

A COMPARATIVE GENRE-BASED ANALYSIS OF LETTERS TO THE EDITOR IN PAKISTANI ENGLISH NEWSPAPERS: AN ADAPTED SWALES' CARS MODEL

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Abstract

Despite the success of genre analysis as a tool to study the rhetorical organization of language in certain social and professional contexts, the genre of writing letters to the editor in Pakistani English newspapers is still not studied systematically on a rhetorical basis. Previous research has examined the Pakistani newspaper letters mainly within the Critical Discourse Analysis frameworks that emphasize ideological representation, yet no study suggested a formally adapted form of the CARS model for the newspaper letters genre, and none of the studies attempted a systematic comparison of the rhetorical move structures of newspapers that have different editorial identities. The present study aims to fill these gaps by studying ten letters to the editor that were published in two prominent English newspapers of Pakistan (Dawn and The Nation) using a six-move adapted CARS model as a framework for the genre. The sample of social and political letters from each newspaper was chosen by purposive sampling, and a more detailed move and step analysis was applied to the letters. The results show that all six moves of the adapted model are consistently realized in both newspapers and in both thematic categories, but with differences at the step level: Step 1A (Heading) occurs as obligatory in Move 1, while Step 1B (Salutation) is completely missing from the corpus, meaning that the epistolary character of the genre has been lost in both newspapers at the level of steps. Step 4B (Oppositional Argument) becomes the one universal requirement for all 10 letters. The study brings an original adapted CARS model to the genre theory and ESP pedagogy, and provides a culturally embedded and rhetorical model for guiding the teaching of genre in educational settings of Pakistan.

Keywords: Genre analysis, Letters to editors, CARS model, Pakistani English newspapers, rhetorical move structure, ESP pedagogy, The Dawn, The Nation.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Language is not simply a tool for communication but rather a key mechanism that constructs, negotiates, and reproduces social realities. In the context of language studies in general, genre analysis is one of the most fruitful approaches to studying the use of language in specific social and professional situations. Genre analysis has been a useful analytical tool for researchers to analyze the rhetorical organization of texts in academic, professional, and media contexts ever since its systematic articulation by Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993). Attention to the communicative purposes that drive the production and reception of texts in genre analysis not only uncovers text structures, but also why and how texts are structured in particular ways in particular communities of practice.

There are many types of genres that make up print media discourse, of which one of the most interesting and important is the letter to the editor. Letters to the editor, as a kind of genre, serve as a formal space in which ordinary people address issues of the public sphere, consider and respond to editorial stances, and participate in democracy (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2001; Nielsen, 2010). Dual as it is, a product of individual expression and a place of institutional mediation, this genre is an especially fertile object of linguistic and rhetorical study. In the Pakistani context, the English-language print media acts as the main medium that handles the public discourse and acts as a medium of communication between citizens and state

institutions. The letters to the editor columns of Dawn and The Nation are particularly noteworthy discursive spaces that express the concerns and opinions of an engaged and educated public (Memon, 2016; Khan et al., 2024).

Although letters to the editor is a socially important genre, there is very limited systematic genre analysis of this text type in Pakistani English newspapers. Previous research on Pakistani newspaper letters has considered them mostly from a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) lens, where the analysis is based on the ideology represented in the letters and the power dynamics between the writer and the editor (Khan et al., 2024; Farooq et al., 2025), or on the demographic perspective that provides social profile of the letter writers (Memon, 2016). These studies have significantly contributed to the knowledge of Pakistani newspaper letters and their ideological and social rhetoric, but the rhetorical and genre-based aspects of this text type have still been under-researched.

The most recent study that is most relevant to the genre was conducted by Umrani et al. 2015 on letters written in three Pakistani English newspapers that they analyzed using Swales' (1990) model of CARS to find a six-move structure. This study, however, did not offer a formally adapted version of the communicative model of CARS to suit the communicative needs of the letter to the editor text type, nor did it attempt a systematic comparative analysis of newspapers of different editorial profiles. The original CARS model was developed for the introduction of a research article, which does not entirely represent the unique communicative functions and rhetorical characteristics of letters to the editor, so a formally adapted model is required.

The following are some important differences between the present study and previous ones. In the present study, we take a different theoretical approach to the same newspapers as compared to Khan et al. (2024), who used the Critical Social Analysis framework of Fairclough to examine letters to the editor in Dawn and The Nation, where the emphasis was on ideology as they dealt with social, political, religious and gender issues. The present study, however, does not attempt to analyze the ideological content of these letters but focuses on the rhetorical organization of the letters, using an adapted version of Swales' CARS model, to provide a contribution to genre theory and ESP pedagogy, not critical discourse analysis. The two studies are thus complementary, rather than duplicative, as they answer different research questions and generate different kinds of knowledge about the same genre.

In particular, there are three related gaps in the literature that have not received attention. First, there is no study that proposes a formally adapted CARS model, which is specific to the genre of a letter to the editor in the Pakistani newspapers. Second, no research has systematically compared the rhetorical move structures in two newspapers, Dawn and The Nation, whose editorial orientations are quite different. Third, the thematic content of social and political issues in the newspaper letters of Pakistan has not been studied systematically from the genre analysis perspective and the relationship between the thematic content and rhetorical move structure has not been studied. The present study aims to fill all three gaps, which will benefit the field of genre theory, rhetorical analysis and ESP pedagogy in the context of Pakistan.

1.2 Research Questions

The following research questions will be used to direct the current study:

1. What rhetorical move structure (RMS) do letters to the editor in Dawn and The Nation exhibit?
2. What modifications are needed to Swales' CARS model to make it suit the letter-to-editor genre in Pakistani English newspapers better?
3. Comparatively, what are the differences in rhetorical move structures within letters to the editor from Dawn and The Nation?

4. Is there any difference in rhetorical move patterns between social issues letters and political issues letters within the two newspapers?

1.3 Significance of the study

The present study has a number of significances. Firstly, it fills a gap in the literature identified by the fact that it proposes a formally adapted version of Swales' CARS model for the genre of letter to the editor, which is missing in the research on genre theory and ESP. Second, the comparative nature of the study in two major English newspapers of Pakistan provides a depth of analysis that has not been explored in the field before. Third, the study looks at the case study of how thematic content is matched with move structure, offering fresh insights into the flexible and context-sensitive nature of newspaper discourse genre conventions. Fourth, the study has direct pedagogical relevance as it provides a culturally situated genre model which can be used in the teaching of writing to learners and novice writers in Pakistan. Last but not least, given the unique nature of genre theory and critical discourse analysis, the study also addresses the question of social reality as reflected and constructed in the discourse of print media in Pakistan through the genre-specific rhetorical features, which lie at the heart of both.

2. Literature Review

The theoretical basis of the present study is based on genre theory from the two traditions of systemic functional linguistics and ESP. Halliday (1985) laid the theoretical foundations for understanding the social origins of recognizable genres who showed the systematic motivation behind language choices in relation to social contexts. On this basis, Martin (1984) proposed that genre is a goal-oriented social process and that genres are essentially influenced by the purposes they serve in specific cultural contexts. Miller (1994) theorized genre as social action, believing that genres are not only formal structures but also the social settings in which they are summoned up by members of a particular discourse community. This focus on the social and purposeful aspects of genre serves as the basis for the analysis of letters to the editor as a genre that is produced in a culturally dominant communicative condition of citizens' interaction with public. For ESP, the most influential framework for genre analysis developed by Swales (1990) marked the introduction of the distinction between moves and steps as basic analytical units and operationalized by the CARS model. A move is a communicative unit that has a coherent function within the genre and is realized through a specific linguistic strategy, a step. The CARS model distinguishes three core moves that guide introduction to a research article: Establish a Territory, Establish a Niche, and Occupy the Niche, all of which represent the persuasive logic of academic knowledge-making. Although the model is strong in a broad range of fields, subsequent studies have consistently shown that when the model is transferred from its original context, there is a need to adapt the model to each genre because of the different communicative functions and rhetorical structures of the genres.

Building on the genre analysis tradition, Bhatia (1993) placed genre in the larger context of professional discourse and devised a seven-step process-oriented methodology that took into account the three dimensions of the text, context, and cognition. Bhatia (2008) also suggested that genre analysis has a critical dimension, in that it plays a role in the reproduction of power relations within institutions. Paltridge (1994) added the significance of text boundaries in genre identification, and Dudley-Evans (1994) placed emphasis on move structure as the basic analysis unit, which can be systematically described and compared for rhetorical organisation. These contributions make up the theoretical foundation for the present study and serve as the methodological context for the formulation of the adapted CARS model offered in this study.

The CARS model has been found applicable and adaptable to a variety of contexts, such as the introduction of research articles, and is analytical in nature, as well as the need for

genre-specific adaptation. In their applied linguistics graduate degree research proposals, the three moves needed to be supplemented with more moves for Establishing a Theoretical Basis, Spelling out Methodology, and Achieving Closure, as the model was expanded by Yin (2016) to show that different genres have different move structures due to their different communicative purposes. Flowerdew and Dudley-Evans (2002) used genre analysis tools for the analysis of editorial letters in academic journals, and they found that correspondence genres can be described systemically by recognizing their rhetorical structures. The overall conclusions of these studies set the precedent for adapting the CARS model to a different genre and context, thereby methodologically justifying the adaptation of the CARS model that was proposed in the present study.

In his comparative rhetorical analysis of editorials in English and Persian newspapers, Bonyadi (2010) found that cultural concerns influence the conventions of the newspaper genre, especially on the level of opinion genre, and that the newspaper genre analysis can lead to the creation of useful tools for comparison of English and Persian newspapers. The move structure of newspaper editorials was also explored by Tongsibsong (2012), who also found some commonalities and some significant differences in the ways in which the moves are realized in different newspapers. These studies prove the usefulness of move analysis to the newspaper genres and fix the comparative dimension as a fruitful approach in the analysis of print media genres, which directly guides the comparative design of the present study.

To become familiar with the specific genre, patterns of circulation, and editorial process of letters to the editor, one must read a number of them, as outlined by Nielsen (2010), who created a typology of three main sub-genres of letters: storytelling, criticism, and appeal. But letter sections are not a reflection of public opinion; they are carefully constructed letters that frame public opinion in a manner that reflects the institutional agenda and ideology of the newspaper they appear in, as Wahl-Jorgensen (2001) showed. The implications for this insight are significant for the present study, as it indicates that individual writers' decisions must be considered alongside institutional gatekeeping processes, which can vary systematically across newspapers of different editorial identities.

Hartford and Mahboob (2001) proved that the letter-to-editor genre was found to have both universal rhetorical features and culturally specific variations. Ashraf (2013) also made a significant contribution by bringing concerns of genre analysis into critical discourse interest by describing Pakistani letters to the editor as a resistant genre, which inverts the dominant ideology. McCluskey and Hmielowski (2012) validated this finding; that genre is necessarily situated within the context of the social and political conditions in which it is produced, of significance for the theme of this study.

The study of genre analysis in letters to the editor of Pakistani English newspapers has significantly increased in the last few years. The basic study is carried out by Umrani et al. (2015), who have found that the letters from Dawn, The Nation and Daily Times have six moves, namely Beginning, Background, Sharing, Arguments and Facts, Solution or Conclusion, and Personal Details moves using the CARS model as an analytical framework. This study did not develop a formally adjusted version of the CARS model or systematically compare the move structures of the newspapers analyzed; it did offer a valuable empirical indicator of the rhetorical structure of the Pakistani letters-to-the-editor. The present study is an extension of the work done by Umrani et al. (2015), as it further extends the study by developing a formally adapted model and implementing a systematic comparative design.

Ali et al. (2015) further explored the analysis of Pakistani paper letters using Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and found that newspaper letters are a unique genre with ideological orientations that vary from other sections in the newspaper. Memon (2016) added a demographic background to the study, which was carried out by examining 282 letters

published in Dawn, finding that non-capital cities and female voices were grossly underrepresented in the letters section, thus questioning institutional gatekeeping in the genre. The Pakistani letters to the editor have been examined mainly from the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective in more recent studies. In October 2022, Khan et al. (2024) compared the two newspapers, Dawn and The Nation, using an integrated framework, which is a combination of two CDA models (Fairclough, 2003, 2013), and the differences were found in them in terms of their thematic orientation. It was revealed that ideological polarization influences the making of letter sections. Their research revealed that the most prevalent thematic categories, across both newspapers, were social and political issues, with Dawn receiving a much greater volume of letters on social and political issues than The Nation. Importantly, Khan et al. (2024) only demonstrated the ideological elements of the letters in these two newspapers and did not analyze the rhetorical move structure of the letters or offer any analytical framework based on genre, which the present study aims to fill.

This choice of social and political issues as two thematic categories is supported by Farooq et al. (2025), who analyzed the letters published in Dawn between 1 January 2025 and 31 January 2025, and found that 37.14% of letters were about social issues, while 23.81% were about political issues. Although Farooq et al. (2025) analyzed letters from January 2025, their thematic findings are consistent with the categories observed in our 2026 corpus, supporting the selection of social and political themes. To provide a cross-cultural comparative dimension, Iqra and Khan (2023) compared the letters in the Pakistani newspapers with those in the Canadian newspapers, based on Bhatia's (1993) model, revealing some notable differences in terms of vocabulary diversity, thematic orientation and tense usage between the two national corpora. They found that the meaning and rhetorical constructions of the letter-to-editor genre are influenced by the cultural context in which they are produced, so they concluded that culturally situated genre analysis is important and offered useful comparisons for the present study.

These studies collectively demonstrate that letters to the editor in the Pakistani English newspapers are a distinct genre that is analytically productive; social and political issues are the most common thematic categories in this genre; Dawn and The Nation are distinctively oriented newspapers and can therefore be analyzed comparatively. No previous research has adopted the CARS model, a model of formally adapted discourse, to analyse the rhetorical move structure of these letters, nor has there been a systematic comparative genre analysis of move structure between these two newspapers, nor has there been a study of the relationship between the themes of the letters and the rhetorical move patterns from a genre analysis point of view. Apart from Umrani et al. (2015), no published study has adopted the ESP approach of move as the analytical unit and proposed any adaptation of the CARS model to the genre letter-to-editor in Pakistani English newspapers, or has conducted a systematic cross-cultural comparison of move structure in the genre. This study thus fulfills gaps that remain unfilled in the existing literature and adds an original contribution to the genre theory, rhetorical analysis and ESP pedagogy in the Pakistani context.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study is a qualitative research study based on the genre analysis tradition that has been developed by Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993). The study will be descriptive and comparative in nature in order to identify, describe and compare the rhetorical move structures of letters to the editor published in Dawn and The Nation and will be conducted by means of an adapted Swales CARS-model.

3.2 Data Collection

The corpus was selected by picking out ten letters to the editor, 5 from Dawn and 5 from The Nation, based on their broad circulation, known readership, and different identities (Umrani et al., 2015; Khan et al., 2024). All the selected letters were published in March 2026, guaranteeing temporal consistency. Letters were obtained by purposive sampling, out of which the three letters in social issues and two letters in political issues were drawn from each newspaper, based on the thematic classification of the newspaper alone, not based on rhetorical structure. These categories are derived from the documented dominance of these in the Pakistani newspaper letters (Farooq et al., 2025; Khan et al., 2024). Farooq et al. (2025) examined letters written in January 2025, and the thematic results obtained in the current study are similar to those obtained by Farooq et al. (2025); they are cited for methodological consideration, but not for time comparison. The number of ten letters is similar to other qualitative genre analysis studies, such as Umrani et al. (2015, who analyzed thirteen letters.

3.3 Analytical Framework

The analytical framework is based on the CARS model of Swales (1990), which has been adapted for the genre of the letter to the editor. The three-move model was developed for research article introductions and is not representative of the rhetorical moves used in letters to the editor. The adapted model is based on close reading of the corpus and is based on the concepts of Umrani et al. (2015), Bhatia (1993), and Swales (1990). The framework was informed by three points made in the corpus: No letter uses a formal salutation; no letter refers to a previous letter or editorial; and there are three identifiable patterns of argumentative strategies in the corpus.

The model is based on 6 moves:

Move 1: Opening Frame

Achieved in Step 1A (Heading), appeared in all ten letters.

Move 2: Establishing the Issue

Background reference for a previous news item, editorial, article, or public event that motivates the letter, and is analogous to Swales' Move 1 of Establishing a Territory.

Step 2A: Reference to a specific news item or report.

Step 2B: General, long-term public concern or situation mentioned.

Move 3: The Writer's Position

Expressing the writer's personal experience, perspective, or reaction to the topic, and establishing the writer's authority and relevance to the topic.

Step 3A: Personal experience, observation, or professional identity in the move of the Writer

Step 3B: Opinion and/or critical voice.

Move 4: Developing the Argument

The rhetorical core of the letter: present the substantive argument, using facts, figures, reasoning, and rhetorical persuasion. This is achieved in three stages:

Step 4A: Making arguments for a positive stance or vision

Step 4B: Presenting arguments against prevailing conditions, policies, or practices

Step 4C: Making specific facts and figures provide evidential support

Move 5: Occupying the Stance.

Providing conclusions, suggestions, appeals, or recommendations to an appropriate audience or to the general public, as in Swales Move 3, Occupying the Niche. This is accomplished in 3 steps:

Step 5A: Providing specific suggestions/recommendations

Step 5B: Direct appeal or request to the appropriate authorities

Step 5C: Expressing a personal opinion, rhetorical question, guarded hope

Move 6: Closing Frame

Authenticating the letter and establishing the writer's social identity by providing details of the writer: name, professional title (where applicable), and geographic location.

As per Swalesian genre analysis conventions, if a move or step occurs in 75% or more of corpus texts, it is obligatory, in 50-74% it is quasi-obligatory, and in less than 50% it is optional.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis was done manually, in the form of close reading and sentence-level coding. No automated software was used because communicative moves need to be interpreted and they require human judgment to detect rhetorical intent. The analysis involved six steps: (1) close reading of each letter as a whole; (2) sentence-by-sentence identification of each sentence by its dominant function (Move), and of each sentence by its most salient function (Step) according to Swales' (1990) dominant function principle, where Move 2 and Move 3 were distinguished by the provision or lack of provision of contextual background, and Move 4B and Move 3B were distinguished by providing/omitting the writer's personal stance; (3) all the results were recorded in a three-column table, with the Sentence column, the Move column, and the Step column on the Excel spreadsheet manually; (4) a short descriptive analysis following each table;

(5) The frequencies of the moves and steps were aggregated across the corpus; (6) the frequencies of the moves and steps were disaggregated by newspaper and thematic category for comparative analysis.

3.5 Inter-Rater Reliability

A formal inter-rater reliability procedure was carried out before final frequency data was compiled to make sure coding was reliable and free of any subjectivity. A second writer who has a background in applied linguistics coded a stratified sample of three letters (30 per cent of the entire corpus), which represent half the newspaper and half the thematic category, independently, without referring to the coding of the primary researcher. Cohen's Kappa was computed as a measure of statistical agreement, which resulted in a high inter-rater agreement (Kappa = 0.83) and therefore, the adapted CARS model proved to be a consistent and replicable analytical tool for sentence-level move and step identification in the context of newspaper letters in Pakistani English.

3.6 Ethical Consideration

All letters cited in the present study were published in both print and online editions of Dawn and The Nation. These letters are public documents and do not need to have individual informed consent from the writers for research purposes. The names of the writers and identifying details are kept as they are in published letters, following the existing genre analysis research on newspaper letters like Umrani et al. (2015) and Memon (2016). All letters are on file with the author and can be made available upon request.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Overview of the Corpus

In this study, 10 letters to the editor were selected from the two popular newspapers in Pakistan, namely Dawn and The Nation. Five letters have been taken from each newspaper, three dealing with social issues and two with political issues. The letters were chosen purposefully, considering them for their thematic clarity.

The letters have each been studied individually and examined with the adapted model of Swales' CARS developed for this study. The analysis starts at the level of the individual letter and progresses to comparative and thematic statements in the later sections.

4.2 Individual Letter Analysis

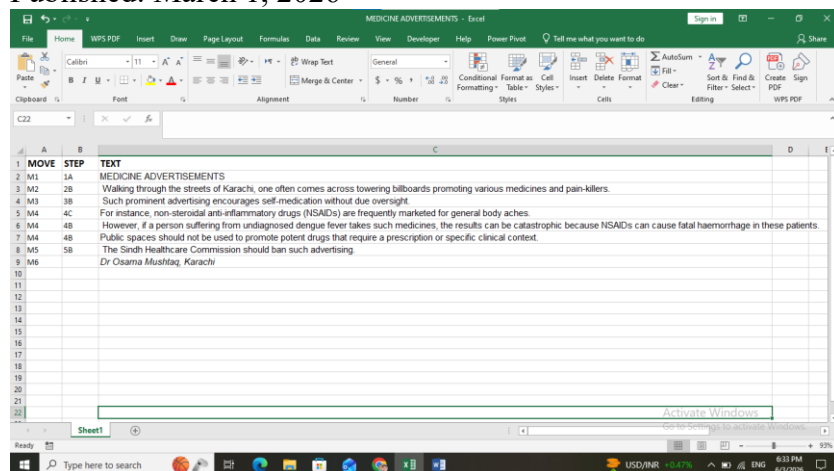
4.2.1 Dawn — Social Letters

Letter 1 (L1)

Title: Medicine Advertisements

Author: Dr Osama Mushtaq, Karachi

Published: March 1, 2026



MOVE	STEP	TEXT
M1	1A	MEDICINE ADVERTISEMENTS
M2	2B	Walking through the streets of Karachi, one often comes across towering billboards promoting various medicines and pain-killers.
M3	3B	Such prominent advertising encourages self-medication without due oversight.
M4	4C	For instance, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) are frequently marketed for general body aches.
M4	4B	However, if a person suffering from undiagnosed dengue fever takes such medicines, the results can be catastrophic because NSAIDs can cause fatal haemorrhage in these patients.
M4	4B	Public spaces should not be used to promote potent drugs that require a prescription or specific clinical context.
M5	5B	The Sindh Healthcare Commission should ban such advertising.
M6		Dr Osama Mushtaq, Karachi

Move Analysis:

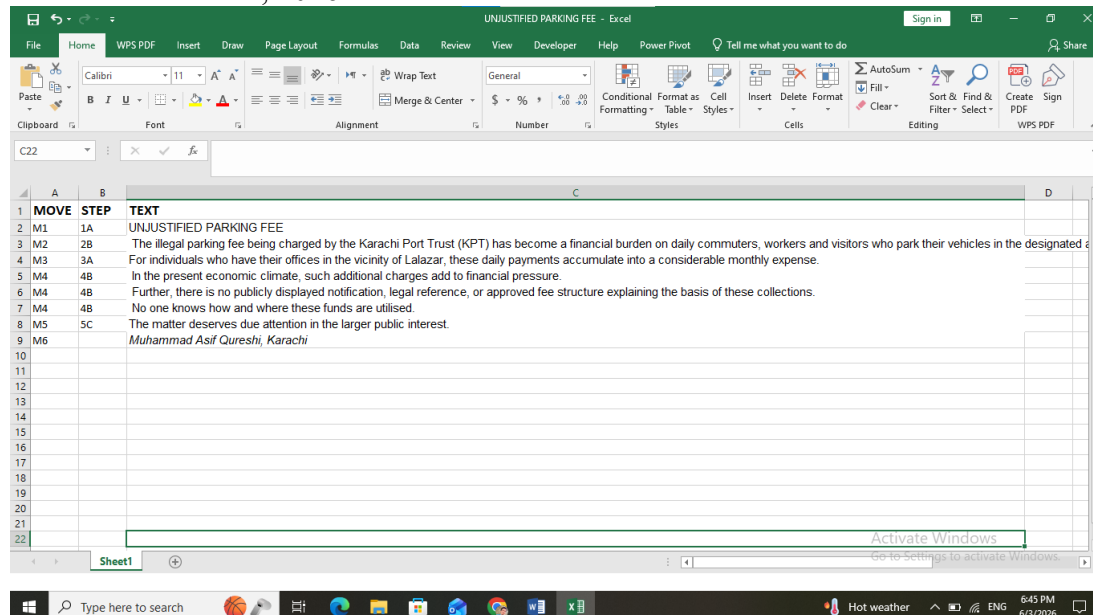
Though short, there is a rhetorical fullness in this letter. The writer establishes authority (implicitly based on a medical title) through personal narrative, realizing **Move 3, Step 3B**. The “However” sentence is analytically important because it introduces the most specific clinical evidence, in this case, the fatality case of dengue-NSAID, as an illustration of the consequences of **Step 4B**, followed by Move 6(writer Identification).

Letter 2 (L2)

Title: Unjustified Parking Fee

Author: Muhammad Asif Qureshi, Karachi

Published: March 2, 2026



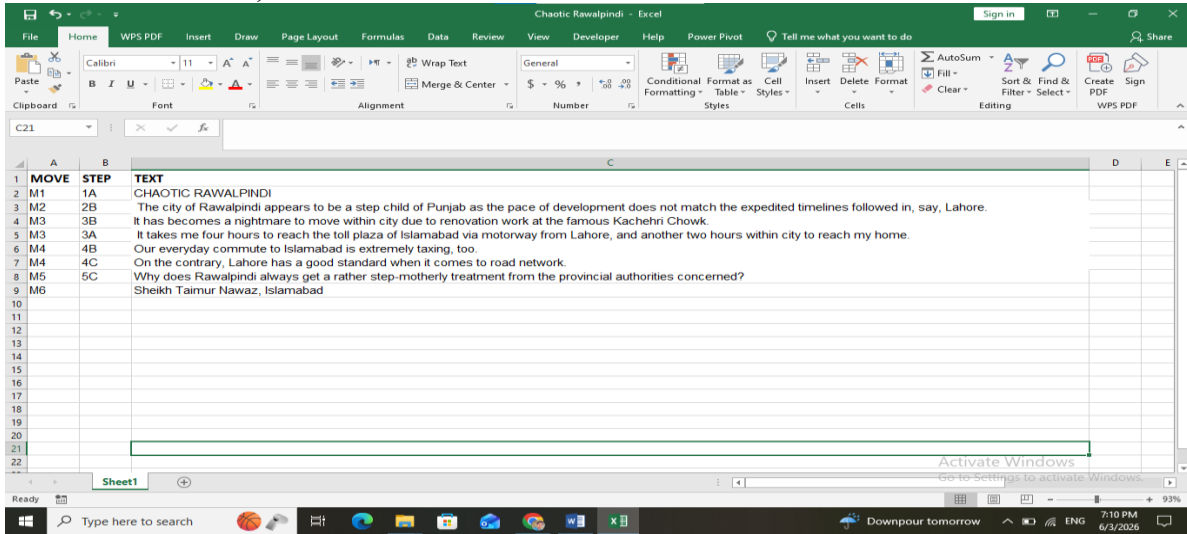
MOVE	STEP	TEXT
M1	1A	UNJUSTIFIED PARKING FEE
M2	2B	The illegal parking fee being charged by the Karachi Port Trust (KPT) has become a financial burden on daily commuters, workers and visitors who park their vehicles in the designated
M3	3A	For individuals who have their offices in the vicinity of Lalazar, these daily payments accumulate into a considerable monthly expense.
M4	4B	In the present economic climate, such additional charges add to financial pressure.
M4	4B	Further, there is no publicly displayed notification, legal reference, or approved fee structure explaining the basis of these collections.
M4	4B	No one knows how and where these funds are utilised.
M5	5C	The matter deserves due attention in the larger public interest.
M6		Muhammad Asif Qureshi, Karachi

Move Analysis:

In the following letter, the six-move structure is used in a minimal amount of text. In **Move 2, Step 2A** is anchored, while in **Move 4**, the two rhetorical questions are implied critique. The closing sentence ("delivered more out of frustration than conviction") allows for an evaluative analytical dimension in **Step 5C**, followed by Move 6(writer Identification).

Letter 3 (L3)

Title: Chaotic Rawalpindi
Author: Sheikh Taimur Nawaz, Islamabad
Published: March 2, 2026



MOVE	STEP	TEXT
M1	1A	CHAOTIC RAWALPINDI
M2	2B	The city of Rawalpindi appears to be a step child of Punjab as the pace of development does not match the expedited timelines followed in, say, Lahore.
M3	3B	It has become a nightmare to move within city due to renovation work at the famous Kachehri Chowk.
M3	3A	It takes me four hours to reach the toll plaza of Islamabad via motorway from Lahore, and another two hours within city to reach my home.
M4	4B	Our everyday commute to Islamabad is extremely taxing, too.
M4	4C	On the contrary, Lahore has a good standard when it comes to road network.
M5	5C	Why does Rawalpindi always get a rather step-motherly treatment from the provincial authorities concerned?
M6		Sheikh Taimur Nawaz, Islamabad

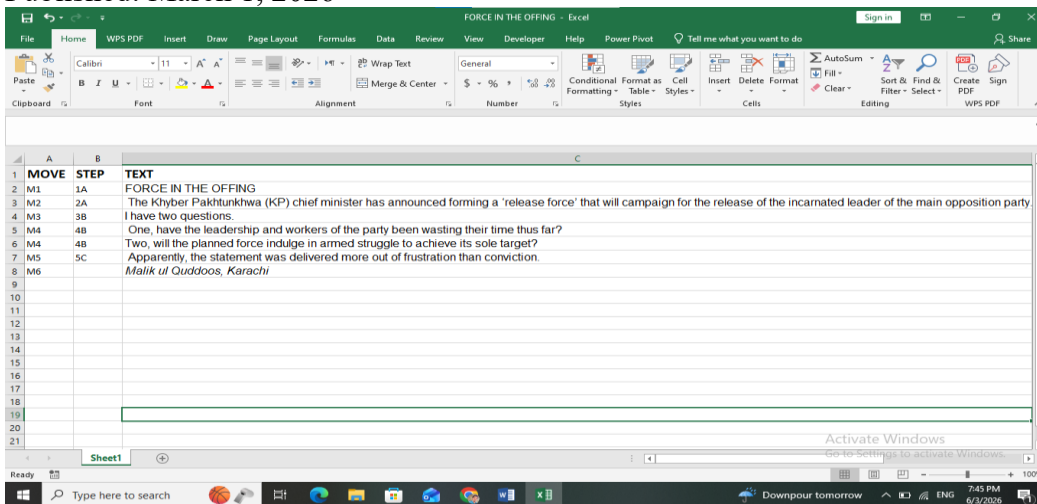
Move Analysis:

In **Step 3A**, the writer demonstrates how he has experienced the concern in his daily life near Lalazar, thereby realizing the move. **Move 4** groups three **Step 4B** sentences of financial critique and a legal observation (with no public display nor approved fee structure), creating illegality, not just unfairness. It ends with **Step 5C**, instead of an institutional appeal, which lends it a measured tone.

4.2.2 Dawn — Political Letters

Letter 4 (L4)

Title: Force in the Offing
Author: Malik ul Quddoos, Karachi
Published: March 1, 2026



MOVE	STEP	TEXT
M1	1A	FORCE IN THE OFFING
M2	2A	The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) chief minister has announced forming a 'release force' that will campaign for the release of the incarcerated leader of the main opposition party
M3	3B	I have two questions.
M4	4B	One, have the leadership and workers of the party been wasting their time thus far?
M4	4B	Two, will the planned force indulge in armed struggle to achieve its sole target?
M5	5C	Apparently, the statement was delivered more out of frustration than conviction.
M6		Malik ul Quddoos, Karachi

Move Analysis:

This is the most personally experiential letter in the Dawn corpus. Move 3 is achieved in both Step 3B and Step 3A, from a general evaluative opinion to a specific personal account of a four-hour journey. In Move 4, Lahore's road network is provided as a factual alternative, which highlights the uneven provincial response to the neglect of Rawalpindi, in Step 4C. The rhetorical question in Step 5C is an indirect accusation, not a demand, followed by Move

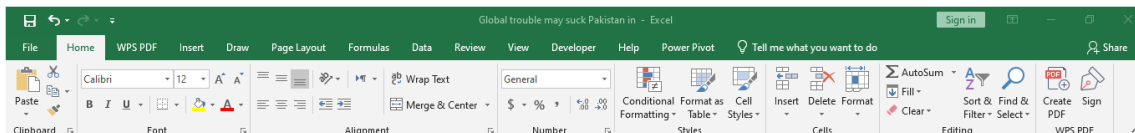
6(writer Identification).

Letter 5 (L5)

Title: Global Trouble May Suck Pakistan In

Author: Abdullah Ali, Karachi

Published: March 4, 2026



	A	B	C	D
1	MOVE	STEP	TEXT	
2	M1	1A	Global trouble may suck Pakistan in	
3	M2	2A	THIS is with reference to the report "Khamenei's assassination brings world to precipice of chaos" (March 2).	
4	M3	3B	The joint attack by the United States and Israel on Iran, resulting in the decapitation of its leadership and the killing of civilians, particularly innocent schoolgirls, has once again underscored	
5	M4	4C	From the very beginning, the Zionist regime of Israel has never hesitated in eliminating whatever it perceives as a threat — Saddam's Iraq, Qadhafi's Libya or Assad's Syria.	
6	M4	4B	The broader strategic objective appears to be complete Israeli dominance across West Asia.	
7	M4	4B	Without neutralising revolutionary Iran, that key objective remains unfinished.	
8	M4	4B	It is foolhardy, however, to believe that Israel will stop after Iran's fallout.	
9	M4	4B	The next strategic targets could well be Pakistan and Turkiye.	
10	M4	4C	These are the only two Muslim countries possessing powerful and advanced military machines, a factor Israeli strategic planners never exclude from their long-term equations.	
11	M4	4C	Recently, a former Israeli prime minister and current opposition leader Naftali Bennett described Turkiye and Pakistan as an emerging Sunni Islamic bloc that, in his view, could pose a th	
12	M4	4C	In Pakistan's case, particu- larly, its nuclear deterrence has for long unsettled Western powers.	
13	M4	4B	Nuclear deterrence alone, however, may not suffice for Pakistan, and Nato's Article 5 may not prove to be a dependable shield for Turkiye if the proverbial push comes to shove.	
14	M5	5A	Both states, therefore, require credible and sustainable conventional deterrence.	
15	M5	5A	A functional strategic align-ment between them — one that operates effectively in moments of crisis — would be essential.	
16	M5	5A	The primary objective must be the expansion of robust ballistic and cruise missile capabilities alongside the modernisation of air, electronic and cyber defences.	
17	M5	5A	Central to this effort is the integration of land, air, and sea forces through enhanced joint coordination and multi-domain exercises.	
18	M5	5A	Having said that much, strategy abroad demands stability at home.	
19	M5	5B	Pakistan, with volatile eastern and western borders, cannot afford prolonged political instability.	
20	M5	5B	This should immediately attract the attention of our planners and strategists.	
21	M6		Abdullah Ali, Karachi	

Move Analysis:

It is the longest and most argumentatively developed letter in the corpus. Move 4 uses named historical precedents and specific sources to link together 4 sentences of Steps 4B and 4C, and the second sentence in Move 3 gives credit to Thucydides to set up an intellectually sophisticated analytical positioning. Move 5 includes six sentences with four concrete strategic recommendations, followed by two urgent calls to Pakistani planners, followed by Move 6(writer Identification).

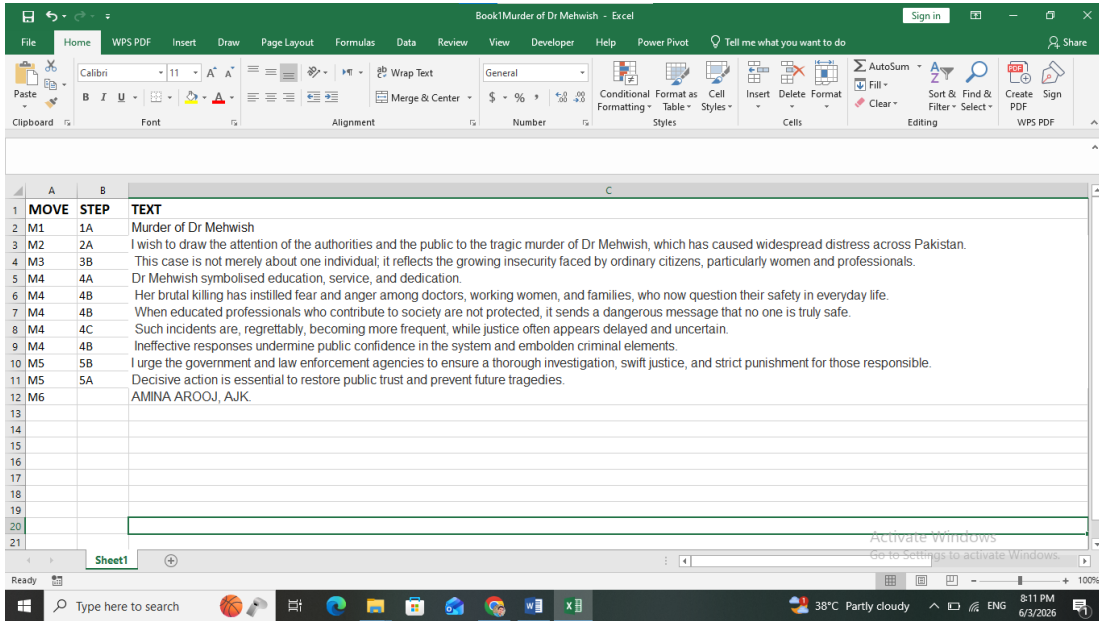
4.2.3 The Nation — Social Letters

Letter 6 (L6)

Title: Murder of Dr Mehwish

Author: Amina Arooj, AJK

Published: March 1, 2026



MOVE	STEP	TEXT
M1	1A	Murder of Dr Mehwish
M2	2A	I wish to draw the attention of the authorities and the public to the tragic murder of Dr Mehwish, which has caused widespread distress across Pakistan.
M3	3B	This case is not merely about one individual; it reflects the growing insecurity faced by ordinary citizens, particularly women and professionals.
M4	4A	Dr Mehwish symbolised education, service, and dedication.
M4	4B	Her brutal killing has instilled fear and anger among doctors, working women, and families, who now question their safety in everyday life.
M4	4B	When educated professionals who contribute to society are not protected, it sends a dangerous message that no one is truly safe.
M4	4C	Such incidents are, regrettably, becoming more frequent, while justice often appears delayed and uncertain.
M4	4B	Ineffective responses undermine public confidence in the system and embolden criminal elements.
M5	5B	I urge the government and law enforcement agencies to ensure a thorough investigation, swift justice, and strict punishment for those responsible.
M5	5A	Decisive action is essential to restore public trust and prevent future tragedies.
M6		AMINA AROOJ, AJK.

Move Analysis:

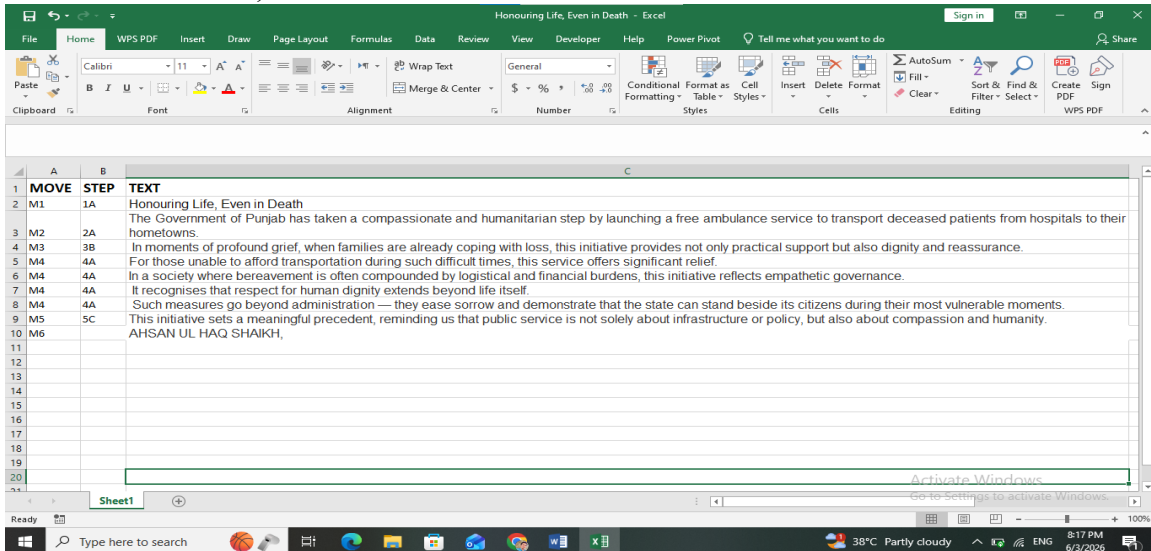
The five sentences in Move 4 are a mixture of Steps 4A, 4B and 4C: making Dr Mehwish a positive figure and then moving on to the systemic impacts of her murder and the delayed justice. The sentence "Incidents do occur more frequently" serves as Step 4C because it's an observation that shows systemic patterns, not just opinions. Steps 5B and 5A are combined into Step 5 to provide the closing with a double rhetorical effect, followed by Move 6(writer Identification).

Letter 7 (L7)

Title: Honouring Life Even in Death

Author: Ahsan ul Haq Shaikh, Chunian

Published: March 1, 2026



MOVE	STEP	TEXT
M1	1A	Honouring Life, Even in Death
M2	2A	The Government of Punjab has taken a compassionate and humanitarian step by launching a free ambulance service to transport deceased patients from hospitals to their hometowns.
M3	3B	In moments of profound grief, when families are already coping with loss, this initiative provides not only practical support but also dignity and reassurance.
M4	4A	For those unable to afford transportation during such difficult times, this service offers significant relief.
M4	4A	In a society where bereavement is often compounded by logistical and financial burdens, this initiative reflects empathetic governance.
M4	4A	It recognises that respect for human dignity extends beyond life itself.
M4	4A	Such measures go beyond administration — they ease sorrow and demonstrate that the state can stand beside its citizens during their most vulnerable moments.
M5	5C	This initiative sets a meaningful precedent, reminding us that public service is not solely about infrastructure or policy, but also about compassion and humanity.
M6		AHSAN UL HAQ SHAIKH,

Move Analysis:

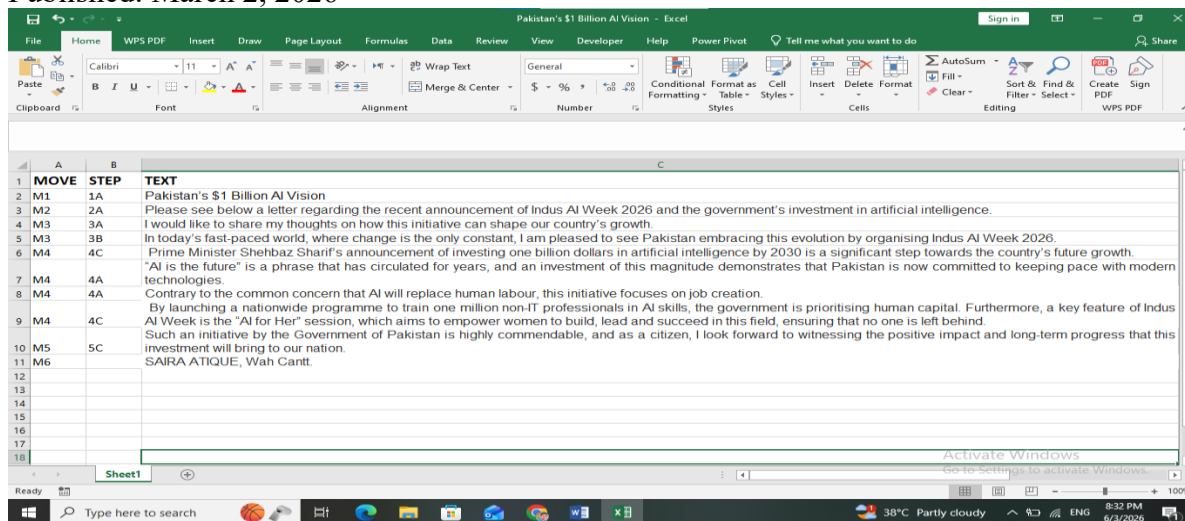
This is the clearest civic appreciation letter in the corpus; only four consecutive Step 4A sentences, and none in Step 4B, are dedicated to the humanitarian aspect of the ambulance project. Move 5 is only used in Step 5C and it is the most contemplative form of closing in The Nation corpus, followed by Move 6(writer Identification).

Letter 8 (L8)

Title: Pakistan's \$1 Billion AI Vision

Author: Saira Atique, Wah Cantt

Published: March 2, 2026



MOVE	STEP	TEXT
M1	1A	Pakistan's \$1 Billion AI Vision
M2	2A	Please see below a letter regarding the recent announcement of Indus AI Week 2026 and the government's investment in artificial intelligence.
M3	3A	I would like to share my thoughts on how this initiative can shape our country's growth.
M3	3B	In today's fast-paced world, where change is the only constant, I am pleased to see Pakistan embracing this evolution by organising Indus AI Week 2026.
M4	4C	Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's announcement of investing one billion dollars in artificial intelligence by 2030 is a significant step towards the country's future growth.
M4	4A	"AI is the future" is a phrase that has circulated for years, and an investment of this magnitude demonstrates that Pakistan is now committed to keeping pace with modern technologies.
M4	4A	Contrary to the common concern that AI will replace human labour, this initiative focuses on job creation.
M4	4C	By launching a nationwide programme to train one million non-IT professionals in AI skills, the government is prioritising human capital. Furthermore, a key feature of Indus AI Week is the "AI for Her" session, which aims to empower women to build, lead and succeed in this field, ensuring that no one is left behind.
M5	5C	Such an initiative by the Government of Pakistan is highly commendable, and as a citizen, I look forward to witnessing the positive impact and long-term progress that this investment will bring to our nation.
M6		SAIRA ATIQUE, Wah Cantt.

Move Analysis:

This letter is not nearly as brief as it appears; Move 4 is actually five sentences, incorporating Steps 4A and 4C. The inclusion of the names of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the USD one billion amount, the professional training programme (one million professionals), and the "AI for Her" session offer robust support for the positive argument. The writer also rebuts the AI-replaces-labour argument with a well-developed reframing approach in move 4, followed by Move 6(writer Identification).

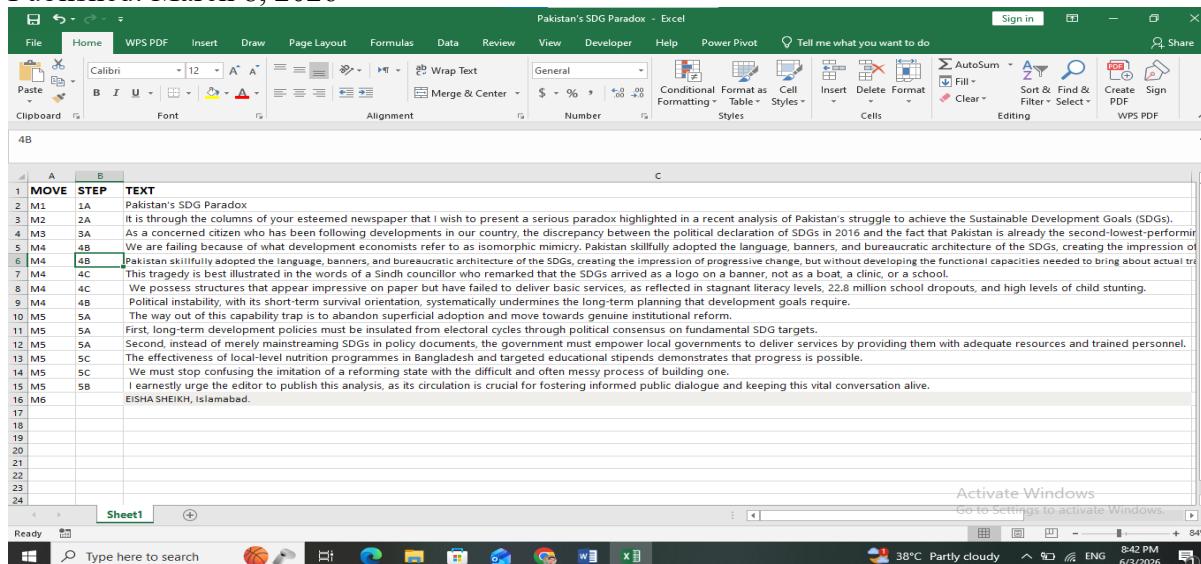
4.2.4 The Nation — Political Letters

Letter 9 (L9)

Title: Pakistan's SDG Paradox

Author: Eisha Sheikh, Islamabad

Published: March 8, 2026



MOVE	STEP	TEXT
M1	1A	Pakistan's SDG Paradox
M2	2A	It is through the columns of your esteemed newspaper that I wish to present a serious paradox highlighted in a recent analysis of Pakistan's struggle to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
M3	3A	As a concerned citizen who has been following developments in our country, the discrepancy between the political declaration of SDGs in 2016 and the fact that Pakistan is already the second-lowest performing country in the world is a stark reality.
M4	4B	We are failing because of what development economists refer to as isomorphic mimicry. Pakistan skillfully adopted the language, banners, and bureaucratic architecture of the SDGs, creating the impression of progressive change, but without developing the functional capacities needed to bring about actual transformation.
M4	4C	This tragedy is best illustrated in the words of a Sindh councillor who remarked that the SDGs arrived as a logo on a banner, not as a boat, a clinic, or a school.
M4	4C	We possess structures that appear impressive on paper but have failed to deliver basic services, as reflected in stagnant literacy levels, 22.8 million school dropouts, and high levels of child stunting.
M4	4B	Political instability, with its short-term survival orientation, systematically undermines the long-term planning that development goals require.
M5	5A	The way out of this capability trap is to abandon superficial adoption and move towards genuine institutional reform.
M5	5A	First, long-term development policies must be insulated from electoral cycles through political consensus on fundamental SDG targets.
M5	5A	Second, instead of merely mainstreaming SDGs in policy documents, the government must empower local governments to deliver services by providing them with adequate resources and trained personnel.
M5	5C	The effectiveness of local-level nutrition programmes in Bangladesh and targeted educational stipends demonstrates that progress is possible.
M5	5C	We must stop confusing the imitation of a reforming state with the difficult and often messy process of building one.
M5	5B	I earnestly urge the editor to publish this analysis, as its circulation is crucial for fostering informed public dialogue and keeping this vital conversation alive.
M6		EISHA SHEIKH, Islamabad.

Move Analysis:

It's the analytically most complex letter in the corpus, using the three steps of Move 4 and the three steps of Move 5 in a total of thirteen sentences. Move 3 is used in Step 3A, which is unusual for a political letter because it moves the positioning of social letters to political content. The only case in the corpus of a writer taking the editor as an explicit interlocutor is

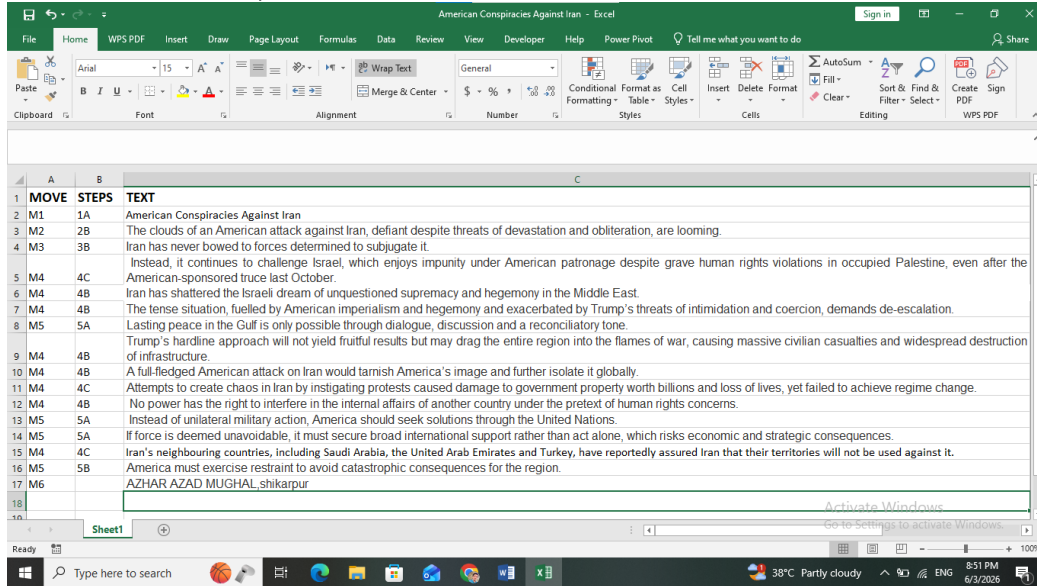
in the closing appeal, "I earnestly urge the editor to publish this analysis", followed by Move 6(writer Identification).

Letter 10 (L10)

Title: American Conspiracies Against Iran

Author: Azhar Azad Mughal, Shikarpur

Published: March 6, 2026



Move Analysis:

The most salient structural detail in the corpus is that Move 4 and Move 5 sentences are not in consecutive order in the letter, but are interleaved: in between sentences of Move 4, there is a suggestion in Move 5, and then argumentation continues. Move 4 has nine sentences that combine Steps 4B and 4C, and the last appeal is against an “international actor” instead of a domestic institution, followed by Move 6(writer Identification).

4.3 Frequency Analysis

The following tables provide a summary of the patterns across the corpus; each letter has been analyzed separately.

Table 1: Move Frequency Across All Letters

Move	Function	Dawn (n=5)	The Nation (n=5)	Total (n=10)	%	Status
Move 1	Opening Frame	5 (100%)	5 (100%)	10	100%	Obligatory
Move 2	Establishing the Issue	5 (100%)	5 (100%)	10	100%	Obligatory
Move 3	Positioning the Writer	5 (100%)	5 (100%)	10	100%	Obligatory
Move 4	Developing the Argument	5 (100%)	5 (100%)	10	100%	Obligatory
Move 5	Occupying the Stance	5 (100%)	5 (100%)	10	100%	Obligatory
Move 6	Closing Frame	5 (100%)	5 (100%)	10	100%	Obligatory

Table 2: Step Frequency Analysis

Move	Step	Dawn (n=5)	The Nation (n=5)	Total (n=10)	%
M1	1A: Heading	5	5	10	100%
M2	2A: Specific event	2	3	5	50%
M2	2B: General issue	3	2	5	50%
M3	3A: Personal experience	2	3	5	50%
M3	3B: Personal opinion	4	4	8	80%
M4	4A: In support	0	3	3	30%
M4	4B: Against	5	4	9	90%
M4	4C: Facts and figures	4	5	9	90%
M5	5A: Suggestion	2	4	6	60%
M5	5B: Appeal	3	3	6	60%
M5	5C: Opinion/hope	2	3	5	50%

4.4 Comparative Analysis: Dawn vs The Nation

Table 3: Comparative Step Analysis

Step	Dawn (n=5)	The Nation (n=5)	Observation
2A: Specific event	2 (40%)	3 (60%)	Nation slightly higher
2B: General issue	3 (60%)	2 (40%)	Dawn slightly higher
3A: Personal experience	2 (40%)	3 (60%)	Nation slightly higher
3B: Personal opinion	4 (80%)	4 (80%)	Equal
4A: In support	0 (0%)	3 (60%)	Nation only
4B: Against	5 (100%)	4 (80%)	Dawn universal
4C: Facts and figures	4 (80%)	5 (100%)	Nation universal
5A: Suggestion	2 (40%)	4 (80%)	Nation notably higher
5B: Appeal	3 (60%)	3 (60%)	Equal
5C: Opinion/hope	2 (40%)	3 (60%)	Nation slightly higher

A comparison of these two yields two analytically significant differences. First, Step 4A (supportive argument) is found in three of the Nation letters, but not any of the Dawn letters, and therefore represents a type of civic appreciation letter that is completely missing from Dawn. Second, Step 4C (facts and figures) is used in all five Nation letters (100%) but only four letters from the Dawn (80%), indicating that the Nation writers in this corpus are somewhat more consistent in their use of facts and figures in both social and political letters. In all five Dawn letters, Step 4B – oppositional argument – is present, while four Nation letters contain it, again showing the overall oppositional rhetorical stance of the Dawn letters. The Nation corpus has a much higher number of Step 5A (concrete suggestions) in its closing messages (80% vs. 40% in Dawn letters), indicating that The Nation's closing style is

more advocacy and solution-oriented.

4.5 Thematic Analysis: Social vs Political Letters

Table 4: Step Realization by Theme

Step	Social (n=6)	Political (n=4)	Observation
2A: Specific event	3 (50%)	2 (50%)	Equal
2B: General issue	3 (50%)	2 (50%)	Equal
3A: Personal experience	4 (66.7%)	1 (25%)	Social notably higher
3B: Personal opinion	4 (66.7%)	4 (100%)	Political universal
4A: In support	3 (50%)	0 (0%)	Social only
4B: Against	5 (83.3%)	4 (100%)	Both high
4C: Facts and figures	4 (66.7%)	5 (100%)	Political universal
5A: Suggestion	3 (50%)	3 (75%)	Political slightly higher
5B: Appeal	4 (66.7%)	2 (50%)	Social slightly higher
5C: Opinion/hope	4 (66.7%)	1 (25%)	Social notably higher

The full sentence-level analysis highlights a number of interesting trends. Step 3A (personal experience or identity) is found in four of six social letters but in only one of four political letters, suggesting a stronger sense among social letter writers of grounding their authority in personal experience or professional identity or civic engagement. The one political letter using Step 3A in L9 (Pakistan's SDG Paradox) in which the writer explicitly claims to be a concerned citizen who is keeping a check on the developments in the country, thus bridging the social and political letter conventions. Step 4A (supportive argument) is found only in social letters, and all three occur in the Nation corpus. There is a higher percentage of political letters that include Step 4C (facts and figures) than there are in social letters (100% of political letters include this step, whereas 66.7% of social letters do). This is in line with the higher demand for evidence in political argumentation. Step 5C (opinion, rhetorical question, or guarded hope)is used in four social letters and just one political letter, and social letters tend to be much more reflective, varied and occasionally optimistic with their closing than political letters, which end mostly with concrete suggestions and direct appeals.

4.6 Key Findings

Finding 1: All 6 Moves are Universally Obligatory.

All six moves are found in 100% of the letters across the two newspapers and two thematic categories, which supports the six-move structure as the stable rhetorical framework of the letter-to-the-editor genre in Pakistani English newspapers. This stability is at the move level and at the step level; it is variable depending on the newspaper, thematic content, and the choice of the individual writer.

Finding 2: Steps 4B & 4C are Jointly Obligatory.

Step 4B (oppositional argument) and Step 4C (facts and figures)are the two most common steps in Move 4 and constitute the rhetorical engine of the genre: found in 90% of all letters in the corpus. This discovery not only further confirms the oppositional description of the genre but also marks the evidential base of this opposition as a rhetorical necessity.

Finding 3: Step 3B is the Dominant Positioning Strategy

Step 3B (direct personal opinion) is found in 80% of all letters and is equally common in both newspapers; this is the most common positioning strategy, whereas Step 3A (personal experience or identity) is found in 50% of all letters and is used as an add-on or alternative strategy.

Finding 4: "Thematic Content Shapes Step Realization

Like social and political letters, letters have a standard number of six moves, but each move is realized differently. Step 3A and Step 4A seem to be significantly more common in social letters. Step 4C is found in all political letters and in two-thirds of the social letters. Step 5C

is mentioned in four social letters and one political letter. The difference in communication situations, argumentation, and rhetorical functions across thematically different types of communication is expressed in these patterns.

Finding 5: The Nation's Rhetorical Range is Broader and More Solution-Oriented

The Nation letters show higher frequencies of Step 4A (60% vs 0%), Step 5A (80% vs 40%), Step 5C (60% vs 40%), and Step 4C (100% vs 80%) compared to Dawn letters. Where Step 4B exists in all letters, and Step 4A exists in none, the letters are more consistently and exclusively oppositional. These differences are characteristic of two distinct yet complementary rhetorical orientations of the two newspapers.

Finding 6: Newspapers use the same move framework.

Although the rhetorical orientation at the step level is different between the two newspapers, the structure of the letters produced by both newspapers is the same, and the adapted CARS model reflects a common rhetorical framework that is shared across newspapers, above and beyond their distinct identity.

5. Discussion

The sentence-level analysis verifies that the genre is structured as a stable six-move genre, which is consistently implemented in both newspapers, both thematic categories, and letters of different lengths. There is meaningful level-to-level variation that is systematically related to thematic content and newspaper identity that exists within this macro-level stability. This discovery brings up an interesting theoretical discussion about the probabilistic classification of moves proposed by Swales (1990). The CARS model predicts that some moves in the model may not occur in a subset of texts, but in all six letters examined, all moves from the CARS model are present. This may indicate that the genre of letter to the editor is more consistent rhetorically than other genres of academic writing for which the CARS model was developed, perhaps because of the rhetorical consistency that is provided by newspaper editors as gatekeepers of the genre. It is a finding that can be used to add to genre theory by suggesting that Swales' probabilistic framework should be modified for institutionally mediated public genres.

The near obligatory pairing of Steps 4B with 4C — 90% of letters had both of these components, strengthening the resistant and evidential character of the genre. Pakistani letter writers, however, not only complain but develop a critique using details, statistics and named sources. The subtype of civic appreciation letter that affirms instead of challenges institutional action is a discovery in genre analysis literature on Pakistani newspaper letters, which is introduced in The Nation corpus (L7 and L8).

The present study validates and extends Umrani et al.'s (2015) six-move model by employing sentence-level analysis, extracting steps from the corpus and carrying out a systematic comparison between newspapers and thematic categories. The obligatory nature of Steps 4B and 4C offers rhetorical support for Ashraf's (2013) depiction of the genre as resistant, and the evidential element represented by Step 4C provides a nuance: resistance here is not just attitudinal, but structural, based on factual evidence.

The thematic differences in step realization expand the results of Khan et al. (2024) and Farooq et al. (2025) by showing that social and political categories are not only distinguished in terms of their topic but also by unique rhetorical approaches. Comparing the two, Step 4A does not appear in the letters of Dawn, but appears in three of the Nation's letters, whereas Step 4B appears in all of the letters of Dawn. These differences resonate with the research of Khan et al. (2024), in which the ideological and genre analysis aspects of the same genre highlight different yet complementary dimensions. The principle of genre-specific CARS adaptation beyond contexts of academic research articles validated here supports the principle set forth by Yin (2016) and Flowerdew and Dudley-Evans (2002) that it is essential.

This study also makes some claims. First, letters to the editor of Pakistani English newspapers are structured by six moves that are repeated across newspapers, themes and length of letters. Second, the adapted CARS model more accurately reflects the rhetorical organization of this genre than does the original three-move model. Thirdly, Steps 4B and 4C are always co-occurring, which means that the genre's resistance is both attitudinal and evidential. Fourth, step-level realization takes place in relation to thematic content; social letters are more experiential, constructive and reflective, whereas political letters are more evidential, oppositional, and institutionally oriented. Fifth, the genre includes a separate subtype of civic appreciation, which should be identified as a separate subtype, in addition to the prevalent resistant subtype. Sixth, the study of such a small number of texts, the short time frames, the cultural differences, and the lack of a micro-level analysis of hedging, modality, and evaluative language in each move call for further research using larger corpora, longitudinal designs, cross-cultural comparisons, and micro-level analysis of hedging, modality, and evaluative language in each move.

Conclusion

In this study, the rhetorical move structure of letters to the editor has been explored in two popular English newspapers in Pakistan: Dawn and The Nation, using an adapted Swales CARS model and analyzing the sentences to see how the rhetorical moves are used at the sentence level. The analysis of 10 letters published in March 2026 has shown that this genre can be structured consistently in the following six moves: Opening Frame, Establishing the Issue, Positioning the Writer, Developing the Argument, Occupying the Stance and Closing Frame; the sequence is consistently the same across both the newspapers and thematic categories. Meaningful differences at levels of each step show that genre conventions are not always uniformly applied but are sensitive to the communicative contexts, topics, and editors in which various types of letters are produced. The almost compulsory co-occurrence of 4B and 4C makes it clear that the genre's resistant nature is also attitudinal and evidential, and the inclusion of civic appreciation letters in the Nation corpus suggests a rhetorically distinct variant that could be noted in the genre analysis literature. It can be noted that the modified CARS model suggested in this study is an original and empirically sound contribution to genre theory and ESP pedagogics with respect to the context of Pakistan. The analysis of this socially significant genre could be further expanded and deepened with bigger and more diverse corpora, longitudinal designs, and micro-level linguistic analysis.

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