

Analyzing Teaching Skill Contest as A Genre System to Decode the Code of Excellent Pedagogies: A Comprehensive Functional Perspective of Realization, Instantiation, Individuation, and Genesis

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Abstract

Discourse is a process resulting in a communicative act which takes the form of a text (Chimombo & Roseberry, 1998, p. ix). Ingested by this view, every discourse type demonstrates the role relations among social groups on the one end, and how these relations manifest in language on the other end. A teaching skill contest is a multi-party social process of putting forward alternative pedagogies, evaluating these pedagogies and propagandizing excellent pedagogies. From a discourse perspective, this process manifests in texts constructed throughout the contest. However, the discourse features of a teaching skill contest are rarely observed. This paper therefore starts a discussion to fill in this vacancy.

Within the theoretical framework of systemic functional linguistics, this paper raises the question of mapping the SFLEP national college English teaching contest (finals) (<http://nfltc.sflep.com/>) held in China as a genre system (Martin & Rose, 2008, p. 17). Focusing on the role of the SFLEP contest in screening excellent Chinese tertiary EFL pedagogies, this paper also puts forward an analytic framework for the system which integrates four SFL complementary perspectives of discourse semantics, viz. realization, instantiation, individuation, and genesis (Martin, 2010a). Specifically, it mainly addresses the following questions: (a) What is the nature of the SFLEP contest genre system? (b) How can we employ SFL theories of discourse semantics to observe the role of this genre system in refining excellent pedagogies?

Besides proving the feasibility and application significance of SFL genre theories and discourse semantics, this paper also proposes a paradigm of the contest genre system which is worth further developing.

Keywords: Teaching skill contest, Genre system, Discourse semantics, Realization, Instantiation, Individuation, Genesis

1. Introduction

A teaching skill contest is an arena designed for the exchange of viewpoints in different educational circles. It provides opportunities for teachers to display their pedagogies, for other contemporary scholars and practitioners to document, observe, and analyze these pedagogies, for educational administrators and contest organizers to call for public concerns for the development of pedagogies.

Within the theoretical framework of systemic functional linguistics (hereafter SFL), this paper takes Martin & Rose (2008)'s call to replicate the social practices of a given culture through genre systems (p. 6). From a systemic-functional perspective, contest participants of different educational circles construct different genres in light of their positions in the contest setting. These genres do not exist in isolation but interact with each other to form a system of interconnected genres (ibid., p. 17) which serves the overall objective of the contest. The paper therefore proposes to map the various genres constructed in a teaching skill contest as a genre system to screen excellent pedagogies. The discussion is based on the formation of the SFLEP national college English teaching contest (finals) held in China (<http://nfltc.sflep.com/>). It is currently the biggest teaching skill contest for Chinese tertiary EFL teachers. All the contestants and adjudicators are Chinese native EFL scholars and practitioners engaged in Chinese higher education. Moreover, based on the four research foci toward discourse semantics in SFL, viz. realization, instantiation, individuation, and genesis (Martin, 2010a), the paper also sets up a comprehensive analytic framework

for the contest genre system. This framework views the contest genre system from these four complementary angles and advances respective questions awaiting further exploration. In addition, a paradigm of the contest genre system is put forward.

The implication of the paper is two-fold. First, it expands the application range of SFL theories of genre system and discourse semantics; second, the paradigm of contest genre system provides references for various contest observers.

In the following parts of the paper, I will first discuss how the SFLEP contest can be mapped as a genre system and then discuss how the system refines excellent pedagogies. After that, I will also discuss how Martin's four perspectives of discourse semantics can be employed to analyze this system.

2. Present Studies of SFLEP Teaching Skill Contest

Teaching skill contest is a popular teaching and researching technique. It enables educational practitioners and scholars to collect and observe the most representative and successful pedagogies efficiently. An analysis of 253 teaching ideas in the Great Ideas for Teaching (GIFT) awards presented 2000-2009 at Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, for example, reveals that the most effective teaching practices in American journalism education are team-based and involving visual communication (Cuillier & Schwalbe, 2010). Such an observation is hard to achieve within normal classrooms. Besides, a teaching skill contest also works as a popular teacher education technique. Based on a field survey in Shanghai, China, Paine (2003) reveals that the teaching skill contest is a dominant induction activity carried out in China to provide new teachers with learning opportunities outside their classroom (p. 73).

The 1st SFLEP national college English teaching contest (<http://nfltc.sflep.com/>) is by far the biggest tertiary EFL teaching contest held in China. It involves more than ten thousand contestants representing more than one thousand universities in twenty-eight provinces in China. Sixty-one contestants are selected from a preliminary round and participate into the finals of the contest held in Shanghai (Shu, 2010). The contest prompts strong responses among contemporary EFL pedagogies by Chinese tertiary EFL scholars (e.g. Shu, 2010; Xia, 2011; Yang, 2011; Du, 2012). By observing and reflecting on the contest process per se, these scholars critically think about various issues about Chinese tertiary EFL education, such as the requirement for teacher quality, classroom teaching procedures, problems of the teaching, standards for effective teaching, objectives of EFL teaching, constraints of the contest setting, pedagogical innovations, contestants' performances, and so on. The results of the researches, however, lack the support of rigorous scientific studies and empirical evidences. This paper therefore fills the vacancy by looking into the contest process from a perspective of discourse analysis. One of my pilot studies is a discourse analysis of the 1st SFLEP contestants' mock teaching (Liu, 2013). In this paper, I intend to extend the previous research and embroider a more comprehensive analytic framework for the SFLEP contest genre system.

3. SFL Theories of Genre System

The research is based on SFL theories of genre system. From a systemic-functional perspective, a genre is "a staged, goal-oriented social process (Martin, 1986, p. 28; Martin & Rose, 2003, p. 7)" which takes the form of recurrent global patterns (Martin & Rose, 2008, p. 5) in language and attendant modalities of communication (*ibid.*, p. 20). Ingested by this view, every communicative activity in the society constructs its particular genre types which manifest in the discourse patterns constructed in these communications. With an intention to extend SFL genre theories, Martin and Rose propose to consider more about genre relations than individual genres (*ibid.*, p. 6) so as to map cultures from a semiotic perspective as systems of genres (*ibid.*, p. 17). They therefore claim that genres can be viewed as clustering in families which can be observed either paradigmatically or syntagmatically as the other abstract levels of analysis within SFL systems. The paradigmatic relations enact the boundaries between different genre types; the syntagmatic relations enact how genres are expanded (*ibid.*, pp. 231-261). This paper takes Martin and Rose's call to map the discursive process of a teaching skill contest as a genre system. For the sake of the afore-mentioned research purpose of this paper, both of the relations are to be explored in the contest genre system. From a perspective of paradigmatic genre relations, either the contestants' performances or the other relevant parties' evaluations of the performances enact in the complementary roles of different genre types constructed by each of them. Hu & Dong (2006)'s work on the combined effect of contestants' ppt. files and oral narrations in construing meaning in the contest setting can be viewed as an empirical model for such explorations. From a perspective of syntagmatic genre relations, the joint efforts by contestants and other relevant contest participants in screening out the excellent pedagogies are based on an observation of how the subsequent genre types recontextualize previous genre types. In my previously-mentioned pilot discourse analysis, I replicate how the 1st SFLEP contestants recontextualize the cultural information from their selected teaching materials so as to meet the contextual constraints of the contest (Liu, 2013). The pilot study can be viewed as an exploration of such syntagmatic relations in the contest genre system.

One issue worth further exploring is the mutual dependence between genres within a genre system. In any given social context, genres are interrelated when they work together to address any problems. News story genre and recount genre, for example, are opposed to each other in that the former privilege textual organization while the latter privilege temporal sequence (Martin & Rose, 2008, p. 81). When considering the situation that a journalist interviews a participant and then makes out his/her report, however, the recount genre in the interview provides material for the news story genre in the report. The two genres types are thereby interrelated. Or from an individual perspective, the journalist orally accounts his/her observation and documents the accounts with electronic equipments first and then work out the manuscript for the report. The recount genre in the documented file and the news story genre in the report, in this case, are also interrelated. This is in line with the SFL concept of coupling (Martin, 2000; Martin, J. R., Zappavigna, M. & Dwyer, P., 2008; Martin, J. R., Zappavigna, M., Cléirigh, C. & Dwyer, P., 2010) which refers to the binding of linguistic resources into particular combinations in relation to communicative activities in a given culture. Certain genres in the SFLEP contest genre system, therefore, play their complementary roles in refining excellent pedagogies.

4. Genre System of SFLEP Contest

As Figure 1 shows, there are two trajectories underlying the contest formation. One is the discursive process of the contest; the other is the discourse construction throughout this process. In the discursive trajectory, the contest comprises three sections: pre-contest, in-contest, and post-contest. In the pre-contest section, each contesting teacher chooses an article from the textbook they normally use and prepares for their mock teachings; in the in-contest section, these teachers go through three segments viz. mock teaching, report teaching, and question and answer on the report teaching; in the post-contest section, the representative from Chinese ministry of education delivers a speech, the adjudicators give comments on these contesting teachers' performances, the contesting teachers make self-reflections, and the contest organizer reports on its official website of the contest background and awards.

In the discourse trajectory, different participants construct genres at different stages. In the pre-contest section, the genre types are the textbooks chosen by the contestants, and the ppt. files they prepare on the basis of these textbooks; in the in-contest section, the genre types are the videos for these contestants' mock teaching, report teaching, and question and answer on the report teaching; in the post-contest section, the genre types are the education official's address, the adjudicators' comments, the contestants' self-reflections, and the website information released by the contest organizers. These genres in turn constitute the SFLEP contest genre system as a whole.

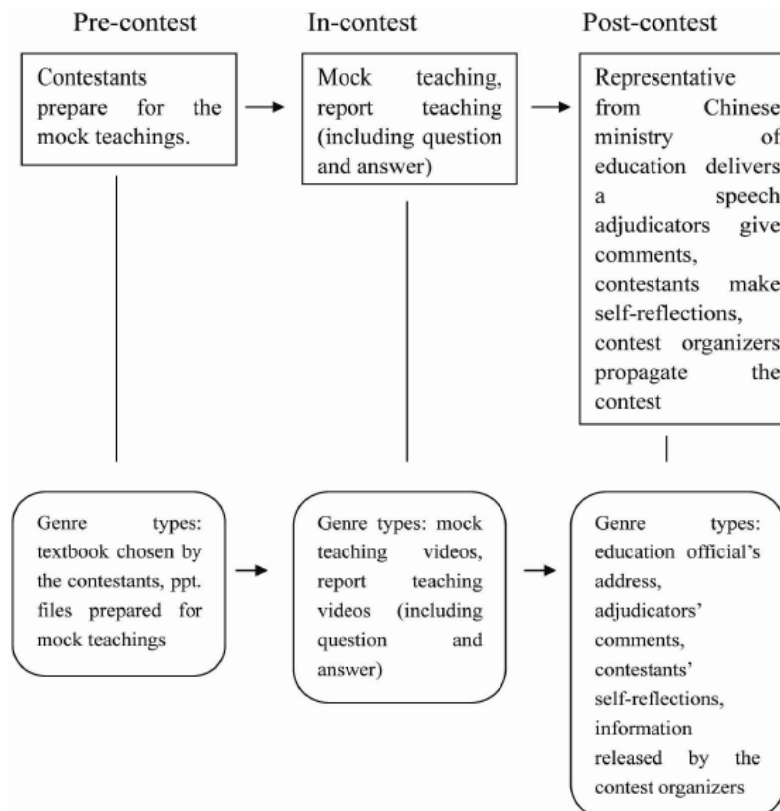


Figure 1. Genre Construction in SFLEP Contest

Two paradigms of the genre system in mock teaching and report teaching are depicted in Figure 2 and Figure 3 respectively. As is shown in Figure 2, a textbook for mock teaching may include different contents, such as text, exercises, and so on. So a contestant may choose which part to cover in the allotted time for mock teaching. Then he/she may decide what pedagogy to employ on the chosen content. After that, the adjudicators evaluate the effects of this pedagogy; the contestant replicates why and how the pedagogy is deployed; the contest organizer will or will not promote the pedagogy. Likewise in a report teaching, as is shown in Figure 3, a contestant explains the assigned text and his/her pedagogy in the report teaching. After that, a question and answer genre reveals how well he/she understands the text and teaching philosophy. At last, adjudicators, contestants, and the contest organizer give comments respectively, as they do in the mock teaching. One thing worth mentioning is that there exist choices between the contents and contestants. In Figure 2, the content 1 may be used by chosen by one contestant while content 2 may be used by another. In Figure 3, one contestant explains the material in one way, while the second contestant explains the material in another way. Therefore, the genre systems work in differentiating these choices so as to inform how and why certain pedagogies are more preferable.

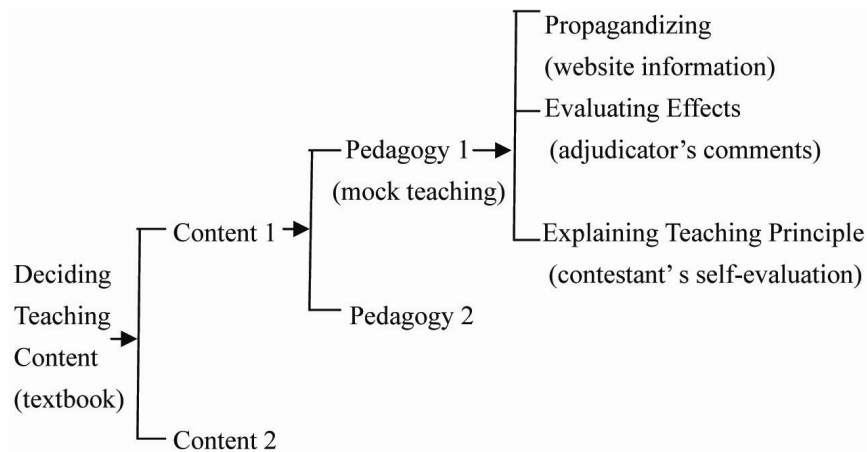


Figure 2. A Paradigm of the SFLEP Contest Genre System of Mock Teaching

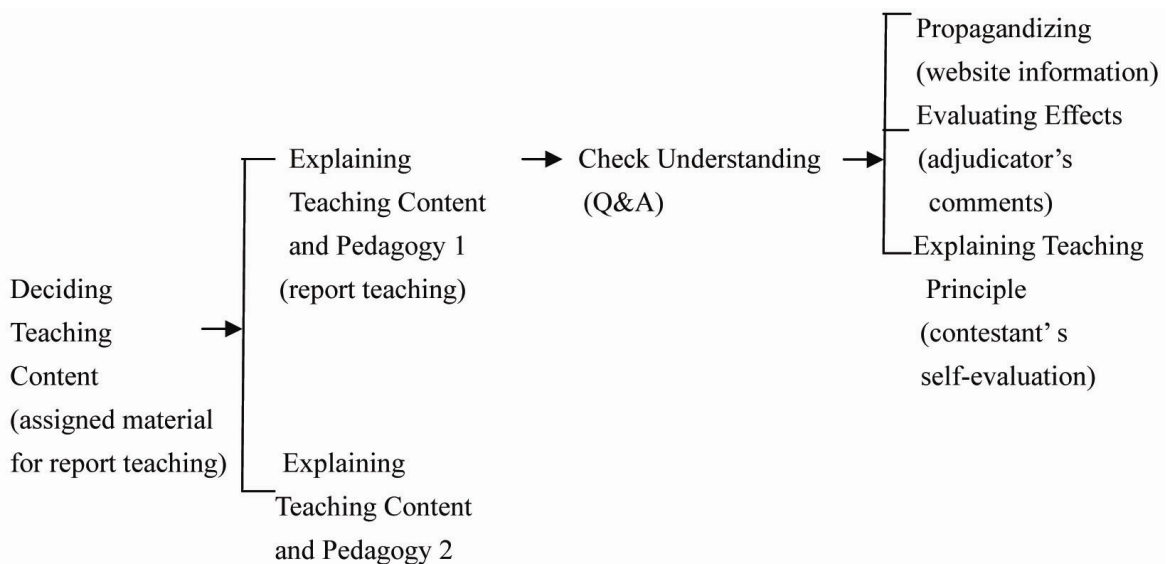


Figure 3. A Paradigm of the SFLEP Contest Genre System of Report Teaching

5. Constructing the Analytical Framework

In this part, I will discuss how the afore-mentioned four perspectives of SFL discourse semantics can be applied to decode the role of the genre system in Figure 2 and Figure 3 in refining excellent pedagogies.

5.1 Realization

The first perspective of SFL discourse semantics is realization, which means the meanings as a whole enact across strata of abstraction in the SFL system (Martin, 2010a). Based on Hjelmslev (1961)'s division of connotative semiotics and denotative semiotics (cf. Martin, 1986, p. 8), SFL scholars treat language as the denotative semiotics which has its own expression forms to make meaning. As Figure 4 shows, at the lower level, SFL scholars think language comprising levels of meaning-making in abstraction viz. phonology, lexico-grammar, and semantics, and see grammar as the intermediate level which locates between semantics and phonology and functions as a resource for making meaning (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 31). On the other hand, SFL scholars treat the social context of language as connotative semiotics. It doesn't have its own expression forms; instead it takes over language as their expression forms (Martin, 1986, pp. 8-9). As is shown in Figure 4, at the upper level, some SFL scholars think context is comprised of ideology, genre, and register. A genre is "a staged, goal-oriented social process (Martin, 1986, p. 28; Martin & Rose, 2003, p. 7)" which replicates why a text is constructed; while a register is "the patterns of instantiation of the overall system associated with a given type of context" (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004, p. 27), which replicates the situation in which a text is constructed. Eggsins (2004) is explicit about the relationship of genre and register. She claims that genre is within the context of culture, and a register is the context of situation in a discourse. Specifically, a genre is a repeated pattern manifesting across various discourses within the same culture; a register is the pattern attributed to a certain social situation enacting in a particular discourse. The genre is therefore posited at the upper strata of register by SFL scholars to indicate an inclusion relationship. The other strata in the upper level is ideology. SFL scholars understand ideology as the power relations that permeate every level of semiosis (Martin & Rose, 2008, p. 19). As Martin (1986) claims, all texts will exhibit patterns of choice which cannot be predicted from genre or register alone. And these choices are not natural, but influenced by ideology. (p. 36)" Ideology refers to "a system of coding orientations which makes meaning selectively available depending on subjects' class, gender, ethnicity and generation. And these coding orientations variably manifest in discourses. (Martin, 2004a, p. 581)" Therefore, an ideological discourse analysis reveals how discourse constructors identify themselves in class, gender, ethnicity and generation and which groups of voice are dominant in the context. As ideology regulates how different SFL strata are organized, it can be observed through these strata. Genre manifests how the dominant group controls the discursive activity; tenor manifests their status in the context; field manifests their expertise related to their social group; mode manifests their prominence of communication which signals them as belonging to the group (Martin & Rose, 2008, p. 19). In a sense, these semiotics are treated as different kinds of phenomena operating at different strata of abstraction. Those in the upper stratum always operate at a more abstract level and involve more in their analysis than those in the lower stratum. SFL discourse analysis, therefore identifies the role of language on the one hand, and explains how the social activities make their meanings on the other hand (Martin and Rose, 2003, pp. 3-5).

Furthermore, the focus of inquiry in SFL researches is always treated with a trinocular perspective (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 31). As Figure 5 shows, at the lower level, SFL scholars believe that language has three metafunctions, viz. ideational metafunctions, interpersonal metafunction, and textual metafunction. With ideational metafunction, language construes human experiences; with interpersonal metafunction, language enacts personal and social relations; with textual metafunction, language on the one hand builds up sequences of discourse, and on the other hand organizes the discursive flow and creates cohesion and continuity as it moves along (ibid., pp. 29-30). At the upper level, there are three contextual variables: field, tenor, and mode. Field correlates with ideational metafunction and concerns what people are doing and what they are doing it to (Martin, 2008, p. 57); tenor correlates with interpersonal metafunction and concerns status, formality and politeness (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 631), which ultimately concerns power relations and solidarity between people (Martin, 2008, p. 63); mode correlates with textual metafunction and concerns channel of communication and the relation between language and what it is talking about (Martin, 2008, pp. 59-60). Since field, tenor, and mode don't have their own expression forms, their existence is embodied by borrowing the forms from lower levels.

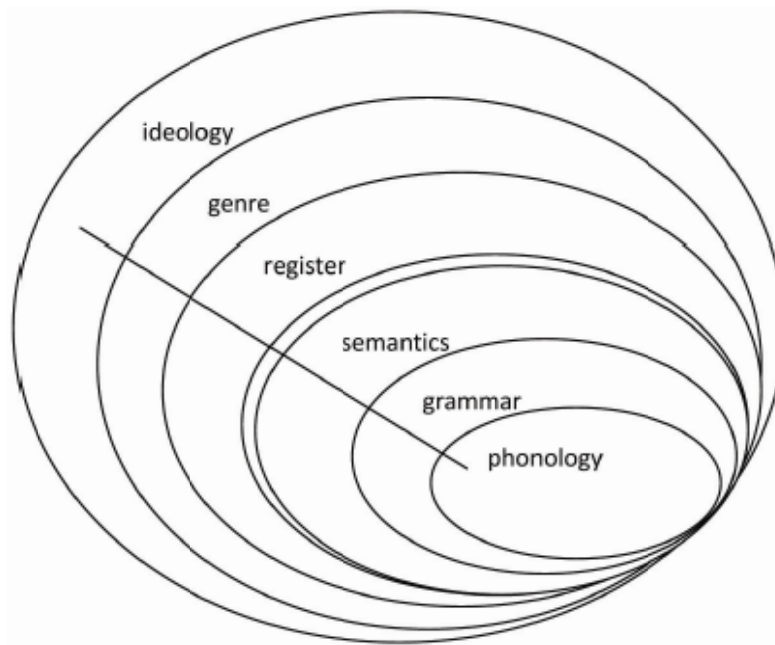


Figure 4. Language and its semiotic environment (cf. Martin, J. R. and Matthiessen, C. M. I. M., 1991, p. 183)

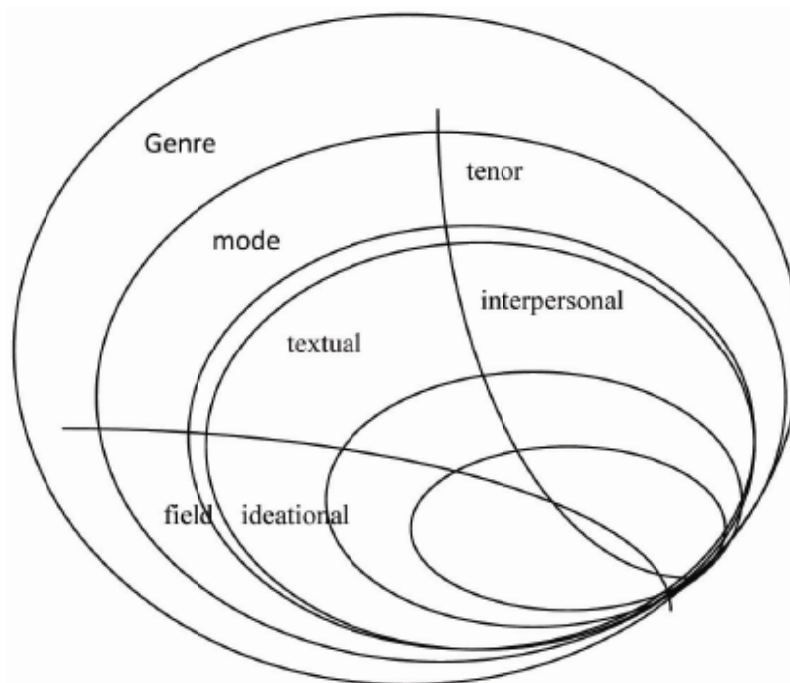


Figure 5. Language in relation to a stratified model of social context (as register and genre) (cf. Martin, 2010a, p. 22)

This realisation perspective is applicable to my analysis of the genre system in Figure 3. Firstly, the metafunctional analysis replicates how meaning resources within each genre are organized (Martin & Rose, 2008, p. 24) and therefore provides the foundation for its register analysis, specifically the analyses of field, tenor, and mode. Based on Butt et. al. (2000, pp. 194-195)'s template, a few research questions relating metafunctions with register are listed as follows:

- From Interpersonal Metafunction to Tenor of Discourse:

Who are the contestants in the contest? Who are the participants other than the contestants in the contest? What are the power relations between contestants and other co-participants?

- From Ideational Metafunction to Field of Discourse:

What are the teaching contents? What do the contestants do in the contest? What do the other co-participants do in the contest? What circumstantial factors are there in the contest? What are their interrelations?

- From Textual Metafunction to Mode of Discourse

What are the types of communication in each genre? How do the contestants organize their language? How do the co-participants organize their language?

Secondly, the genre feature of the contest can be explored. Based on the register analyses, boundaries between the genres within the system can be determined. Specifically, the register values shift around as they do in reaction to the goals of discourse constructors (Martin, 2008, p. 65). Therefore, a staged goal-oriented division can be drawn on the basis of our observation of register shifts.

Besides, as it is mentioned previously, SFL genre analysis is set up to explain how people achieve their goals on a staged process. The analysis of each genre can therefore reveal the goals of each genre constructor. There are obviously intermixing goals in a genre system. In terms with the genre system in Figure 3, there are segmental and overall goals with its genres. SFL scholars generalize them into two strata, viz. elemental genre and macro-genre (Martin, 1994). One thing worth mentioning here is that SFL discourse analysts hold a positive position toward discourse (Martin, 1999, Martin and Rose, 2003, p. 264; Martin, 2004b). They mainly explore how people get together and make room for themselves in the world by redistributing power rather than struggling against it. It sheds light on how the world changes for the better in various sites (Martin, 2004b, pp. 282-283). This viewpoint is in line with my research orientation. From my perspective, the genres work together to screen out excellent pedagogies.

Relevant questions can therefore be put forward as follows:

What are the register features of each genre? What are the social purposes behind these genres? How do participants realize these purposes? How do the values of register, viz. field, tenor, and mode, change across different genres? What is the macro-genre of the contest constructed? What is the overall social purpose of the macro-genre?

Thirdly, the ideological feature of the contest can be explored. In terms with this paper, the pedagogical ideology that dominates the contest can be studied. We can seek for answers to the following questions:

- From tenor to ideology

What are the social status of contest participants belonging to different social groups? Who is the dominant group?

- From field to ideology

What do participants of the dominant group do in the contest?

- From mode to ideology

What are the language features of the participants of the dominant group in the contest?

- From genre to ideology

How do the participants of the dominant group regulate the contest formation?

All in all, the metafunction analysis provides the basis for register analysis. The register analysis in turn replicates the situations in which each genre is constructed; the genre then depicts the contest of goals of each genre within the genre system. An ideological analysis, then, reveals the dominant pedagogical ideology that is reflected in the contest genre system.

5.2 Instantiation

The second perspective of SFL discourse analysis is instantiation. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) regards the underlying meaning potential of a language as the system, while the language per se as a set of texts. The relationship between the system and the text is analogues to the relationship between climate and weather. Though they are the same phenomenon seen from different standpoints of the observer, the former is seen from a greater depth than the latter. Therefore, a climate is to a weather is what a system to a text (pp. 26-27). SFL scholars regard this relationship between the system and the text as a cline of instantiation (ibid., p. 27). As in Figure 6, system locates at the upper pole of the cline, while text locates at a lower pole of the cline. Between these two poles, there are two intermediate

patterns: genre/register and text type. Genre and register have been explained previously. A text type is the patterns that texts share in a certain register (ibid., p. 27). Therefore, in specific social activity, the system of meanings as a whole is related to specific genre and registers, which in turn takes the form of shared text types (Martin, 2010a, p. 23). Martin adds reading to the cline as an additional pole. He claims that social subjectivity of the customers enforce them to interpret the texts differently (ibid., p. 23).

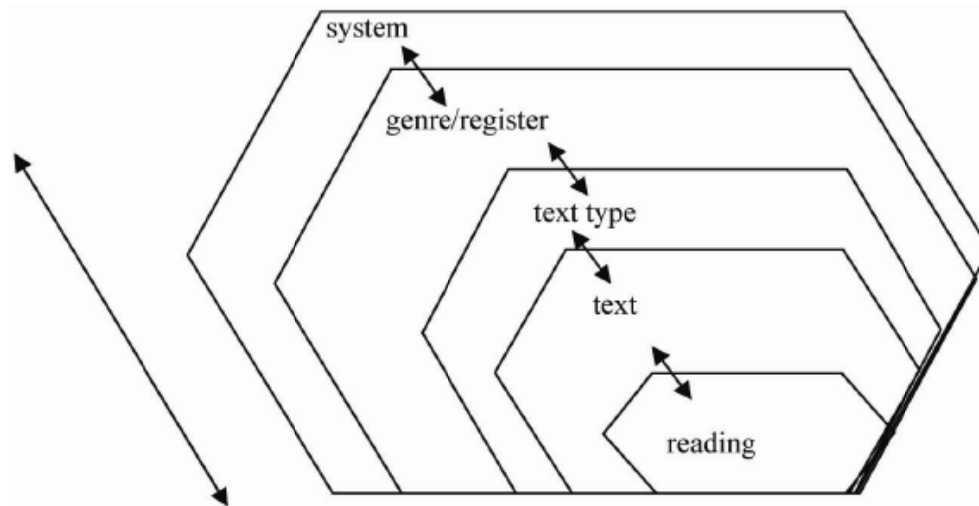


Figure 6. The hierarchy of instantiation (adapted from Martin, 2010a, p. 24)

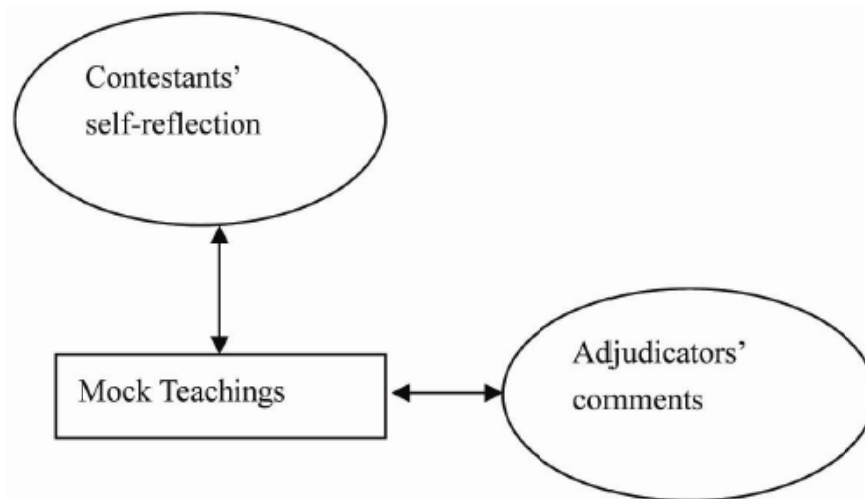


Figure 7. An Instantiation Perspective of the Adjudicators' Criteria

This instantiation perspective enables us to analyze the complementary roles of the genres within the genre system in refining excellent pedagogies. As is shown in Figure 7, discourse analysts can either compare the contestants' mock teaching videos and their self-reflections to reveal teaching philosophies behind their pedagogies, or they can compare the mock teaching videos and adjudicators' comments to reveal the effects these pedagogies and what criteria are being used in the evaluation.

Taking the example of how adjudicators comment on mock teaching, discourse analysts can ask the following questions:

- Firstly, a realisation analysis of the mock teaching:

Who are the contestants being observed? What do they do in the mock teaching? What are the contextual restrictions of their mock teachings? How do they deal with the restrictions? How do they deal with the power relations between them and adjudicators? What are the types of communication in their mock teachings? What teaching procedures are taken by the contestant to realize their overall teaching purposes? What are the dominant pedagogical ideologies among the contestants?

- Secondly, an instantiation observation of how the adjudicators evaluate the mock teaching observed. The following questions can be asked:

What meaning resources are employed by the adjudicators in their comments? How do the adjudicator's comments recontextualize the mock teachings? Between the contestants and the adjudicators, whose pedagogical ideologies are dominant?

5.3 Individuation

The third perspective of SFL discourse analysis is individuation. It refers to the meaning potential of the system according to individual discourse constructors (Martin, 2010a). As is shown in Figure 8, a culture can be divided into different sub-cultures through master identities, such as their gender, class, generation, and so on. The individual personas therefore align themselves with different sub-cultures (ibid., p. 31). For the same reason as that in Section 5.2, discourse analysts can analyze texts to reveal what culture types are individuals affiliated with, and what particular persona exist in the culture. For the research purpose of this paper, we may set the following questions:

Which social groups are these participants affiliated with? Does the affiliation influence their genre features and activities in the contest? Are there any particularities in the case being observed above? Do these particularities make the certain contestants stand out or fail in the contest?

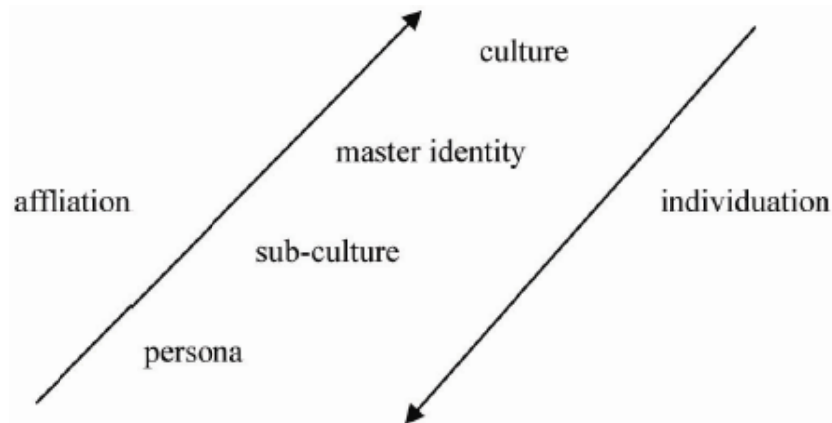


Figure 8. Individuation and affiliation (adapted from Martin, 2010a, p. 32)

5.4 Genesis

The fourth perspective of SFL discourse analysis is genesis, which refers to the overall evolution of the repertoire in a discourse (Martin, 2010a). From SFL perspective, this repertoire is comprised of three processes: phylogenesis, logogenesis, and ontogenesis. Phylogenesis refers to the evolution of meaning resources in a culture (ibid., p. 37); ontogenesis refers to the development of an individual's meaning potentials (ibid., p. 37); logogenesis refers to the temporal unfolding of the meanings in texts through time (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 43; Martin, 2010a, p. 36). As in Figure 9, the phylogenetic process which subsumes the evolution of linguistic metafunctions is taken as paralleling with both the logogenetic process which represents the ever more extensive representativeness of language in society and the ontogenetic process which represents the ever changing identity of language users (Martin, 2010b, p. 264).

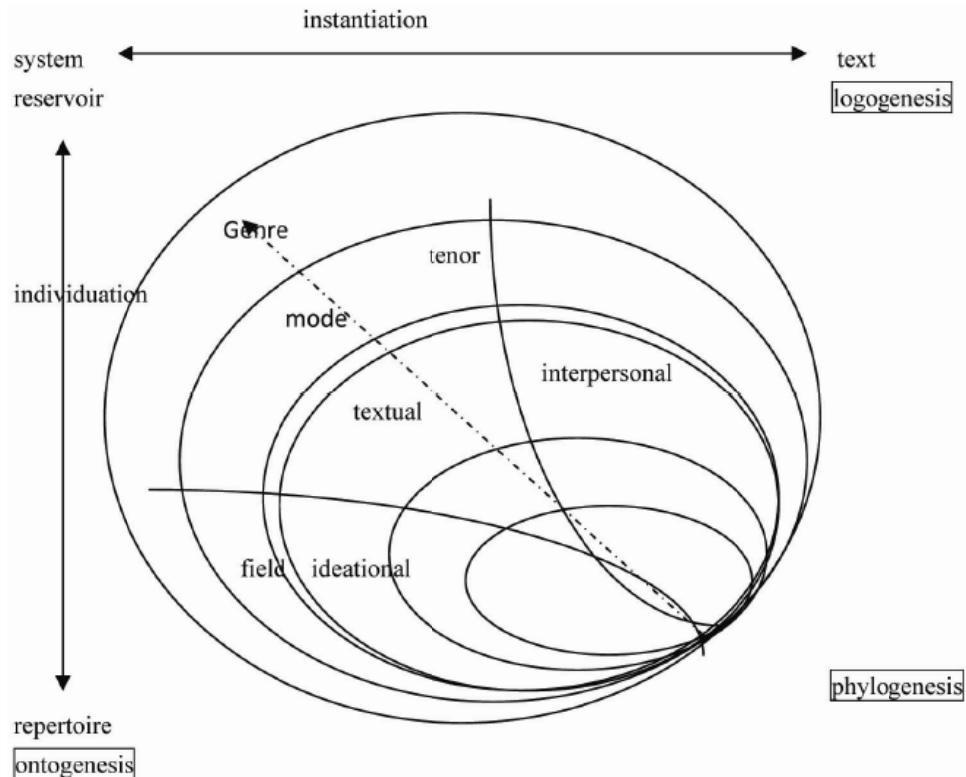


Figure 9. Realization, instantiation, and individuation in relation to genesis (adapted from Martin, 2010a, p. 37)

From the perspective of genesis, each genre within the genre system in Figure 3 attaches to one another. As is shown in Figure 10, the rear genre always recontextualizes the previous one and therefore produces new discourse features. In particular, when the contestants do their mock teachings, they reinterpret the information embedded in the textbook to the students and adjudicators, for the sake of their contest purposes. Likewise, the adjudicators give comments based on recontextualizing the information embedded in the contestants' performances, and contestants' self-reflection is also based on recontextualizing previous genres.

Questions worth asking are:

Are the individual social identities changed throughout the contest?

Are social activities reinterpreted by different participants throughout the contest?

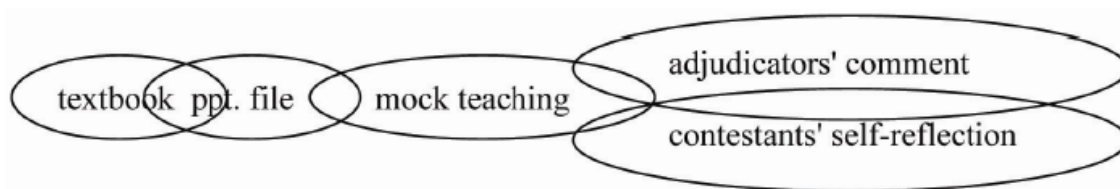


Figure 10. Recontextualization of genres in the SFLEP genre system

6. Conclusion

Like any other theories of discourse analysis, SFL is an application-oriented approach. This paper proposes the possibility of applying it in contest discourse observation. Based on a reinterpretation of the SFL theories, the author proposes to map the contest into a genre system and puts forward a comprehensive analytic framework to decode the

role of the system in refining excellent pedagogies. A set of questions with specific relevance to the analysis of contest genre system are also asked.

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