the identified moves are commonly employed, and that grammatical features such as tense usage and register are strongly move-specific. Building on these findings, the study also reports on a classroom application in which explicit instruction in moves and language features helped students produce more coherent and professional cover letters. These results underscore the importance of genre-based pedagogy for equipping non-native English learners with the skills necessary for effective business writing in globalized professional environments. This study is believed to contribute to ESP by demonstrating how genre analysis can be directly translated into pedagogical practice for Japanese learners.

*Keywords:* genre analysis, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), job application letters, move-step analysis, Japanese EFL learners

## Introduction

In recent years, the need for English business communication has grown rapidly within Japanese universities. Many institutions have established new language departments aimed at preparing graduates for participation in international business contexts. Increasing numbers of students now aspire to work overseas or for foreign-affiliated companies, while domestic firms engaged in global markets are also adopting English as their working language. Notably, large Japanese corporations such as Rakuten and Uniqlo have designated English as their official language of communication, requiring graduates to be proficient in both spoken and written

business discourse.

As more graduates seek to enter such organizations, it has become essential for them to understand international job application practices. One important distinction is the English Job Application Letter (EJAL), or cover letter, which remains uncommon in Japan but is widely expected elsewhere. As Baugh (1991) explains, the EJAL serves both as an introduction of yourself and a strategy to interest employers sufficiently to read your resume and to grant you an interview. Mastery of this genre, therefore, is a crucial skill for Japanese graduates aiming to compete in globalized employment markets.

Genre analysis has been widely applied in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) research to better understand the communicative purposes, structural moves, and linguistic patterns of workplace texts (Bhatia, 1993; Henry & Roseberry, 2001; Swales, 1990; Wang, 2005; Wijayanti, 2017). Building on this tradition, the present study employs an established move-step framework to investigate 15 authentic EJALs. By examining both structural organization and linguistic features such as tense and register, this paper aims to provide insights that are not only descriptive but also pedagogically valuable for the teaching of business writing to non-native English learners. While many studies have analyzed EJALs in other contexts, few have examined their pedagogical application for Japanese learners.

### **Genre-based Approach to Analysis**

Since the 1980s, applied linguists working in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) have increasingly turned to genre analysis as a way of understanding written discourse, according to Shamsudin et al. (2012). Swales (1990) defines genres as communicative events that are goal-directed and shaped by shared communicative purposes. These events typically exhibit schematic structures with identifiable beginnings, middles, and endings. Building on this view, Dudley-Evans (1987) described genre analysis as “a system of analysis that can reveal something of the patterns of organization of a genre and the language used to express those patterns in the light of communicative purposes” (p.229), highlighting its value in uncovering form–function relationships.

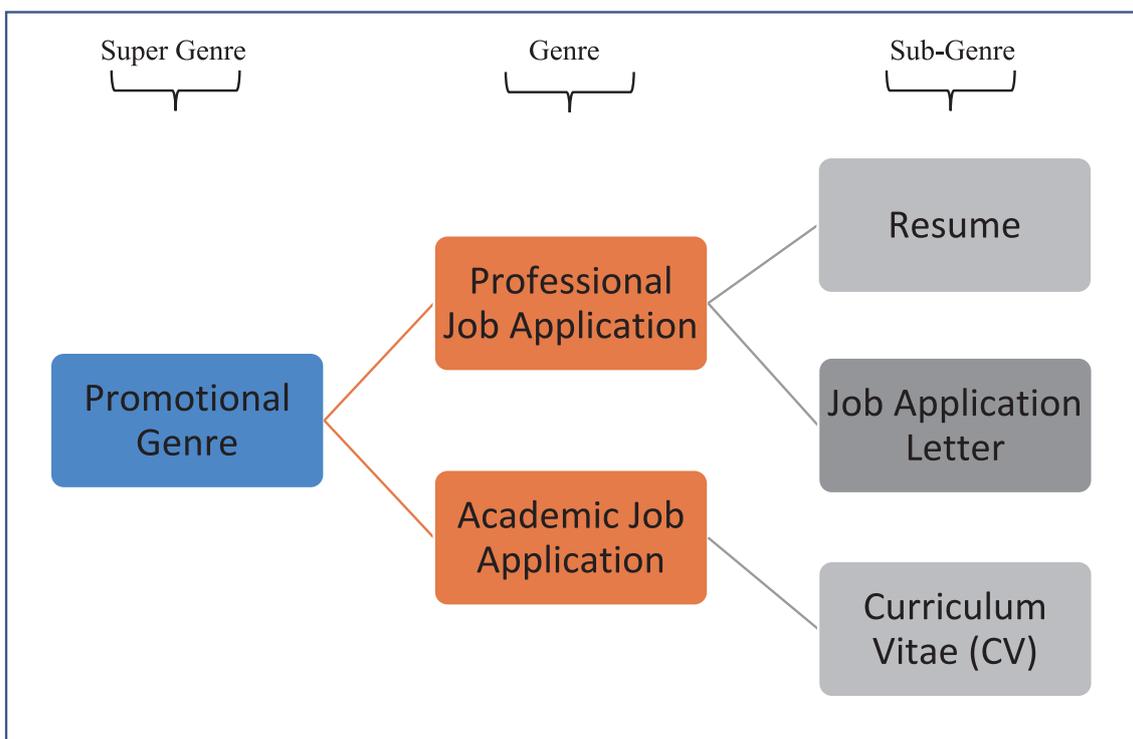
In the case of English Job Application Letters (EJALs), adherence to these formal conventions is essential to fulfilling the communicative purpose of persuading an employer. At the same time, standards of organization and language use are not universal; they are shaped by socio-cultural influences that vary across language communities. As Connor et al. (2002) show in their comparative study of business English writing in Belgium, Finland, and the United States, differences in rhetorical expectations can pose significant challenges for writers attempting to transfer their skills across contexts. This is particularly relevant for Japanese learners, who must adapt from domestic practices, where cover letters are rarely used, to international norms that

demand genre-specific rhetorical strategies.

### EJALs as a Genre

Previous studies of English Job Application Letters (EJALs) have examined both their generic structures and linguistic features (Bhatia, 1989; Henry & Roseberry, 2001). Bhatia’s (2004) framework of genre generalization identifies the job application letter as a sub-genre of both academic and professional applications (Figure. 1). These are forms of promotional discourse that share the same communicative purpose: to persuade the reader and, ultimately, “to elicit a specific response from its reader, in this case a call for interview” (Bhatia, 1993, p. 45).

Figure 1 Levels of genre generalization



(Bhatia, 2004, p. 59)

As a promotional genre, the job application letter functions not only to introduce the candidate but also to summarize qualifications, highlight strengths, and spark the interest of the employer. This requires writers to meet audience expectations regarding both structure and language use. Early genre studies of EJALs provided foundational frameworks for analyzing these rhetorical strategies, particularly through move-step analysis, which reveals how applicants organize content and deploy language to achieve persuasive effect. Such frameworks are essential for understanding

the conventions of EJALs and for guiding pedagogical practice in teaching business writing.

This is especially relevant in the Japanese context, where traditional application practices differ considerably. Japanese companies typically require a standardized résumé (*irekisho*), which emphasizes factual, chronological information with limited space for self-promotion. Unlike EJALs, the *irekisho* does not provide an opportunity to highlight individuality, persuasive self-evaluation, or rhetorical strategies designed to impress the employer. As a result, Japanese graduates seeking employment in international companies, or domestic firms that have adopted globalized hiring practices, must learn to adapt to the rhetorical expectations of EJALs, a task that can be challenging without explicit instruction in genre conventions.

### **Move and Step Analysis**

The most well-known example of the analysis of moves and steps in genre was created by Swales (1990). Swales created the Create a Research Space (CARS) model (*Table 1*), which consists of three “moves” with several possible steps within them. Ding (2007) defines a move as a “functional unit in a text used for some identifiable purpose” and “it is often used to identify the textual regularities in certain genres of writing” (p. 369). It can also be used to “describe the functions (or communicative intentions) which particular portions of text realize in the relationship to the overall task” (Connor, Davis, & De Rycker, 1995, p. 463). A step is a smaller unit than a move and it is placed on a lower level than a move. The length and size of a move and step can vary. Sometimes they may be one sentence while other times they can be several paragraphs long. However, they must contain a least one proposition (Connor & Mauranen, 1999). According to Swales, moves/steps can vary in sequence, can be repeated, and may be embedded within another (1990). Swales used this model to identify the schematic structures of introductions in 48 academic research articles from three different disciplinary domains, with the hope of reflecting a common written academic genre. Since its first publication, the CARS model has been widely studied, revealing its recursive nature, and validating its structure across various disciplines (Bruce, 2009; Cross & Oppenheim, 2006; Martin, 2003). The CARS model has influenced genre analysis in ESP, especially concerning the teaching of academic writing. Since then, many researchers have created their own moves and step patterns that can be used in different disciplines. This includes work by Bhatia (1993), Henry and Roseberry (2001), Wang (2005), and Furka (2008). In these variations, moves can be omitted, changed, or rearranged to suit the writers’ rhetorical response (Dudley-Evans, 2000).

**Table 1** Swales' (1990) CARS model for research article introductions

<b>Move 1: Establishing a Territory</b>
Step 1: Claiming centrality, and/or
Step 2: Making topic generalizations(s), and/or
Step 3: Reviewing items of previous research
<b>Move 2: Establishing a niche</b>
Step 1A: Counter-claiming, or
Step 1B: Indicating a gap, or
Step 1C: Question-raising, or
Step 1D: Continuing a tradition
<b>Move 3: Occupying a niche</b>
Step 1A: Outlining purposes
Step 1B: Announcing present research
Step 2: Announcing principal findings
Step 3: Indicating RA structure

Bhatia (1993) pioneered the study of genre analysis on job application letters. Bhatia presented a seven-move model, where each move functions differently (Table 2). According to Bhatia (1993), the seven-move structure provides a rhetorical organization that writers of a job application letter can follow. With Bhatia's pattern, the writer does not need to use all of the moves. This was evident in Fung's (2014) study, where only five of the moves were necessary to analyze sample academic job application letters. Fung found that Move 3 (*Offering incentives*) and Move 6 (*Using pressure tactics*) are not employed in academic job application letters. Reasons were given such as the

**Table 2** Bhatia's (1993) seven-move structural model of a job application letter

<b>Move</b>	<b>Descriptors</b>
Move 1: Establishing credentials	The writer establishes his credentials as someone who can fulfill the needs of the addressee.
Move 2: Introducing candidature <i>Step 1: Offering candidature</i>	The writer introduces himself The writer mentions the offer that he is referring to.
<i>Step 2: Essential detailing of candidature</i>	The writer presents his essential details for the job applied.
<i>Step 3: Indicating value of candidature</i>	The writer evaluates himself for the job applied.
Move 3: Offering incentives	The writer offers incentives to the addressee.
Move 4: Enclosing documents	The writer encloses documents to complement the letter.
Move 5: Using pressure tactics	The writer puts pressure on the addressee to solicit desired responses.
Move 6: Soliciting response	The writer solicits further contact with the addressee.
Move 7: Ending politely	The writer ends the letter politely.

academic discourse community emphasizing “greater value on the applicant’s educational background, research profiles and teaching experiences which are largely conveyed in Move 2”, and the use of pressure tactics not being necessary when only “niche skills and qualifications are highly sought after” (p. 37). In addition, the order of some of the moves can be rearranged. This provides more freedom for the writer to organize the moves in a way that best suits their communicative function. However, Bhatia (1993) explains that some of the moves are “obligatory”, as they are present in all promotional letters. These moves include *Introducing the offer*, *Soliciting response*, and *Ending politely*.

Bhatia’s (1993) move structure has been utilized as a framework for a variety of studies in various locations around the world (Khan & Tan, 2012; Mustaffa et al, 2007; Wang, 2005). However, Henry & Roseberry (2001) believed that Bhatia’s model neglected the idea of analysis in the letters of native speakers. This led to Henry and Roseberry identifying eleven moves in their move analysis of 40 job application letters written by native speakers (*Table 3*). Of the eleven moves, Henry and Roseberry explained that two of them can be accomplished by different strategies (*Table 4*). However, unlike Swales’ (1990) and Bhatia’s (1993) models, these were not considered to be steps as none of the strategies “appeared to be part of a series in a specific order” (p. 159).

**Table 3** Henry & Roseberry’s (2001) eleven-move structural model of a job application letter

Move	Definition
Opening (O)	The writer identifies the target and invites the target to read the letter.
Referring to a job advertisement (AD)	The writer refers to the advertisement in which the position was named and described.
Offering candidature (CA)	The writer states an interest in applying for the position.
Stating reasons for applying (RA)	The writer gives reasons for wanting the position.
Stating availability (A)	The writer indicates when he or she would be able to take up the position.
Promoting the candidate (P)	The writer presents selected information demonstrating qualifications and abilities relevant to the desired position.
Stipulating terms and conditions of employment (TC)	The writer indicates expectations regarding salary, working hours, and other relevant contractual matters.
Naming referees (R)	The writer names referees who will support the candidature.
Enclosing documents (EN)	The writer lists documents enclosed with the letter
Polite ending (PE)	The writer ends the letter in a conventional manner.
Signing off (SO)	The writer signs his or her name in a respectful manner, thus claiming ownership of the letter

**Table 4** Henry & Roseberry's (2001) list of moves that can be accomplished by different moves

Move	Strategies
Promoting the candidate (P)	Listing relevant skills, and abilities. Stating how skills and abilities were obtained. Listing qualifications. Naming present job. Predicting success. Listing publications. Giving reasons for leaving present job. Demonstrating knowledge of target position.
Polite Ending (PE)	Welcoming response. Inviting favorable consideration. Thanking. Offering to provide further information.

Differences between Bhatia's (1993) and Henry and Roseberry's (2001) move structure include the combination of *establishing credentials* and *offering incentives* into a new moved name *Promoting candidature*, as Henry and Roseberry believed that they held the same communicative purpose. In addition, four additional moves were found, including *referring to a job advertisement*, *stating reasons for applying*, *stipulating terms and conditions of employment*, and *naming referees*. Finally, the move, *using pressure*, proposed by Bhatia, was not included in Henry and Roseberry's structure as they believed "I look forward to..." is used to signal the end of a letter, rather than put pressure on the reader to reply.

This insight led to other researchers examining move structures that better-suited writers of other languages. Wang (2005) examined the schematic structure of job application letters by Chinese applicants. Their research led to the addition of four new moves, including *establishing self*, *offering self*, *referring to enclosed materials*, and *inviting further action*. In an examination of job application letters written by Hungarian EFL learners, Furka (2008) found that self-appraisal was not valued positively due to cultural differences. This was highlighted in Upton & Connor's (2001) study, which took a cross-cultural concept into account, where move interpretation differences were found between Americans, Belgians, and Finns. Al-Ali (2004) also carried out a contrastive analysis between Arabic and English job application letters. Due to different moves being used on either side, moves were emitted to suit both Americans and Jordanians. Move analysis by these researchers supports the belief that different languages use the same genre in different ways.

Job applicants from different cultural backgrounds use and arrange rhetorical moves of a job application letter similarly in general, but differently in specific. However, the main communicative purpose of this genre is always to "elicit a specific response from its reader" (Bhatia, 1993, p. 45)

or to “create a desire on the part of the employer to hire the job applicants” (Al-Ali, 2004, p. 5). This has important implications for Japanese learners. Whereas domestic hiring practices emphasize the *rirekisho* (a factual, standardized résumé with minimal rhetorical elaboration), international employers expect applicants to craft persuasive EJALs that highlight individual qualifications through carefully structured moves. Understanding these rhetorical frameworks is therefore essential for Japanese graduates aiming to succeed in globalized employment markets.

### **Grammatical and Lexical Features**

For a job application letter to be successful, it is important for the applicants’ writing to be free of grammatical and word errors. In addition, Henry and Roseberry (2001) observed a correlation between the moves of a job application letter and the tenses used. In Allison, Townend, and Emmerson’s (2008) study, they found that it is not necessary for applicants to understand all English tenses, as long as they understood past-simple, present-simple, present-perfect, and present progressive. Faiza (2012) states that the present progressive tense is often used by the applicant to show recognition of what kind of individual the employer is looking for and also to refer to the source of the job advertisement. Wang (2005) also suggested that the present progressive is used to politely end the letter. The present perfect tense is more apparent at the start of the letter during the introductory stages, where the applicant details their candidature and highlights their work experience (Bhatia, 1993).

The choice of appropriate register is also an important factor as it indicates a degree of formality in a business letter. Butt et al. (2000, as cited in Young, Fitzgerald, & Fitzgerald, 2018) explain the notion of genre as follows: “When texts share the same context of the situation to a greater or lesser extent, they will share the same experiential, interpersonal and textual meanings and so they belong to the same register” (p. 9). Register refers to the variety of language that varies according to the way it is used in different situations and can be defined as “a configuration of meanings that are typically associated with a particular situational configuration of field, mode, and tenor” (Young, Fitzgerald, & Fitzgerald, 2018). Henry and Roseberry (2001) also highlight register in their study and refer to it as “the totality of all lexico-grammatical realizations of a genre” (p. 154).

**Table 5** *Definitions of Field, Tenor and Mode (Young, Fitzgerald, Fitzgerald, 2018, p.230)*

<b>1. Field</b>	This accounts for what language is being used to talk about, accounting for the content of what is being said in different contexts.
<b>2. Tenor</b>	This explains the types of interactions between interactants carried out through language in the situation.
<b>3. Mode</b>	This has to do with the nature of language itself, whether it is spoken or written, or spontaneous or planned discourse. Each mode – spoken or written – and its subcategories have certain characteristics that determine discursive choices in different situations.

## Literature Gap and Research Questions

Although prior studies have established the structural and linguistic characteristics of English Job Application Letters across various cultural contexts, limited research has examined how genre-analytic findings can be systematically translated into classroom pedagogy for Japanese learners. In particular, there is a lack of empirical work linking move analysis directly to instructional design and observable improvements in student writing. To address this gap, the present study investigates both the rhetorical features of authentic EJALs and their pedagogical application in a Japanese university setting. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What rhetorical moves and linguistic features characterize English Job Application Letters in a corpus of authentic solicited applications?
2. To what extent are these moves and features consistently realized across professional fields?
3. How does explicit genre-based instruction influence Japanese university students' ability to produce coherent and professional EJALs?

## Methodology

### Data Collection

A total of 15 solicited English Job Application Letters (EJALs) were selected for analysis. Solicited letters are written in response to a specific, advertised vacancy and are addressed to a known employer (Bhatia, 1993). The sample texts were collected from a range of publicly available online sources and represented different professional fields, written by successful job applicants. To protect anonymity, all personal details, such as names, company names, and addresses, were

removed. Letterhead details were also excluded, as they are not considered rhetorical moves within the genre.

### **Analytical Framework**

The study employed a genre-based approach, focusing on rhetorical moves and linguistic realizations. Henry and Roseberry's (2001) move-structure model was adopted as the primary analytical framework. This model was chosen because, unlike Swales' (1990) framework, it was derived specifically from job application letters and provides insights into the conventions of native speaker writing within an ESP context.

### **Grammatical and Lexical Analysis**

In addition to identifying rhetorical moves, the analysis examined grammatical and lexical features in order to highlight how language is used to realize communicative purposes. Particular attention was given to tense usage, such as the present perfect in introductions or the present progressive in closings, and to register, which reflects the level of formality and professionalism expected in business communication. Together, these dimensions provide a more comprehensive picture of how EJALs achieve their persuasive function.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Structural Features**

#### ***Moves***

Out of the eleven moves, only nine were identified in this study (*Table 6*). *Stipulating terms and conditions of employment* and *naming referees* did not occur. Also, *stating availability* only occurred once. Generally, the terms and conditions of employment and the start date of the position tend to be decided by the employer and presented in the job advertisement. Therefore, it would not be necessary for the applicant to discuss these in the application, in most cases. It is common for referees to be listed in the applicants' CV/resume, meaning the move *enclosed documents* would satisfy the function of this move. In Henry and Roseberry's (2001) study, similar findings were identified, with *stating availability* and *naming referees* only occurring twice, and *stipulating terms and conditions of employment* only taking place four times over a total of 40 EJALS. Henry and Roseberry explain that these moves are optional and that "context plays a crucial role in deciding which moves are optional and which obligatory" (p. 159). This study supports Henry and Roseberry's belief that O, CA, P, PE, and SO are considered obligatory moves.

**Table 6** Occurrence frequency of moves in the current study

Moves	Occurrences	Percentage %
Opening (O)	15	100%
Referring to a job advertisement (AD)	12	73.3%
Offering candidature (CA)	14	93.3%
Stating reasons for applying (RA)	11	73.3%
Stating availability (A)	1	6.7%
Promoting the candidate (P)	15	100%
Stipulating terms and conditions of employment (TC)	0	0%
Naming referees (R)	0	0%
Enclosing documents (EN)	9	60%
Polite ending (PE)	15	100%
Signing off (SO)	15	100%

*Opening* occurred in all of the samples by referring to the recipient's title and surname or position (e.g., Dear Mr. Hart, Dear Hiring Manager). This move is common in all business letters (Henry & Roseberry, 2001).

*Referring to a job advertisement* and *offering candidature* often happened within the same sentence, with twelve cases of *offering candidature* taking place first (e.g., "I am writing to apply for the position of Media Relations Assistant Manager, which I saw advertised on MediaJobs.com"). In the letter related to Journalism, *offering candidature* did not explicitly occur, although it is indirectly implied when a reason is stated referring to a job advertisement in the following sentence: "Your news reporter opening advertised on Monster is an excellent match to my qualifications". In four samples, no reference is given to the job advertisement, supporting Henry and Roseberry's (2001) idea that it depends on the context. In Letters 12 (Marketing) and 13 (Management), the applicants have been working in the same industry for an extended period of time. It is possible that they learned about the new positions by word-of-mouth or through other connections/relations.

In eleven of the letters, *stating reasons for applying* was used to introduce positive self-evaluation. This was done with the use of verbs, in particular, "believe". For example, "I believe that my extensive experience in media makes me an ideal candidate". In ten of the letters, this move is used as a transition into *promoting the candidate*.

The move, *promoting candidate*, allows the writer to present "selected information demonstrating qualifications and abilities relevant to the desired position" (Henry & Roseberry, 2001, p. 159). In this study, the move accounted for the majority of the letters. For example, it accounted for 79.1% of the letter related to Marketing, with the pattern of discourse ranging from expository to narrative. This is Henry and Roseberry's (2001) introduction of strategies, rather than

steps that follow a set pattern. *listing of qualifications* and *listing of publications* did not occur often. Also, *giving reasons for leaving present job* was not evident in any of the samples. One explanation is that the majority of applicants were university graduates, so they may not have had jobs in the same field before.

The move *enclosing documents*, also proved to be optional, as it only occurred in nine of the letters. Important documents tend to be attached to job application letters, so the applicants may not have needed to address this. Supportive documents are also a requirement for most applications, so a cover letter would not be read without them being submitted.

The final two moves, *polite ending* and *signing off* were used to close the letters and occurred in all samples. One of the strategies noted by Henry and Roseberry (2001), *welcoming response* was evident in most of the samples. This was used to suggest further contact (e.g., interview, telephone call). However, in six of the letters, a more direct strategy was implemented to guarantee a response. Direct speech was used using the verb “will” in sentences such as:

- *I will call your office next week to inquire...*
- *I will call your office next Wednesday to follow up...*
- *...and will email you within the next week to arrange a time to speak further.*

In these cases, I feel Bhatia’s (1993) steps *using pressure tactics* and *soliciting response* a better suited to describe the strategy being used. Finally, the writer “signs his or her name in a respectful manner, thus claiming ownership of the letter” (Henry & Roseberry, 2001, p. 159).

The following fields had the same move patterns: Design and Engineering, Marketing and Management (see *Table 7*). Although, there is no strong evidence to explain why this happened. *Opening* always occurred first, and *polite ending* and *signing off* always occurred last. The remaining moves did not always follow the same pattern, with some moves (RA and PE) occurring more than once in some of the letters.

## **Linguistic Features**

### **Words and Register**

As in Henry and Roseberry’s (2001) study, the most frequently used word was the pronoun ‘I’ (see *Table 8*), used as a cohesive device that “enables the genre as a whole to lack the wide range of cohesive ties found in other genres” (p. 160). The words my and your were frequently used, especially in the opening and closing stages (O, CA, EN, PE) to highlight relationships between the applicant and the position available. The conditional, would, was used 23 times, which can be seen as a politeness strategy, as it is considered more polite than want. There was significant use of the

Table 7 Organization of moves in each individual EJAL

No.	Field	Move pattern	Freq.
1	Science	O + CA + AD + EN + P + RA + P + A + PE + SO	1
2	Publishing	O + CA + RA + P + EN + PE + SO	1
3	Media	O + CA + AD + RA + P + AD + P + PE + SO	1
4	Healthcare	O + AD + CA + P + EN + PE + SO	1
5	Design	O + CA + AD + RA + P + EN + PE + SO	2
6	Sports Coaching	O + CA + AD + RA + P + RA + PE + SO	1
7	Journalism	O + RA + AD + P + RA + P + RA + P + EN + PE + SO	1
8	Retail	O + CA + AD + P + EN + PE + SO	1
9	Programming	O + CA + AD + EN + RA + P + PE + SO	1
10	Engineering	O + CA + AD + RA + P + EN + PE + SO	2
11	Social Work	O + CA + AD + P + PE + SO	1
12	Marketing	O + CA + RA + P + PE + SO	2
13	Management	O + CA + RA + P + PE + SO	2
14	Education	O + CA + AD + P + RA + PE + SO	1
15	Human Resources	O + AD + CA + P + PE + EN + PE + SO	1

Table 8 Frequently used bigrams and trigrams in total sample (15 EJALs)

Order of Frequency	Bigrams	Trigrams
1	I am	I am a
2	I have	for your time
3	as a	your time and
4	in the	thank you for
5	for your	you for your

word and, especially when highlighting skills and abilities, *promoting the candidate*. It was used in binary phrases, mainly with two nouns, but also with adjectives and verbs.

Table 9 lists the binary phrases used. Writers “most likely feel that binary expressions of this kind seem more complete, and provide an additional promotional opportunity”, making them common in promotional genres (Henry & Roseberry, 2001, p. 16). This means that from a pedagogical perspective, it is important to teach the use of binary expressions to language learners, to conform to the norms of EJALs, and provide validity to a prospective employer.

Table 10 lists other genre-specific words that appeared throughout the samples. Words such as position, experience, skills, and company may be considered genre-specific, highlighting the importance for teaching of such vocabularies to conform to the conventions of the genre. These words also tend to be move-specific, such as position being used when *offering candidature*, and experience occurring more when *promoting the candidate*. In addition, Table 11 shows examples of field-specific words.

**Table 9** *Pairs of nouns, verbs and adjectives*

<b>Nouns</b>	<b>Verbs</b>	<b>Adjectives</b>
Studies and research	Developed and pitched	Exciting and challenging
Research and experience	Writing and editing	Critical and technical
Institution and pioneer	Play and grow	Strong and immediate
Skills and attention	Report and work	Deep and varied
Time and consideration	Publish and promote	News and feature
Teams and families	Developed and supported	Local and national
Questions and answers	Learning and applying	Dependable and dedicated
Skills and knowledge		Outgoing and friendly
Lesson and practices		Experienced and professional
Issues and events		Unique and enriching
Expertise and knowledge		Enthusiastic and strong
Awards and recognition		Trained and prepared
Organizer and planner		
Experience and education		
Education and career		
Systems and design		
Techniques and strategies		
Creativity and enthusiasm		
Content and ads		
Restaurants and bars		

**Table 10** *Genre-specific words in the total sample (15 EJALS)*

<b>Genre specific words</b>	<b>Occurrences in sample (15 EJALS)</b>
Position	26
Experience	24
Would	23
Time	19
Work	15
Writing	14
Skills	14
Company	13
Team	13
College	12
Media	12
Strong	11
Social	10
Thank	11
Graduate	9
Opportunity	9
Resume	8
Apply	8

**Table 11** Examples of field-specific words

Journalism	Retail	Marketing	Education
Communications	Volume	Social media	Teacher
Newspaper	Revenue	Industry	Qualifications
Report	Merchandising	Activation	Certificate
Advertised	Inventory	Research	Practicum
News	Cash	Conversion	Extra-curricular
Articles	Customer	Campaigns	Academically
Editor	Staffing	Technological	Interpersonal
Blogger	Satisfaction	Action plan	Student
Political	Business	Markets	Faculty
Newscasts	Employees	Platforms	Classroom
Website	Turnover	Strategies	
Covering	Shrinkage	Creative	
Readers	Budget	Analyzing	
Media		Consumer	
Digital			

**Tense**

As previously stated by Henry and Roseberry (2001), tense use was also move-specific. There was a clear correlation between the common linguistic features in each individual move. *Table 12* shows the tenses most used with each move, and the keywords used. This suggests that the function of each move determines the tense used to achieve it.

**Pedagogical Priorities for Teaching EJALS to Japanese Learners**

The genre analysis of English Job Application Letters highlights several areas that require focused instructional attention when teaching Japanese EFL learners. These areas reflect differences between Japanese domestic application practices and the rhetorical expectations of international business communication rather than general linguistic deficiencies.

The move *promoting the candidate* emerged as the most prominent and rhetorically flexible component of EJALS, accounting for the largest proportion of text in the corpus. This move poses a particular challenge for Japanese learners, whose prior experience with standardized résumé formats encourages factual listing and discourages explicit self-promotion. Instruction should therefore emphasize evidence-based promotion, guiding learners to connect skills and experience directly to job requirements and to articulate value through concise narrative elaboration.

The analysis also showed that *stating reasons for applying* frequently functions as a transition into promotional content, establishing alignment between the applicant and the organization. Learner writing, however, often relies on generic expressions of desire that fail to demonstrate audience awareness. Pedagogical focus is needed to help students frame motivation as rhetorical

**Table 12** Common tense usage during selected moves

Moves	Common tenses	Keywords
Offering candidature (CA)	Present progressive	Interest, writing, express
<i>Referring to a job advertisement</i> (AD)	Simple past tense	Advertised, posted in, position
Stating reasons for applying (RA)	Present tenses	Apply, career, interest
Stating availability (A)	Future Progressive	Available, will be, a specific date
Promoting the candidate (P) - Listing relevant skills, and abilities. - Stating how skills and abilities were obtained. - Listing qualifications. - Naming present job. - Predicting success. - Demonstrating knowledge of target position.	Present simple tense Past tense narrative  Simple past tense Present tenses Present tenses Present tenses	Experience, team, strong, have College, student, work, university  Skills, graduate, have, completed Position, company, work Know, will, feel, enjoy, love Know, hear, company
Enclosing documents (EN)	Present perfect	Enclosed, resume, CV
Polite ending (PE) - Welcoming response. - Inviting favorable consideration. - Thanking. - Offering to provide further information.	Present tenses Present tenses Present tenses Present tenses	Join, excited, and look forward Will, arrange, consider, beneficial Thank you, consideration Email, phone, contact, discuss, speak, meet

alignment by referencing organizational characteristics and linking them to personal qualifications.

From a linguistic perspective, tense usage in EJALs was found to be strongly move-specific. For example, the present progressive commonly realizes *offering candidature*, while past tense and present perfect forms are used to describe prior experience when *promoting the candidate*. Japanese learners often approach tense as a purely grammatical issue, resulting in inconsistent usage. Teaching tense as a rhetorical resource tied to communicative function can improve both accuracy and appropriacy.

Register control represents another key instructional priority. The corpus revealed consistent use of formal lexico-grammatical patterns and indirect politeness strategies, particularly in closing moves. In contrast, learner texts often contain overly direct or colloquial expressions. Instruction should therefore focus on how politeness and professionalism in English business writing are achieved through modality and indirectness rather than honorific forms.

Finally, the move analysis demonstrated that EJALs allow flexibility in move selection and sequencing, with certain moves absent or repeated depending on context. Learners' reliance on rigid templates can inhibit effective writing. Explicit instruction in move optionality can help students understand genre conventions as adaptable resources rather than fixed rules, facilitating a shift from résumé-style reporting to rhetorical organization.

In summary, the genre analysis suggests that instruction in EJAL writing for Japanese learners should prioritize promotional self-presentation, audience alignment, move-specific tense usage, register control, and genre flexibility. Addressing these areas explicitly can support learners in adapting domestic application practices to international professional writing conventions.

### **Pedagogical Application**

Building upon the findings, pilot study was used to investigate whether explicit genre-based instruction, informed by the move-step analysis of English Job Application Letters (EJALs), could support Japanese university students in producing more coherent and professionally appropriate cover letters. Specifically, the study aimed to:

1. Examine how students apply rhetorical moves and linguistic features (tense, register) after targeted instruction.
2. Explore the feasibility of integrating genre analysis findings into a Business English curriculum.
3. Provide preliminary evidence to inform larger-scale classroom interventions in the future.

### **Teaching English Job Application Letters Through Genre-Based Instruction**

The intervention was conducted as an action research project in a Business English Communication class over one semester. A total of twelve undergraduate students, who belonged to various faculties, participated in weekly 90-minute lessons. The instructor, informed by the prior genre analysis, explicitly taught students the obligatory and optional moves (e.g., *Opening*, *offering candidature*, *promoting the candidate*, *polite ending*), along with associated tense usage and register. Instruction included scaffolded exercises: drafting introductions, practicing promotional language, and producing polite closings.

Due to ethical considerations, all students received the same treatment; therefore, no control group was used. Data for evaluation included classroom observations, written drafts, and final EJAL submissions.

Drawing on the findings of the genre analysis presented earlier, this section proposes a structured, genre-based instructional approach for teaching EJALs in a Business English or English

for Specific Purposes (ESP) context. The pedagogical framework is informed by established genre theory (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990) and empirical studies of job application letters (Henry and Roseberry, 2001; Wang, 2005), and it aims to bridge the gap between descriptive genre analysis and classroom practice.

The instructional sequence is organized into five stages: genre awareness, explicit move instruction, linguistic realization, guided production, and independent performance. This allows learners to gradually internalize genre conventions while retaining flexibility in rhetorical choice.

### **Genre Awareness and Communicative Purpose**

Instruction begins with explicit awareness-raising activities designed to foreground the communicative purpose of EJALs as a promotional genre. As demonstrated in the genre analysis, EJALs function primarily to persuade employers and elicit a specific response, typically an invitation to interview (Bhatia, 1993). This purpose contrasts sharply with Japanese application conventions, such as the *rirekisho*, which emphasize factual reporting and standardized formatting rather than rhetorical persuasion.

To address this contrast, learners are guided through comparative analysis of Japanese application documents and authentic English job application letters. This activity helps students recognize differences in audience orientation, degrees of self-promotion, and rhetorical expectations. Such contrastive awareness is particularly important in the Japanese EFL context, where cultural norms may discourage explicit self-evaluation (Furka, 2008; Upton and Connor, 2001). By framing EJALs as a genre governed by shared professional conventions rather than personal stylistic preference, students are better positioned to adopt unfamiliar rhetorical strategies.

### **Classroom Activities**

#### **Contrastive Warm-Up**

##### **Show:**

- A Japanese *rirekisho*
- A professional English EJAL

##### **Ask students:**

- *Which one persuades?*
- *Which one only reports facts?*

Elicit the idea that EJALs are promotional genres.

**Outcome:** Students understand why self-promotion is required.

### **Explicit Instruction in Rhetorical Moves**

Once students understand the communicative purpose of EJALs, instruction shifts to explicit teaching of rhetorical move structure. Students are introduced to both obligatory and optional

moves identified in the corpus, including opening, *offering candidature*, *promoting the candidate*, *polite ending*, and *signing off* (Henry and Roseberry, 2001).

Rather than presenting these moves as fixed templates, instruction emphasizes their functional roles. Students analyze authentic EJALs to identify move boundaries and sequencing, through labeling or color-coding activities. This analytical work reflects the recursive and flexible nature of move realization observed in the data (see *Table 7*) and reinforces the idea that moves may vary in length, order, and frequency depending on context (Dudley-Evans, 2000; Swales, 1990).

Through this process, learners develop an understanding of genre structure as purposeful and adaptive rather than rigid, an insight that is essential for effective professional writing.

**Table 13** *Teaching Tool: Move Function Table*

Move	What this move does	Key question for students
Opening	Establishes relationship	Who am I writing to?
Referring to ad	Shows legitimacy	Where did I find this job?
Offering candidature	States purpose	Why am I writing?
Stating reasons	Aligns with company	Why this company?
Promoting candidate	Persuades employer	Why should they choose me?
Enclosing documents	Signals completeness	What else am I sending?
Polite ending	Invites response	What do I want next?
Signing off	Closes relationship	How do I end professionally?

### Classroom Activities

#### 1. Move Identification Task

- Give students an authentic EJAL.
- Color-code each move.
- Compare answers in pairs.

#### 2. Move Scramble

- Provide a scrambled letter (moves out of order).
- Students reorder based on communicative logic.

Outcome: Students internalize rhetorical logic, not memorized formulas

### Linking Moves to Linguistic Realizations

Building on move awareness, instruction then focuses on the relationship between rhetorical moves and linguistic features. As shown in the grammatical and lexical analysis, language choices in EJALs are strongly move-specific. For example, the present progressive tense frequently realizes the move *offering candidature*, while past tense narratives and present perfect constructions are commonly used when *promoting the candidate* through prior experience (Henry and Roseberry, 2001; Wang, 2005).

These findings are incorporated into classroom instruction through guided sentence analysis

and rewriting tasks, enabling students to observe how grammatical choices contribute to persuasion and professionalism. Attention is paid to register, as the corpus analysis demonstrated consistent use of formal lexico-grammatical patterns associated with business communication (Halliday and Hasan, 1989; Young, Fitzgerald, and Fitzgerald, 2018).

This stage encourages learners to move beyond a narrow focus on grammatical correctness and toward a functional understanding of how language realizes communicative intent within specific rhetorical contexts.

### Classroom Activities

1. **Bad to Better Rewriting**

- Students improve sentences by:
  - adjusting tense
  - increasing specificity
  - improving register

2. **Promotion Sentence Builder**

- **Scaffold:** Skill + where/how developed + result  
(e.g., *I developed strong analytical skills during my internship, where I assisted with market research and reporting.*)

**Outcome:** Students see how grammar serves persuasion, not correctness alone.

### Guided Writing and Scaffolded Production

Following explicit instruction, students engage in scaffolded writing activities that mirror the staged development of genre competence. Rather than drafting complete EJALs immediately, learners compose individual moves sequentially, beginning with opening and *offering candidature* before progressing to promotional and closing moves.

This approach reflects the move-by-move analytical framework used in the study and allows instructors to provide targeted feedback on discourse function rather than surface-level errors. Peer review activities are structured around move checklists derived from the analytical model, encouraging students to evaluate whether each move fulfills its communicative purpose. Such scaffolding has been shown to be particularly effective for learners who struggle with self-promotion or rhetorical elaboration (Hyland, 2007).

### Classroom Activities

#### Move-by-Move Practice

##### Practice structure:

- **Task 1:** *Opening + Offering candidature*
- **Task 2:** *Stating reasons + Promoting candidate*
- **Task 3:** *Polite ending + Full draft*

##### Each task includes:

- Model
- Checklist
- Peer feedback focused on moves, not grammar only

##### Checklist for *promoting candidate*:

- *Did I give evidence, not adjectives?*
- *Did I connect skills to job requirements?*
- *Did I use appropriate tense?*

**Outcome:** Students gain confidence and control, especially regarding self-promotion.

### Independent Performance and Reflective Practice

In the final stage, students independently produce complete EJALs in response to authentic or simulated job advertisements. This task requires learners to select, sequence, and linguistically realize moves without explicit guidance, demonstrating internalization of genre knowledge.

Reflective activities accompany this stage, prompting students to consider how genre awareness influenced their writing choices and how EJAL conventions differ from domestic résumé practices. Reflection reinforces the pedagogical goal of developing transferable genre competence rather than formulaic reproduction.

Overall, this instructional sequence demonstrates how genre analysis can be operationalized in ESP classrooms. By making rhetorical expectations explicit and linking structural moves to linguistic realizations, genre-based pedagogy enables learners to develop both pragmatic competence and confidence in professional writing. As illustrated by the classroom application reported in this study, such an approach is particularly well suited to Japanese EFL contexts, where differences between domestic and international application practices are often implicit and require explicit pedagogical mediation.

### Final Task

<p><b>Create</b> Write a <u>complete</u> EJAL for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a real job ad</li><li>• or a simulated international company</li></ul> <p><b>Reflection</b> Short guided reflection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>What felt uncomfortable?</i></li><li>• <i>How is this different from Japanese style?</i></li><li>• <i>How did the move structure help?</i></li></ul> <p><b>Outcome:</b> Students understand EJAL writing as strategic communication.</p>
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### Learner Outcome

Students were able to internalize the rhetorical moves and apply them to their own writing with relative ease. Most produced cover letters that displayed clear structural organization, appropriate use of promotional language, and awareness of business register. The framework simplified lesson delivery, allowing the teacher to give precise feedback on target language, grammar, and discourse functions. Informal evaluation of student texts showed that the majority successfully employed obligatory moves and genre-specific vocabulary identified in the original study.

### Classroom Observations

During the drafting stage, several students initially struggled with *Stating reasons for applying*, often producing vague statements such as “*I want to work at your company*”. However, after explicit instruction and examples, students began to elaborate more persuasively, writing phrases like “*I am particularly motivated to join your company because of its strong record in global marketing and its commitment to innovation.*” In addition, many drafts reflected *rirekisho*-style factual listing, whereas final versions integrated qualifications and skills with persuasive detail.

In peer-review sessions, students noticed each other’s misuse of tense. One student commented: “*You wrote ‘I work as an intern last year,’ but it should be past tense, ‘I worked.’*” This demonstrated growing awareness of the move-specific tense choices highlighted in the lessons.

In addition to classroom observations, informal student responses were collected after classroom activities as a supplementary means of monitoring students’ comfort with the instructional approach. The students appeared to be satisfied with the instruction, and no negative comments were given.

### Sample Student Responses

- “Before this class, I didn’t know how to start or finish a cover letter. Now I can use expressions like ‘I look forward to discussing my application with you,’ which makes my letter more professional.”
- I realized the cover letter is not only about me, but about showing I understand what the company wants.”
- “It was difficult to ‘promote myself’ because in Japanese style we don’t write like that, but using the moves made it easier to organize.”

### Improvements in Student Writing

Comparison of early drafts and final submissions showed clear development. For example:

- Early drafts often lacked *polite ending*, but all final versions included it.
- The frequency of vague self-descriptions (“I am hardworking”) decreased, replaced by more specific claims (“I specialized in international marketing and developed analytical and teamwork skills”).
- Register improved: colloquial phrases such as “I really want this job” were replaced by more formal alternatives like “I am eager to contribute my skills to your international team.”

**Table 14** Study Example: Student A - Draft vs. Final Version

Moves	Draft Excerpt	Final Excerpt	Outcome
Opening / Referring to Job Advertisement	“I write this letter to apply job at your company.”	“I am writing to apply for the position of Marketing Assistant, as advertised on your company website.”	Improved accuracy, clearer reference to solicited position, adoption of present progressive.
Promoting Candidature	“I am hardworking and like to talk with people.”	“I have developed strong communication and problem-solving skills during my internship, where I assisted with client outreach and project coordination.”	Shift from vague self-description to concrete, specific qualifications.
Closing / Polite Ending	“Please hire me. I wait your answer.”	“I look forward to the opportunity to discuss how my skills and experiences can contribute to your team. Thank you for considering my application.”	Register upgraded, polite and professional tone achieved.

Closer examination of the revisions between early drafts and final submissions reveals that the observed improvements were not merely linguistic but fundamentally rhetorical in nature. In particular, students demonstrated increased control over genre-specific moves, greater awareness of audience expectations, and more appropriate deployment of linguistic resources to fulfill communicative purposes.

At the structural level, the consistent inclusion of a *polite ending* in final drafts indicates improved awareness of obligatory genre moves. While early drafts frequently omitted this move, its systematic presence in final versions suggests that students had internalized the schematic structure of EJALs and recognized the importance of explicitly inviting further contact. This shift reflects growing genre awareness rather than rote imitation, as students employed varied yet functionally appropriate realizations of the move.

Improvements were also evident in the realization of the *promoting the candidate* move. Early drafts tended to rely on vague, evaluative self-descriptions (e.g., *I am hardworking*), which provide limited persuasive value. In contrast, final submissions showed a clear move toward evidence-based promotion, with students grounding claims in concrete experience and contextual detail. This change suggests that learners had begun to reconceptualize self-promotion as a genre-specific communicative requirement rather than a personal assertion, an adjustment that is particularly significant in the Japanese context, where explicit self-evaluation is often discouraged.

In addition, the revisions demonstrate enhanced control over register and grammatical choices. Colloquial or overly direct expressions present in early drafts were replaced with more formal, indirect constructions typical of professional business correspondence. Notably, students also demonstrated more accurate use of move-specific tense patterns, such as the adoption of the present progressive in openings (e.g., *I am writing to apply...*) and the use of past tense narratives when describing prior experience. These changes indicate that students were beginning to align grammatical form with rhetorical function, rather than treating grammar as an isolated concern.

Taken together, these improvements suggest that genre-based instruction supported students in developing a more sophisticated understanding of EJALs as persuasive texts. Rather than simply correcting surface-level errors, students learned to select and organize content strategically, adapt language to audience expectations, and realize rhetorical moves more effectively. Although the scope of the study does not allow for strong generalization, the observed revisions provide qualitative evidence that explicit instruction in genre structure and linguistic realization can lead to meaningful improvements in professional writing performance.

## Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated both the analytical and pedagogical value of a genre-based

approach to English Job Application Letters (EJALs). The genre analysis revealed recurring rhetorical moves, step structures, and linguistic features that characterize effective cover letters. These insights not only contribute to the broader body of research in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) but also provide practical guidance for teaching writing in professional contexts.

The classroom application further illustrates the utility of such findings. By explicitly teaching moves, steps, and language features derived from the analysis, students were able to produce coherent, persuasive cover letters that aligned with the conventions of international business communication. Importantly, the study highlights how genre analysis can bridge the gap between theoretical research and classroom practice, equipping students with concrete strategies for producing texts that meet real-world professional expectations.

However, the reflection on the teaching context also underlines certain limitations. The absence of a control group and reliance on a small sample size ( $N=12$ ) restricted the ability to generalize these results. In addition, the study relied primarily on teacher observation and student writing samples rather than standardized assessment tools. Future research should aim to incorporate larger and more diverse cohorts, along with pre- and post-assessment measures, in order to provide stronger empirical evidence of learning gains. At the same time, this study raises an ethical consideration often overlooked in applied linguistics research: the fairness of instruction. By teaching all students the same strategies rather than withholding them from a “control group,” the teacher ensured equitable learning opportunities, reinforcing the practical and moral responsibilities of ESP practitioners.

Despite the limitations, the pilot study provides preliminary evidence that genre-based pedagogy is effective in Business English instruction for Japanese learners. It demonstrates how research findings from genre analysis can be directly translated into classroom practice, helping students bridge the gap between domestic résumé conventions (*rirekisho*) and international expectations for EJALs. For practitioners, this suggests that even small-scale interventions can yield significant benefits in students’ ability to produce professional business writing.

Ultimately, this study reinforces the idea that genre-based pedagogy is not merely an abstract analytical tool but a highly effective teaching framework. For Japanese graduates preparing to enter globalized work environments, such explicit instruction helps demystify the expectations of international employers, builds confidence in professional writing, and improves employability. More broadly, it shows that genre analysis, when directly applied to pedagogy, has the potential to transform ESP classrooms into spaces where students can develop both linguistic accuracy and pragmatic competence. By connecting research-driven insights with classroom practice, practitioners can foster deeper learner engagement, greater clarity in writing, and more authentic preparation for the communicative demands of the global workplace.

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