



Exploring Recurrent Rhetorical Patterns
in Digital Motivational Discourse: A Comparative
Swalesian Move Analysis of TEDx Narratives

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-08-11 Revised: 2026-09-17 Accepted: 2026-09-17 Keywords: Swales' Genre Analysis; Adapted CARS Model; Motivational Narrative; TEDx Talks; Comparative Discourse Analysis; English Language Education DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i2.12255 Corresponding Author: Nurdiana Kusuma Astuti nurdianakusuma@students.unnes.ac.id English Education, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia	<i>This study explores recurring rhetorical patterns and linguistic features in digital motivational narratives on the TEDx platform. Focusing on Syakira Putri's talk, Manifesting Goals: Visualizing Your Future Success, as a central focal text, the investigation uses a qualitative comparative genre-analysis design alongside two comparison talks sharing the same theme of goal visualization and manifestation, delivered by D. Ivan Young and Madeline Wood. Drawing on John Swales' genre analysis framework, the study explores the applicability of Swalesian move analysis to spoken digital motivational discourse by adapting the Create a Research Space (CARS) model into a provisional three-move framework: Establishing Engagement, Establishing the Narrative Niche, and Occupying the Niche. Transcripts of the three talks (totaling 4,850 words across 112 coded segments) were analyzed using a instrument validated by three expert reviewers (kappa coefficient of 0.84 indicated high inter-coder agreement). Across the three talks examined, all three moves occurred consistently, suggesting a potentially recurrent rhetorical pattern that should be tested in a larger corpus. At the step level, structural realizations demonstrate speaker-specific flexibility: Syakira Putri establishes her niche through a personal-crisis narrative, whereas the comparison speakers rely on conceptual counter-claims against established models. Linguistically, crisis narratives rely on narrative past tense, temporal connectors, and affective lexis, while counter-claims favor generalizing present tense, negation, and contrastive markers; all speakers shift toward second-person imperatives during the directive call to action. The findings provide practical insights for English Language Teaching (ELT) and public-speaking pedagogy, while highlighting the need for caution when extending move-analysis frameworks to small-corpus digital spoken discourse.</i>

1. Introduction

The evolution of public speaking from traditional physical oratory to digital platforms such as TED and TEDx has reshaped inspirational communication into a distinct form of digital public discourse [cite: 2]. On these platforms, spoken narratives are structured as

multimodal communicative events designed to persuade, engage, and motivate geographically dispersed online audiences [cite: 2]. Within this context, language serves not merely as a vehicle for information transfer, but as a strategic resource for constructing speaker identity, credibility, and actionable models of self-improvement [cite: 2]. As digital motivational speeches circulate globally, analyzing their structural and lexicogrammatical patterns becomes vital for understanding how persuasion operates in modern digital spaces [cite: 2].

Although John Swales' Create a Research Space (CARS) model was originally developed to explain the rhetorical organization of written research-article introductions, subsequent research has demonstrated that its underlying move-and-step logic can be adapted effectively to spoken non-academic genres [cite: 2]. For example, move-analysis frameworks have been extended to political inaugural addresses, valedictory speeches, TED Talks, and personal narrative essays [cite: 2]. These adaptations show that communicative moves—defined as functional structural units serving specific communicative purposes—can describe spoken genres, provided that the analytical framework is re-derived from the genre's specific communicative context rather than applied verbatim [cite: 2].

A parallel body of literature examines TED and TEDx Talks as digital public discourse, focusing on storytelling techniques, interpersonal stance, modality, and lexicogrammatical features that foster rapport and drive audience action [cite: 2]. Prior studies demonstrate that TED presenters frequently blend personal narrative with expert authority, utilizing stance markers, evaluative adjectives, and direct address to achieve persuasive goals [cite: 2].

Despite these contributions, two clear research gaps persist in the literature [cite: 2]:

- Contextual Novelty Gap: Most documented CARS-based and TED-style discourse studies focus primarily on Western speakers [cite: 2]. The rhetorical choices of non-Western speakers, such as Indonesian presenters addressing specific themes like goal visualization and manifestation, remain comparatively under-examined within digital genre studies [cite: 2]. Indonesian speaker representation is thus framed here as a contextual novelty within a globally accessible platform [cite: 2].
- Methodological Limitation Gap: Some existing analyses of motivational or individual TED/TEDx performances remain case-based single-text studies, limiting claims about recurring move structures [cite: 2]. Because Swales defines genre as a class of communicative events recognized by a discourse community, move patterns derived from a single text cannot establish whether a structure represents a broader recurring pattern or a speaker's individual idiosyncrasy [cite: 2].

To address these gaps, this study examines a small comparative corpus of three TEDx talks sharing the specific sub-genre communicative purpose of guiding audiences on "manifesting goals and visualizing future success" [cite: 2]. By using Syakira Putri's talk as a focal case alongside two demographically varied comparison talks on the same thematic territory, the study explores recurring structural patterns while respecting corpus limitations [cite: 1, 2].

Specifically, this study addresses the following four enumerated research questions [cite: 1]:

- What rhetorical moves and steps occur across the three TEDx motivational narratives? [cite: 1]
- How consistently do these identified moves and steps recur across the talks examined? [cite: 1]

- What lexicogrammatical features realize each of the identified moves and steps? [cite: 1]
- How do these structural moves and steps jointly contribute to fulfilling the communicative purpose of motivational narratives? [cite: 1]

2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative, comparative genre-analysis design based on document analysis and systematic audiovisual observation of recorded public TEDx Talks [cite: 1, 2]. The design combines detailed qualitative analysis of a focal text with a comparative cross-talk examination across a small purposive sample [cite: 2].

Corpus Characteristics and Selection Criteria

The corpus consists of three complete, publicly available TEDx Talks sharing the core communicative purpose of guiding audiences through goal visualization and manifestation [cite: 2]. Selection followed criterion-based purposive sampling based on official TEDx channel availability, thematic alignment, complete verbal delivery, rhetorical complexity, and high audiovisual clarity [cite: 2].

Talk Title	Speaker & Background	TEDx Event	Duration	Word Count	Coded Segments
Manifesting	Syakira Putri	TEDxAvicen	11m 45s	1,620 words	38 segments
Goals:	(Indonesian	naCinere			
Visualizing	student	(2024)			
Your Future	speaker)				
Success					
(Focal Text)					
Talk Title	Speaker & Background	TEDx Event	Duration	Word Count	Coded Segments
Emotional Intelligence: Using the Laws of Attraction	D. Ivan Young (Western adult speaker)	TEDxLSCTo mball (2015)	14m 10s	1,810 words	41 segments
The Dream Doesn't Work Unless You Do: Goal Setting	Madeline Wood (Western youth speaker)	TEDxYouth @KCVI (2018)	10m 15s	1,420 words	33 segments
Total Corpus	3 Speakers	3 TEDx Events	36m 10s	4,850 words	112 segments

Theoretical Framework Adaptation

To apply Swales' CARS framework to spoken digital motivational speeches, the original academic research-article moves were systematically mapped into functional equivalents suited for motivational discourse [cite: 1, 2]. Table 2 details this adaptation mapping [cite: 1].

Original CARS Concept (Swales, 1990, 2004)	Adapted TEDx Motivational Move	Operational Definition	Communicative Purpose	Representative Example
Move 1:	Move 1:	Capturing	Opening	"Have you ever
Establishing a	Establishing	audience	audience	wondered why
Territory	Engagement	attention,	rapport and	some people

Original CARS Concept (Swales, 1990, 2004)	Adapted TEDx Motivational Move	Operational Definition	Communicative Purpose	Representative Example
		establishing	topic orientation.	achieve their
		shared values,	[cite: 2]	dreams while
		and framing the		others stay
Original CARS Concept (Swales, 1990, 2004)	Adapted TEDx Motivational Move	Operational Definition	Communicative Purpose	Representative Example
		overarching topic.		stuck?" [cite: 2]
Move 2: Establishing a Niche	Move 2: Establishing the Narrative Niche	Identifying a problem, personal crisis, or conceptual flaw in prevailing goal-setting assumptions.	Creating narrative tension or problematizing existing knowledge. [cite: 2]	"I went from top student to 16th place... I felt completely lost and desperate." [cite: 2]
Move 3: Occupying the Niche	Move 3: Occupying the Niche	Presenting a solution, framework, or personal method, backed by results and a direct directive.	Resolving tension, demonstrating method, and prompting action. [cite: 2]	"Step 1: Visualize clearly. Step 2: Take daily intentional action." [cite: 2]

Instrumentation, Validation, and Inter-Coder Reliability

The coding instrument was evaluated prior to full analysis by three independent expert validators in applied linguistics and discourse analysis [cite: 1, 2]. Validators evaluated the theoretical alignment of the adapted moves, operational definitions, and trial segment coding [cite: 2]. Recommendations led to refined boundary definitions for overlapping transitions between storytelling and explicit advice [cite: 1].

To establish coding reliability beyond internal comparison, a second qualified coder independently analyzed a randomized 30% sample of the corpus (34 segments) [cite: 1]. Inter-coder agreement for move classification yielded a Cohen's kappa coefficient of $\kappa = 0.84$, indicating strong coding reliability [cite: 1]. Ambiguous boundaries—such as segments blending narrative reflection with direct instruction—were resolved through collaborative consensus guided by the primary communicative intent of the segment [cite: 1].

Corpus-Specific Recurrence Descriptors

Given that each text in a three-talk corpus represents 33.3% of total data, threshold classifications (3/3, 2/3, 1/3) are treated as sample-specific descriptive recurrence labels within this corpus rather than definitive, broad genre status rules [cite: 1, 2]:

- Recurrent across all three (3/3): Identified in every talk examined. [cite: 2]
- Recurrent across two (2/3): Identified in two of the three talks. [cite: 2]
- Observed in focal talk only (1/3): Identified exclusively in the primary text. [cite: 2]

3. Result

The comparative analysis revealed structural consistency at the macro-move level alongside step-level and lexicogrammatical flexibility [cite: 2]. Table 3 summarizes the comparative occurrence of moves and steps across the corpus [cite: 2].

Move / Step Realization	Syakira Putri (Focal)	D. Ivan Young	Madeline Wood	Sample Recurrence Label
Move 1: Establishing Engagement (Any realization)	✓	✓	✓	Recurrent across all three (3/3)
— Realized as reflective question hook	✓	✗	✗	Observed in focal talk only (1/3)
— Realized as direct topic / self announcement	✗	✓	✓	Recurrent across two (2/3)
Move 2: Establishing Narrative Niche	✓	✓	✓	Recurrent across all three (3/3)
Move / Step Realization	Syakira Putri (Focal)	D. Ivan Young	Madeline Wood	Sample Recurrence Label
(Any realization)				
— Realized through personal-crisis narrative	✓	✗	✗	Observed in focal talk only (1/3)
— Realized through conceptual counter-claim	✗	✓	✓	Recurrent across two (2/3)
Move 3: Occupying the Niche (Method outline/demonstration)	✓	✓	✓	Recurrent across all three (3/3)
— Citing speaker's own achieved results	✓	✗	✓	Recurrent across two (2/3)
— Explicitly numbered/structured advice list	✓	✗	✓	Recurrent across two (2/3)
— Closing directive call to action	✓	✓	✓	Recurrent across all three (3/3)
Move / Step Realization	Syakira Putri (Focal)	D. Ivan Young	Madeline Wood	Sample Recurrence Label
action				(3/3)

Move Structure and Step Flexibility

All three broad moves occurred across the three talks examined, indicating a potentially recurrent macro-rhetorical sequence [cite: 1, 2]. However, speakers utilized distinct step-level strategies to fulfill these moves [cite: 2]. Most notably, Syakira Putri realized Move 2 by constructing an autobiographical personal-crisis narrative, recounting academic setback and emotional distress [cite: 2]. In contrast, D. Ivan Young and Madeline Wood realized Move 2 through conceptual counter-claims against conventional goal-setting models (challenging passive attraction laws and rigid SMART goals, respectively) [cite: 2].

Lexicogrammatical Evidence and Textual Diagnostics

Linguistic analysis reveals clear grammatical choices corresponding to specific move strategies [cite: 2]. Table 4 illustrates representative textual evidence and potential linguistic indicators across the corpus [cite: 1, 2].

Move & Strategy	Speaker	Transcript Excerpt	Linguistic Features	Rhetorical Function
Move 1 (Engagement)	Syakira Putri	"Have you ever felt like you worked so hard, yet your goals felt completely out of reach?"	Interrogative syntax, 2nd-person pronoun (you), present perfect aspect.	Establishes immediate interpersonal rapport and shared experience. [cite: 2]
Move 2 (Personal	Syakira Putri	"I had dropped to 16th place. I was devastated,	Past tense, past perfect, affective lexis	Creates emotional narrative
Move & Strategy	Speaker	Transcript Excerpt	Linguistic Features	Rhetorical Function
Crisis)		terrified, and didn't know how to recover."	(devastated, terrified), temporal connectors.	tension and personal vulnerability. [cite: 2]
Move 2 (Counter-Claim)	D. Ivan Young	"People think wishing is enough. But law of attraction without action is just wishful thinking."	Present tense generalization, negation (without), contrastive conjunction (but).	Problematizes popular assumptions and creates a conceptual niche. [cite: 2]
Move 3 (Directive Action)	Madeline Wood & Syakira Putri	"Write down your vision today. Do not wait for permission. Start now."	Second-person imperatives (write, do not wait, start), temporal adverbs (today, now).	Shifts from exposition to direct audience instruction and mobilization. [cite: 2]

The verb tense contrast between narrative past (for personal crisis) and generalizing present (for conceptual counter-claims) serves as a potential linguistic indicator for distinguishing niche-building strategies in spoken discourse [cite: 1, 2]. Across all three talks, Move 3 closing segments consistently feature a shift toward direct second-person imperatives [cite: 2].

4. Discussion

The findings explore the applicability of Swalesian move analysis to spoken digital motivational discourse [cite: 1]. The primary theoretical contribution lies not in claiming a established new genre convention from three texts, but in demonstrating how broad macro-move stability coexists with step-level lexicogrammatical flexibility [cite: 1, 2].

Theoretical Functional Correspondence with the CARS Model

When transferring Swales' CARS framework from written academic introductions to spoken digital discourse, functional shifts occur across each move [cite: 1]:

- Territory to Engagement: Academic Move 1 establishes research importance within literature; digital TEDx Move 1 establishes interpersonal rapport and immediate topic relevance with a live and virtual audience [cite: 1, 2].
- Niche Creation: Academic Move 2 identifies a research gap or gap in literature; digital TEDx Move 2 problematizes personal struggles or flawed public assumptions regarding success [cite: 1, 2].

- Niche Occupation: Academic Move 3 outlines main findings and paper structure; digital TEDx Move 3 provides actionable steps, speaker credibility markers, and direct calls to action [cite: 1, 2].

Visually, the overarching rhetorical progression across the corpus follows a three-stage functional path: ENGAGE → PROBLEMATIZE → RESOLVE / MOBILIZE [cite: 1].

Contextual Positioning and Alternative Explanations

In the focal text, Syakira Putri relies on an autobiographical crisis narrative to establish her niche [cite: 2]. While the Introduction raised socio-cultural background as a contextual dimension, the data do not support attributing this strategy directly to Indonesian rhetorical culture [cite: 1, 2]. Because only one Indonesian speaker was analyzed, Syakira Putri's narrative choice should be interpreted as an individual rhetorical positioning strategy rather than a representative non-Western cultural variable [cite: 1]. Alternative factors—including speaker age, student status, personal experience, speaking style, and specific TEDx event context—may equally account for differences between speakers [cite: 1].

Comparison with Prior TED Genre Research

While previous studies (e.g., Miranda & Moritz, 2021) observed a five-move structure across broader TED topics, this study shows that goal-visualization talks streamline their progression into three primary communicative moves [cite: 2]. The integration of personal narrative steps within Move 2 reinforces earlier findings that personal storytelling serves as a key legitimacy tool in digital inspirational speeches [cite: 2].

Pedagogical Implications for ELT and Public Speaking

The provisional three-move framework offers practical applications for English Language Teaching (ELT) and public speaking instruction [cite: 1]:

- Structuring Persuasive Speeches: Students can use the Engage → Problematize → Resolve/Mobilize macro-structure to organize presentations logically [cite: 1].
- Targeted Grammar Instruction: Language teachers can highlight specific grammatical shifts—such as using past aspect for narrative problem-setting and second-person imperatives for persuasive calls to action [cite: 1, 2].
- Building Credibility: Learners can study how both personal stories and conceptual counter-claims build speaker authority in digital environments [cite: 1, 2].

Limitations

Several limitations should be noted [cite: 1, 2]:

- The corpus is limited to three talks on a single thematic area [cite: 1, 2].
- Categorizations reflect sample-specific descriptive patterns rather than statistically generalizable genre rules [cite: 1, 2].
- Analysis was restricted to verbal transcripts, excluding multimodal features such as gesture, prosody, slide visuals, and audience reactions [cite: 1, 2].

5. Conclusion

This study explored the rhetorical structures of TEDx motivational narratives using an adapted Swalesian framework [cite: 2]. Across the three talks examined, a recurring three-move structure—Establishing Engagement, Establishing the Narrative Niche, and Occupying the Niche—effectively fulfilled the overarching communicative purpose of digital inspirational speeches [cite: 1, 2]. While macro-moves recurred consistently, step realizations varied between personal crisis storytelling and conceptual counter-claims [cite: 2].

Future research should test this provisional framework across larger, culturally diverse corpora to evaluate move stability at scale [cite: 1, 2]. Additionally, combining move analysis with multimodal frameworks—investigating prosody, facial expression, and body language—will provide a more holistic understanding of digital public discourse [cite: 1, 2].

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