

A cross-cultural study of restaurant reviews from two different locations

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Abstract

Reviews are critical appraisals that simultaneously describe and evaluate different aspects of books, films, restaurants, etc., in order to influence readers' consumption and leisure choices. In the case of restaurant reviews, they are a critical evaluation of the overall experience expressed in terms of food, ambience, location, and service, enabling prospective customers to decide whether they should visit (or avoid) a particular restaurant over others. Although some research is available on the rhetorical structure and content of professional, semi-professional, and user-generated restaurant reviews, very little attention is paid to the underlying cultural differences, especially cross-cultural differences in these reviews from different geographical locations. The purpose of this study is, therefore, to provide a cross-cultural genre analysis of the rhetorical, content, and linguistic/metaphorical aspects of restaurant reviews. The sample consists of 30 restaurant reviews extracted from two specific geographical locations and national newspapers from India and Singapore. It is hoped that this analysis will be useful for both novice food critics and customers alike, helping the former to write better reviews for different markets and the latter to make appropriate dining choices.

Keywords: restaurant reviews, cross-cultural genre analysis, rhetorical analysis, content analysis, linguistic/metaphorical analysis

Resumen

Un estudio transcultural de reseñas de restaurantes de dos lugares diferentes

Las reseñas son una valoración crítica que describe y evalúa simultáneamente distintos aspectos de libros, películas, restaurantes, etc., para influir en las decisiones de consumo y ocio de los lectores. En el caso de las reseñas de restaurantes, se trata de una evaluación crítica de la experiencia global en relación

con la comida, el ambiente, la ubicación y el servicio que permite a los clientes potenciales decidir si visitarán (o evitarán) un determinado restaurante frente a otros. Aunque existen algunas investigaciones sobre la estructura retórica y el contenido de las reseñas de restaurantes profesionales, semiprofesionales y generadas por los usuarios, se presta muy poca atención a las diferencias culturales subyacentes, especialmente a las diferencias transculturales en estas reseñas procedentes de distintas ubicaciones geográficas. El propósito de este estudio es, pues, proporcionar un análisis transcultural de género centrado en los aspectos retóricos, de contenido y lingüístico-metafóricos de las reseñas de restaurantes. La muestra analizada consta de 30 reseñas de restaurantes extraídas de dos localizaciones geográficas concretas y de periódicos nacionales de la India y Singapur. Se espera que este análisis sea de utilidad tanto para los críticos gastronómicos noveles como para los clientes, de tal forma que ayude a los primeros a redactar mejores reseñas para los distintos mercados y a los segundos a tomar decisiones gastronómicas adecuadas.

Palabras clave: críticas de restaurantes, análisis transcultural de género, análisis retórico, análisis de contenido, análisis lingüístico-metafórico.

1. Introduction

In today's world, dining outside in restaurants is considered a pleasurable activity when compared to the drudgery of cooking and eating at home. However, restaurants do not simply serve the purpose of feeding people, they are a "total consumption package" (Bell & Valentine, 1997, p. 125) that provide patrons a holistic experience. Restaurants are therefore constantly competing and redefining themselves in ways that appeal to their clientele. Apart from food and drinks, proprietors focus not only on the culinary aspects of their restaurants but also on other aspects such as atmosphere, décor, professional staff, and consumer experience (Ashley et al., 2004). Newspaper restaurant reviews written by food critics are an excellent reflection of these aspects as reviewers critique all these aspects to help customers in their dining choices.

The practice of reviewing restaurants originated in France in the 18th century, spread to guidebooks and print media such as newspapers and magazines in the 20th century, and extended more recently to online websites such as Yelp (Chik & Vásquez, 2016). Although online reviews are an important source of information, the goal of the present article is to revisit traditional restaurant reviews in print media as they are still very popular with older customers with higher income levels (Parikh et al., 2017). In addition, in

comparison to user-generated reviews, these reviews written by food critics “play a vital role in constructing themes of taste, culinary and social capital, authenticity and terroir/nationality” (Goodsir et al., 2014, p. 129). The role of critics in these print reviews as informers and gatekeepers can have considerable influence as customers are more likely to patronize restaurants with positive reviews than those with negative reviews (Fleischer, 2009; Hsu et al., 2012).

Although the focus of this paper is on print reviews written by critics, an important aspect that is of interest in both print and online restaurant reviews is that of representation and its accompanying politics. According to Fiske (1989, p. 191), it is important “to interrogate the nature of these politics” in cultural studies and therefore in any kind of food writing as it reflects identity politics of nationality. Fürsich (2014) addresses these identity politics in ethnic food reviews from three theoretical contexts: the representation of national identity (e.g., establishing national identity as different enough in an ethnic restaurant review to be considered special, but not so different that it drives away Western customers who are not prepared for too exotic an experience), the problematic relation between authenticity and culture (e.g., the dichotomy between classic cuisine versus experimental and hybrid forms of cooking), and the ‘us’ (referring to citizens) versus ‘them’ (referring to foreigners) discourse (e.g. how owners of ethnic restaurants are depicted as Others) in restaurant reviews. Not unlike travel journalism, she aptly points out that the task of food reviews is to promote and explain different kinds of culture to prospective customers who may not be familiar with the food or culture of a particular restaurant.

To extend this body of research on food reviews and culture, the objective of this paper regarding newspaper print reviews is threefold:

1. To conduct a rhetorical, content and linguistic/metaphorical analysis of restaurant reviews using the genre analysis framework;
2. To highlight the rhetorical, content, and linguistic/metaphorical similarities and differences between restaurant reviews from the two different geographical locations of India and Singapore;
3. To identify whether there are any cross-cultural differences between the restaurant reviews from the two geographical locations.

While the first objective will provide a holistic analysis of the genre of newspaper restaurant reviews, the second objective will highlight the rhetorical, content and linguistic/metaphorical similarities and differences between the reviews from the two different geographical locations, and the third one will focus on cross-cultural differences between these reviews. Above all, it is hoped that this analysis will be useful for both novice food critics and customers alike, helping the former to write better reviews and the latter to make appropriate dining choices. Finally, it is hoped that a comparative analysis of reviews from print media in the two different geographical locations will provide insights into cross-cultural differences in these reviews and the influence of local contexts in which these reviews are produced.

2. Related research

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of the research available on restaurant reviews from four specific perspectives: genre, content, metaphorical and cross-cultural analysis.

2.1. Genre analysis of restaurant reviews

The genre of reviews in this paper has been explored using the ESP framework (Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993, 2004, 2017) and is an extension of work conducted in the past on the analysis of other reviews. It is particularly suited for this analysis as it holistically examines the realisation of texts at the contextual, rhetorical and linguistic levels while taking into consideration the underlying communicative purpose of the text as a whole and its constituent parts. The visual representation of this framework is as follows:

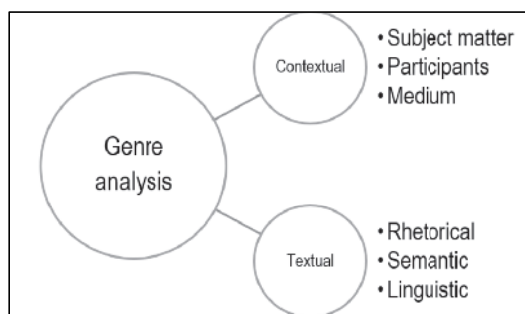


Figure 1. Framework for genre analysis (adapted from Kathpalia, 2022, p. 176).

In conventional genre analysis, the focus is on the contextual and textual aspects of a genre, specifically on identifying the text internal indicators of genre integrity, such as the rhetorical, semantic and linguistic features of texts belonging to the same genre. In the tradition of the ESP school, therefore, Kathpalia (2022) analysed conventional book, film and product reviews by examining their contextual situation in terms of their communicative purpose, situation type, content/subject matter, participants and channel/medium of communication, as the contextual background of this genre has an impact on its realization at the rhetorical, semantic and linguistic levels of realization. Based on this analysis, one can make certain predictions about generic structure (that it will begin with a catchy headline/subhead, introduce the object under review, describe and evaluate it, and finally recommend it), the content (that it will describe and evaluate the object under review), and linguistic realization (that it will have expressions of praise and criticism and expressions to engage the readers). Although this analysis was made with specific reference to book, film and product reviews, the expectation is that it would apply equally well, with some variations, to restaurant reviews, which are subgenres of the review genre. This analysis will be applied to the restaurant reviews with some variations and described in further detail in the methodology section.

2.2. Content analysis of restaurant reviews

Content analysis, which is a systematic analysis of texts, enables the identification of themes and patterns (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000) as well as a comparison between texts extracted from different sources (Krippendorff, 2004). Titz et al.'s (2004) exploratory study is an example of a content analysis of newspaper restaurant reviews extracted from five top newspapers in the US in which the content was classified according to eight categories: Quality of food and beverage, Quantity of food, Quality of service, Ambience and atmosphere, Menu variety, Price and value, Other customers, and Professionalism. Using manual coding by two coders, this study found that the restaurant critics primarily described the quality of the food and the ambience/atmosphere of the restaurants and only described the other categories if a positive or negative exception occurred. Another finding was that some categories like service and price were reflected in symbolized scales that accompanied these reviews.

Parikh et al.'s (2017) study also shares the content analysis of restaurant reviews, but it takes the analysis a step further by comparing the content

categories of three different types of reviews — professional (in newspapers), semi-professional reviews (in food guides), and user-generated (on websites) reviews. The findings of this comparative study showed that there are some commonalities, but experts and amateurs evaluate restaurants in slightly different ways in relation to the content categories. While food quality and price are mentioned in all three review types, there are some unique categories specific to each type such as evaluative descriptions of the chef and waiters. The length of each review type also varies with newspaper reviews being the longest, followed by online reviews and then those in food guides and this is true of the words devoted to each content category as well. This study is an important step forward as it highlights the fact that each review type has different customer demographics with the newspaper readership being the oldest and most affluent, the food guides appealing more to college graduates and professionals, and the readers of the user-generated reviews falling in the youngest age bracket. It is important for review writers to understand the demographics of the diners and focus on those aspects that appeal the most to the target diners in the different types of restaurant reviews.

Although this kind of content analysis is very much part of genre analysis, it is subsumed under functional analysis and is usually referred to as the semantic analysis of moves in a genre. The terms content analysis and semantic analysis will therefore be used interchangeably in this article.

2.3. Metaphorical analysis of restaurant reviews

The research that focuses on the micro analysis of restaurant reviews includes Souder and Bottone's (2014) article on the metaphorical analysis of restaurant reviews. Using the New Rhetoric framework that focuses on task-specificity and style of writing (Bazerman, 1994; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Miller, 1984, 1994), this study begins by explicating the form/structure of this genre but focuses on one aspect of this genre, the style of writing, particularly in relation to the use of metaphors in professional restaurant reviews. The metaphors identified are the food-as-food metaphors reflecting spatial, temporal and class dimensions; the food-as-person (anthropomorphic) metaphors attributing human qualities to food; food-as-artifact (anthropogenic) metaphors invoking the fine arts, music, furniture, and architecture; and food as other worldly or food-as-sacrament metaphors comparing the experience of food with divine experience. This analysis shows how these metaphors reflect the two attitudes of aesthetics and ethics

towards food, with the former figuratively describing food in terms of other foods, humans and artifacts whereas the latter in terms of the moral aspects of food. In this way, food is elevated, on the one hand, to art that is valuable, and on the other, to religious, mystical and ethereal experiences. The outcome in Souder and Bottone's (2014, p. 904) words is that "the readers are addressed as gourmands, who are more highly evolved beings and therefore privileged agents, who are more worthy and, in fact, entitled to consume food items that required extraordinary efforts and resources." In the present study, a broader analysis of literary devices used in restaurant reviews conducted as a preliminary analysis of the sample revealed that the reviewers used a wide range of these devices to engage the readers and promote the restaurant.

2.4. Restaurant reviews and culture

There is some research on the cultural aspects of online and print restaurant reviews, mostly related to reviews of ethnic restaurants in a single location or in different geographical locations. Fürsich (2014), for instance, analyses newspaper food reviews of ethnic restaurants from three different perspectives: the creation of national identity, the dichotomy between authenticity and culture and the polarity between "us" versus "them" discourse. The findings showed that reviewers made a concerted effort to establish the ethnic/national credentials of the restaurants being reviewed — this was achieved in terms of food and cooking techniques, décor, proprietors and their families, restaurant staff (particularly the chef), and typical clientele of the restaurant and their ethnicity. Both reviewers and owners of the restaurants established authenticity and national difference through different cultural strategies, highlighting difference as a mark of quality but at the same time ensuring that the picture painted is not so exotic that it drives away the citizens of the host country.

Other articles on evaluations of ethnic restaurants involve cross-cultural comparisons between Western and Eastern customers in the context of different ethnic cuisines. Using Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework (1980, 1991), these studies explore culturally different evaluations of restaurants. The study by Kim et al. (2016) applies multiple reference effects of disconfirmation (customer's existing expectations), attractiveness of alternatives and self-image congruity on restaurant evaluations by South Koreans representing the Eastern collectivist and high uncertainty avoidance culture and Americans representing the Western individualistic and low

uncertainty avoidance culture. In their post-consumption evaluations, the findings from an online survey showed that self-image congruity is equally important in both cultures, but the effect of disconfirmation is stronger in the responses of Korean customers whereas attractiveness of alternatives is stronger in the responses of American customers. By understanding the interaction between cultures and customers, the findings of this study enable marketers to develop efficient marketing strategies for promoting their restaurants to different categories of their customer base depending upon their cultural orientations.

Yet other studies on restaurant reviews have focused on cross-cultural differences in user-generated reviews of customers from Eastern and Western countries. Jia's article (2020) compares the topics of reviews of Chinese tourists extracted from Dianping.com with reviews by American tourists extracted from Yelp using Hofstede's framework of cultural dimensions and text mining technology. The findings revealed some interesting cross-cultural differences: the comparison between motivation and satisfaction of tourists from these different backgrounds showed that Chinese tourists are more likely to focus on food in their reviews and are less likely to provide low ratings, whereas the American tourists are more fun-seeking and therefore less likely to feel uncomfortable in crowded restaurants.

Most of the studies reviewed in this section show cultural differences in the analysis of ethnic restaurant reviews based on different cuisines, reviewers of different ethnicities and reviews based on restaurants in different geographical locations. The message is that culture not only shapes these reviews but also affects the perception of readers from different cultural backgrounds. It will therefore be interesting to see the influence of culture on the reviews from the two different geographical locations in the current study.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample

The sample for this comparative study consists of 30 restaurant reviews, 15 extracted from a reputable Indian newspaper *The Hindu* and 15 from the national newspaper in Singapore *The Straits Times*. As this is primarily a qualitative study, the data size is small to ensure intensive engagement with

the source texts from several different perspectives — rhetorical, content and metaphorical. The duration of data collection from these newspapers was from August 2023 to February 2024 for the Indian sample, with the reviews written by 7 different reviewers and from August 2023 to April 2024 for the Singapore sample, with the reviews written by 5 different reviewers. The spread of writers ensured that the reviews were not biased due to the writing style of one particular reviewer in terms of rhetorical structure, content and language. *The Hindu* is a daily English-Language newspaper owned by The Hindu Group and circulated across eleven Indian states. *The Straits Times* is also a daily English-language newspaper in Singapore, owned by the SPH Media Trust and a newspaper of record that is widely circulated in the country with a large regional audience. The restaurant reviews in both papers usually appear over the weekend in the leisure sections of these newspapers as people are usually looking for new and popular restaurants to visit during their free time.

3.2. Framework: Genre analysis

3.2.1. Rhetorical analysis of restaurant reviews

Plenty of general advice in the form of tips for writing restaurant reviews is available online. For example, Sharma (2024) in Owlcation shares 10 tips for writing such reviews: Do background research; build a chronological narrative; include chronological information; set your evaluation criteria; be a customer, not a reviewer; include both pros and cons; discuss only what you sample; be clear, fair, and honest; proofread and edit; and close with your recommendation. Although useful, such advice is a mixed bundle of ideas related to the content, organisation and sequence of ideas, and process of writing. In addition to tips, many online sites also provide examples of good restaurant reviews (Owlcation, birdeye.com, Eaterly, and Grammarly). However, Cutrara's (2019) advice in Grammarly is more organised as it begins with tips on how to structure a restaurant review (Set the stage, deliver the main course, wrap up the takeaway) and then offers 5 essential tips for writing a memorable restaurant review (Take notes, get specific, be fair, don't rant, remember to proofread) which focus on the procedure and style of writing. Although better organized, it only provides very general advice on writing reviews. For a more thorough and systematic analysis, a genre approach will be used in this study as it takes into consideration analysis at different levels of writing: rhetorical, semantic, and linguistic. More specifically, Kathpalia's (2022) analysis of book, film and product

reviews will be applied to the present sample. To begin with, the following components and moves in Table 1 will be applied to the restaurant reviews in this study for an analysis at the rhetorical level:

Components	Moves	Examples
Headline and Subhead	Move 1 Attracting reader attention (Unique Selling Proposition)	Heading: IVegan Subhead: Meatless Wonders (ST10)
Opening	Move 2 Establishing the context	Oyakodon — Japanese-style rice bowl with chicken and egg — is one of these foods usually underrated because of its simplicity. (ST1)
Middle	Move 3 Appraising the restaurant Move 3a Describing the restaurant Move 3b Evaluating the restaurant	Enter Loya, where culinary exploration unveils a broader canvas of the north. Their menu embarks on a delightful expedition, leading you from the expansive Gangetic plains to the rugged Himalayan foothills, and onward to the picturesque mountains and valleys of Himachel Pradesh and Kashmir. (TH1)
	Move 4 Recommending specific menu items	A must order is the Grilled Octopus (\$48++) and creamy purple potato mousse. (ST8)
Closing	Move 5 Recommending the restaurant Move 5a Summarising pros & cons Move 5b Ending with a call to action	Move 5a: With all that it has going for it, Concu could very well be on your list of solo hangouts in the city. Move 5b: A meal for two costs ₹ 2500 approximately including beverages. For reservations, call 8270000200. (TH10)

Table 1. Components and moves of reviews (adapted from Kathpalia, 2022).

In Move 5a, the pros and cons are mentioned together in order to present a balanced assessment of the restaurant for raising the credibility of the review, but there are some instances in which only the pros or merits of the restaurant are highlighted in this closing move. This framework will be applied to the current data in order to determine the presence and absence, recurrence and sequence of these moves and the findings will be reported in the results section.

3.2.2. Content analysis of restaurant reviews

Following Krippendorff (1980), Titz et al. (2004, p. 53) define content analysis, as “a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding” such as ensuring that the categories are mutually exclusive and exhaustive. In Titz et al.’s study based on newspaper restaurant reviews, coders were instructed to make a list of descriptive statements, categorize each descriptor to ensure consistency, and classify the descriptors until there was a discernible pattern of redundancy. The eight attributes that emerged from this analysis included: Quality of food and beverage, Quantity of food; Quality of service, Ambience and atmosphere, Menu variety, Price and value, Other customers and Professionalism. In a more recent study conducted on user-generated

restaurant reviews, Pantelidis (2010) identified six factors that were mentioned frequently: Food, Service, Atmosphere and ambience, Price, Menu, and Design and décor. The categories identified in these studies were used as a starting point for the content analysis in the current study, but additional categories were included as they emerged during the analysis. Table 2 provides a list of the categories identified in previous studies and the current study:

Titz et al.'s study (2004)	Pantelidis' study (2010)	Present study
Quality of food	Food	Quality of food
Quantity of food	–	Quantity of food
Quality of service	Service	Quality of service
Ambience and atmosphere	Atmosphere or ambience	Ambience and atmosphere
Menu variety	Menu	Menu
Price and value	Price	Price
Other customers	–	Target customers
Professionalism	–	–
	Design or décor	Spaces, interiors and entertainment
		Background on restaurant, proprietors, chef and staff
		Culinary techniques

Table 2. Content categories of restaurant reviews.

The content categories that emerged in the present study were similar in number and type to those in Titz et al.'s study (2004) although some of them were expanded to include more sub-categories. For example, the Food category also included information about traditional and modern cooking techniques, and the Professionalism category was expanded to include background information on the restaurant, proprietors, staff and chef (including professionalism) and have therefore been listed as new categories in the present study. The findings of the content analysis using these categories and sub-categories will be reported in the results section.

3.2.3. Linguistic/metaphorical analysis of restaurant reviews

The linguistic analysis is mainly concerned with two aspects: descriptions that are provided of different ethnic terms and phrases in the reviews, and literary devices used to embellish the descriptions of the content categories. The reviews were therefore examined from the perspective of the use of ethnic language and literary devices.

The linguistic analysis focussed on the different types of descriptive phrases that were employed to share ethnic qualities of the dishes as well as different

culinary techniques used to prepare them. Table 3 sets out the ethnic expressions that were employed for the description of ethnic dishes and techniques:

Categories	Description and Features	Examples
Description in brackets	Translation of ethnic terms in pre-modifications, head nouns and post-modifications.	<i>satrangi</i> (colourful) décor (TH1) colourful <i>dari</i> (tapestry) (TH1)
Descriptive phrases	Pre-modifications, post-modifications and conjunctions to describe ethnic dishes	At Loya, the culinary artistry is deeply rooted in the traditions of indigenous tribes inhabiting the mountainous region, known as the <i>pahadi ilaaka</i> . (TH1) The Hamachi Carpaccio (\$48++), a luscious plate of cured Japanese amberjack (ST8) like Jianjiangmyeon, or black bean sauce noodles (ST9)
Descriptive sentences/clauses	Independent sentences with SVO and SVC structures and dependent clauses beginning with conjunctions, "-ing" verbs and relative pronouns	<i>Mehfil</i> , a term of Persian origin, conjures images of terraces, balconies, and living rooms hosting bespoke <i>bailhaks</i> of Hindustani music on Delhi winter evenings. (TH8) A vegetarian version of the dish is <i>Malai Soya Chaap Kebab</i> (\$22++) made with organic spinach and fresh button mushroom lending a meaty bite to the forest green-hued dish. (ST7)

Table 3. Ethnic expressions in restaurant reviews.

The reviews were also examined from the perspective of style, and it was found that they abound in the use of literary devices to make the descriptions more appealing and engaging to the readers. Table 4 sets out the literary devices, their definitions and examples from the sample.

Literary device	Definition	Example
Alliteration	The occurrence of the same letter or sound at the beginning of adjacent or neighbouring words in a phrase	<i>Mehfil</i> in the metropolis (TH8)
Allusion	A reference to a well-known person, character, place, book or event to deepen a reader's understanding	Finding wonderland with Alice in Indiranagar's Drawing Room. (TH2)
Analogy	A comparison between things to explain or clarify something	The Qissa lounge exudes a nostalgic aura, evoking summer vacation memories of the backyard <i>chowki</i> behind grandma's house, where you would find elders and children gathered around a tamarind tree for tea at 4 p.m. (TH1)
Asides	A direct comment made to the reader in a text	Perhaps what will make Concu a hit with families and the sweet tooth is that fascinating array of pastries one can indulge in for dessert or even as a standalone meal (hey, no judgement here!) (TH5)
Hyperbole	An exaggerated claim to make something sound better than it is in reality	The patisserie and café chain presents simple, delicious and charming fare with something for everyone on their menu. (TH5)
Idiom	A formulaic phrase that cannot be interpreted literally but has a special meaning that cannot be decoded from the individual words	The vegetarian lunch starts on a high note with the superbly tasty <i>Tamatar Kele Dhaniya Shorba</i> ... (ST7)
Metaphor	An expression that is used to describe a person or object by referring to something that has similar characteristics	Chef Yin brings a whimsical flair to the food which is artfully presented, harvesting the colours of nature. (ST8)
Oxymoron	A phrase in which contradictory or incongruous words appear together	Or the cream cheese dumpling served with roasted chilli oil brings together the bland and fiery in a surprising morsel ... (TH3)
Personification	A phrase that applies human characteristics to something non-human	This is a rosti all grown up: a crisp golden disc crowned with specs of caviar. (ST14)
Pun	A witty play on words that exploits the multiple meanings of it	Not only do they (inhouse sodas) pair well with your drinks, they could also be a bubbly end to a heavy, around-the-world meal. (TH3)
Simile	A phrase comparing two unlike things for a vivid description that is introduced by 'like', 'as' or 'akin to'	It (the restaurant experience) feels a bit like scoring an invitation to the home of a sophisticated acquaintance. (ST14)

Table 4. Literary devices and their definitions.

A comparative analysis between the reviews from the two geographical regions was conducted to examine various linguistic and literary devices for describing ethnic food on the one hand and the different aspects of the restaurant on the other and these findings will be reported in the results section.

3.3. Comparison of restaurant reviews and cross-cultural differences

The restaurant reviews from the two different geographical locations of India and Singapore as well as two newspapers representative of these two locations were analysed and compared at several different levels of analysis:

rhetorical, content, and linguistic/metaphorical. Past research on such comparisons has revealed that culture plays an important role in the realisations of genres so an attempt will be made to focus on the points of comparison to shed light on cultural variations in the restaurant review genre. Although comparative research at the rhetorical level is scarce in this review genre, some studies have conducted a comparative content (Chik & Vásquez, 2016), cross-cultural (Fürsich, 2014; Jia, 2020; Kim et al., 2016); and linguistic analysis (Fürsich, 2014; Nakayama & Wan, 2019). A comparative rhetorical, content and linguistic/metaphorical analysis of restaurant reviews from the two different geographical locations, India and Singapore, will be conducted in the current study to examine how culture is reflected in these reviews and the findings will be reported in the next section.

4. Analysis of restaurant reviews

The rhetorical, content and linguistic/metaphorical analysis of the 30 restaurant reviews is presented below, along with a comparison between 15 restaurant reviews from *The Hindu* and *The Straits Times*, to explore the underlying cultural differences in these two contexts.

4.1. Comparison between the restaurant reviews at the rhetorical level

The analysis of the data at the rhetorical level shows that the restaurant reviews in this study have five specific moves in the headline/subhead, opening, middle and closing parts of the texts as shown in Table 5:

Components	Moves	The Hindu		The Straits Times	
Headline and Subhead	Move 1 Attracting reader attention	15	100%	15	100%
Opening	Move 2 Establishing the context	8	53%	7	47%
Middle	Move 3 Appraising the restaurant	15	100%	15	100%
	Move 4 Recommending specific menu items	12	80%	11	73%
Closing	Move 5 Recommending the restaurant	13	87%	15	100%

Table 5. Distribution and comparison of moves in the two newspapers.

A comparison of the distribution of moves in the two newspapers shows that all 5 moves are present in the 30 restaurant reviews, with Moves 1 and 3 being present in all the reviews in *The Hindu* and Moves 1, 3 and 5 being present in all the reviews in *The Straits Times*. While Move 4 has a high

percentage of occurrence in both newspapers (80% and 73% respectively), Move 2 is the only move with a lower percentage of occurrence in both newspapers. It is not surprising that attracting reader attention (Move 1), appraising the restaurant (Move 3) and recommending the restaurant (Move 5) are present in all or most of the reviews as these are the key functions of a review genre — engaging prospective customers at the outset by highlighting the USP or Unique Selling Proposition of the restaurant, providing them enough information and evaluation on the restaurants to enable them to make a decision about patronizing or avoiding the restaurants, and ending the review with a final recommendation based on the rest of the review. However, there are some differences in the realization of Move 5, with 7 instances of formulaic realizations in *The Hindu* and 15 instances in *The Straits Times*. The formulaic realizations take the form of either a mention of the addresses of the restaurant or tables with the items Hits, Misses and Price/Wallet Factor in *The Hindu* and the items Where, MRT (Mass Rapid Transit), Open, Tel, and Info in *The Straits Times*. Move 4 Recommending specific menu items also has a high frequency of occurrence as it is useful for prospective customers to know which specific drinks, dishes and desserts they should order the first time they visit a restaurant and reviews are expected to contain such recommendations. As for Move 2 Establishing the context, this move is only present if the restaurant has an interesting background, history or fact about the cuisine, location or restaurant that is worth sharing with the customers to raise credibility.

The logical sequence of the moves in this review genre is from Move 1 to Move 5 though there are some instances of move recurrence where Move 4 Recommending food, drinks and desserts is merged with Move 3 Appraising the restaurant and there is an alternating pattern of these two moves, with 4 instances each in *The Hindu* and *The Straits Times*. Some multimodal features were unique to the two newspapers: an additional summary in tabular form after Move 1 in *The Hindu* and a picture of the reviewer at the beginning of the reviews in *The Straits Times*. Apart from these variations, the move structure and sequence were very similar in the two newspapers.

4.2. Comparison between the restaurant reviews at the content level

Based on previous studies on content analysis (Pantelidis, 2010; Titz et al., 2004), a list of 10 specific categories were identified and applied to the restaurant reviews of the present study. These categories and their

occurrence in the two sets of restaurant reviews from two different geographical locations are shown in Table 6:

Categories		<i>The Hindu</i>		<i>The Straits Times</i>	
C1	Quality of food	15	100%	15	100%
C2	Quantity of food	2	13%	4	27%
C3	Quality of service	3	20%	0	0%
C4	Ambience and atmosphere	9	60%	2	13%
C5	Menu	14	93%	15	100%
C6	Price	7	47%	15	100%
C7	Target customers	2	13%	1	7%
C8	Spaces, interiors and entertainment	13	87%	8	53%
C9	Background on restaurant, proprietors and staff	10	67%	8	53%
C10	Culinary techniques	2	13%	7	47%

Table 6. Distribution and comparison of content categories in the two newspapers.

The table shows that some categories such as Quality of food and Menu were popular in *The Hindu* (100% and 93% respectively) and *The Straits Times* (100% in both categories) and had equal or near equal distribution. This is not surprising as these categories related to the food are the most important from the customer's perspective when selecting a restaurant and can be deal breakers that cannot be compensated for by other categories even if they have high ratings. Regarding the Quality of food category in both newspapers, it was found that in *The Hindu* 33% provided positive appraisal whereas 67% balanced positive with negative appraisals and in *The Straits Times* 53% were positive whereas 47% were balanced. As for the Quantity of food, Quality of service and Target customers, their occurrence is low in both newspapers (*The Hindu*: 13%, 20% and 13%; *The Straits Times*: 27%, 0% and 7%) as they are included in the review only if the food quantities are very small or very generous, service is exceptionally good or very poor and when the restaurant's USP includes special considerations such as being child friendly, corporate friendly, or pet friendly.

Of interest in this paper are the variations in the frequency of some categories such as Ambience and atmosphere (*The Hindu*: 60%; *The Straits Times*: 13%), Price (*The Hindu*: 47%; *The Straits Times*: 100%), and Culinary techniques (*The Hindu*: 13%; *The Straits Times*: 47%) in the two newspapers as they could be a reflection of the culture of the customers in the two different geographical locations of India and Singapore. Another point of interest is that the Price category is embedded in Move 5 Recommending the restaurant in *The Hindu* and in Move 3 Appraising the restaurant in *The Straits*

Times when discussing individual dishes. The price is basically an estimate on how much it would cost to dine in the restaurant in the former newspaper whereas it is displayed alongside individual dishes or set meals in the latter newspaper. The disparity in the frequency of content categories and their placement along with the cross-cultural differences between the two newspapers that originated from two different countries will be elaborated in the discussion section.

4.3. Comparison between the restaurant reviews at the linguistic/metaphorical level

The linguistic analysis was conducted at two levels — first to identify the ethnic expressions used to describe ethnic dishes and culinary techniques and second to examine the literary devices used in the restaurant reviews. The first analysis was important from the cultural perspective as it explicated ethnic terms and phrases to describe ethnic foods to readers of different backgrounds. These take the form of description of terms in brackets, descriptive phrases and descriptive sentences/clauses as shown in Table 3. These expressions are particularly prominent in the reviews of ethnic restaurants in the sample though there are some instances where the reviews of local cuisines also use ethnic expressions and translations. In the Indian setting, there are many regional differences between cuisines, therefore it becomes necessary to translate and describe dishes to consumers from different regional backgrounds who are not familiar with the different Indian languages. This applies to the Singapore situation as well because the reviews are aimed at the Chinese, Malays, Indians and other ethnic groups who make up the population of Singapore as well as expatriates from different parts of the world. There are altogether 14 such reviews with ethnic terms and expressions in the Indian sample and 13 in the Singapore sample.

Although the descriptions of the ethnic dishes and cooking techniques are fairly similar in the restaurant reviews from the two newspapers, there is an interesting difference in the style and expression of some of the reviews in the Indian sample, particularly in the aspect of the use of literary devices. For instance, these reviews are more flamboyant in their use of literary devices such as alliterations, allusions, analogies, asides, hyperboles, idioms, metaphors, oxymorons, personifications, puns and similes. In the reviews from *The Hindu*, there are altogether 188 (28%) literary devices across 15 reviews whereas the reviews in *The Straits Times* tend to be more factual and only have 63 (9%) of these devices across 15 reviews. The most

predominant literary devices are metaphors (50/27%), idioms (44/23%), personifications (34/18%) and allusions (33/18%) in the Indian sample, while those predominant in the Singapore sample are metaphors (25/40%), idioms (21/33%) and personification (16/25%). The frequency of occurrence of the various literary devices in the reviews from the two newspapers is provided in Table 7:

Literary device	The Hindu		The Straits Times	
	No.	%	No.	%
Alliteration	1	0.5%	–	–
Allusion	33	18%	–	–
Analogy	5	2.5%	–	–
Aside	4	2%	–	–
Hyperbole	11	6%	–	–
Idiom	44	23%	21	33%
Metaphor	50	27%	25	40%
Oxymoron	1	0.5%	–	–
Personification	34	18%	16	25%
Pun	2	1%	–	–
Simile	3	1.5%	1	2%
Total	188	28%	63	9%

Table 7. Literary devices and their distribution in the reviews.

The Indian sample has a greater range of literary devices (alliterations, allusions, analogies, asides, hyperboles, idioms, metaphors, oxymorons, personifications, puns, and similes) whereas the Singapore reviews only have 4 out of the 11 literary devices listed in Table 7 (idioms, metaphors, personifications and similes). Interestingly, there are between 1 to 6 literary devices per review in *The Straits Times* and between 4 to 27 literary devices per review in *The Hindu*, which amounts to an average of 4.2 literary devices in the former and 12.5 devices in the latter.

5. Discussion

This section revisits the three objectives set out in the introduction of the paper to confirm whether these have been met. The three objectives of the study are closely related as the first objective was to conduct a rhetorical, content and linguistic/metaphorical analysis of restaurant reviews using the genre framework, the second was to compare the findings of the restaurant reviews from the two different geographical locations of India and Singapore at the rhetorical, content and linguistic levels, and the third was to

explain whether these differences are due to the cultural variations among the Indian and Singapore restaurant customers in the context of restaurant patronage.

The rhetorical analysis revealed that these reviews seem to have five specific moves in the same sequence, with Move 1 Attracting reader attention and Move 3 Appraising the restaurant being the most important moves with a frequency of 100% in both samples. It is not surprising that both sets of reviews from the two different sources have the same moves and organization patterns as the communicative purpose of the genre of restaurant reviews is the same irrespective of geographical location — to critique the restaurant positively and negatively to enable prospective customers to make the right decisions about where they should dine. Comparison at the content level reveals some differences, however, particularly the disparity in realisation of the content categories of Ambience and atmosphere, Price and value, and Culinary techniques. In the Indian newspaper, the ambience and atmosphere of the restaurant appears to be more important whereas in the Singapore newspaper, more emphasis is placed on price and value of the food and the culinary techniques used in the preparation of the food with different ethnic cuisines. This suggests that Indian customers prefer a more holistic experience when dining out, and although the quality of the food is prioritised, they aspire for a good restaurant ambience and atmosphere to enhance the social experience of communicating with their fellow diners in a conducive environment. As for Singaporeans, it appears that they are quite content if the food is top quality, and they may be willing to overlook the ambience and atmosphere for good quality food that is value for money. The fact that the reviews in the Singapore newspapers make it a point to mention the prices of the dishes being described quite diligently and skim over the ambience and atmosphere of restaurants could be a cultural reflection of what is valued and sought by patrons in the context of restaurant dining.

An attempt was specifically made to compare the content categories of reviews from the Indian and Singapore newspapers to throw light on the underlying cultural reasons for their selection in the two different social contexts. It was found that even though the two sets of reviews were extracted from two geographical locations in Asia, there are some cultural differences in relation to customers prioritising food and value for money in the Singapore context and a holistic dining experience in the Indian context. Most past studies on content analysis tend to focus on reviews in the same

geographical location (Titz et al., 2004) whereas the comparative studies tend to compare different types of reviews such as professional, semi-professional and user-generated reviews (Parikh et al., 2017) rather than those from different cultural contexts. Although Chik and Vásquez's (2016) article compares user-generated restaurant reviews from two different geographical contexts (Hong Kong and US), it expands its comparison to the review format as well as the use of several semiotic resources. Its findings show that the formal properties of the genre are similar but there are some variations in content due to the underlying cultural differences, as in the present study. One major difference between reviews in OpenRice and Yelp representing Hong Kong and US respectively, for instance, is that the reviewers in the former tend to mention specific dishes frequently and provide more details in terms of texture, taste and smell of these dishes compared with their Yelp counterparts, who provide more general food descriptions. This could be a reflection of the values and practices associated with dining in the two contexts as well as the functional properties of the two different websites. In future comparative studies, it is therefore recommended that special attention be paid not only to variations in different types of reviews originating from Asian and Western cultures but also to reviews representative of either Asian or Western culture, as there could be subtle variations even within reviews originating from the East or West.

Although both sets of reviews in this study did not include ratings of the restaurant or other factors, the qualitative analysis revealed that the quality of food is most important to both Indians and Singaporeans, but Indian customers are more concerned about the restaurant's ambience and atmosphere whereas the Singapore customers are more conscious about the price of dishes and whether they are worth the expense. This shows that the former are willing to overlook the cost for a holistic experience, but the latter are more practical in weighing the cost involved as one of their restaurant selection criteria. These differences in culture are also apparent in Jia's (2020) survey-based study which compared the satisfaction levels of Chinese and American tourists representing two different online communities and found that the former are less likely to rate restaurants low and are more fascinated by the food while the latter are not only fun-seekers but are also comfortable with crowds.

In the current study, the analysis revealed that the review writers did make an attempt to portray the ethnic restaurants as genuine and authentic through

the use of vocabulary (authentic cooking techniques — TH1, traditional clay pots — TH1, earthy flavours and colours — TH1), indigenous/local ingredients (homemade masala syrup — TH1), descriptions of ethnic terms and techniques (Meat lovers can savour the *Kangra kbodiya gosht*, a *Pahadi*-special mutton curry infused with hand-ground charred walnut ink, which turns the curry black — TH1) and verbatim quotes of ethnic proprietors (“This is something that Mehnaz (the proprietor) keeps telling us, if I don’t serve it to my own children and my guests, I am not serving that to the customers. And this is something we try to stick to here,” says Zeenat (the proprietor’s spouse) — TH4). However, unlike the findings of previous studies, when it came to acknowledgement of hybrid food, they did not shy away from promoting it in those restaurants whose USP was to appeal to that segment of the market that enjoys experimenting with foods from different parts of the world and particularly, fusing the different culinary styles and techniques into new and exotic blends (Highlights from the lunch menu include half lobster broth; *pani puri*-inspired crispy minced duck in a spherical dough fritter; London duck pancake roll and Sichuan-style chicken — ST1). In the Indian and Singapore context, it is important to define ethnic terminology and techniques due to the background of the readers representing different ethnicities or regional differences in relation to language and food. For instance, the Singapore population comprises Chinese (74%), Malays (13%), Indians (9%) and others (4%) and it is therefore important in this context to appeal to the various ethnicities in order to enlarge the customer pool. The same applies to India as most major cities are cosmopolitan with a mix of people from different regions in India and it becomes imperative to appeal to this large pool of customers to expand the customer base. To reach a larger clientele, it therefore becomes necessary to educate the customers not only about different cuisines but also to use ethnic vocabulary along with its translation, to describe the dishes and cooking techniques to entice customers to visit these restaurants. Although some findings of the present study are similar to Fürsich’s (2014) study on cultural discourse in ethnic food reviews, there are some differences in relation to fusion food, descriptions or promotions of which are deliberately avoided. Like the present study, Fürsich’s study reveals that reviewers use several strategies to establish the restaurant as genuine/authentic through the use of vocabulary (ethnic, traditional, exotic, etc.) and ethnic terms accompanied by descriptions for dishes and cooking techniques, to establish an authentic national identity for branding purposes (the flavours are distinctive and there’s no Americanization of the flavours) and to make a

distinction between ethnic proprietors and Americans by quoting them verbatim in the reviews rather than silencing or replacing them with expert voices from the Western world (Fürsich, 2014). However, unlike the reviews in the present study, acknowledgement of hybrid food is avoided in these reviews as it detracts from the authenticity of the ethnic cuisine that is being promoted.

As for the language and style in restaurant reviews, a comparison of the reviews from the two different geographical locations in the current study showed that both sets of reviews use similar strategies for describing ethnic terminology. However, an interesting difference emerged in the style of some of the reviews in the Indian sample, particularly in the use of literary devices as mentioned in the results section. Interestingly, it was found that the restaurant reviews in the current study differed stylistically in that the reviews from *The Hindu* tended to be more flamboyant in style when compared to those in *The Straits Times* that were more factual in their descriptions. This could be a reflection of the culture of the restaurant-goers in the two geographical locations, with the Indian consumer seeking a more holistic and fun-filled experience in the restaurant (and willing to pay for it) whereas the Singapore customer prioritizing cost of individual dishes and an overall value-for-money experience. This is evident not only in the moderate use of literary devices in *The Straits Times* but also in the indication of prices alongside individual dishes as well as factual rather than overly embellished descriptions of the content categories in the reviews. In this respect, the Indian consumer is similar to the American consumers in Jia's (2020) study of user-generated reviews and the Singapore consumer to the Chinese consumers in the same study, revealing that there are no clear distinctions between Asian and Western culture and that there could be hybrid cultures within the East and the West as reflected in the present study.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this article has focused on the rhetorical, content, and linguistic/metaphorical analysis of reviews from two newspaper sources in two different geographical locations. The comparisons between the two sets of data revealed that the rhetorical categories are similar in terms of move realisation and sequence. However, there are some differences in the content and the use of the literary devices. While both sets of reviews prioritised the

quality of food and menu categories, the reviews in the Indian newspaper gave more importance to ambience and atmosphere whereas the Singapore reviews were more concerned about the price of individual dishes and culinary techniques used for the preparation of dishes. These variations are perhaps a reflection of the culture in the two different geographical locations, with the Indian consumers seeking an all-round restaurant experience whereas the Singapore customers not only concerned about the food quality but also the cost of individual dishes. At the linguistic level, the analysis showed that the linguistic devices for describing ethnic dishes and techniques are similar in both samples but there is an interesting difference in the style of writing these reviews. Specifically, the range of literary devices employed and their frequency of occurrence is different in the two samples, with the Indian reviews being more flamboyant in style when compared to the Singapore reviews which tend to reflect a more factual style that appeals to customers with practical concerns such as the cost of individual dishes and a value-for-money expectation. The Indian consumer, on the other hand, appears to be content with an overall estimation of the dining cost at the end of the review and seems to be seeking more than good quality food at the restaurant, such as ambience and atmosphere, décor and interesting background information on the restaurant and its proprietors, for a more holistic experience. As these inferences are based on the text analysis of a small data set, it is recommended that future studies extend the findings of the current study by conducting a perception study using customer questionnaires and structured interviews to substantiate these claims. Another recommendation would be to conduct data mining studies with a larger sample size to confirm some of the cross-cultural differences that emerged from the current comparative study between reviews from two different geographical locations.

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