



RESEARCH PAPER

**Language, Identity, and the Action Thriller: A Genre Analysis Study
of Bourne Supremacy**

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ABSTRACT

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The study was undertaken to carry out genre analysis of Bourne Supremacy, an action thriller movie. The intent was to explore the linguistic pattern, the rhetorical strategies, and the move structure by applying Bhatia's multi-perspective framework. The present study is important from the pretext that genre study is helpful in building communication skills. Teachers can make use of it in communication skill class by bringing in media text, a powerful language tool to target all the four language skills. They are also obliging for media studies discipline for clarity and perception of a particular genre and its visual construction. The linguistic analysis of this particular action thriller genre study revealed interesting details pertaining to Bourne Supremacy. It shows how the typical pattern emerges in a new format. Its linguistic structure gives rise to thrill and action at a liberal pace. The move structure indicates a complicated and twisted plot built up through inquiry questions. The rhetorical strategies are simplistic in tone often based on formal tone. They are entwined with the theme and the mystery in a coherent manner.

Introduction

Action films trend has a wide range of style and creativity at play. The current study was focused on exploring the language in an action thriller. The researchers' interest was developed due to teaching Functional and Communicative English at the university level as well as an intriguing curiosity about the media studies discipline in universities. The research focused on the use of linguistic choices and rhetorical strategies employed in the selected movie. The purpose was to learn how these linguistic choices and rhetorical strategies add to the action of the movie. The research also focused on the identifiable pattern of move structure emerging through genre-

based analysis. Erwin Panofsky (as cited in Barsam, 2010, p. xiii) an art historian shared an insight regarding movies as a form of popular art. They are what most other art forms are not, and thus a necessity. He stated if all the dignified and seasoned poets, composers, painters, and sculptors were forced by law to stop their activities, a small fraction of public would notice it and still a smaller fraction would regret it. If the same phenomenon was to happen with the movies, the social consequence would be noticed at a large scale.

Theoretical Framework

To develop the theoretical framework, the study chose genre theory to approach a wider range of the understanding of topics in the film under question. Derrida (1980) proposed that every text belongs to some genre as there is no genre less text, adding to the presumption that any text can be examined with genre perspective. Therefore, the study selected action thriller as a genre and the written script of *Bourne Supremacy* as data for this study, because; firstly, the move structure and rhetorical strategies used to achieve the communicative purpose of *Bourne Supremacy* as an action thriller has not been studied earlier; and secondly, despite availability of the existing literature on merits of genre analysis, the existing literature in Pakistan does not seem to take into consideration the linguistic features of the language used in modern-day action thrillers. The study employed Bhatia's "multidimensional perspective framework" (2004, pp. 163-167) for identifying the cognitive move structure of *Bourne Supremacy* and rhetorical strategies used to achieve its communicative purpose. In addition, the study conducted a linguistic analysis of action thriller movie, *Bourne Supremacy*, to identify its linguistic features, and explored the learning outcomes in the language classrooms.

Literature Review

Pascoe (2014) conducted a study to explore the representation of masculinity in film with a particular focus on leading a male character in a purposive sample action genre and romantic comedy film. The study suggested that masculinity is a construct, the meaning of which is dependent on the individual. Since films are a social artifact, therefore everyone comes with an individual perception about the characters in the film. The findings of the study indicate that the male characters created for each genre have characteristics; especially the lead male character has more real-world norms of masculinity as compared to the romantic comedy male character.

A study directed by Rasheed & Shah (2002) presented a method to classify movies based on audio-visual cues present in the previews. A preview summarizes the main idea of a movie providing suitable amount of information to perform the genre classification. The initial classification is usually based on action and non-action movies through the visual content. However, they went further to identify the horror, drama, thrillers through colour coding, explosions, and gun fire. This work is a step towards automatically building and updating video database, thus resulting in minimum human intervention. Other potential applications include browsing and

retrieval of videos on the Internet (video-on-demand), video libraries, and rating of the movies.

The formalist literary theorist Northrop Frye (1957) presented certain universal genres and modes as the key to organizing the entire literary corpus. Contemporary media genres are identifiable to specific forms rather than to universals of tragedy and comedy.

Now-a-days, films are also in routine classified as 'thrillers', 'westerns' and so on. However, there are innumerable other genres to investigate the field of media which have no names. It is expected in popular culture to identify certain characteristics of the genre. The primary characteristics of the action genre which are identified include the following, though of course they may not be limited to these:

- The protagonist is a member (or through the course of the film becomes a member) of a particular subgroup of the American society.
- There is a clear distinction made between the subgroup and American mainstream culture at large.
- Characters in the film define themselves according to the subgroup.
- At some point in the movie, the protagonist is forced to choose between the subgroup and mainstream society (though "mainstream society" may be represented by a larger, less well-defined group).

Hyland (2004) argues that genre is a term for grouping texts together, representing how writers typically use language to respond to recurring situations. It is a study of language to indicate its structure, style, pattern, content and intended audience. Therefore, genre is a social action and a speech event that has a communicative purpose shared by members of a particular discourse community (Swales, 1990). A genre, therefore, is seen as a class of communicative events with a common purpose which the members or participants of the discourse community not only recognize, share, rather own it. Therefore, it is these purposes which determine the structure and linguistic choices in the genre.

Bhatia (1993, p.13) defines, "genre is primarily characterized by the communicative purpose it is intended to fulfill." This definition somehow, like other definitions, helps to determine the communicative aspect of any genre through Bhatia's model. This model created along with Swales goes beyond the lexicogrammatical description of the language use in the given genre by incorporating text external context, i.e., institutional, and situational aspects.

Bhatia gives different examples to illustrate his point that the communicative purposes determine the structure of the genre. Bhatia (1993) distinguishes between main purpose and additional purposes, but it is not clear how he gets to this hierarchy. However, the noteworthy aspect is that any major change in the communicative purpose(s) is likely to give us a different genre; however, minor changes or modifications help us distinguish sub-genres (Bhatia, 1993).

Genre-based research in technical communication was conducted by Luzon (2004) to describe the different approaches to genre and genre-teaching. The study suggested whether the research focuses on textual forms, linguistic feature of a genre or the social practices of the discourse community that owns the genre, they all tend to complement the research. The study concluded that from academic perspective it is not enough to make the students aware of the textual regularities of a genre. These regularities, which are determined by the social actions, performed through language in response to the recurrent rhetorical situations, will be highly significant to empower the students to succeed as members of the community of practice.

Interaction between Genres and Media

The interaction between genres and media can be seen as one of the instrumental aspects contributing to the growing change and development in genres. Many theorists have pointed out that the inconsistency is defining genres that is to say; they exist in that point of history. In film studies, popular studies on conventions of genres indicate the historical nature of genres (Neale, 1995). The current genres go through different phases of evolution and popularity. They are in constant flux of change and differentiation. Miller (1984) believes in social nature of genre and the purpose it intends to accomplish. Still ahead Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) have stressed on the dynamic nature of genres. Miller also argues with reference to mass media reading and writing within genres *purposes* are instrumental to learn about the genre. Referring to film, Tudor (as cited in Chandler, 1997, p. 4) notes that 'a genre...defines a moral and social world' therefore, a particular genre develops to frame and legitimize some concerns, it raises questions and pleasures.

The present-day media theory shows a triangular relationship between the text, its producers, and its interpreters. Therefore, genres provide frameworks within which texts are produced and interpreted. They are seen as establishing mutual relationship and understanding between the genre writers and its interpreters. There is an understanding of an 'ideal reader' who would be able to interpret the embedded assumptions in the texts. There is an indication towards the commercial and industrial significance of the genres. They tend to consistently maximize the mass production of any medium to keep the relationship intact with their customers. Though it is an established fact that genres exist within the realm of economic relations and practices (Neale, 1995; Chishti & Qadir, 2015; Afzaal. Hu, Chishti, & Imran, 2019). This helps in strengthening the audiences' preferences to remain intact.

Contemporary media theorists also emphasize the existence of Intertextuality and Interdiscursivity between texts. It is in relation to other texts or lived experience that a genre comes to an understanding and makes an impact. We already have a mental picture of the experience being exhibited through a text or moving image to connect to. These images or scripts help us to coordinate with the familiar events in everyday life. Fiske (1987, p. 115) offers an excellent example in this respect about car chase which only makes sense in relation to all the others we have seen--similarly it goes the same for Intertextuality which we have so often seen on our screen. It is then,

a cultural knowledge of the concept 'car chase' which is encoded by the producer to be decoded by the viewer. Therefore, it is safe to say genres can thus be seen as medium of building communication.

Material and Methods

The genre-based linguistic analysis of *Bourne Supremacy* was conducted by employing Bhatia's "Multidimensional Perspective Framework".

The study employed the qualitative approach. According to Hsieh & Shannon (2005) qualitative content analysis is defined as a research method used for the subjective elucidation of the content of text through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying the themes or patterns in it. Therefore, we can also consider its scientific approach with practical and organized analysis of texts within the context of communicative event with careful precision of rules without hasty quantification (Mayring, 2003). The qualitative research provides most befitting answers to the use of language cultural and institutional settings. The purpose of the study was to explore and interpret the linguistic characteristic features of English as used in the action thriller movie, *Bourne Supremacy*. The study tried to make sense of the ways the language was observed to have been used in the movie with the help of the script.

Hyland (2004) maintains that producing a text/ script according to the norms of the genre requires one to focus on the strategies used to organize and achieve the communicative purpose of a text, identify the intended audience, and determine the linguistic features. Although, there are various frameworks to explore such features, Bhatia's widely used "multidimensional perspective framework" (2004; pp. 163-167) has been employed in this study. It consists of seven tools, as listed below.

Bhatia (2004; pp. 163-167) suggests that these tools may be used in combination with those traditionally used by researchers to provide a broad framework for exploring genre-specific characteristics of a text, and the strategies used to realize the text's communicative purposes. He further suggests that these tools may be used in any order for conducting the analysis. To apply this framework, Bhatia (2004; pp. 163-167) suggests starting the investigation by putting the text in its situational context, and asking several questions about different elements, such as, "communicative purpose, situation-type, content, participants, medium/channel" (Bhatia, 2004; p. 170) and seeks answers to various aspects, which may include but are not limited to the following dimensions:

The lexico-grammatical features of the text/ script (Bhatia, 2004; p.170) such as, the use of verbs, nominal, adjectives, pauses and silence etc., as well as the level of complexity in the use of these features to determine:

The genre to which the text may belong.

The communicative purpose as reflected using such features

The intended or potential audience and the nature of relationship the writer seems to have with them (Bhatia, 2004; p.171)

- The rhetorical organization of the text and comparison with other similar texts in the same field to determine any variations "in terms of lexico-grammatical realizations and any variations "in terms of lexico-grammatical realizations and rhetorical structuring" (Bhatia, 2004; pp.172-173)
- The relevant genre-specific limitations imposed by professional community and the socio-cognitive dimensions in constructing the genre to which the script seems to belong, by asking questions, such as:
 - Who is the writer of the movie?
 - What relationship is created between the scriptwriter and the audience?
 - Who are the audience of the movie, or what criteria are used to target the audience?
 - Are there any signs of intertextuality or interdiscursivity in the text?
 - How language has been used in the construction of genre? (Bhatia, 2004; pp.170-178).

As mentioned above, the study employed the *multidimensional model* (Bhatia, 2004; Afzaal 2020) for conducting the genre-based linguistic analysis of the movie, Bourne Supremacy through the script. While applying this multidimensional framework, the following aspects were kept in view:

- The use of verbs, and rhetorical strategies in the script/movie to determine:
- The genre to which the text may belong.
- The communicative purpose as reflected using these features.
- The intended audience of the movie and the kind of relationship it seemed to create between them.
- The lexico-grammatical features of the movie script, the inquiry-based questions as textualization feature in selected movie script of Bourne Supremacy; and the rhetorical move structure of Bourne Supremacy script and movie at text level.

The genre analysis suggested by Bhatia (2004) involves determining the cognitive structuring of the text being examined. This was done by employing Bhatia's (2004; pp.64-65) descriptive and evaluative approach for determining the "common element," which guides the choice of various rhetorical strategies to achieve the communicative purpose of a text. For example, the rhetorical moves used in

advertisements are channeled by the communicative purpose of either describing or evaluating a product. So, Bhatia (2004) labeled each piece of information or data element in the advertisement according to its communicative purpose and its move (p. 65). The process of identifying the moves in *Bourne Supremacy* was also guided by closely observing the dialogues in the script as well as in the movie according to its communicative purpose, in addition to taking into consideration the following sub questions:

- Who is the scriptwriter of the *Bourne Supremacy*?
- What relationship is created between the scriptwriter, producer, director, and the audience of the movie?
- Who are the audience of the action thriller movie, *Bourne Supremacy*, or what criteria are used to choose its audience?
- Examining the use of language in the movie/script to identify signs of intertextuality and Interdiscursivity. In addition, the intertextuality and interdiscursivity were analyzed by examining how the scriptwriter maintained the level of action and thrill yet moved it to a whole new level of creativity.

Genre Analysis

The Bourne Supremacy is a continuation of the story of a former CIA covert operation, assassin suffering from psychogenic amnesia. Bourne is acted out by Matt Damon and the film focuses on his attempt to learn more of his past as his past is shrouded with conspiracy involving the CIA and Operation Treadstone. The film also stars Brian Cox as Ward Abbott, Joan Allen as Pamela Landy and Julia Stiles as Nicky Parsons.

Action thrillers are not usually based on long dialogues, its smart script and action tells us about the characters. It is not just the character which captivates but the action that reveals the character and this moves the action with clarity and without confusion. Much of the dialogues comprise conversations between CIA agents who have their own specialized language and terms especially during search operations and action scenes. *The Bourne Supremacy*, therefore, is a fresh-looking film. It has got an excellent script, although the pace is breathtaking, and the action comes thick and fast. There is always logic, the change of location gives us a sense of place and helps us not to lose the thread. There is also time for moments of tenderness and quiet. A fast-paced action thriller with striking car chases. It is one of those movies overflowing with more action and thrill than any others in the previous decade and therefore, sets a different tone and pace for the ones that came after.

From the standpoint of Bhatia's institutional perspective, theme of *Bourne Supremacy* is built on a combination of thrill and suspense filled action scenes, with a particular move structure. The frame of the film is set on building a delirious state of images from the onset instead of loud exploding scene. The intertextual and

interdiscursive pattern of action thrillers and suspense is visible using very brief dialogues and with the use of present tense which is indicative of the present moment when the incident occurs, however the mist and constant rainfall adds to the scene, it designates a perturbing situation which is about to explode and expose a reality. From the standpoint of situational and contextual analysis the shot reveals a novel idea, it is a recurrence of a nightmare and none-other but Jason Bourne having it. The linguistic pattern using nouns like, 'soldier', 'drill', 'training', are an indication of military training programme. A training programme which has strict discipline, strict routine, zero tolerance for insubordination and it is imperative to follow orders without question. The director has established generic integrity to raise the importance of the opening scene and to create suspense. However, novelty is achieved through a delirious state of a flashback and by the opening lines "This is not a drill, soldier." "We clear on that." During this exposition move, the linguistic choices are based on brief declarative statements leading to an imperative remark; suggestive of threat that might lead to drastic consequences if misinterpretation occurs.

From the initial confused state during exposition and the restlessness move, the director takes on further moves like building curiosity and suspense, confusions gaining momentum with each twist and turn in the plot. He raises the element of doubt and then gradually dusts off the mystery. The writer shows a protagonist who stands out due to his very high IQ level. The move structure indicates that the writer and the director are establishing ground for his intelligence to be exercised and appreciated by the audience and therefore it resonates with the movie title, *Bourne Supremacy*. The interdiscursive element is visible through the portrayal of protagonist; well equipped to execute actions with precision. His analytical skills are of supreme appreciation as he solves the core issue of mystery about himself which had initiated this whole quest.

The linguistic pattern of the protagonist's utterances is in fact a portrayal of his dilemma. They remain consistent and exhibit his confused and doubtful state combined with a deep silence and a long pause. The best example we witness during the first scene when he questions Marie regarding the legitimacy of writing down these flashbacks, "Two years scribbling in that notebook. It's the same thing repeatedly." He finds it futile to fill in pages and in this confused state, he sat alone during the night and flips through the diary, he exhibits an aura of self-reliance rather than needing a shoulder for help.

The rhetorical strategies in the movie are built on giving assurances when in doubtful situation, using polite tone, having confidence that this will eventually solve the issue. The use of simple sentences in present tense makes it a communicable script for the audience. There is consistency of thought process and attitude of certain characters like Abbott, Pam, Cronin, and Yuri in different scenes, indicated through the rhetorical strategies adopted by them. The linguistic pattern of team leader, Pamela, sounds domineering. In scene two the linguistic pattern that emerges through higher-up's talk is to establish the authority and overall check on the operation.

Pamela, through her curt dialogues and a clipped tone “I want one final go-round” assures and asserts herself as the operation head. Whereas, when the scriptwriter needs to indicate surprise, we find that Pamela’s linguistic choices remain the same throughout the movie. It is usually on first name basis, “Bourne”, “Martin”?

Her linguistic pattern and tone of voice with differing stress and intonation gives impetus to the moves she will make ahead. Through her, we get to know why her absolute clarity is important to state, why it necessitates the action, “For a thief, a mole. If it only narrows the suspects, it’s a bargain at ten times the price.” There is no beating about the bush here and the very long pauses during the scene indicate tension at Martin’s end but, understanding is being met through resolute stance on the matter from Pamela.

However, in scene 8, we find there in the middle of it is Pamela Landy sitting with her head down when Martin, the CIA director’s calm yet infuriated voice resounds, “Two men dead, three million in cash gone, no Neski files, and all very public.” He questions Pam’s decision as well as her approach in retrieving the files, which were going to nail the “the mole, a rat”. A huge amount of cash in obtaining Neski files had resulted in a failure. This had to be a secret operation as he states, “this is still a clandestine agency, no?” The whole operation had gone haywire with the murder of the agent and with the disappearance of the file. It had given them nothing, instead exposed the CIA before local law agencies which CIA cannot afford.

On the other hand, Pam does not view it as failure. This surprises Martin. “You call it a success?” There is no cynicism or sarcasm in the tone, however; a difference of approach and a clash of perspective seem evident. The contextual clues indicate that the director is not making the journey of this discovery altogether too plain but constantly building up an argument through clash of opinions. We also witness how respect and understanding is met, even with the differing approach. Pam explains how close they are in solving the case as they have retrieved a fingerprint that leads to one of their own people.

Findings and Conclusion

The linguistic choices during this scene are both investigative as well as explanatory. The rhetorical strategies suggest a logical pattern negotiated to eliminate the deadlock in the approach. They not only help in solving the mystery, but also to reach its root cause. Therefore, if answers to this case must be found, Pam negotiates her way directly to a top-level security clearance. “We have a lead, Marty.” Martin feels convinced and allows Pam to pursue but cautions her, “but you’re on a very short leash.” The conversation is brief and with minimal use of words.

The rhetorical pattern suggests skill and excellence of understanding, which is the essence of a successful scriptwriter. By having smart dialogues in the script, it is to avoid unnecessary wordiness. The typical CIA jargon and its professional protocol have been most emphatically focused on. In Scene two CIA office building coded language once again gains momentum with Pam’s anxious tone in order to establish

“eye contact,” to gain view “eyes are up the whole way,” to know about the firing incident. Instructions are directed at once and there is no breach in gaining information through handy use of manpower and technology. The interdisciplinary clues exhibit director’s understanding of the CIA culture, the training of its personnel and familiarization with the kind of language used there during different scenarios.

The writer raises doubts, apprehensions and show of power through questions. Yuri, in scene three adopts an authoritative tone while addressing Kirill, who on the other hand maintains an aura of silence; it confirms he is a man of few words. Yuri’s discourse is snappish and suggests urgency to be on the plane for yet another task waiting for Kirill. “Are you sure the information is good?” Kirill questions about some information and its validity which is indicative of his future task. Yuri’s response, “he’ll be there” has an assured tone to it. The deal is simple as any other business deal. The situational and contextual analysis reveals a flow of pattern. There is a repeated structure of inquiry. Rhetorical strategies based on smart dialogues, curt remarks, and use of phrases has an emphatic impact.

Ward seems cautious and anticipates something conspicuous, therefore considers Pam’s visit as a threat. He remarks very cautiously, “Let me check my schedule.” We see Pam’s number two, Cronin, outside Ward’s office, a deliberate move to indicate his presence as well as Pam’s arrival. We witness how skillfully Pam has yet again negotiated her way inside Ward’s office and in meeting him about Treadstone project.

Supremacy exaggerates action thriller genre features, and this is typicality known to the audience. It has put before them an amnesia stricken ex-CIA agent, who has not lost it all even in this state. He amazes himself at every turn through his own self-discovery of languages known to him, physical strength and fighting skills to combat his adversaries. Besides this, having immense wealth and multiple passports at his disposal it simply surprises him. The writer gives a new meaning to the word ‘action’ itself. Instead of gore actions with violence and innocent killings there is an immense concentration on search and hunt. Wise use of resources and money is the high mark of Bourne series. There is a new touch to the movie script through multiple camera movements giving off simultaneously going on action scenes. It would be safe to say that there is liberal use of action in *Bourne Supremacy* with mystery and suspense at its peak with every twist and turn. The audience are made to stick to their seats till the very end which is unbelievably mind blowing unlike the typical understanding of an action thriller end.

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