



The Rhetorical Structure & Discursive Features of Call for Papers as a Genre

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Abstract

This paper, at the first stage, presents a genre analysis of 50 calls for papers of conferences held in Iran at both national and international levels from 2000 to 2012 (Swales, 1990). The study also targets the politeness strategies employed in such texts adopting Arundale's (2006) face model. The results obtained from the first phase of the study revealed four moves and a number of constituting steps including opening, salutation, informing (interested areas, necessary dates and formats), and complementary close and signature. Interestingly, findings of the second phase of the study, based on Arundale's theory, demonstrated that all sentences and phrases used in this genre in Iranian academic contexts function as connection face as all were apparent as unity, interdependence, solidarity, association, congruence, and more, between the conference chair/s and other academicians as the members of a same discourse community. It can also further justified by different request strategies employed by the conference chair/s.

Keywords: call for paper; genre; generic structure; politeness; face

1. Introduction

From three decades ago or so there has seen growing interest in analyzing academic texts. While the main directions coming from studies of language used in disciplines such as anthropology (Clifford & Marcus, 1986) and economics (Dudley-Evans & Henderson, 1990), different academic genres including research theses (Thompson, 2001; Bunton, 2002), research articles (Swales, 1990; Posteguillo, 1999), textbooks (Hyland, 2000), book reviews (Nicolaisen, 2002), conference papers (Rowley-Jolivet, 2002), grant proposals (Halleck & Connor, 2006) have been under in depth analysis. Various approaches have been applied to reveal the overall features of academic discourse along with the characteristics of particular genres.

Regarding the aim of investigation, these studies fall into two broad categories. The first area of study zooms on the stylistic and grammatical aspects of particular genres including tenses and aspects (Burrough-Boenisch, 2003), modalities (Vassileva, 2001), adjectives (Soler, 2002), nouns (Flowerdew, 2003), reporting verbs (Thompson & Ye, 1991), and etc. The second realm of research focuses on the macro-organization of academic texts such as abstracts (Hyland, 2000; Samraj, 2005; Martin, 2003; Lores, 2004), introductions (Swales, 1981, 1990; Dudley-Evans & Henderson, 1990; Holmes, 1995), results (Brett, 1994; Williams, 1999), discussions (Hopkins & Dudley-Evans, 1988; Holmes, 1997), conclusions (Yang & Allison, 2003; Bunton, 2002), research paper titles (Haggan, 2004), and so on. The latter studies gain their insights mainly referring to Swales' (1990) CARS (creating a research space) model, which "has played a vital role in genre analysis in ESP and on the teaching of academic writing, both to international or L1 students, or to professional authors wishing their works to be published in international journals" (Dudley-Evans, 2000, p. 6).

Drawing on the above statements, there has been a growing interest in examining the rhetorical characteristics of different academic texts. A call for papers (henceforth CFP), as an academic genre, is a strategy employed in academia for gathering book/ journal articles or conference presentation articles. A CFP usually is sent to different academicians explaining the relevant themes, the time for the CFP, information on the kind of abstracts and important dates such as deadline. A CFP, on the one hand, is usually sent using a mailing list or specialized online services. Papers, on the other hand, are usually submitted relying on an online abstract or paper management service. Despite the importance of CFPs in academic contexts, this genre has not yet reached its respectable position, most notably in Iranian academic contexts since, as far as the authors are concerned, there is no study examining the generic structure of calls for papers. Thus, the

first phase of the study, aims to explore the overall structure of Iranian conference CFPs in terms of moves or communicative functions and steps or linguistic considerations (Swales, 1990).

Since 1980s, 'face', 'facework' and 'politeness' notions have been disputed among different scholars in the fields of pragmatics and sociolinguistics. In this way, various types of theories concerning the imagined notions have been proposed all of which have been highly abstract direct or indirect recourse to great variation of social strategies to construct co-operative social interaction across cultures.

The most known theory of politeness is Brown and Levinson's ground-breaking work (1978; reissued 1987). For them, a speech is polite if one employ the kinds of verbal strategies which take the addressee's feelings into account by respecting his or her 'face' (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 61; Brown, 1998: 84). As argued by Goffman, face involves both the need/desire not to be imposed upon, i.e. negative face, and the need/desire to be liked or affirmed, i.e. positive face (Goffman, 1967: 5-7) Thus, drawing on Goffman's theory, Brown and Levinson (1987) proposed that polite speech encompass all strategies addressing both types of needs.

Despite its merits, Brown & Levinson's theory of politeness strategies has come under criticism in the realm of research on politeness. Some criticism has also called it a more than enough pessimistic theory of social communication (Arundale, 2006). Among the critics is Nwoye asserting that if we rely on Brown & Levinson's theory of politeness as a true one which holds that social interaction is an activity of continuous mutual monitoring of potential threats to the faces of the interactants, it could rob social interaction of all elements of pleasure (1992:311). Werkhofer also criticized (1992:156) Brown & Levinson's account of politeness as being essentially individualistic since it, at least during the production of speech, it regards the speaker as a rational agent being unconstrained by social norms and thus, he/she is free to choose egocentric, asocial and aggressive intentions. According to Watt, the other major critique of Brown & Levinson's model is freeing the speakers to select in the form of a decision-tree through which they have to work their way before they can arrive at the appropriate utterances in which to frame the FTA (2003:88). This type of system excludes the possibility of happening two or more strategies at the same time and limits the speaker to just exploiting one single strategy in any situation.

An alternative, but complimentary, view of face that also addresses the criticisms of Brown and Levinson's theory examines positive and negative face as a relational rather than individual phenomenon (Arundale 1999, 2006; Bargiela-Chiapini 2003). As one of the latest re-examinations of face as pertinent to politeness, Arundale (2006) which, contrary to the Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, examines positive and negative face as a relational rather than individual phenomenon. He argues that positive and negative faces are best addressed as the dialectical opposition between connection and separation from others:

...connectedness and separateness provides a clear, culture-general conceptualization of "positive" and "negative" face.... As a re-conceptualization of positive face, "connection face" encompasses a range of interpretations much broader than, but inclusive of being "ratified, understood, approved of, liked or admired" by others (Brown and Levinson 1987: 62). As a re-conceptualization of negative face, "separation face" encompasses meanings and actions that include among many others, a person's "freedom of action and freedom from imposition" or "claim to territories" (2006: 204-205).

Thus, in the second phase of the study, different politeness strategies exploited in CFPs will be examined adopting Arundale's (2006) model of face.

2. Methodology: research questions, corpus and procedures

Drawing on the above-mentioned developments and tendencies in the field of linguistics, this study addresses the following questions:

1. What generic structure underlies Iranian conferences' CFPs?
2. In what ways are politeness strategies revealed in the Iranian conferences' CFPs?

Data of the current study comes from a corpus of 50 language and literature conferences' CFPs in Iran held at both national and international levels from 2000 to 2012. The CFPs that comprise the corpus are, for the most part, one page in length and typed. Following data collection, the analysis of the data consisted of examining the rhetorical and linguistic devices used in the samples (Swales 1990). The CFPs were also examined to determine how linguistically-realized politeness was used to convey the message adopting Arundale's (2006) theory.

3. Results

3.1 Rhetorical components

Our generic analysis of the CFPs helped identify four moves or communicative functions and a number of constituting steps or linguistic realizations. The first move is *opening move* which provides the opportunity for the conference chair/s to introduce the conference announcing the name and level of the conference. Here, in what follows, two examples are extracted from the corpus to clarify this move.

Example.1: *The 9th International TELLSI Conference: Global Perspective, Local Practice*

Example. 2: *The First National Conference on Language Learning & Teaching: An Interdisciplinary Approach*

The second move, *salutation move*, refers to an opening address and includes general pleasantries and/or terms of address. In our opinion, this move is a persuasive one functioning to get academic members to submit their abstracts. Following are two examples of this move from the corpus.

Example. 3: *Dear colleagues and students*

Example. 4: *Dear Academicians*

The third move extracted is *informing move*. This move paves the way to give necessary information and can be divided into three steps. The first one is information on interested areas of the conference setting the scene for introducing themes and topics to be covered in the conference. Note the following examples taken from the corpus.

Example. 5: *The themes of this conference for TEFL and English Literature are "language teaching from the perspective of Iranian EFL teachers", and "the world as viewed by literature writers", respectively.*

Example. 6: *All ELT-related papers, posters, and workshops are most welcome, including but not limited to the following topics: • Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) • Foreign Language Teaching/Learning • Foreign Language Assessment • Language Teacher Education • ESP/EAP • Curriculum Design and Materials Development • Discourse Analysis • Psycholinguistics • Sociolinguistics • Teaching Literature in the EFL Classroom*

The second step is information on necessary dates informing the academicians of the dates should be kept in the memory including abstract submission, full-text submission, and etc. Here, two examples are given to clarify this sub-step.

Example. 7: *Deadline for submitting abstracts: Ordibehesht 1st, 1389 (April 21, 2010) • Deadline for submitting full papers: Tir 15th, 1389 (July 6, 2010)*

Example. 8: *The notification of acceptance of the abstracts will be made by Ordibehesht 31st, 1390 (May, 21st, 2011). However, the deadline for sending the full papers of the accepted abstracts will be Tir, 15st, 1390 (July, 6th, 2011).*

The last step is information on the format of the submitted papers. This sub-step gives a chance to the conference chair/s to inform the academicians of desired format of the papers including the number of words, kind of spaces, styles of referencing as well as devoted times to different kind of presentations including poster presentations, oral presentations and workshops. In what follows, we have presented two examples for this sub-step.

Example. 9: *Abstract Submission Form*

1. *Title of presentation (maximum 10 words, please)*
2. *Abstract (maximum 250 words, please)*

Example. 10: *Papers accepted for the conference are scheduled for a 25-minute presentation, with 10 minutes allowed for discussion and questions. Workshops will be scheduled for 55 minutes.*

The last move revealed is *Complementary close and signature*. This move sets the scene for first utilizing terms that are traditionally used in formal requests such as respectfully, sincerely, and cordially and then introducing the conference chair/s. note the following examples taken from data to better understand this move. It should be mentioned that for confidential reasons the real names of people are replaced with pseudo names.

Example. 11: *Regards,*

*UT Postgraduate Conference Committee
Secretary of Conference
Dr. B. Fattahi*

Example. 12: *Best regards,*

*Mansour Aghdasi
Department of English Language and Literature
Shahid Beheshti University*

Thus, after analyzing the overall structure of the Iranian CFPs in terms of communicative functions and linguistic realizations the following move structure was derived.

Move.1. Opening: Presenting the name and level of the conference

Move.2. Salutation: opening address

Move. 3. Informing: providing essential information and details

3.1. Information on interested areas of the conference

3.2. Information on necessary dates

3.3. Information on the formats of the papers and devoted times for presentations

Move.4. Complementary close and signature

3.2 Linguistically-realized politeness in conference call for papers

In light of what Arundale argues, “Connectedness” is defined as meanings and actions voicing as unity, interdependence, solidarity, association, congruence, and more, between the relational partners and “Separateness” indexes meanings and actions being apparent as differentiation, independence, autonomy, dissociation, divergence, and so on (2006, p. 204). His approach to face provides a culture-general conceptualization that can be adapted to the analysis of written discourse in a variety of cultures and settings. Hence, in the second phase of the study, different politeness strategies employed in Iranian CFPs will be explored adopting Arundale's (2006) model of face.

Academics make a discourse community. Swales (1990: 24-32) argues that a discourse community:

- has a broadly agreed set of common public goals
- has mechanisms of intercommunication among its members
- uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback
- utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative utterance of its aims
- has acquired some specific lexis (specialized terminology, acronyms)
- has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discursive expertise.

Adopting Arundale's face theory, all of the features of a discourse community engender connectedness between the conference chair/s and academics as all are voicing as signs of unity, interdependence, solidarity, association, congruence, and more, between the relational partners. The chairs' use of politeness reflects their understanding of where he or they belong (inclusion) and stands (distinctions). Because of CFPs, many collaborative ties are shaped between the conference chair/s and other academic members who are of equal status in most cases. Thus, it can be concluded that all moves and steps they employ in conferences' CFPs function as connection face.

On the other hand, CFPs as a genre which is widely employed in academia inviting academic figures to submit their articles is a kind of request. Requests are situated in contexts of social relations and of activity, and their form and interpretation depend on them. The writers perform requests using the following linguistic mechanisms: 1) please + directive verb, 2) bare request (active voice), and 3) hedge + verb. Table 1 illustrates the distribution of request types

Table 1. *Distribution of Request Types in the Data*

Request Type	Distribution	
	Total	% of total
Please + directive verb	36	72
Performative (active voice)	14	28

3.2.1 Please + directive verb

Writers of CFPs employ imperatives headed by 'please' to perform requests. In

CFPs, the linguistic realization of requests that are in the imperative mood is an infinitive verb, specifically 'consider', 'help' and 'give', preceded by 'please':

Example.13: *Please consider the dates and stay tuned for more news soon*

The use of an imperative headed by 'please' appears to be intimately connected with the speech act 'request' and, hence, explains why 'please' is used in CFPs to indicate the utterance with which it co-occurs as a request for action” (Sato 2008, p. 1252). The request that follows 'please', and which may be anticipated by the context, imposes on the academics, since it, regardless of distance and financial problems, sincerely requests from them to participate in their conference.

3.2.2 Performative (active voice)

In some cases, conference chair/s exploit direct requests in active voice to invite academics to participate in their conferences.

Example. 14: *To submit your abstract, use the attached CONFERENCE PROPOSAL FORMS.*

As Baratta (2009) argues the use of the passive is one of the ways that writers use to convey their stance towards the text and the audiences, and it indicates a de-emphasis on the semantic role of the subject. It can be drawn from the above statement that passive voice is apparent as differentiation and independence and consequently functions as separation face. Thus, since any discourse community follow the same goals and any exchanges between them engender connectedness, the application of passive voice is avoided in CFPs. The logic behind the use of active voice in CFPs is to foster the rapport between conference chair/s and other academics.

4. Conclusions

The current study examined the conference CFPs in terms of moves or communicative functions and steps or linguistic considerations (Swales, 1990) as well as politeness strategies adopting Arundale's (2006) face model interpreting communication as connectedness with the other, as well as by separateness from them.

The analysis of the generic structure of this genre revealed four moves and a number of constituting steps including opening, salutation, informing (interested areas, necessary dates and formats), and complementary close and signature. Examples of these moves and steps are given in the previous section to clarify the different communicative function they manifest.

Interestingly, the analysis of CFPs in terms of politeness strategies revealed that all sentences and phrases used in this genre in Iranian academic contexts function as connection face as all were apparent as unity, interdependence, solidarity, association, congruence, and more, between the conference chair/s and other academicians. This can be attributed to the membership of both chair/s and academicians in a discourse community as all features of discourse community counted by Swales (1990) engender connectedness between all its members. It can be further proved by the type of requests in such texts. Two request types uncovered in Iranian CFPs (please + directive verb and performative (active voice)). In both types we can trace the signs of connectedness between the relational partners as in the first conference chairs are intimately connected to other academicians by utilizing "please" and in the second, due to avoiding using passive voice which indicates a de-emphasis on the semantic role of the subject and so is a sign of separateness, chairs try to establish solidarity with other academicians by employing active voice.

In sum, this study provides an initial view of how CFPs are structured and discursive features, such as linguistic politeness and request speech act are realized. Since this analysis, to our best knowledge, is the first attempt at examining the linguistic and discursive features of CFPs, future research, with a larger and more diverse sample, is needed to further our understanding of this genre. Areas of future research, for example, may include: the examination of the apparent uniformity of the rhetorical structure and discursive features of CFPs, the similarities between CFPs written on behalf of the Iranian and non-Iranian chair/s, and the role of culture in shaping language use in CFPs.

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