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Structuring Mental Health Discourse: A Genre-Based Analysis of Ted Talks

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Abstract
Public speaking is one of human communication manifestations, in which presenters impart knowledge while simultaneously inspiring and influencing their audience. The well-known public speaking platform TED Talk is renowned for its captivating delivery that blends charisma, persuasiveness, and clarity. Previous studies on TED Talks have focused on the persuasive strategies, while this study highlights recurrent structural patterns employed in TED Talks using Swales' Genre Analysis framework. Although several studies have used Swales' theory of speech structure, no study has fully utilized this framework in examining TED Talks, particularly on the topic of mental health. A subject that has recently attracted a lot of public interest. Four TED Talk transcripts with the highest viewers were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive method and Swales' Genre Analysis theory to determine the rhetorical "Moves" and "Steps" that went into each speech. The results show that although all speakers have identical basic components, the order of moves changes based on the emphasis and presentation styles of each speaker.

***Keywords*:** Public Speaking, TED Talk, Speech Structure, Mental Health, Genre Analysis

INTRODUCTION

One of the most fundamental communication abilities people acquire from an early age is the capacity to express ideas. Public speaking is a structured activity aimed at conveying messages, sharing thoughts, and influencing audiences through spoken communication. According to Tucker (2019), public speaking is a face-to-face communicative act in which a speaker delivers ideas or viewpoints to a group of listeners with a specific purpose. Oktaviani and Rusdi (2019) believe that successful communication could be obtained and developed

through hard work and the right methods, in which using varies of platforms and following specific structures. Among various types of public speaking, persuasive speech stands out as a powerful form aimed to influence beliefs, values, or behavior. According to Perloff (2020), "Persuasion is a symbolic process in which communicator try to convince other people to change their attitudes or behaviors regarding an issue through the transmission or a message", not only by using logic, but also considering the emotions and credibility.

Speaking before an audience holds significant communicative and influential power, enabling individuals to impart knowledge, inspire change, and spark meaningful discussions on a wide range of issues. With the rapid advancement of digital technology and the widespread accessibility of the internet, public speaking has expanded beyond traditional physical stages to online platforms, with TED Talks emerging as one of the most prominent examples. TED (Technology, Entertainment, and Design) is an international conference that brings together speakers from various fields to share ideas and new perspectives with global audiences. TED Talks are distinguished by the fact that many speakers are not trained orators, yet they effectively employ narratives, storytelling, and rhetorical devices to engage, inspire, and persuade viewers.

Numerous studies on TED Talk have been conducted with various framework. Rahmawati (2022), Tan and Byod (2021) focus on the persuasive element of TED Talk applying Lamb's (2019) theory. Meanwhile, Azzahra and Heryono (2023) still with the same framework investigate the magazine advertisement. However, none of these studies explore the structure of TED Talk with a genre-moves approach specifically on mental health issue. In recent years, mental health advocacy has gained substantial visibility in public discourse, and TED Talks have become a powerful medium for raising awareness and reducing stigma surrounding mental health issues. This gap highlights an important question: How do presenters structure their arguments about mental health in TED Talks?

To understand how these speech are organized, this study used the framework of Genre Analysis (Swales, 1990). Genre Analysis helps researchers identify how different types of communication follow certain patterns or structure. This structure analyzed using the concept of "Moves" and then "Steps" from Swales's theory, where each part of the talk serves a specific function in supporting the speaker's main purpose. By applying Genre Analysis to mental health-themed TED Talks, this study hopes to understand how structure works together to build up persuasiveness. This research explore not only what the speaker say, but also how they say it, and how the structure helps and shape the audience's response. This study is aimed to provide deeper insight into the structure of persuasive speech in modern digital public speaking, especially for the topics that requires empathy, awareness, and social action.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explain how TED Talk presenters construct their presentations. This design is particularly

suitable for examining language use, communication styles, and persuasive strategies in public speaking, as it allows the researcher to observe how meaning and impact are conveyed through discourse. In the context of this study, the qualitative descriptive approach enabled an in-depth exploration of how TED Talk presenters organize ideas, choose linguistic features, and build intellectual as well as emotional connections with audiences when addressing sensitive topics such as mental health.

The data source of this study were four TED Talk videos focusing on mental health, with two talks published in 2023 and two in 2024. The videos were selected using purposive sampling based on several criteria. First, the talks address mental health issues, ensuring thematic relevance to the research focus. Second, the selected talks represent recent public speaking practices, reflecting current perspectives and discourse patterns. Third, each video has approximately one hundred thousand views and at least 50,000 likes, indicating high audience engagement and public impact. Finally, the duration of the talks ranges from 10 to 18 minutes, which is typical for TEDx Talks and sufficient for analyzing argument development and speech structure. By applying these criteria, the study ensures that the data are both relevant and representative of influential public speaking on mental health.

These criteria were chosen to ennsure that the selected speeches are relevant to the current public discussion and have significant audience reach. This study is exploratory in nature and aims to provide an in-depth qualitative analysis of speech structure used in the selected TED Talk videos discussing mental health. Therefore, the study does not attempt to represent the entire discourse of mental health on TED Talks. Instead, it focuses on a small number off carefully selected videos to explore patterns of speech structure in greater detail.

Table 1. Source of Data

No.	Video Title	Speaker	Year	View	Link
1	*How to Talk to the Worst Part of Yourself*	Karen Faith	2023	2,4M	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUV5DJb6KGs
2	*Discussing Mental Health and Suicide in Constructio n*	Vince Hafeli	2023	2,6M	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrNdAT2vual
3	*Why You Should Talk to Your Anxiety at Work*	Adam Whybre w	2024	188K	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4FT5RYuifwE
4	*Living Fully with Bipolar*	Nacho Ruiz Hens	2024	616K	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tBhUbHQxeQ0

No.	Video Title	Speaker	Year	View	Link
	Disorder				

The data collection process consisted of four main stages. First, selecting TEDx Talk videos based on specific criteria, including mental health themes, publication years (2023-2024), number of views, duration, and keyword relevance to ensure the talks reflected current discussions on the representation of mental health. Second, repeatedly viewing each video to understand the speakers' content, tone, and delivery style before transcription. Third, transcribing the talks using both the official TED transcription feature and TurboScribe.com to ensure accuracy, while also noting non-verbal elements such as pauses, emphasis, and tone shifts.

To analyze the structure of the selected TED Talks, this study applied John Swales' theory of Genre Analysis, which defines a genre as a communicative event characterized by shared purposes and a recognizable structural pattern. Each speech was divided into moves, the major functional stages such as introducing the topic, presenting arguments, and concluding, and steps, which are smaller components that show how speakers achieve their communicative goals, such as giving examples, citing evidence, or posing questions. The researcher segmented each transcript into moves based on the speaker's intention and then identified the supporting steps, categorizing them according to Swales' model and adjusting them to fit the TED Talk format. The identification of moves and steps was conducted through repeated reading and coding of transcripts. To improve reliability, the coding results were reviewed by another researcher. The structures of all four speeches were then compared to identify recurring patterns and differences in how speakers organize and deliver persuasive messages about mental health, revealing how rhetorical structure contributes to clarity and audience engagement in TED Talks.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the four selected TED and TEDx Talks revealed that all speakers followed a similar overall rhetorical structure consisting of three major moves: Opening, Body, and Closing. Each move served a distinct communicative function and was realized through several steps, consistent with Swales' (1990) Genre Analysis framework. Although the macro-structure remained consistent across talks, variations were observed in the sequence and emphasis of steps depending on the speaker's style and communicative focus.

Opening Move

The first part of the speaker's speech is the opening move, in which where the speaker attempt to introduce the main theme of the speech itself, also to establish relatability with the audience. The Opening section of the Moves consists of four Steps, which is: "Greetings and Salutation". "Attention Getter", "Establishing

Relevance" and "Stating purpose". All speakers began with a greeting or an attention-getting statement to establish rapport with the audience. This was often followed by a short personal story or a rhetorical question that introduced the topic of mental health. This step helped the speakers create an emotional connection with the audience and set the tone for the rest of the talk.

Table 2. Comparison of Opening Move

Steps	Speaker 1	Speaker 2	Speaker 3	Speaker 4
Greetings and Salutation	"Thanks everyone, for being here"	"Thank you"	-	-
Attention getter	"It isn't true what they say, that you can't love--"	"They were built by men and woman--"	"I lead teams of data scientist--"	"Do you believe in Santa?"
Establishing Relevance	"Some of us...regards feelings--"	"I landed on researching the topic of suicide in the construction industry"	"And to make them feel comfortable to tell me--"	"For decades, i was doing what everybody does--"
Stating purpose	"An, it's my job as the moderator to make sure they all get heard"	-	"Because i want them to tell me--"	-

Body Move

The body refers to the main part of the speech where the speaker develops and delivers the core ideas. In this stage, the speakers presented their key arguments, explained relevant concepts, and shared personal experiences or examples that supported their points. Some speakers used data or expert references to add credibility, while others relied on storytelling to make their messages more relatable. Transitions between subtopics were generally smooth and guided the audience clearly through the main ideas.

Table 3. Comparison of Body Move

Steps	Speaker 1	Speaker 2	Speaker 3	Speaker 4
Presenting main points	"Loves welcome everyone unconditionally"	"We lose five times as many suicide as we do to work injuries"	"My psychologist gave me a really simple, practical advice--"	"I was a failure in every aspect--"
Supporting evidences	"I love verybody before i love myself"	"We lose more than 5.500 workers a year by suicide"	"It helps me put things off--"	"Between 2 to 3% of adult population is bipolar--"

Use of transition Adressing counter arguments	"Which is how and why--" "But what about the thought that i'm worthless?"	"Two months later--" "Mental illness doesn't always mean that i need to be meditated--"	"And that's because--" "It's possible to overdo it, and i know--"	"But many years later--" "Bipolar is chronic, yes, but it's treatable"

Closing Move

The Third Movement: Closing is the final part of a speech where the speaker brings the discussion to an end and leaves a lasting impression on the audience In this section, the speakers summarized the key points of their talks and delivered a memorable or motivational message that reflects the overall purpose of the speech. Most of them ended with a call to action or an emotional statement that encouraged the audience to think more deeply about mental health or take positive steps in their lives. This final move served to reinforce the central message and leave a memorable impression.

Table 4. Comparison of Closing Move

Steps	Speaker 1	Speaker 2	Speaker 3	Speaker 4
Summarizing	"if we can welcome each other with curiosity and the kind of welcome--"	"We were going to beegin addressing mental illness and suicide"	"I recover from something better than before i was--"	"Bipolar didn't happen to me, but for me"
Reinforcing	"Love is a house--"	-	"There are no guarantee that everyone else will experience the same thing."	"This can increase compassion and saves life"
Memorable closing statement Thanking the audiences	"We are beutiful and strange and complicated" "Thank you"	"Well. when this meeting ends, we'll find out" -	"You're not alone" -	"What can we do as a society?" *None
Invitation	"All you have to do is let them be here"	"So the challange is..."	"Look for free solutions online"	"I want to propose the concept of radical transparancy"

Discussion

In terms of structure, all speakers follow the general rhetorical organization of opening, body, and closing. However, speaker 1 presents a more complete and balanced structure, including all essential components such as attention-getter, relevance, and clear closing reinforcement. This suggests that the speaker aims to maintain strong audience engagement throughout the speech while ensuring clarity and coherence. In contrast, speaker 2 adopts a more concise and pragmatic structure, with stronger emphasis on logical development but less completeness in the opening and closing sections. The omission of certain introductory and concluding moves may indicate that the speaker prioritize efficiency and direct delivery of information over formal rhetorical completeness.

Meanwhile, both speaker 3 and speaker 4 are similar in missing out greetings and salutation sections. Speaker 3 relies on the speaker's background as a reliable source of information, using their position as a lead scientist, suggesting that authority and expertise function as the primary persuasive strategy instead of interpersonal engagement through greetings. Speaker 4, on the other hand, relies on numerical data and personal stories as evidence. Similar to speaker 2, speaker 4 also does not state the purpose of their speech. Yet, speaker 4 fullfilled the second movement, the body, consisting the main points and supporting evidence. The absence of an explicit statement of purpose in speaker 4's speech may indicate that they speaker prefers an implicit and narrative-driven approach, allowing the audience to infer the intended message through the presented experiences and evidence.

The consistent use of Opening, Body, and Closing moves across all talks confirms that TED and TEDx Talks adhere to recognizable genre conventions, supporting Swales' (1990) view that genres are defined by shared communicative purposes and structural patterns. However, the variation in steps within each move demonstrates that TED Talks allow flexibility, enabling speakers to adapt their delivery while still fulfilling genre expectations. Furthermore, the findings indicate that persuasive communication in mental health TED Talks relies on a balance between emotional appeal and logical reasoning.

Storytelling and personal narratives were particularly prominent in the Opening and Body moves, fostering empathy and audience identification. Meanwhile, the inclusion of data and expert references enhanced credibility. Addressing counterarguments further strengthened persuasion by acknowledging audience doubts and reducing resistance to sensitive mental health topics. The Closing move played a crucial role in extending the persuasive impact of the talks beyond the presentation itself. Calls to action and emotionally resonant closing statements encouraged reflection and behavioral change, highlighting the advocacy-oriented nature of mental health discourse. This supports the notion that effective closings are essential in persuasive public speaking, particularly when the goal is to influence social attitudes and reduce stigma.

Yakymchuk (2022) study similiar with this one by analyzing TED Talks about mental health. The differences lies on the framework used. Yakymchuk only

identified persuasive strategies using framework focused kn rhetorical argumentative strategies, while this research analyzed the full rhetorical structure including all moves and their corresponding steps. Using similar method, Addoboah-Bersah and Diaba (2024) also using Swale's theory in their research. But unlike this study, their analysis stopped at the move level without comprehensive steps analysis.

The structural patterns identified in this study suggest that effective mental health advocacy through public speaking benefits from clear organization, emotional engagement, and strategic persuasion. By combining standardized rhetorical structures with personalized delivery, TED speakers are able to communicate complex and sensitive issues in ways that are both accessible and impactful.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The analysis showed that the structure of these TED Talks followed a clear and consistent pattern that aligns with Swales' genre framework. The combination of personal storytelling, logical explanation, and emotional closure contributed to the persuasiveness of each speech. These findings suggest that maintaining a clear structural flow helps TED speakers deliver complex messages in an accessible and impactful way. In conclusion, the use of structured organization in TED Talks plays a crucial role in shaping their persuasiveness and clarity. This study analyzed all elements in the speech structure, providing a more complete picture of the use speech structure in mental health-themed speeches according to Swales's framework. Future studies may extend this research by analyzing not only the structure but also the specific linguistic or rhetorical strategies that further enhance persuasion in public speaking contexts.

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