

# Rhetoric of Daily Editorials: A Review Study of Selected Rhetorical Analyses on Daily Editorials

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**ABSTRACT:** The present study with the aim of reviewing a few research studies carried out in the field of rhetoric, tried to concentrate on four components of research framework, aim, data, and finding. It besides, critiqued the literature of the rhetorical analyses. The results of the review study suggested that there existed some drawbacks that could have been avoided such as lack of a) triangulation in terms of methodology b) adequate data (here, editorial texts), c) clear rationale of research, d) attention to the main purpose of editorial texts, that is to say, persuasion, and e) genuinely editorial readers' engagement (attention to genuine audiences rather than university students).

**Keywords:** Review Study; rhetorical studies; persuasion; audience; engagement; critique

## 1. INTRODUCTION

More than a decade into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, exist many research studies into the field of written rhetoric. (Malmkjaer 2004). The current study has selected a few rhetorical analyses carried out on daily editorial texts with the focal domains of their framework, aim, data, and finding.

## 2. Overview of Rhetoric

As defined by Valero-garces (1996:281), rhetoric is "the strategies the writer uses to convince readers of his/her claims and to increase the credibility of his/her research." Rhetoric is of two major trends which maintain the term rhetoric in their designations: generative rhetoric which was developed under the influence of Neom Chomsky's transformational generative grammar, and the other is contrastive rhetoric - what the current study deals with (Malmkjaer 2004).

## 3. Newspaper Editorials as a Sub-Genre

An editorial is here defined as "an article in a newspaper that gives the opinion of the editor or publisher on a topic or item of news" (Sinclair, 1995). Newspaper editorial articles are generally regarded as the large class of opinion discourse which is considered a newspaper sub-genre these days (van Dijk, 2005).

Regarded as a discourse (sub) genre, newspaper editorials have sparingly been analyzed in a systematic and explicit way. The structure of editorials is different from that of the news reports they refer to (Van Dijk, 1988a). Their limited length is between 200 and 500 words and they are located at a fix place in the newspaper. In terms of topic, they revolve around cultural, socio-political, and economic issues.

## 4. Rhetorical Studies in Daily Editorials

Here in this section, four studies have been chosen to be reviewed on the basis of their aims, data, frameworks, and results.

First of all, Katajamaki and Koskelain (2007) quoted in Shokouhi and Amin (2010:388) studied the structure of editorials in English, Swedish and Finnish business newspapers: *Financial Times*, *Dagens Industri*, and *Taloussanommat*. The study revolved around the following inquiries: first, if existed a typical rhetorical structure for the editorials in business newspapers irrespective of national and cultural features; second, if there were different types; and third, what factors were connected to the content of the text, language and culture which would correlate with the different types. The material of the study consisted of 22 editorials from these three business newspapers. As a starting point for their analysis, they used a modification of Van Dijk's (1995) view of the rhetorical structure of editorials as a model for the study. Van Dijk (1995) quoted in Katajamaki and Koskelain (2007: 2) classifies editorials into three sections. For each section,

there are specific stages and functions. Although the editorial texts represented three countries and their three languages, the variation in the rhetorical structure was of subtle variation. This work (Katajamaki and Koskelain, 2007) used a different model - Van Dijk's (1995) view of the rhetorical structure of editorials- for analysis. This study is a contrastive rhetoric to identify and distinguish the rhetorical patterns used in English, Swedish, and Finish newspaper editorials.

Applying the Generic Structure Potential (GSP) model, Babaie (2010) described the rhetorical patterns of English newspaper editorials as an important public genre. Based on the same model adopted from the Systemic Functional (SF) theory of language and genre (see Halliday & Hasan, 1989), Babaie identified four *obligatory* structural elements (Run-on Headline, Addressing an Issue, Argumentation, and Articulating a Position) which existed in 90% of the sampled editorials. These elements were sequenced as: RH^AI^A^AP. In addition, came up a few *optional* elements which are: providing Background Information (BI), which either preceded AI or followed it, Initiation of Argumentation (IA), and Closure of Argumentation (CA). These optional elements of the GSP, in some cases, were helpful to writers to start off their arguments, and sometimes used to finely round off the arguments. This study delved into the GSP of the English editorials. Babaie (2010) contrasted the editorials written by Americans and Iranians.

In another study to find out the distinctive rhetorical features of English newspaper editorials, Ansary and Babaii (2004) quoted in Shokouhi and Amin (2010:388) made use of the GSP model of the Hallidayian approach to identify a generic pattern of text development for editorials. They culled 30 editorials from 'Washington Times' which represent the American newspaper. Four obligatory elements (Run-on Headline, Addressing an Issue, Argumentation, and Articulating a Position) appeared in the 90% of the sampled editorials. A few optional elements in the same editorials were explored to provide Background Information (BI), Initiation of Argumentation (IA), and Closure of Argumentation (CA) which sometimes used to round off the arguments. Ansari & Babaie (2004) used the GSP model in the study. Their work showed that just identification of rhetorical structure of American editorials was under investigation.

Investigation of rhetorical elements in editorials as done by Shokouhi and Amin (2010) crystallized some findings. They sampled ninety newspaper editorials culled from six newspapers; New York Times, Washington Times ( written in English by native speakers of English), Tehran Times, Keyhan International written ( written in English by non-native English speakers), and Keyhan, and Resalat ( written

in Persian by native speakers of Persian). They also administered four reading comprehension tests to 27 university students. The study resulted in the point that the generic structure includes three obligatory elements in almost all editorials. These three elements of the GSP were similar regardless of the language and place of publication. Also based on the result of the reading comprehension tests, it was made clear that the differences between students' performance on the test was linked to the varied degree of their familiarity with the content and context rather than the text structure. The study (Shokouhi & Amin, 2010) applied triangulation. Using the GSP model, this rigorous study on one hand compared and contrasted English editorials written in Iranian and US newspapers and on the other hand between English and Persian editorials written by Iranians. In addition, Shokouhi and Amin (2010) involved (twenty-seven) student readers of editorials through reading comprehension tests. It is a wonder why reading comprehension of the editorial readers rather than the degree of reader's acceptance, rejection, influence, or persuasion – that might be caused by editorial argumentation- was measured. It is a commonsense that the main purpose behind arguing some claims through editorials is to have readers digest and agree with the claimed points. According to Conner (2001), "in most newspapers, the purpose of editorials is to influence the opinion of readers on some controversial issue" (p. 143). Reading comprehension plays an important part in reader's trying to understand the argument though. Understanding the debated problems (means) seems just to serve as to transport the reader toward persuasion and support (end). In other words, in this study, attempts were made to a) spot the rhetorical patterns of editorials, b) identify their differences, and c) test reader's comprehension of editorials. Therefore, the reasons why these rhetorical patterns emerged as well as whether or not the editorials succeeded to perform their major tasks – to win influence, persuasion, and support- are absent in Babaie & Amin's work in particular and all the above cited studies in general.

## 5. Discussion

The review centered on the four common components that almost all research studies hold: framework, aim, data, and finding. In addition, the reviewer tried to incorporate the critical point of view as well in form of *critique*. It needs to be made clear that all the above studies, from one hand, contained merits and on the other hand, could have been strengthened to perfect. The table below seems appropriate in illustrating the results of the present review in brief.

**Table 1- Review Analysis of the rhetorical studies**

No	Researcher's Name	Framework	Aim	Data	Finding	Critique

1.	Katajamaki and Koskelain (2007)	modification of Van Dijk's (1995)	identify and distinguish the rhetorical patterns used in English, Swedish, and Finish newspaper editorials	22 editorials from three English, Swedish and Finnish business newspapers	Although the editorial texts represented three countries and their three languages, the variation in the rhetorical structure was of subtlety.	a)Why editorials in Swedish and Finish papers were analyzed? rationale? b)small in scale(data), not generalizable.
2.	Babaie (2010)	Generic Structure Potential (GSP) model of Halliday & Hassan (1989)	Identifying rhetorical patterns	sampled editorials.	A new rhetorical pattern: RH^AI^A^AP	The work lacks triangulation and is a single-focal study.
3.	Ansary and Babaii (2004)	Generic Structure Potential (GSP) model of Halliday & Hassan (1989)	identify a generic pattern of text development for editorials	30 editorials from 'Washington Times'	A new rhetorical pattern	The study lacks triangulation and holds only one focus (identification).
4.	Shokouhi and Amin (2010)	Generic Structure Potential (GSP) model of Halliday & Hassan (1989)	a) spot the rhetorical patterns of editorials, b) identify their differences, and c) test reader's comprehension of editorials	1)sampled sixty newspaper editorials culled from six newspapers; New York Times, Washington Times, Tehran Times, Keyhan International written, and Keyhan, and Resalat 2) (twenty-seven) student readers of editorials through reading comprehension tests	1)retorical patterns 2) differences in students' performance was due to their various degrees of familiarity with content and context, and not the structure of the texts.	a) small in scale (data), not generalizable b) reading comprehension of the editorial readers rather than the degree of reader's acceptance, rejection, influence, or persuasion – that might be caused by editorial argumentation was measured. (For persuasion is the main aim of editorials (Connor1990). 3) Are university students equated with editorial readers?

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## Vitae

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