

## **THE INFLUENCE OF SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS ON TEACHING FUNCTIONAL TEXTS IN A WRITING CLASS**

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### **Abstract**

This article analyzed the functional text and register in Systemic-Functional theoretical framework. It explored how both register and genre realized in pedagogic models especially in English business writing course. In English as a foreign-language, writing for functional texts is considered important in teaching learning activities. The register and genre were considered in composing the application letter. It was used the teaching cycle of Genre Based Approach (henceforth GBA) to connect between register and genre in the writing functional text especially in writing application letter activities. There were the models of functional writing provided and the students followed the teaching cycle of GBA the students compose the letter of application. The most noticeable qualities of generic structures and tenor awareness tended to be emphasized by lecturer over less-evident lexico-grammatical patterns. It is also important of how the students' recognize stages of formal letters. This was suggested that choice of genre and more systematic attention to details of register (especially tenor) awareness are truly important in writing formal letter for learners English for Business Writing class.

Keywords: Systemic Functional Linguistics, functional text, and register

### **Introduction**

The goal of this article is to explore how genre and register in teaching English business writing, especially in functional texts. The basis for elaborating the idea is to connecting among the genre and register on language teaching and learning. The appropriateness of linguistic forms achieves specific communicative purposes that were linked to the paradigm of analyzing language in use and the relation between genre and register. This present study is under the concept theories based on Halliday and Hasan (1985) discussed about language, context, and text, Martin and Rose (2003) defined about discourse and genre, Biber and Conrad (2009) described about register and genre, and Thornbury (2005) defined about discourse analysis. Christie and Derewianka (2010:6) assert SFL theorize language in terms of the relationship between the meanings being made in a particular context and the linguistic resources which have evolved to realize those meanings. Martin (1997) as cited in Christie and Derewianka (2010:6) genre sees as a social practices operating in level of culture. Additionally, Burns, 2010;

Callaghan & Rothery, 1988 defined the cycle is a text-based instructional sequence that leads learners from joint to independent creation of meaning.

Furthermore, in Genre Based Approach teaching cycle is a text-based instructional sequence that leads learners from joint to independent creation of meaning (Burns, 2010; Callaghan & Rothery, 1988). It includes three main stages: deconstruction, joint construction, and independent construction. The first stage is setting the context and building field activities which occur throughout the cycle rather than as part of independent stages and seek to raise learners' awareness of the social context and goal of the genre under study. This stage involves understanding what the genre is used for, its context, and its vocabulary; the roles and relationships of the people involved (e.g. formal, informal, distant, or close); and the mode of communication in which the genre occurs (e.g. face-to-face or email). At this stage, learners could discuss the purpose of functional text and the type of register that commonly found.

Deconstruction is the first stage where the learners analyze an authentic model text belonging to a genre. In this stage students learn the rhetorical structure of the genre and the lexico-grammatical (i.e. lexical and grammatical) resources it uses to create meaning (Derewianka, 2003). It is during deconstruction that direct language teaching is most likely to occur. Following with the example, the student could explain the parts of an application letter (i.e. opening part, body) or learners could compare several application letters to discover register and genre.

The next stage is Joint construction. In joint construction, the teacher guides learners to create a new text belonging to the same genre. This stage constitutes an approximation by students to producing the genre thanks to teacher mediation. Mediation is possible due to the shared meta-language that students gained during deconstruction. For example, the learners could construct a jumbled sentences in new application letter jointly, with rewording students' contributions when necessary and explaining the reasons for doing so. Pair work activities to create a new text could take place in this stage with more teacher support.

The last stage is independent construction. In this stage the learners create another textual instance of the target genre independently (e.g. job vacancy as secretary). However, they can still recruit the teacher's help in the form of co-editing and other types of feedback (Derewianka, 1990). For this stage, learners could do drafting. Prior to this, learners would need to build knowledge of the language needed to talk about job vacancy and decide whether other contextual factors of the letter are to be maintained (e.g. roles and relationships of participants). During independent construction, the learners criticize and control of the genre, as the arrows pointing towards the center. That is, learners relate what they have learned to other or similar genres, and to previous or future cycles of teaching and learning. For example, learners could compare application letter in different register (e.g. power of equal vs unequal), or compare contact frequent and infrequent.

As may be already obvious, the cycle draws on a sociocultural view of development (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986) for which language and literacy result from an individual's guided participation in social, language-based activity. Accordingly, the cycle builds on the concepts of scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) and the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) that see

instruction as the provision of graded and contingent support (i.e. tuned to students' ability level and offered only when needed). This results in learners' awareness of how language works, which in turn leads to learners' control of actual language use (Painter, 1996). Abundant research from ethnography of communication and education (Heath, 1983; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988), cultural psychology (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2003), linguistic anthropology (Baquedano-Lopez, 2004), and second language (L2) sociocultural theory (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), a detailed review of which is beyond the scope of this paper, sustain this view of learning as assisted participation.

This present study analyzes the writing composition and connected to the register in context of situation within culture. There are three variables field, tenor, and mood according to Halliday and Hasan (1989). This present study is only analyzed generic structures and the tenor awareness in the functional text.

Thus, the present study is under the Systemic Functional Linguistics theory. Systemic Functional Linguistics was built on previous work of linguists; Bronislaw Malinowski and J.R. Firth. Then Halliday was developing the Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) largely in 1978. Based on O'Donnell (2011) Malinowski argued one of his key concepts was that to fully understand an utterance, understanding the "context of situation" of that utterance is highly important. Firth as cited in O'Donnell (2011) contributed four things in SFL; the centrality of the context of situation, and applied it throughout his linguistic model; the central concern of linguistics should be the study of meaning; the development of an approach to phonology, called 'prosodic phonology'.

SFL is a theory of language and a methodology for analysing texts and contexts. SFL has viewed that the language is as a social semiotic (Halliday, 1978). In conclusion based on Halliday and Ruqaya (1989) there are four majors assumption of language based on SFL, the first, language use is functional; the second, the function is meaning making; the third, the social context influence meaning; the last, the use of language is a social semiotic process in which language users construct meaning by making certain linguistic choices within a given social context. The fundamental theoretical asserts that the organization of language and social contexts are interrelated, built around three different types of meanings (or metafunctions): textual, interpersonal, and ideational (Eggins, 1994). According to Eggins (1994), textual meaning is related to how a text (spoken or written) is organized as a coherent message; interpersonal meaning expresses the role relationships between participants; and ideational meaning deals with representing or constructing experience within language—the topic, subject matter, or content.

SFL has been described as a functional semantic approach to language which explore both how people use language in different context and how language is structured for use as a semiotic system (Eggins, 2004). Then, Christie and Derewianka (2010: 1) argue that the study on which it is based is distinctive in that it adopts a systemic functional linguistic (SFL) framework (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004) with which both to characterize the nature of language, spoken and written, and to trace developmental changes in writing from childhood to adolescence. SFL in the present study is analyzing the functional text and its context explores how the students use the written language and hint their writing development in adolescence.

Systemic functional linguistics is a linguistic theory that sees language as a social process that contributes to the realization of different social contexts (Schleppegell, 2008). He also asserts a key feature of functional analysis is its focus on register as the manifestation of context. Register is the term for the configuration of lexical and grammatical resources which realizes a particular set of meanings. Halliday (1978) defines register as “a set of meanings that is appropriate to a particular function of language, together with the words and structures which express these meanings Halliday as cited in Martin (2014) suggests modelling context metafunctionally, as tenor, field and mode. Those were constituted the context of situation. (Schleppegell, 2008) elaborates elements in the three areas of the grammar can be analyzed to reveal how language realizes different contexts through different grammatical and lexical choices, with the field of discourse realized in ideational resources, the tenor of discourse realized in interpersonal resources, and the mode of discourse realized in textual resources. These features can be analyzed in any text as shown in table 1.

Table 1. Grammar and Context of Situation

<i>Contextual Variable</i>	<i>Linguistic Realization</i>
Field (Presenting ideas)	Ideational Choices Noun phrases/nominal groups (participants) Verbs (process types) Prepositional phrases, adverbial adjuncts, and other resources for information about time, place, manner, etc. (circumstances) Resources for marking logical relationships
Tenor (Taking a stance)	Interpersonal Choices Mood (statements, questions, demands) Modality (modal verbs and adverbs) Intonation Other resources for evaluative and attitudinal meaning (e.g., resources for appraisal)
Mode (Structuring a text)	Textual Choices Cohesive devices, including conjunctions and connectors Clause-combining strategies Thematic organization

Based on Halliday (1989, 1994) as cited in Schleppegell, 2008

Genre according to Thornbury (2005) reveal from the context of variables of field, tenor, and mode interacts to determine the register of the text, realized in choices at the level of words and grammar. Thus, through repeated use certain register combinations become institutionalized. Originally the term genre came from literary studies which extended the meaning into social process that involves the language. Moreover, Martin (1997) sees genres as social practices operating at the level of culture. Thus, Christie and Derewianka (2010) the notion of genre is concerned with how a text is organized to achieve its social purpose. Eggins (2004) asserts genre theory is about bringing this unconscious cultural knowledge to consciousness by describing how we use language to do things, and reflecting critically on just what our culture life involves. To sum up, Genre is a term used to refer to particular text or discourse types. Genres come into being to serve specific social purposes, so ability to realize the genres that are characteristic of particular social contexts allows participation in and mutual understanding of those contexts.

One important implication of treating genre and register as supervening strata is that they are conceived as emergently complex patterns of meaning. Register

and genre are higher levels of meaning, so that genre is a pattern of register patterns, register a pattern of discourse semantics ones (Martin, 2014). The terms register (context of situation) and genre (context of culture) identify the two major layers of context which have an impact on text, and are therefore the two main dimensions of variation between texts. (Eggins & Martin 1997: 251). Both of them are connected one each other in a text. This present study focuses on the tenor. According to Eggins (2004) tenor is the relationship between interactants, for examples role such as lecturer/student, salesman/consumer, or friend/friend. Instinctively it is no doubt recognizing that the kind of social role have an effect on how we use language. Thornbury (2005) defines tenor as the participants and their relationship in the situation. It means in tenor we can observe who the speaker/writer is and what the relationship between the listener/reader. As mentioned by Eggins (2004) there are three dimensions in tenor, power, contact, and affective involvement. The example of power is the role of equal power happens between friend and friend, whereas the unequal role of power occurs within boss and employee. In equal power, vocative use is reciprocal, for example calling you by the first name. In contrary if it is unequal power, vocative use would be non-reciprocal. For example, we are calling other people by his/her academic title such as Dr. James. The position of contact is the continuum of the role between the speaker-listener and writer-reader that brought into frequent or infrequent. Frequent contact is happened to the partner, occasional contact is occurred to the acquaintances. In written text, the contact can be frequent and infrequent. It is frequent among the people we know and it is infrequent contact among the person that occasionally met, such as the applicant and employer. The affective involvement means how the role position of the writer and the reader in certain situation, high or low. Based on (Conrad and Biber, 2009) written language plays a very important role in daily life for many people. Students usually produce many kinds of writing: notes during class sessions, written assignments, term papers, and possibly numerous text messages and/or e-mail messages). They also argues that in daily life many people read even more different kinds of texts such as newspaper articles, editorials, novels, e-mail messages, blogs, text messages, letters and ads in the mail, magazine articles, ads in magazines, textbooks, research articles, course syllabi, and other written assignments or handouts, lists, memos, notes, pamphlets, brochures, flyers, print advertisements, CD cover inserts, invitations, announcements, programs, business letters, scripts, minutes of a meeting. Shorofat (2007) as cited in Abdallah (2014) defines functional writing, as opposed to academic and creative writing, as that kind of writing which aims at conveying a specific, direct and clear message to a specific audience. It includes several areas such as writing instructions, formal letters, notes, invitations, advertisements, and reports. Functional writing skills are perceived as those tangible, concrete aspects/components of linguistic performance that indicate a learner's mastery of functional writing in English for realistic everyday-life purposes (e.g. writing a formal business letter, application letter) as seen at the following table 2.

Table 2 List of Functional Writing Skill Needed by EFL Learners

2. Writing for Formal & Academic Purposes	2.1 Taking notes while listening to or watching something (e.g. a lecture or movie).
	2.2 Writing 'formal letters/e-mails' for study and recruitment purposes.
	2.3 Communicating in writing with a course instructor to ask for clarification.
	2.4 Filling in a job 'application form'.
	2.5 Writing an 'official/business letter/e-mail' to request something (e.g. unpaid leave).

## Method

The research method is qualitative study. Particularly, this study is analyzing the register and genre in functional text. This current study focuses on the texts written by the third semester students at one of private universities in a small town area. The present research aims to explore the functional text, letter of application, written and deployed textual features to convey the meaning in the text. Furthermore the researcher constructs the research questions as follow, (1) how do the students fulfill the requirements of a functional schematic structure? (2) How do the students develop tenor in functional text? The participants are the English students who sat in the third semester. The course is Business Writing. The reason of choosing this course is to develop students' awareness in register and genre in writing application letter. Thus, they can compose a good application letter. The researcher is the lecturer in this course. I took the data from the mid-term test assignment in business writing course. The students were asked to compose letter of application during the mid-term test in April 2017. Furthermore, I collected 6 compositions out of 16 compositions based on three categories, high, middle, and low achievement. The data was analyzed based on Martin and Rose (2003) dealing with register and Eggins (1994) concerning to tenor analysis. Additionally, systemic functional linguistics analyzed the structure of genre in functional text.

## Findings and Discussion

After following the stages of Genre Based Approach, the lecturer asked the students to write application letter. They need to be carefully composed the text as regarding to the genre, lexico-grammatical, context of situation in tenor area. The text is application letter. The language features is mood declarative and follow the generic structures of functional text. The tenor in the text must be appeared the power, contact, and affective involvement between the writer and reader. There were six texts chosen that were produced by high level students, middle level students, and low level students. The high level students are the students who have the highest achievement in writing. The middle level students are the students who have average achievement in writing. The last, low level students are the students who have difficulties in writing class. Each of them consists of 2 students. The composition task was conducted during the mid - term test in April 2017. The functional text was similarly in kind of formal letter such as application letter. The table 2 was showed the different tenor appear in each composition in each level. It can be seen that there are differences among the three levels of text producers viewed from three different continua. The table was based on Eggins (1994) regarding to tenor analysis. Different power used by the writer to convey

their message. The contact and affective involvement were also varies in each written task that produced by the learner at those level.

**Table 3. Tenor in Text**

	Tenor					
	High 1	High 2	Middle 1	Middle 2	Low 1	Low 2
Power	Hierarchic power Non-reciprocal	Unequal Non-reciprocal	Unequal	unequal	Equal	Equal
Contact	Infrequent	No vocatives at all	Infrequent	Infrequent	Nick names	Nick names
Affective Language Situation	Low Full form Formal	Low Politeness Formal	Low Neutral Formal	Low Neutral Formal	low Swearing Informal	low Opinion Less formal

According to Eggin (2004) power is the role of equal power happens between friend and friend, whereas the unequal role of power occurs within boss and employee. In equal power, vocative (speaker/writer) use is reciprocal (non-formal), for example calling you by the first name. In contrary if it is unequal power, vocative use would be non-reciprocal (formal) .The power was appeared in the high level students’ non-reciprocal. It means that the high level students used formal language in writing the application letter. In the middle level, the students wrote in unequal power relation between the writer and reader. It means that there were no significant differences between high and middle level students. In the low level students, they used equal power relation in writing the application letter.

The contact in high and middle were infrequent. It means that the writer and the reader did not know each other. In this case, the applicant and the employer were not occasionally met. Based on the table 3, it was assumed that both levels were already known the situation in composing the application letter. The only difference is how they arranged the sentences. Moreover, in low level the contact of situation in application letter was addressed the reader by nick name. In conclusion, there were differences background knowledge in composing the letter of application especially in contact role of relationship among the writer and reader.

Eggins (2004) asserts the language and situation that were used in application letter differ among the levels. There were full form, politeness, neutral, swearing, and opinion language used. For the situation, there were formal, less formal and informal. The language and situation awareness were different among those levels. The claim of three aspects (power, contact, and affective aspect) was important and gave an impact on how the students wrote application letter.

Table 4 demonstrated how the students produced the letter of application viewed from the generic structures of functional text. There are some schematic features that should be fulfilled by the students in composing the application letter.

Table 4 Generic Structures of Application Letter

	High 1	High 2	Middle 1	Middle 2	Low 1	Low 2
Sender's address	Written on left	Written in the middle	Center	Center	Incomplete	Unstated
Inside address	Written on the left	Written on the left	On the left	On the left	On the left Unspecified division	On the left unspecified the name
Greeting	Formal	Formal	Formal	Formal	Formal	Formal
Reason for writing	Written declaratively	Written declaratively	Mood declarative	Mood declarative	Unstated	Implicitly
Reason for applying	Written clearly	Written clearly	Incongruent arrangement	Incongruent arrangement	Overlap	Overlap
Thanking	Written at end of paragraph Formal	Mention resume Formal	Written implicitly	Written implicitly	Unstated	Unstated
Closing	Formal	Formal	Formal	Formal	Informal	Less formal

According to Murray and Rockowitz (2017) describe the generic structures of the letter of application are sender's address, inside address, greeting, reasons for writing, reason for applying, thanking, and closing. Based on Table 4, the high level students followed the generic structures in accurate arrangement. It was also seen in the middle level students, in which they constructed the letter of application in a good arrangement although several elements were missing. In contrast, in low level students' compositions, they were still lack of generic structures awareness. It was important to give diverse models of letter of application, thus the low level students could practice more in composing the formal letter, especially in composing the application letter.

In terms of the tenor awareness, the students from high to low level showed the used of difference choice of vocative in power, avoidance of slang, and politeness phenomena. The difference between contact and affective involvement is by using the infrequent and low affective involvement. The contact and affective seemed to be the effort of the students in developing their tenor awareness in composing the application letter. As mentions by Eggins (1994: 64), tenor is proposed as more than just an interesting description of the interpersonal aspects of situation. It is proposed as a direct claim about the link between language and context. Tenor is part of register. Martin and Rose (2003: 254) argue register analysis gives us another way of thinking about context, alongside genre. The main difference is that register analysis is meta-functionally organized into field, tenor, and mode perspective.

Genre analysis is a staged, goal-oriented social process. It was social because the writer participated in genres with the reader. It was goal oriented because the

writer used genres to get things done. It was staged because usually it took the writer a few steps to reach the goals (Martin and Rose, 2003). The functional text is one of genres. Thus, it had several stages to reach its goals. The goal of the functional text is used in daily life communication whether in formal or informal situation. The language feature that was used in the functional text especially in the letter of application was declarative mood for statement. Furthermore, the distancing phrase showing respect frequently used "I am writing to express...". The generic structures of the letter of application were used in order to reach the goal of the writer (applicant) to the reader (employer). Thus, the contact between writer and reader are infrequent and low in affective involvement.

### **Conclusion**

This research has described the relationship among teaching approach, register, and genre in functional text. The findings from tenor analysis point out that there were different power, contact, and affective involvement in an application letter. Of all the six writing tasks I have examined, non-reciprocal occurs in an application letter. Moreover, infrequent contact appears in letter of application text types that have been identified in the students' composition. There was used low affective involvement in formal letter. The contextual analysis was showed that the students has already used tenor writing formal letter. Matthiessen (2006) pointed that learners expand their personal meaning potentials by adding registers to their register repertoires. The findings from this research have enriched on the writing letter of application. The result of how the students' fulfill the functional schematic features was by composing the letter of application through the generic structures of functional text. The limitation of time and sample were considered as the weaknesses of this research.

To sum up, there were strong connection between register and genre. Both cannot be separated, because it completes each other. Knowing the organization of the text helps the students compose the application letter correctly and coherently. Realizing the tenor in text also help the students build the context of situation in certain text. The relationship between the register and genre perspectives is treated as an inter-stratal one, with register realizing genre. Additionally, genre is a pattern of register patterns, just as register variables are a pattern of linguistics one (Martin and Rose, 2003). The genre based approach teaching cycle in writing class helps the students to accomplish their writing composition. It started from building their knowledge, deconstructing, joint constructing, modeling, drafting and final writing.

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