The Rhetoric of Letters to the Editor: A Systematic Functional Approach

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Abstract

Letters to the editor (LTEs) are considered as a platform of media discourse, serving as an important avenue for public engagement and perspective exchange on important societal issues. However, this form of communication remains under-researched, as reflected in the study's literature review. Accordingly, the present study analyzes the rhetorical pattern and elements in several LTEs published in the Toronto Sun newspaper, using the Generic Structure Potential (GSP) model drawn from the Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1998). The qualitative analysis explored seven key rhetorical elements—Run-on Headline (RH), Background Information (BI), Addressing an Issue (AI), Initiating Argumentation (IA), Argumentation (A), Concluding Remarks (CR), and Articulating a Solution (AS). These elements together form the rhetorical structure RH^[(BI).AI]^[(IA)^A]^[(AS).(CR)], which enhances the overall coherence and persuasive impact of texts. Utilizing the GSP model, the study tends to examine how rhetorical elements are arranged within LTEs to involve readers and create public opinion. The findings can significantly provide insights into the construction of persuasive communication within LTE sub-genre. This study also contributes to the understanding of the planned organization of rhetorical elements, underscoring significant implications for pedagogy, journalism, media studies, and among other fields.

Keywords: Systematic Functional Linguistics, Generic Structure Potential, rhetorical pattern, letters to the editor, Toronto Sun newspaper

Introduction

Rhetoric, the persuasive art, has remained a fundamental cornerstone of communication for centuries, shaping the way individuals influence public opinion and convey meaning through language. Rhetoric acts as a pivotal tool in both spoken and written discourse and therefore it is significantly relevant in today's media as it streamlines public opinion and encourages societal dialogue (Wijaya and Bram, 2022). Letters to the editor (LTEs), a classic yet vigorous sub-genre of media exemplify the use of rhetoric in public discourse. LTEs offer a broad platform for citizen journalists to raise their concerns, advocate for a better society, and involve in public communication, making them suitable candidates for rhetorical analysis (Hayek et al., 2020).

An Analysis LTEs from the Toronto Sun provides precious insights into the human communication and persuasive strategies writers use (Khalaf & Khalaf, 2023). The current research unravels and analyzes the rhetorical elements embodied within these letters and elaborates how these elements are sequenced to shape a pattern, accomplishing persuasion, as advocated by Casal and Kessler (2020) in their corpus-based rhetorical analysis. As a matter of

fact, rhetorical elements, their sequencing, and pattern contribute to understanding how public opinion is shaped and how ordinary people take part in democratic procedure in making changes in their society through written discourse and rhetoric (Bhatia, & Bremner, 2012).

The fields of rhetoric and writing have gone through a recent resurgence. This combination seems to improve the persuasion and effectiveness of written discourse (Fiskvik et al., 2023). Rhetoric manifests itself in patterns; employs sequence to help audiences better realize and accept the main intent of writers even in English as a foreign language classroom and plurilingualism (Coyle & Meyer, 2021). This realization may lead to a) crystallized text comprehension for readers and b) a more effectively persuasive piece of text for authors. It is apparent that rhetorical elements, patterns, and their sequence influence English writing (Fartousi & Al-Smadi, 2024). Today, the roles of these three factors –rhetorical elements, patterns, and their sequence - in how writers configure, develop, and present their written texts are inevitable (Awoyemi & Ajayi, 2023).

The existing literature, replete with academic works, has examined the analysis of newspaper headlines, editorials, with notable contributions from Naji (2022), Kyaw and Zhiying (2019), Fartousi (2012), and Ansary and Babaie (2004). Despite the insightful examinations in these areas, a discernible gap emerges as there is a lack of rhetorical investigations within the domain of letters to the editor (LTEs). This void prompts the need for a focused inquiry into the rhetorical elements and sequencing employed in LTEs, as this sub-genre represents a unique and influential form of public discourse that warrants scholarly attention (Ehlers & Nelson, 2024). Understanding the rhetorical dimensions of LTEs is essential for a comprehensive grasp of persuasive techniques in written communication and provides an avenue for enriching the existing scholarship in rhetorical studies. In other words, the rhetoric of LTEs as a representative of media discourse has hardly yet been studied and this sub-genre seems overlooked based on the literature review (Fartousi & Al-Smadi, 2024). The study aims to (a) examine the rhetorical elements embedded within letters to the editor (LTEs) and (b) analyze the rhetorical pattern formed by these elements. Gray (2017) highlights the importance of developing a set of clear research questions. Accordingly, this study has created a couple of research questions, aligned with the research objectives to explore and examine the specific rhetorical elements and patterns within LTEs. This design offers insights into how rhetoric enables these letters to effectively transfer meaning, convey public opinion, and persuade their audience. The research questions guiding this study are: What rhetorical elements are embedded in English letters to the editor published in the Toronto Sun newspaper? And What rhetorical pattern is formed by these rhetorical elements?

Literature Review

The Generic Structure Potential (GSP)

The term 'Generic Structure Potential' (GSP) refers to the capacity of language to create varied texts, or genres, through cultural and linguistic resources. It serves as communication goals in a broad range of discourse communities and contexts, entailing the adaptability and flexibility of linguistic structure (Ansary & Babaie, 2016). Obtaining an understanding of GSP can assist individuals to better realize how languages are utilized to generate a wide range of texts, from straightforward narratives to high-level academic papers and professional reports (Naji, 2022).

In essence, the GSP represents the dynamic interworking between language function and form. Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL) of Halliday, provides a theoretical framework for analyzing GSP through assessing how linguistic elements realize and structure communication

goals in texts (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). A text is constructed by different linguistic strata, such as discourse structure, semantics, and lexicogrammar which interact to generate meaning and convey communicative goals according to the Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory of language and genre (Eggins, 2004).

Previous Studies

To clarify the Generic Structure Potential (GSP) of the 'service Encounter' (p.62), Halliday and Hasan (1998) analyzed a shop transaction text between a customer and shop assistant. They believe that any shop transaction is composed of a set of optional and obligatory macro-structural elements ordered specifically (Muangsamai, 2018). They eventually came out with the following GSP which consists of elements of Greeting (G), Sale Initiation (SI), Sale Enquiry (SE), Sale Request (SR), Sale Compliance (SC), Sale (S), Purchase (P), Purchase Closure (PC), and Finish (F). These elements constructed the following schematic representation: [(G)**.** (SI)^] [(SE.) {SR^SC^} ^S^] P^PC(^F).

Halliday (1990, p. 34) maintains that the GSP model is particularly suitable for any investigatory study that:

'enables us to analyze any passage and relate it to its context in the discourse, and also to the general background of the text: who it is written for, what is its angle on the subject matter and so on.'

Building on this premise, Henry and Rosebery (1997) analyzed forty essays from magazines, newspapers, and encyclopedia with a focus on unravelling the GSP of introductions and endings of selected essays. They also suggested that raising, explaining, and defending a viewpoint is the major communicative purpose of almost all essays. Employing the GSP model of Halliday and Hasan (1989), the researchers have identified three rhetorical elements, pertaining Introducing a Topic (IT), Narrowing the Focus (NF), and stating the Central Idea (CI) of the essays and only the last one is the obligatory elements for it has been found in almost all the selected essays. Besides, they have discovered two more rhetorical elements, including Commitment of Central idea (CC) and Expansion (EX), following the description of obligatory and optional elements by Farooq et al. (2024).

Employing the same model for analysis, Ansary and Babaie (2004) described the rhetorical patterns of English newspaper editorials, as an important public genre. Based on the same model adopted from the Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) theory of language and genre (see Halliday & Hasan, 1990), Ansary and Babaie (2004, p 13-14) identified four obligatory structural elements (Muangsamai, 2018), such as Run-on Headline (RH), Addressing an Issue (AI), Argumentation (A), and Articulating a Position (AP) which existed in 90% of the sampled editorials. In addition, the analysis has revealed 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 elements were sequenced as: RH^(BI)^AI^(IA)^A^(CA)^AP. The elements within the pattern follow a schematic sequence: RH (Run-on Headline) → BI (Background Information) → AI (Addressing an Issue) → IA (Initiating Argumentation) → A (Argumentation) → CA (Closing Argument) → AP (Articulating a Position), which reflect the organizational flow of persuasion in LTEs. The 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. Aligned with Bonyadi (2010) who studied schematic structures of editorials, this study delved into the GSP of the English editorials written by Americans and Iranians (p.13-14).

To continue with, Fartousi (2012) analyzed an editorial. In his qualitative study, Fartousi (2012) delved into an editorial published in the New Straits Times (NST) the oldest English newspaper in Malaysia, to examine the rhetorical elements embedded in the editorial. The theoretical framework of the analysis was grounded in the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory of language and genre (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). Using the GSP model of Halliday and Hasan (1989), the researcher unearthed eight rhetorical elements, including Run-on Headline (RH), Addressing an Issue (AI), providing Background Information (BI), Initiation of Argumentation (IA), Argumentation (A), Concluding Remarks (CR), Articulating a Position (AP), and Articulating a Solution (AS).

Ashraf (2014), continuing with the press genre, examined letters to the editor (LTEs) publishe in the Pakistani English newspapers, during the years 2002-2009. The study focused on LTEs' genre of English newspapers in the post 9/11 socio-political and historical unrest, employing Bhatia's (2002) framework of Applied Genre theory. The discourse analysis revealed the Pakistani people's dissatisfaction and mistrust in the government which kept distance from its people. The analysis of the LTEs characterized two separated identities: the helpless people and powerless state which neglected its nation's problems.

Again, Kyaw and Zhiying (2019) analyzed the schematic structural elements of editorials in the Myanmar Times newspaper. The analysis was grounded in the GSP proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1989). The findings of the study showcased the presence of two obligatory elements and five optional elements in the editorials, as noted in the GSP analysis of Amusa (2023). The explored obligatory elements were Heading (H) and contributing the writer's Opinion (O), while the optional elements included Picture (P), Caption (C), Addressing the Issue (AI), Background Information (BI), and Discussing the issue raised (D). The sequence of these elements is demonstrated in the following structure: H^ (P)^{*(BI) *(AI) *(D)} ^O.

Furthermore, the research by Osisanwo and Alughin (2019) examined the rhetorical structure, communicative functions, and GSP of American presidential concession speeches. Utilizing Halliday and Hasan's (1989) model of GSP. The research purposefully selected eight American presidential concession speeches, spanning over a period of thirty-three years for analysis. Ten communicative functions were identified in these speeches. Eight elements were identified as obligatory, including Phatic Greeting (PG), General Appreciation (GA), Personal Appreciation (PA), Call to President-elect (CP), Congratulating the President-Elect (CPE), Regrets over Election Outcome (REO), Call for Unity and Support (CUS), and Prayer for America (PAM). The optional elements were Allusion (A) and Eulogizing the Winner (EW). The study concluded that the GSP of American presidential concession speeches is represented as: [PG]^GA.^CP^CPE^{PA}. REO^{(A)} ^{(EW)} ^CUS^[PAM].

Another rhetorical analysis by Mohamad (2022) delved into analyzing appeals and related devices in Englis as a Native Language (ENL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) research abstracts (RAs) from indexed journals. The study revealed significant differences in the rhetorical devices used across ENL and ESL RAs, particularly in appeals to logos, ethos, and pathos. Such findings underscore the influence of linguistic and cultural factors on rhetorical strategies employed in academic discourse.

In another rhetorical study, Naji (2022) delved into a pragma-rhetorical analysis of COVID-19-related headlines from four online newspapers, exploring pragmatic strategies and rhetorical tropes employed in news headlines. The study identified hyperbole as a prevalent rhetorical trope used to provoke reader reactions and reinforce messaging. By examining the pragmatic and rhetorical dimensions of news headlines, the study provided insights into the

persuasive techniques employed by media outlets to engage audiences and shape public perceptions of COVID-19.

After one year, Awoyemi and Ajayi (2023) conducted a qualitative study with a focus on the generic structure analysis of Nigerian presidential inauguration speeches delivered between 1999 and 2015. Utilizing Halliday and Hasan's Generic Structure Potential (GSP) model, the analysis led to the emergence of ten rhetorical elements, including Title (T), Theme (TH), Acknowledgement of God (AoG), Opening Acts (OA), Protocol (P), Recognition of Predecessors (RoP), Manifesto (M), Call for Support (CfS), Closing Acts (CA), and Customary Declaration (CD). Being sequenced together, these rhetorical elements constructed five GSPs, representing the rhetorical structures of the five analyzed presidential inauguration speeches. At the end, the following rhetorical pattern was revealed from all the GSPs: [T. (TH)] ^[(AoG)^OA] ^{P^RoP^} ^{M}^[CfS^CA^CD]. By examining the structural elements of presidential speeches, the study provided insights into the rhetorical strategies employed by political leaders to convey their messages effectively.

The above reviewed studies were all connected to the Hallidayan model of GSP, showcasing how this model is widely applied in varied genres discourse (Tuan, 2022) ranging from newspaper editorials, news headlines, and research abstracts to political speeches. The GSP model in diverse contexts, highlights its significantly robust application as a theoretical framework in the studies of Halliday and Hasan (1989), Henry and Roseberry (1997), Ansary and Babaie (2004), Fartousi (2012), Kyaw and Zhiying (2019, Qsisanwo and Alughin (2019), and Awoyemi and Ajayi (2023). The model is proven as an adaptable theoretical tool. The above-mentioned research studies, have also revealed several rhetorical elements, highlighting the genre's communicative purpose, including Greeting (G), Introducing a Topic (IT), Run-on Headline (RH). Heading (H), and Argumentation (A) which are considered obligatory elements, while some other elements such as Background Information (BI), Picture (P), and Caption (C) are regarded as optional, in line with the rhetorical description of Onipede and Olayinka (2021). Such a pattern of elements is echoed in all the first six reviewed studies within the literature review section.

On the contrary, the reviewed studies varied in their identified rhetorical elements and genre. Henry and Roseberry (1997), for example, laid focus on the elements specifically employed in essays such as Narrowing the Focus (NC) and stating the Central Idea (CI), while Fartousi (2012) has emphasized the structural elements unique to press editorials, including Concluding Remarks (CR) and Addressing an Issue (AI).

Thus, almost all the studies reviewed, demonstrate the versatility of the GSP model in analyzing various genres for exploring the rhetorical structures and elements in newspaper editorials, headlines, speeches, essays, rhetorical appeals, persuasive communication, and communicative functions (HO et al.,2021). As seen in the reviewed studies, the need for researching the rhetorical elements, their sequencing, and pattern is conspicuous and therefore the current research has covered this gap. In other words, the reviewed literature highlights the diverse facets of rhetoric employed in different communicative contexts, ranging from political speeches to newspaper editorials and news headlines. However, limited research has focused specifically on the rhetorical patterns and sequence within LTEs, representing a notable gap in the literature. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by examining the rhetorical pattern employed in LTEs, delving into a) examining the rhetorical pattern of LTEs, b) exploring the elements within such a pattern, and c) analyzing the way these elements are sequenced within LTEs.

Methodology

The present investigation utilizes a qualitative approach to meticulously analyze the media rhetoric in English letters to the editor (LTEs) published in the Toronto Sun newspaper. The choice of a qualitative approach stems from the nature and objectives of the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the context of rhetorical analysis, qualitative methods provide the flexibility needed to capture the richness of language and its nuanced expressions (Islam & Aldaihani, 2022). The qualitative approach aligns with the interpretive paradigm, emphasizing the subjective and contextual nature of human experiences, which is particularly relevant when studying language use and discourse in a real-world context, as asserted by Johnson and Christensen (2020).

A small-scale corpus for data collection was created, as advised by Khelifi and Bouri (2018). To construct this corpus, the researcher has drawn LTEs from the Toronto Sun newspaper, a widely circulated daily publication in Canada. Ten LTEs published in 2023 have been culled into the corpus. During the selection of these LTEs, the researcher has been faced by the saturation point, resulting in stopping collecting more than ten LTEs. LTEs published in 2023 have been selected rather than old ones since there were plenty of standalone LTEs published in that year. Focusing on a single year allows for coherent analysis of rhetorical elements and patterns within a specific socio-political global event, such as the 2023 Israel-Hamas conflict and Canada's response to it. Unlike other conventional sampling techniques, such as simple random sampling, the present study employed judgmental sampling (Nanjundes & Divakar, 2021). This type of sampling entails a special requirement (Fartousi & Dumanig, 2012a). In other words, the researcher has only selected independent LTEs. Notably, there exist so many LTEs linked to previously published ones which are not suitable for the current study. Therefore, the researcher's judgment plays an essential role in selecting independent or unlinked LTEs. That is the reason why the judgmental method, a subcategory of the non-probability sampling, has been selected (Nanjundes & Divakar, 2021).

A few key factors were involved in choosing the *Toronto Sun* newspaper, which is based in Canada where English is spoken as a native language (Mustafa et al., 2021).Furthermore, LTEs, in most newspapers, respond to previously published LTEs making standalone analysis challenging. The Toronto Sun stands out as one of newspapers publishing a myriad of unlinked LTEs and that's one of the reasons for selecting such a newspaper. This study has only compiled LTEs unlinked to any other LTEs and therefore, the judgmental sampling method has been selected for this study (Islam & Aldaihani, 2022). The Toronto Sun is amongst the mainstream English-language newsprint media circulating in Canada, available in both hardcopy and electronic format. Being popular for its opinionated sections and sport reports, the Toronto Sun newspaper has attracted rich audience (Minta, 2024). According to the Toronto Sun's official website (https://torontosun.com), the paper is a daily English language tabloid with a circulation of 180.000 per day. The paper was founded in 1971 (Mustafa et al.,2021).

Following the recommendations of Ansary and Babaie (2004), the researcher, under the guidance of his supervisor, coded all 10 LTEs. After that, the LTEs were provided to a second rater, a specialist in the same field. The aim was to ensure reliability and coding consistency in identifying and labelling rhetorical elements. The identification and definition of rhetorical elements would affect the examination of their sequencing and the rhetorical pattern they form (Fartousi & Al-Smadi, 2024). The comparison of results between the two coders indicated 90% agreement. In other words, nine of the ten LTEs were coded identically. As for discrepancies, only 10 % disagreement between the coders emerged, as the second rater identified a different rhetorical element in one LTE. A 90% agreement rate for the study shows high inter-rater

reliability (Ansary and Babaie, 2004). As a result, the high volume of consistency advocates for the validity of the findings.

Results and Discussion

The analysis led to explore seven rhetorical elements employed within the LTEs. These elements include Run-on Headline (RH), Background Information (BI), Addressing an Issue (AI), Initiating Argumentation (IA), Argumentation (A), Concluding Remarks (CR), and Articulating a Solution (AS). The identified rhetorical elements will be explained below here. Following that, the researcher who has analyzed all the ten LTEs, will randomly select and present an LTE analysis as a sample.

Sampled LTE

In this sub-section, an LTE from the corpus has been randomly chosen, which discusses citizens' reactions towards Canada's stance in the 2023 Israel-Hamas conflict, critiquing Prime Minister Trudeau' policies. The chosen LTE has been broken down into its rhetorical elements and analyzed accordingly. It should be noted that the LTE has been published on 29 October 2023 in the Toronto Sun newspaper.

'WHICH WAY IS THE WIND BLOWING?

AI: Woke culture is alive and well in Canada under Justin Trudeau, our "woke" Prime Minister. **IA:** He's usually the first one out of the gate waving the Canadian flag and condemning anyone with "unacceptable views" (usually meaning they are different from his own) and **BI:** will call people racist, misogynist or generally "un-Canadian" as he did with the Freedom Convoy protesters or any other group he doesn't agree with. He even takes it upon himself to preach to leaders of other countries on "correct thinking." Until last week. He has not been his usual opinionated self, but practically mum on the situation in the Middle East, trying to take the middle road. **A:** He is loath to call Hamas a racist, anti-Semitic terrorist organization because if he did, he'd have to address those Canadians that are in support of Hamas' anti-Semitic views. After the Hamas' terrorist actions of Oct. 7 against Israel, Trudeau stuck his finger in the air to see which way the wind was blowing and where he would lose the most votes. He must feel there are many more anti-Semitic (or uninterested) Canadians around and that he'd lose more votes if he speaks strongly in favour of supporting Israel and condemning Hamas as a terrorist organization. So, he won't. Why else would he be on the other side of the fence of every other democratic country regarding this situation? **CR:** Although other leaders already know he's a fool, they must still be wondering how he arrived at this conclusion. (The Toronto Sun, 29 October 2023) (https://torontosun.com/opinion/letters/letters-to-the-editor-oct-29-2023)'

Run-on Headline (RH)

'WHICH WAY IS THE WIND BLOWING?'

The headline, being a rhetorical question, requires no answer from its audience but a grabbing attention. The question provides a hint to the newspaper readership about a shift and uncertainty in political decision making. The phrase 'wind blowing' is metaphoric in essence, pinpointing Justin Trudeau's inconsistency approach in dealing with Hamas' attack on Israel's territory on October 7th, 2023. The headline urges its readers to question the government's political stance in this respect.

Addressing an Issue (AI)

'Woke culture is alive and well in Canada under Justin Trudeau, our "woke" Prime Minister. '

The LTE commences by addressing the Woke culture, highlighting themes of inclusiveness and collective environment. The author criticizes Justin Trudeau for his inconsistent stance in adhering to the Woke values by using irony, such as ' our Woke Prime Minister'. This element emphasizes the gap between the government's stated principles and its actual policies.

Background Information (BI)

'will call people racist, misogynist or generally "un-Canadian" as he did with the Freedom Convoy protesters or any other group he doesn't agree with. He even takes it upon himself to preach to leaders of other countries on "correct thinking." Until last week. He has not been his usual opinionated self, but practically mum on the situation in the Middle East, trying to take the middle road.'

This element provides a clear context referring to Trudeau's previous attitude and reaction towards protesting groups, highlighting his priority of politics over clear morality.

Initiating argumentation (IA)

'He's usually the first one out of the gate waving the Canadian flag and condemning anyone with "unacceptable views (usually meaning they are different from his own)'

The writer highlights Trudeau's silence in condemning Hamas as a terrorist group, referencing his controversial speech for other leaders about 'correct' thinking. This element sets the stage for a serious argumentation.

Argumentation (A)

'He is loath to call Hamas a racist, anti-Semitic terrorist organization because if he did, he'd have to address those Canadians that are in support of Hamas' anti-Semitic views. After the Hamas' terrorist actions of Oct. 7 against Israel, Trudeau stuck his finger in the air to see which way the wind was blowing and where he would lose the most votes. He must feel there are many more anti-Semitic (or uninterested) Canadians around and that he'd lose more votes if he speaks strongly in favor of supporting Israel and condemning Hamas as a terrorist organization. So, he won't. Why else would he be on the other side of the fence of every other democratic country regarding this situation?'

This rhetorical component criticizes Justin Trudeau's political position by avoiding calling Hamas a terrorist organization, risking losing votes. It accuses him of prioritizing neutrality over moral acts for appeasing his Islamist supporters as a part of population.

Concluding Remarks (CR)

'Although other leaders already know he's a fool, they must still be wondering how he arrived at this conclusion.'

The element concludes the letter by reiterating Trudeau's foolish political stance in the eyes of other world leaders, underscoring skepticism in the lack of principled actions. This is the last element used in this LTE, that is, the writer avoids employing any solutions.

The examined sampled LTE exhibits that it holds six rhetorical elements that can be cataloged as: RH^AI^IA^BI^A^CR. In the scheme, carets (^) show sequencing. The position of BI between IA and A uncommon, as it usually appears before IA and adjacent to AI in almost all the analyzed LTEs in the corpus. Moreover, the writer suffices to end up the LTE with CR without suggesting any solution in the end.

Analysis

The researcher analyzed all ten LTEs. As a result, seven key rhetorical elements have been revealed. The analysis revealed that a few elements have appeared in all the analyzed LTEs, while others have emerged in some of the analyzed LTEs. Thus, the following figure illustrates the results of the analysis, focusing on the presence of the rhetorical elements identified in the analyzed corpus.
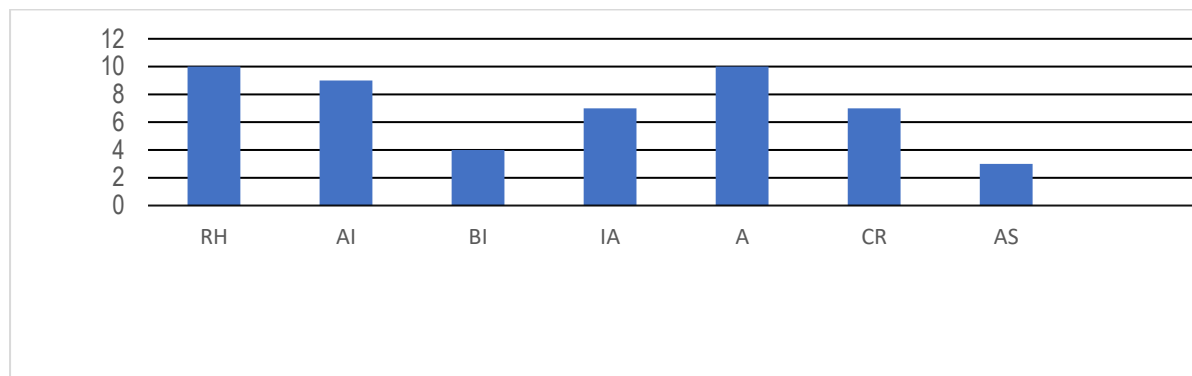
Figure 1. Frequency Distribution of All Rhetorical Elements

As seen in the above figure, elements RH and A have emerged in the whole corpus. Element AI has been observed in nine examined LTEs. Therefore, these three rhetorical elements with ninety and hundred percent presence are considered obligatory, based on Ansary and Babaie's (2016) explanation of obligatory and optional elements. On the contrary, other elements, such as BI, IA, CR, and AS, in order, with forty, seventy, seventy, and thirty percent frequencies in the corpus are regarded as optional (See table one). The attendance of these elements in LTEs is deemed unnecessary yet important (Fartousi & Dumanig, 2012e). Additionally, the table provided below gives a broader view of the frequency, percentage, and features of obligation and optionality for the rhetorical elements examined in the LTEs.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Identified Rhetorical Elements

Rhetorical Element	Frequency	Percentage	Obligatory	Optional
Run-on Headline (RH)	10	100%	✓	
Addressing an Issue (AI)	9	90%	✓	
Background Information (BI)	4	40%		✓
Initiating Argumentation (IA)	7	70%		✓
Argumentation (A)	10	100%	✓	
Concluding Remarks (CR)	7	70%		✓

Rhetorical Element	Frequency	Percentage	Obligatory	Optional
Articulating a Solution (AS)	3	30%		✓

As mentioned in Methodology section, the corpus of the study contains ten LTEs drawn electronically from the website of the Toronto Sun newspaper (https://torontosun.com). The title, link, and GSP of each LTE in the corpus have been saved. Table 2 best demonstrates such metadata of the corpus. The compilation and analysis of all ten GSPs have led to the emergence of a rhetorical pattern, which will be illustrated later in this section.

Table 2. Distribution of Identified GSPs Across Analyzed LTEs

Title	GSP	Link
ALL SHOULD QUALIFY	RH^AI^(IA)^A^(AS)^(CR)	https://torontosun.com/opinion /letters/letters-to-the-editor-oct-8-2023
VALUE OF IMMIGRATION	RH^AI^(IA)^A^(CR)	https://torontosun.com/opinion /letters/letters-to-the-editor-oct-25-2023
MORE THAN ONE	RH^AI^(IA)^A^(AS)	https://torontosun.com/opinion letters/letters-to-the-editor-oct-26-2023
Woefully uniformed	RH^AI^(IA)^A	https://torontosun.com/opinion /letters/letters-to-the-editor-oct-27-2023
WHICH WAY IS THE WIND BLOWING?	RH^AI^(IA)^(BI)^A^(CR)	https://torontosun.com/opinion /letters/letters-to-the-editor-oct-29-2023
Shame on You	RH^(BI)^AI^(IA)^A^(CR)	https://torontosun.com/opinion/letters/letters-to-the-editor-oct-31-2023
SCIENCE FICTION	RH^AI^A^(CR)	https://torontosun.com/opinion/letters/letters-to-the-editor-nov-2-2023
WAR ZONE	RH^(BI)^AI^A^(CR)	https://torontosun.com/opinion/letters/letters-to-the-editor-nov-4-2023

Title	GSP	Link
TAXED TO THE MAX	RH^(BI)^AI^A^(AS)	https://torontosun.com/opinion/letters/letters-to-the-editor-nov-19-2023
FORGOTTEN WAR	RH^AI^(IA)^A^(CR)	https://torontosun.com/opinion/letters/letters-to-the-editor-nov-20-2023

The above identified GSPs demonstrate the rhetorical elements and sequencing they possess. The GSPs shown above indicate which rhetorical elements they contain and how they are ordered in relation to one another. The analysis of the ten GSPs helped to uncover a rhetorical pattern, which incorporates all the rhetorical elements and sequencing patterns observed in the study. The rhetorical pattern of the LTEs published in the Toronto Sun is now schematized as RH^ [(BI). AI] ^[(IA)^A] ^ [(AS). (CR)]. The caret symbol (^) shows the sequence between rhetorical elements, while round brackets signify their optionality (Fartousi & Dumanig, 2012d). For example, the element BI, which is enclosed in parentheses, is considered optional. A dot between rhetorical elements denotes sequence interchangeability. For instance, in the collocation, '[(BI).AI]', element (BI) can precede or follow AI. The elements within the square brackets form a collocation, meaning they almost always appear side by side. In the scheme above, element BI is positioned flexibly. It might follow RH or precede element A which does not usually occur (Fartousi & Dumanig, 2012c). In this case, the writer brings in contextual information exactly before arguing the discussed issue to better convince the reader, using credibility and trust. Thus, the following figure portrays a clear picture of the revealed rhetorical pattern.

RH^ [(BI). AI] ^[(IA)^A] ^ [(AS). (CR)]

Figure 2. Common Rhetorical Pattern Across Analyzed LTEs

In the above pattern, dots refer to exchangeability; round brackets indicate optionality; and square brackets show collocation. Based on the analysis, only element (BI) can have three different positions: next to AI, before A, or after A. The other elements can only move within the square brackets (Fartousi & Dumanig, 2012b).

Discussion

The current study, employing the Generic Structure Potential (GSP) model, has explored and analyzed seven essential rhetorical elements within letters to the editor (LTEs) published in the Toronto Sun newspaper: RH, AI, (BI), (IA), A, (CR), and (AS). The elements enclosed in round brackets are considered optional because they appeared in less than 90 percent of the analyzed LTEs, while the others are obligatory. These elements have been further detailed in the results section. The analyzed LTEs from the Toronto Sun have utilized these sequenced elements to engage public opinion and persuade readers (Fartousi & Al-Smadi, 2024).

The findings of the present study, concerning rhetorical elements support the previous studies, which relies on the GSP model for analyzing diverse media discourse, such as editorials,

speeches, and abstracts. The findings are consistent with the research by Awoyemi and Ajayi (2023), Osisanwo and Alughin (2019), Kyaw and Zhiying (2019), Fartousi (2012), and Ansary and Babaie (2004), all of whom adopted the GSP model of Halliday and Hasan (1989). These studies collectively have explored and analyzed a set of obligatory and optional rhetorical elements organized sequentially (Muangsamai, 2018). These structural elements contribute to the persuasive goal of communication, as argued by Hayek et al. (2020). This demonstrates the GSP model's applicability as a theoretical framework for analyzing various genres (Halliday, 1990).

As previously stated, this study has explored and analyzed several rhetorical elements, sequenced in relation to one another to create rhetorical structures or GSPs. This exploration is like those by Osisanwo and Alughin (2019) and Awoyemi and Ajayi (2023), who also explored and analyzed a range of rhetorical elements arranged specifically to create GSPs, as shown in the reviewed literature. These two research studies, however, differ significantly from the current one as they have investigated presidential speeches as a distinct form of discourse and identified different rhetorical elements from those found here, including General Appreciation (GA), Call to President-elect (CP), Protocol (P), Recognition of Predecessors (RoP), etcetera. Moreover, presidential speeches are written by politicians, whereas LTEs are crafted by ordinary citizens, highlighting a fundamental difference in their intended audiences. LTEs, known as citizen-driven communications, express the writer's opinion on public issues (Minta, 2024), unlike presidential speeches, which represent official political discourse.

Unlike Ashraf (2014), which analyzed socio-political perspectives by adopting Applied Genre Theory, the present study employs the GSP model, focusing on rhetorical structures rather than ideological framing. In other words, the core of the current study lies in the features of rhetorical elements and structures within LTEs, which contrasts with the socio-political context of Ashraf's (2014) research. Both studies have examined different features of LTEs in different cultural contexts. Ashraf (2014) in her investigation employed Bhatia's (2002) framework of Applied Genre theory, unlike the current study, which adopts the GSP model of Halliday and Hasan (1989). Consequently, the only commonality between these two studies is their use of LTEs as a press sub-genre, allowing for a deeper understanding of how rhetorical and contextual factors influence the form and function of LTEs to express citizen concerns, such as the Pakistani and Canadian people's dissatisfaction and mistrust in their respective governments.

Furthermore, the main objective of the current study is to explore and analyze rhetorical elements and structures that contribute to audience persuasion. This communicative objective is aligned with the aims identified in Mohamad's (2022) and Naji's (2022) research studies. These studies focused on the rhetorical appeals found in other public discourse to explore how these appeals lead to persuasion. These two studies share a focus on persuasion with the current investigation, demonstrating that both rhetorical elements and rhetorical appeals are used to persuade the audience, which is the essence of rhetoric (Myllylä, 2019).

Finally, Tiantian (2023), who examined English abstracts authored by English and Chinese scholars, delved into micro-level linguistic features, such as references, ellipsis, substitution, etcetera. In contrast, this investigation adopted a macro-level approach, employing the GSP model of Halliday and Hasan (1989) to explore and analyze the rhetorical elements and structures of LTEs. Furthermore, Tiantian (2023) investigated the cohesion between sentences to show how sentences are sequenced in abstracts, while the current study investigates the cohesion and sequence between rhetorical elements, contributing to the overall persuasive functions of LTEs (Minta, 2024). Both studies utilized two distinct models by Halliday and Hasan, serving as theoretical frameworks for analyzing abstracts and LTEs as different genres.

The study's analysis has revealed several rhetorical elements, including Run-on Headline (RH), Addressing an issue (AI), Background Information (BI), Initiating Argumentation (IA), Argumentation (A), Concluding Remarks (CR), and Articulating a Solution (AS). Hence, these elements are the most appropriate response to the first research question of the study, concerning the rhetorical elements utilized within the Toronto Sun LTEs.

In conclusion, the entire discussion exhibits how citizen-crafted communicative texts, such as LTEs, uniquely engage, contextualize, argue, and conclude. The uncovered rhetorical pattern underscores how citizens attempt to inquire, suggest solutions, and convince their fellow citizens (Struever, 2023) through the flexibly strategic organization of rhetorical elements, employing the GSP model of Halliday and Hasan (1989), which has proven the model's relevance for analyzing media communication (Halliday, 1990). Therefore, based on the analysis of sequencing and rhetorical pattern, the most appropriate response to the second question of the present study, concerning the overall pattern created by such an arrangement, is schematized in the following scheme: RH^ [(BI). AI] ^[(IA)^A] ^ [(AS). (CR)].

Conclusion

The analysis of rhetorical elements of letters to the editor (LTEs) published in the Toronto Sun paper, exhibits that such letters are considered key communicative discourse which are both rhetorical and functional (Struever, 2023). Each of these rhetorical elements, entailing headline, argumentation, and so forth defines a unique segment within LTEs (Mémet, 2025). The proficiency of communication within LTEs is intricately linked to the skilled use of rhetorical elements, such as Run-on Headline (RH), Background Information (BI), Addressing an Issue (AI), Initiating Argumentation (IA), Argumentation (A), Concluding Remarks (CR), and Articulating a Solution (AS).

The examination of rhetorical elements and their patterns enhance the understanding of LTEs as a media sub-genre, leading to the identification of rhetorical features in LTEs which helps media professionals gain a deeper understanding of how these letters are rhetorically constructed. This improved understanding can help journalists and editors in better analyzing and responding to reader feedback. This might lead to an improvement in the quality and significance of their publications after they gain a deeper understanding of the rhetorical landscape of Canadian media with the unique characteristics of LTEs in the Toronto Sun newspaper, as Alexandrovna et al. (2023) emphasized in their media discourse studies.

A better understanding of the sequencing of rhetorical elements within LTEs can contribute to the communication strategies of the media industry (Skogerbø et al. 2021). Examining effective sequences and patterns can assist media outlets to address their concerns and tailor their editorial procedures to engage with their audience. This enhanced insight can aid them in maintaining efficient communication and in engaging the community (Rangsarittikun, 2025).

It is important to note that since this research concentrates on the rhetorical elements, their sequence, and the rhetorical pattern of LTEs, it is highly recommended that other scholars lay focus on other sub-genres, such as news reports and editorials. The way writers develop and organize such press sub-genres can aid readers in better comprehend their structure and better determine the main purpose of such communicative texts. Additionally, other scholars can highlight other aspects of these subgenres as well as LTEs, including rhetorical devices and strategies.

The present study can serve as a foundation for further research to evaluate and compare rhetorical patterns and elements across various newspapers and media platforms to explore similarities and differences in LTE construction. Such a comparative analytic approach could

add valuable insight into the role of rhetorical strategies in shaping public discourse across different media contexts (Ansary & Babaie, 2004).

During the analysis procedure, the researcher has encountered a few challenges, confining the overall investigation. The first restriction relates to the study's scope, as its focus is on LTEs published in the Toronto Sun newspaper during the year 2023. Other studies can expand the timeframe and include LTEs from multiple years. This limited focus may restrict the generalizability of the study's results to other newspapers or media platforms. These newspapers and media organizations might have distinct socio-political contexts, cultural practices, editorial policies, and reader demographics, which could cause a variation from the rhetorical pattern observed in this study (Ansary & Babaie, 2004). Language restriction is another challenge faced by this study. It was carried out on English-written LTEs, potentially overlooking LTEs written and published in languages other than English. Such a language constraint might result in a limited representation of rhetorical patterns and elements, especially in multicultural and multilingual contexts. The LTE writers of such language communities might express societal concerns and present their arguments differently, as Fartousi & Al-Smadi (2024) posited in their book. The third challenge encountered in the study refers to the sample size limitation. Although the researcher made every effort to ensure a diverse and representative sample, the study's findings may not fully represent the broad spectrum of rhetorical elements, sequencing, and patterns prevalent in LTEs, due to the availability and accessibility of data (Ansary & Babaie, 2016).

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