A Comparative Study of Recommendation Letters Issued by Indian and British Authors

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Abstract
Recommendation letters are perceived to be a convincing evaluation instrument, as they provide assurance about the applicant from a third party. It is an occluded genre, and plays an important role during the admission process in the academic discourse. A poorly written recommendation letter can place a worthy applicant in the rejection pile. Few studies (Bouton, 1995; Precht, 1998) have compared recommendation letters in different countries. Previous studies have indicated that recommendation letters from different countries are as individual as the local academic cultures from which they arise. The purpose of this study was to compare the recommendation letters written by Indian and British authors. Rhetorical move analysis was used to analyze the structure of the letters. Appraisal theory was used to analyze the attitudinal resources in both countries' recommendation letters. Appreciable differences in rhetorical organization, and in the use of attitudinal resources were found. The findings will help educational institutions to understand the writing cultures of Indian and British authors, and encourage authors to consider the writing culture of the countries where recommendation letters will be assessed. Similarly, evaluators would gain insight when assessing recommendation letters by considering the culture from which the letters originated.

Keywords
Recommendation letter, education, culture, UK, India

1. Introduction

In this era of globalization, the exchange of students from one country to another has increased, particularly from non-native English speaking to native English-speaking countries. Recent economic growth and higher levels of income have motivated Indian students to apply for admission to colleges and universities around the globe. Many Indian students have traveled to the UK, US, Australia, and New Zealand for higher education. In 2006, around 123,000 students studied outside India (White, 2007). The number of Indian students in the UK almost doubled between 1999 and 2009, with 38,500 attending UK institutions in 2009-2010 (HESA, 2010; UGC, 2011).

A letter of recommendation is an important document in the process of obtaining admission to a higher education program, such as a master degree or Ph.D., and will be seriously considered by admissions committees. It is a widely used selection tool, as it identifies the applicant's ability, previous performance, character, or potential for future success in a qualitative format (Nicklin & Roch, 2009). Moreover, recommendation letters can provide assessments of certain skills and characteristics that are not apparent from Grade-Point Averages and Graduate Record Examination scores (Norcross, Sayette, & Mayne, 2008). Swales (1996) pointed out that these letters are usually confidential, formal documents that typically remain in files and are rarely part of the public record, and as little is known about this genre, problems can arise when they cross cultural boundaries.

A number of cross-cultural studies (Bouton, 1995; Precht, 1998; Liu, 2007) have previously been carried out on recommendation letters, but a common limitation is unrepresentative corpora being drawn on for comparative analysis. Bouton (1995) compared 65 recommendation letters from the US with 65 from five Asian countries. Precht (1998) analyzed 39 recommendation letters, 10 each from the US, the UK, Eastern Europe, and nine from Germany, and found significant differences in discourse features, content, and semantics. Liu (2007) compared one US and one Chinese recommendation, and found similar macro discourse structure patterns and distinct content selection and organization in both. Few studies have examined Indian letters; Bouton's comparison (1995) included India in his five Asian countries, but the fact that he considered these as one culture was identified by Trix (2005) as a major limitation of his study.

In addition, few studies use a systematic approach to analyze the structure of recommendation letters. Though Bouton (1995) and Precht (1998) attempted to address the issue, their tripartite conceptual structure of such letters (introduction, body and closing) appears to be too simple to provide a thorough analysis. To provide a detailed model, we considered Swales' (1990) "move analysis" technique. Move analysis is a useful methodology, as "moves" are semantic or functional units of text that can be identified by their communicative purposes and typical linguistic boundaries (Upton & Connor, 2001). Move analysis has been used to understand various genres, such as the introductions of research articles (Swales 1990; Samraj, 2002), business letters (Dos Santos, 1996), direct mail letters (Upton & Conner, 2001), acknowledgements in a thesis (Hyland, 2004), and company audit reports (Flowerdew & Wan, 2010). However, we found no studies that have applied move analysis to recommendation letters.

Recommendation letters contain a form of evaluative language (appraisal) that writers use to express their attitudes and manage interpersonal relationships. Analyzing evaluative language can be helpful in understanding how the local academic culture may affect the ways in which Indian and British applicants are evaluated through their recommendation letters. The appraisal theory is a method of analyzing evaluative language commonly used to study various texts, such as the introductions of research articles and undergraduate theses (Hood, 2006), argumentative essays (Mei, 2006), narrative discourse (Macken-Horarik, 2003), and everyday communication (Ngo,

Unsworth, & Feez, 2012). However, we found no studies that used appraisal theory to analyze the evaluative language of recommendation letters. An in-depth comparative analysis of the evaluative elements and rhetorical organization of recommendation letters issued by Indian and British professors facilitates a better understanding of their generic features associated with various cultural contexts.

The purpose of this study is to compare recommendation letters (similarities, as well as differences) written by Indian (non-native English speakers, or NNES) and British (native English speakers, or NES) authors. This includes identifying (1) differences and similarities in the rhetorical organization of the letters using the move analysis method, and (2) the use of attitudinal resources by Indian and British authors using evaluative language theory.

2. Method

2.1. Data collection

We gathered two sets of samples: the recommendation letters of (1) Indian authors, and (2) British authors. We followed certain inclusion or exclusion criteria. First, we assumed that there would be differences in the writing styles of letters written for academic purposes and those for employment purposes; we therefore only considered the former, such as those written for admission to a master or Ph.D. program. Second, only letters written by native speakers from India and the UK were considered. Some were excluded if their writing style could be affected by another academic culture: for example, a letter written by a professor from another country, despite the fact he or she had lived in India or the UK for a long period. Third, the authenticity of letters was ensured by directly collecting the letters from the professors or personal contacts. Fourth, to ensure variety, only one recommendation letter per professor was considered.

Snowball sampling was used to collect the data from India and the UK. We asked our personal contacts for recommendation letters. The study's criteria were explained to them. Sixty-five recommendation letters from India and 18 from the UK were collected. However, as at least 30 samples are generally recommended for any data analysis, we contacted 1007 UK professors via email in an attempt to acquire more data from the UK. Certain strategies were followed in this: (1) emails were sent to the individuals, addressing the professors by name (no bulk mailing, cc, or bcc), (2) the university email addresses were used, (3) the dissertation topic and the study's purpose were mentioned, (4) professors were requested to send only one recommendation letter, (5) it was made clear that only letters written by people from the UK would be considered, (6) we stated that the study was for research purposes only, and data confidentiality would be ensured, (7) professors were requested to conceal any information they deemed confidential or sensitive, such as the names of universities or students, signatures, and university logos. We received 31 letters from UK professors using this approach, and these were combined with the 18 letters from the first approach, making 49 letters in total.

2.2. Data Analysis

In summary, 67 recommendation letters from India and 49 from the UK were collected. They were all anonymized, and 30 samples from India and the UK, respectively, were randomly selected for data analysis. The UK letters were coded as UK1, UK2…UK30, and the Indian letters as IN1, IN2…IN30. Information about the average numbers of words in Indian and British

recommendation letters is presented in Section 3.1. The analysis of the recommendation letters was carried out in two parts, first for rhetorical organization and second for attitudinal resources.

2.2.1 Move analysis

The first aim of the study was to compare the rhetorical organization (structure) of the Indian and British recommendation letters. A rhetorical structure was identified using the move analysis method. We decided on the moves and steps of recommendation letters after a number of passes through the text of 60 samples (30 from each country). The explicit text divisions in the letters (such as paragraphs), the linguistic means (tense or modal), and keywords (such as classroom, courses, research, work, maturity, hardworking, friends) were the sources for move or step recognition. Problems that occurred while deciding moves and steps were solved with the help of the existing literature. For example, in the Indian recommendation letters, authors often mentioned the extracurricular activities of the applicant. We were confused as to whether this related to an applicant's personal value or their social competency. A checklist devised by Anderson-Rowland and Sharp (2008) included extracurricular activities as part of the social competency of the applicant. We therefore decided to also regard extracurricular activities as part of the social competency details.

Table 1 shows that six moves were identified in the corpus (total 21,112 words). Table 2 describes the moves and steps with examples. After they were identified, we used the moves and steps to compare the rhetorical organization of the Indian and British recommendation letters. The frequencies of various moves and steps within each move were calculated for all 60 samples. Some moves or steps occurred more than once in one recommendation letter; however, we counted these only once when calculating the frequency.

Table 1: Moves/steps and their descriptive names

Moves and steps	**Description**
Move 1	Purpose of writing
Move 2	Context of knowing the applicant
Move 3	Applicant credentials
Step 3.1	Classroom performance
Step 3.2	Research
Step 3.3	Communication skill
Step 3.4	Work details
Move 4	Applicant personal values
Move 5	Applicant social competency
Move 6	Closing remarks
Step 6.1	Strong recommendation
Step 6.2	Soliciting response
Step 6.3	Best wishes

Table 2: Moves/steps and their definition with examples

Move 1: Purpose of writing – Author indicates that they know the applicant and the institution they are applying to. For example: "This reference letter is provided at the written request of XXX, who has asked me to serve as a reference. It is my understanding that he is applying for an M.Phil. (Epidemiology) at the University of XXX." (IN28)

Move 2: Context of knowing the applicant – Author mentions his or her relationship with the applicant, how he or she knows the applicant, for how many years, some personal details, the applicant's current status, and so on. For example: "I have known XXX for four years, initially as his undergraduate tutor, where I taught him mathematics and electrical engineering, and subsequently as the supervisor of a summer project that he undertook at the Institute of Biomedical Informatics." (UK1)

Move 3: Applicant credentials – Author gives details about the applicant's previous credentials. There are four steps in this 'move.' The order of these was found to be different but at least one was found in almost all recommendation letters.

Step 3.1: Applicant classroom performance – Performance, such as score, award, and attendance is mentioned. For example, "XXX was an excellent student who had a real commitment to learning; he was one of the most able students I have taught in my fifteen years of working in higher education." (UK2)

Step 3.2: Research – Author includes information related to research, such as conferences, publications, and their dissertation topic. For example, **"**He showed keen interest in research and carried out a project entitled XXX. He also presented two scientific research papers at a national conference entitled XXX and XXX." (IN11)

Step 3.3: Communication skills – Written/spoken language and presentation ability are mentioned in this step. For example, "He scored 301/340 in GRE and achieved a 7.0 grade out of 9.0 in the IELTS language test." (IN10)

Step 3.4: Work details – Author discusses the applicant's work-related abilities using past work performance, such as teaching, service, or other ability. For example: "She has taught and assessed at all levels of the undergraduate psychology, nursing, and social work degree. She is attuned to the differing needs of students as they progress through their degrees, and she is particularly adept with students who are struggling academically." (UK3)

Move 4: Applicant personal values – This move details the applicant's personal characteristics, such as integrity, ethics, motivation, honesty, dependability, reliability, decision-making, and adaptability. For example, "She is reliable and trustworthy. She is very determined and works hard. She is not discouraged easily and is a happy and friendly person. She is very down-to-earth, and not a worrier." (UK5)

Move 5: Applicant social competency – Author evaluates the applicant's teamwork ability, capacity to influence others, cooperative attitude, sensitivity, or respect for others. For example, "He does not think twice before voluntarily offering his services to anyone seeking to further their education, including friends, colleagues, and students." (IN9)

Move 6: Closing remark – Author finishes the letter with a summarizing statement. This is an important move as a strong ending is essential in persuading the reader. This move is divided into three steps:

Step 6.1: Strong recommendation – Author shows his or her strong beliefs in the applicant. For example, "I am sure that XXX will be a valuable asset and will live up to the standards of any institution he works for." (IN15)

Step 6.2: Soliciting response – Author invites the reader to ask questions in the future. For example, "Please do feel free to contact me on the phone or by email if you have any further questions." (UK14)

Step 6.3: Best wishes – Author expresses his or her best wishes for the applicant. For example, "I wish him all the best in his future endeavors." (IN16)

2.2.2 Attitudinal resources analysis

The second aim of the study was to identify the usage of attitudinal resources by Indian and British authors. To analyze this, we considered an evaluative language theory (appraisal theory) put forward by Martin and White (2005), as shown in Figure 1. Martin (2000) defines an appraisal as semantic resources construing interpersonal meaning used to negotiate emotions, judgment, and evaluations, alongside resources for amplifying and engaging with these evaluations. The appraisal itself is a juncture of three interacting domains – attitude, engagement, and graduation. We used only "attitudinal resources," as this is concerned with feelings, and includes emotional reactions, judgments of behavior, and evaluation of things. According to the appraisal framework, attitude consists of three sub-systems – "affect", "judgment" and "appreciation". The terms related to affect may describe feelings and emotions (for example

"love", "fear", "pleasure"), judgments may assess the person and their behavior (for example "reliable", "honest", "hard-working"), and appreciation may evaluate the aesthetic qualities of entities (for example "important", "profound", "organized"). Attitudinal resources can be positive or negative and can be mentioned explicitly (directly, such as using adjectives) or implicitly (indirectly, such as using examples or evidence).

For example:

XXX is a **highly motivated** and **hard-working** person. (IN14)

Here, "highly motivated" and "hard-working" shows positive judgment; the recommender has tried to assess the applicant's tenacity and capacity in an explicit way.

XXX achieved a **2:2 with 2:1** marks in social psychology and clinical psychology. (UK5)

Here, "*2:2 with 2:*1" shows positive judgment, where the recommender has assessed the applicant in an implicit way. Instead of using adjectives, the authors used applicant grades to show that the student is intelligent and hardworking.

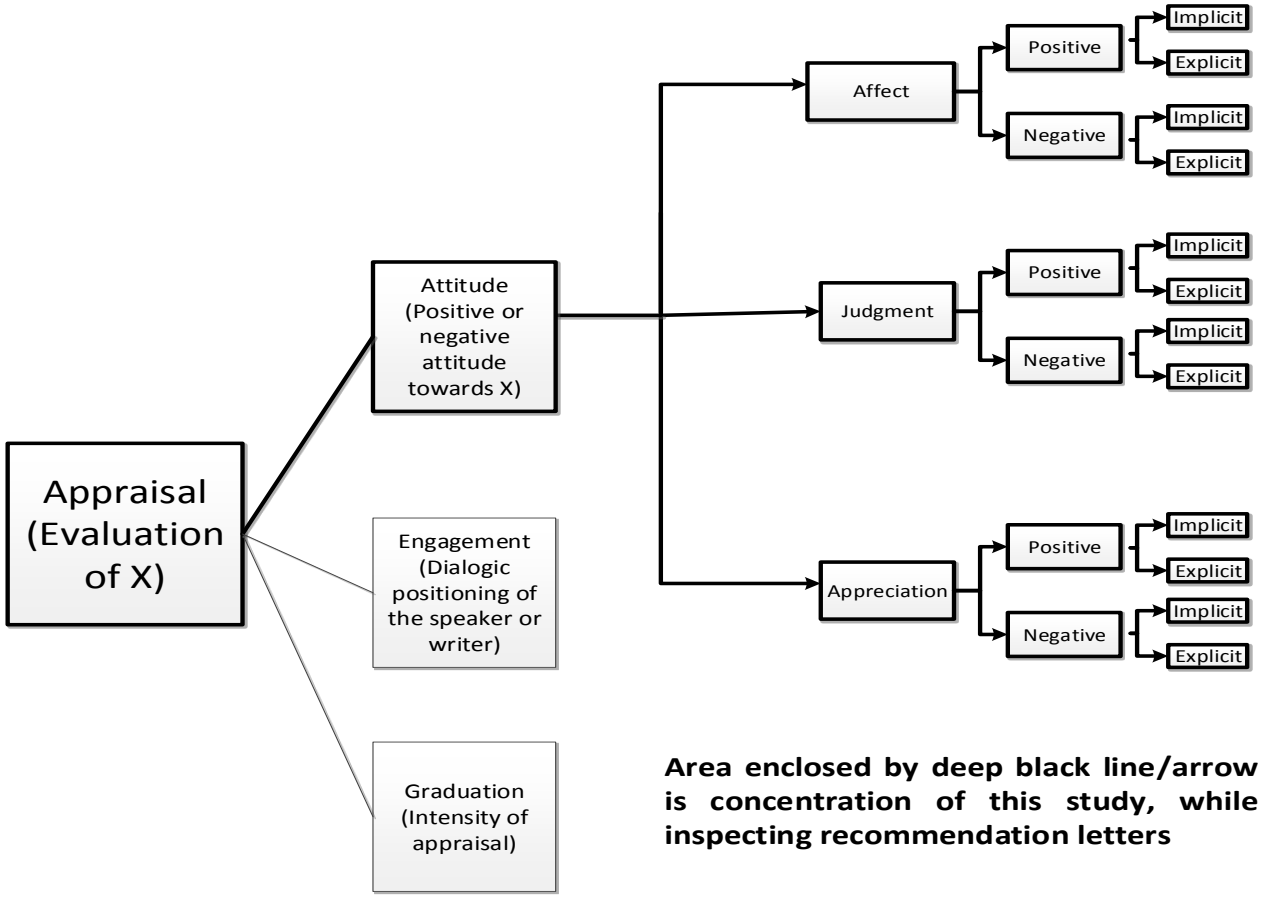

Figure 1: The appraisal framework used in the study

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Average word count

Table 3 shows that the average number of words in the Indian recommendation letters was less (by almost three fifths) than in the British letters. The British average word count was 430, almost similar to that in Precht's 1998 study. There was a huge range variation in the word count of the Indian (range = 383 words) and of the British letters (range = 1511 words).

Table 3: Average word count and standard deviation per Indian or British issued recommendation letter

Country	Total word count	Minimum	Maximum	Average and standard deviation	Ratio = Indian/British) *100
Indian	8201	104	487	273±109	63.48%
British	12911	147	1658	430±301	

3.2 Rhetorical organization of the Indian and British recommendation letters

As illustrated in Table 4, for most of the moves, the overall frequencies were lower in the Indian letters. Move 1 was significantly less common in the Indian recommendation letters than in the British letters; Moves 3 and 5 occurred slightly less often in the Indian letters; and Move 4 was the same in both. However, Moves 2 and 6, Step 6.3, were found more often in the Indian letters.

Table 4: Moves or steps and their frequencies in the Indian and British issued recommendation letters

Moves and Step	Indian (%)	British (%)
Move 1: Purpose of writing	30	50
Move 2: Context of knowing the applicant	97	90
Move 3: Applicant credentials	93	100
Step 3.1: Classroom performance	80	97
Step 3.2: Research	57	63
Step 3.3: Communication skill	40	53
Step 3.4: Applicant work details	24	30
Move 4: Applicant personal values	90	90
Move 5: Applicant social competency	67	73
Move 6: Closing remark	100	100
Step 6.1: Strong recommendation	77	97
Step 6.2: Soliciting a response	20	30
Step 6.3: Best wishes	50	13

Table 4 shows that the initial moves, 1 and 2, are used differently in the Indian and British recommendation letters. Move 1 was used less often (by almost three fifths) in the Indian letters, whereas Move 2 occurred slightly more often than in the British letters. For example:

> It is with pleasure that I write a few words about Mr. XXX. He has been our student from 2004. [Move 2] He did his B. Pharm in 2008 receiving a good 1st class and M. Pharm in

> the year 2010 and got the distinction of standing 2nd in the entire ABC University [Move 3, 3.1]. (IN 25)
>
> I understand that XXX is applying for an YYY program at the University of ZZZ [Move 1]. As her academic tutor at the University of BBB during the academic year2002/3, I am delighted to support her application with this reference letter [Move 2]. XXX was awarded an MA in 2003 from the University of BBB in English language teaching (studies and method). Her MA was awarded at a merit level dedicating work of high intellectual quality [Move 3, Step 3.1]. (UK20)

Move 1 (purpose of writing) is important, as it gives the letter a real context, and shows that the writer knows why the applicant needs a recommendation letter. It was found in 50% of the British letters. It occurred 20% less in the Indian letters. On the other hand, Move 2 was found in 7% more of the Indian letters. It appeared that the Indian authors preferred to begin recommendation letters by explaining their relationship with the applicant, going on to describe the applicant's academic ability. British authors often began by mentioning the purpose of writing, and then described the context in which they know the applicant before discussing the applicant's academic ability. However, they sometimes began with the applicant's academic details, and did not mention their relationship with the applicant. This could be why Move 2 was found to occur slightly less in the British letters.

Move 3 is important as it is concerned with the applicant's credentials. It was found in 93% of the Indian letters and in 100% of the British letters. All four steps under Move 3 were less common in the Indian letters. Step 3.1 was present in 97% of British letters, and 17% less common in the Indian letters. Step 3.2 was found slightly less (6%) in the Indian letters, and Step 3.3 was 13% less.

Table 4 shows that compared with the other steps, Step 3.4 was less common in both the Indian and British recommendation letters. It appeared in 24% of the Indian and 30% of the British letters. The letters analyzed were written for higher education, such as masters and Ph.D. programs. For most of the students, work experience was not relevant to their studies, therefore the authors did not have much information on this to include in the letters.

For Move 3, the difference between the Indian and British letters is 7%, but it is noteworthy that, as the recommendation letters are for higher education, they should all contain at least one of the four steps concerning the applicant's credentials. Two of the Indian letters were very short, and included information about personal and social competency but no details of the applicant's credentials. Some authors used many adjectives to evaluate applicant ability. In one letter, we found seven in one sentence.

Table 4 shows that Move 4 was almost obligatory in both the Indian and British recommendation letters. Interestingly, it was similar (90%) in both groups, indicating that it is an important part of recommendation letters. Move 5 was found in 67% and 73% of the Indian and British recommendation letters, respectively. It was 6% less common in the Indian letters. Five of the Indian letters talked about extra-curricular activities, while none of the British letters mentioned this.

For example:

> Mr. XXX also used to participate in extra-curricular activities of the college, and in most of the cultural programs he worked as an anchor. Besides being a good debater, he has been good sportsman too. (IN25, Move 5)

> He was a part of XXX Institute of Biotechnology football team for three years and ZZZ - the music society, where he was an active member as a guitarist. (IN10, Move 5)

In India, a student is considered favorably (an all-rounder) if he or she participates in activities such as sport, music, or dance. Authors will therefore sometimes mention extra-curricular activities in recommendation letters. Extra-curricular activities demonstrate an applicant's teamwork capabilities and ability to influence others, which can give a positive impression to evaluators.

Move 6, the last move of rhetorical organization is obligatory in both sample groups; however, a significant difference can be seen in the steps. Steps 6.1 and 6.2 were less common in the Indian letters, for example. Step 6.3 (best wishes) was almost four times more common in the Indian letters.

For example:

> He is eager to upgrade his knowledge and skills by pursuing higher education, for which he deserves all encouragement. I recommend him for higher level positions with his attitude, drive and sincerity. [Move 6, Step 6.1]
> I wish him all the best. [Move 6, Step 6.3)
> Name and Address. (IN6)

> XXX will be an outstanding PhD candidate, and is eminently deserving of a funded place. I cannot recommend her more highly. [Move 6, Step 6.1]
> Please don't hesitate to contact me for further information. [Move 6, Step 6.2]
> Yours sincerely
> XXX. (UK7)

We observed that at the end of the British recommendation letters, the writers summarized the capabilities of the applicants, demonstrated their confidence in them, and mentioned that the applicant would benefit the institute they were applying to. In the Indian letters, sometimes the authors did not end with a summary, but finished suddenly by wishing the applicant well. This could be the reason for the high frequency of Step 6.3 (best wishes) in the Indian letters.

Bruland (2009) compared recommendation letters that had been accepted and declined, arguing that a careful reader will pay attention to a letter's opening and closing sentences, and that these locations contain key rhetorical cues. Indian and British authors appear to prefer different strategies when beginning and ending recommendation letters. The Indian letters in the main began by focusing on the relationship, whereas the British focus was on the purpose of the letter. The Indian authors preferred to close the letters with best wishes to the applicant, while the British authors preferred a strong recommendation at the end. The observation above reveals that

the rhetorical strategies used for writing a recommendation letter are affected by distinctive cultural contexts.

3.3. Use of attitudinal resources by the Indian and British authors

Table 5 shows the total usage of attitudinal resources by the Indian and British authors. Table 6 presents a breakdown by usage of attitudinal resources. Table 5 shows that total judgment attitudinal resources appeared slightly less often, and appreciation attitudinal resources significantly less often in the Indian letters. Conversely, affect attitudinal resources were 59% more common in the Indian letters than in the British letters.

Table 5: Total attitudinal resources in the Indian and British recommendation letters

Attitudinal Resources	Indian (per 1000 words)	British (per 1000 words)	Ratio (%) = (Indian/British) *100
Affect	9.75	6.11	159.57%
Judgment	28.28	33.38	84.72%
Appreciation	8.16	11.07	73.71%

Table 6 gives further details regarding attitudinal resource, dividing each resource into four parts – positive, negative, explicit, and implicit. We found a noticeable difference between explicit and implicit writing styles in the Indian and British recommendation letters. Explicit judgmental resources were similar in both sample groups, while explicit affect resources were 94% more common in the Indian letters and explicit appreciation resources were about 19% less common in the Indian letters. There was a marked difference in the use of implicit attitudinal resources, with more found in the British letters. All of the recommendations were generally positive, but some slightly negative descriptions were found in the British letters.

Table 6: Breakdown of attitudinal resources in the Indian and British recommendation letters

Attitudinal Resources	Indian (per 1000 words)	British (per 1000 words)	Ratio (%) = (Indian/British) *100
Affect Explicit +	9.63	4.96	194.21%
Affect Explicit -	0.00	0.00	-
Affect Implicit +	0.12	1.16	10.51%
Affect Implicit -	0.00	0.00	-
Judgment Explicit +	23.90	24.71	96.72%
Judgment Explicit -	0.00	0.46	0.00%
Judgment Implicit +	4.27	8.44	50.59
Judgment Implicit -	0.00	0.00	-
Appreciation Explicit +	7.93	9.76	81.21
Appreciation Explicit -	0.00	0.38	0.00%
Appreciation Implicit +	0.24	1.32	18.48%
Appreciation Implicit -	0.00	0.00	-

3.3.1 Affect

This attitudinal resource describes where the author shows his or her own feelings in the evaluation of the applicant. We did not find any negative affect resources in either sample group. However, Table 5 shows that the average occurrences of the affect attitudinal resources were almost 59% greater in Indian recommendation letters. A significant difference in the average

occurrence of the affect-explicit-positive resources was also found (Table 6), which was almost twice as common in the Indian letters. The affect-implicit-positive resources were approximately 90% more common in the British recommendation letters.

For example:

> It is my **great pleasure** and **honor** to supply this letter of recommendation on behalf of XXX as he wants to pursue his PhD study. (positive-affect-explicit) (IN5, Move 1)

> I am **happy** to support his application without hesitation. (positive-affect-explicit) (UK2, Move 7, Step 7.1)

Table 5 shows that affect resources in the Indian recommendation letters were significantly more common than in the British letters. One reason for this may be that Indian society places much importance on relationship or collectivism, and therefore people tend to express their feelings more readily in letters (Bahadur & Dhawan, 2008; Uberoi, 2005). In contrast to the explicit affect resources, we found fewer (by almost one tenth) implicit-affect-resources in the Indian letters than in the British letters.

For example:

> I **believe** that his endurance and analytical skills will contribute significantly to the research at your institute. I **strongly recommend** him for the graduate program at your university. (positive-affect explicit) (IN10, Move 6, step 6.1)

> When writing a letter of recommendation for a student I would ask one question of myself, would I want them as a PhD student in my lab? Based on what I have **observed** over the last three months I would say yes, I could **rely** on her working hard, doing a good job and not requiring too much supervision. **I don't think** she will be one of the intellectual giants of science, and I have not really had chance to intellectually push her yet so I don't know where those boundaries are, but **I think** she will do careful work and complete a solid PhD. **(**positive-affect-implicit**),** (UK14, Move 6, Step 6.1)

These examples illustrate that Indian authors prefer to end their letters by demonstrating direct faith in the applicants, using explicit affect resources. British authors, however, may prefer an indirect writing style that includes some stylistic cleverness to express what they think about applicants. This sometimes makes the ending of British letters appear somewhat poetic. The Indian authors expressed their happiness and faith in the applicant throughout the recommendation letters, whereas affect resources only occurred at the end of the British letters. Affect resources are found in various moves, such as 1, 2, and 6, in the Indian letters, but they are primarily in Move 6 of the British letters

3.3.2 Judgment

Judgment attitudinal resources are the most important part of the recommendation letter, where the author assesses the applicant's capacity, normality, tenacity, veracity, and propriety. We did not find any negative judgments in the Indian letters, but both positive and negative judgment

resources were found in the British letters. The judgment resources in both sample groups appeared to occur in all of the moves of rhetorical structure, except Move 1. The use of positive explicit judgment was similar in both sample groups. The Indian authors used less (by almost one half) positive implicit judgmental resources than the British authors (Table 6). For example:

> In the final year of her undergraduate studies, she achieved marks of **80%** in two modules (in a department where marks **above 70 are relatively rare**). (positive-judgment-implicit) (UK7, Move 3, Step 3.1)

> He **does not think twice** to offer his services voluntarily to anyone seeking to further their education, including friends, colleagues, and students. (positive-judgment-implicit) (IN9, Move 5)

This could be because the Indian authors used adjectives to define applicant behavior, whereas the British authors used evidence such as score, award, conference name, paper title, and attendance. They also provided various examples and explained coursework criteria, and the rules and regulations of the institute. The British letters were therefore more factual. The results of Precht's (1998) study also support this finding.

Interestingly, we found slightly negative explicit judgmental resources in six of the 30 British letters. However, it seems that in these, the intention was not to highlights weaknesses, but to show the improvements, hard work and changes the applicants had accomplished.

For example:

> At first she comes across a little **shy,** but she quickly opens up and I have certainly enjoyed talking with her in my office, she is quite comfortable to make appointments, bring in her notebooks, and go through the experiments with me. **(**judgment-explicit-negative) **[**UK14, Move 4**]**

We observed that when an author mentioned weaknesses, connecting words were used in the latter part of the statement, such as "however," "but," and "despite." They then described the applicant's strengths, and how they overcame their weaknesses. Precht (1998) also stated that he found some negative descriptions in British recommendation letters (4 out of 10 letters). He qualified this by saying that the intention was not to damage the applicant, but that noting a fault makes the letter seem more credible to British readers. However, readers from other cultural backgrounds such as India who are unaccustomed to this British tendency may see such a remark as a red flag, which reflects negatively on the applicant.

3.3.3 Appreciation

Appreciation is modeled as semantic resources for evaluating entities. Table 5 shows that the average occurrence of the appreciation attitudinal resources was almost 20% less in the Indian recommendation letters. Table 6 shows that the explicit-positive-appreciation resources were fewer (by four fifths), as were the implicit-positive-appreciation resources in the Indian letters. Slightly negative appreciation resources were found only in the British letters.

For example:

> Lessons he plans are **creative** focused and yet **flexible** enough to meet the needs of his students. (positive-appreciation-explicit) (IN5, Move3, step3.4)

> We **still use** some of the material he prepared! (positive-appreciation-implicit) (UK11, Move, step 3.4)

The less common use of appreciation attitudinal resources (both explicit and implicit) in the Indian letters could be partly due to the education system. In India, assessment in Bachelor programs is mainly based on examinations (midterm and final) and very little on practical tests. Master's programs usually run for two years, or three years in some technical and management departments, with six months dedicated to minor thesis work (Cheney et al., 2005). They generally follow the bachelor teaching and assessment style. Class performance, attendance, and assignments are generally not part of student assessment (Cheney et al., 2005). Most Indian universities also have large classes and teacher-student ratios (24:1) in bachelor and master's programs (UNESCO, 2009). This may result in Indian authors having insufficient information on applicants' output, such as dissertation, assignments, and projects.

Most of the appreciation resources were found in Moves 3 and 4 of both sample groups. However, in the Indian recommendation letters, some also occurred in Moves 1 and 6 (Step 6.1), where authors explicitly appreciated other institutes (evidence found in four letters).

For example:

> I understand that he has applied for an MSc in Software Technology (Full time) with your **esteemed** Institution. (positive-appreciation-explicit) (IN3, Move 1)

> Biomedical informatics is an evolving domain and XXX is one of the **world leaders** in it. XXX will greatly benefit from this training. (positive-appreciation-explicit) (IN9 Move 6, Step 6.1)

No such appreciation was found in the British letters. The Indian authors appeared to include praise when writing recommendation letters for an applicant who was applying to internationally known institutions to persuade the reader.

Negative appreciation resources were found in five of the British letters, but none were found in the Indian letters.

For example:

> When she arrived, her English was **very poor,** and we were worried that she might struggle to complete the year. However, within six months of starting the course, her written and spoken English had improved massively. (appreciation-explicit-negative) [UK15, Move 3 Step 3.3]

As previously mentioned, it seems that the author is not attempting to highlight weaknesses, but to show the applicant's improvement, hard work, and changes. In the above example, the author illustrated that the applicant's English ability was initially not good enough, but improved within six months.

To sum up, one of the important purposes of writing recommendation letters is to provide information about an applicant, which is difficult to collect from Grade-Point Averages and Graduate Record Examination scores (Norcross, Sayette, & Mayne, 2008). Information about the aesthetic output of applicants, such as assignments, notes, attendance, and classroom discussions are difficult to collect using other means of evaluation. The use of a large number of appreciation resources makes the British letters very informative. British readers might expect the same from Indian recommendation letters.

The detailed breakdown of the use of attitudinal resources provides useful insights. We found similarities and differences in the explicit and implicit writing styles of the Indian and British authors. Judgmental explicit attitudinal resources were used similarly in both countries' recommendation letters, whereas more affect explicit attitudinal resources were found in the Indian letters. In contrast to explicit attitudinal resources, significantly more implicit attitudinal resources were found in the British letters. The British authors preferred to write factual recommendation letters with evidence and examples, whereas the Indian authors preferred to use many adjectives to evaluate applicants.

We also found slightly negative descriptions in explicit judgmental or appreciation resources in the British recommendations, whereas we found none in the Indian letters. However, the purpose was not to highlight an applicant's weaknesses; rather, such judgment illustrated their improvements and changes. We also found some unique aspects in the Indian letters. For example, some Indian authors provided information about the applicants' extra-curricular activities. This could be due to the Indian cultural belief that a student is considered an all-rounder if he or she is active in extra-curricular activities, such as dance and music. In addition, the Indian authors tended to praise the readers' institution to persuade them.

4. Conclusions

Few studies have been carried out on Indian recommendation letters, and in related research small sample sizes and a lack of studies that used move analysis and attitudinal resources can be observed. To fill these previous gaps, we examined Indian recommendation letters and compared them with British letters using the move analysis method to analyze the structure and appraisal theory to examine the use of attitudinal resources.

First, to find a concrete structure for recommendation letters, move analysis method was used to examine the rhetorical organization, based on 60 recommendation letters (30 each from the UK and India). Based on this rhetorical organization, we compared the moves or steps of both countries' letters. Moves 4 and 6 were found to be similar in the letters of both countries, whereas the other moves or steps, except for Move 2 and Step 6.3 in Move 6, were less common in the Indian recommendation letters. Overall, it appears that Indian authors tend to use fewer moves than British authors. This could account for the considerably shorter Indian recommendation letters.

Significant differences were found in the openings and endings of the two countries' letters. This gave the impression that the Indian authors preferred to start their letters by showing their relationship with the applicant, and to end them with good wishes. British authors seemed to begin by mentioning the purpose of the letters, which showed their awareness of the program to which the applicant was applying, and of the institute to which they were writing. The British authors ended their letters with strong evaluations of the applicant, summarizing their academic, personal, and social abilities, and showing their faith in the applicant. The findings attest to the rhetorical strategies used for composing a recommendation letter associated with various cultural contexts.

We also found similarities and differences in the use of attitudinal resources in both sample groups. Judgmental resources were found to be similar in both countries' recommendation letters. Affect attitudinal resources were found significantly more often in the Indian letters, whereas appreciation resources were found less often. This illustrates that the Indian authors preferred to show their feelings toward an applicant, rather than assess their output. The reverse appeared to be true for the British authors. One possible reason for finding fewer appreciation resources in the Indian recommendation letters could be due to the Indian education system, where bachelor and master's degrees are examination-based programs, and attendance, projects, and classroom performance rarely play a role in students' assessments. The Indian authors may therefore have had insufficient information about the applicants' output, such as dissertations, assignments, and projects.

The relationships between moves and the use of attitudinal resources were also identified. This appeared to vary between the two cultures. The Indian authors seemed to express their happiness and faith in the applicants throughout the recommendation letters; therefore, in the Indian letters, affect resources were found in Moves 1, 2, 3, and 6, whereas in the British letters these mostly occurred at the end of the letters. Some similarities were also observed in the use of judgmental resources, which occurred in all except Move 1 of the rhetorical organization. Most of the appreciation resources were found to be in Move 3 of both the Indian and British letters. However, in the Indian letters, some appreciation resources also occurred in Move 1 and 6, Step 6.1, where the authors mentioned their appreciation of other institutes.

Overall, this study fills a significant research gap. First, it examines Indian recommendation letters and compares them with those of the UK, where English is the native language. Second, it provides a concrete rhetorical structure for the recommendation letter. Third, it analyzes the use of attitudinal resources in recommendation letters. Finally, it explores the relationship between rhetorical organization and attitudinal resources. The study contributes to our knowledge of how a specific genre is shaped by different cultural contexts, and such knowledge may be used to raise writers' and applicants' awareness of variations in recommendation letters and readers' expectations. Interviews with some Indian and British authors could provide further insights into the reasons underlying the differences found in letters from these countries. In addition, future studies comparing recommendation letters issued in other cultural contexts that have not been examined before are also needed in order to shed more light on the features of this genre.

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