Multiple Approaches for Analysing Academic Discourses: Similarities and Differences

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Abstract
Within the previous two decades, a considerable variety of approaches has been utilised to understand and explore the complex, multifaceted essence of academic discourses. These approaches are guided by either pedagogical needs and/or based on the emic or etic perspectives of writers. Consequently, due to the increasing numbers of teachers and scholars who are interested in investigating and exploring academic discourses, it could be probably helpful to obtain knowledge about the approaches employed for studying academic discourses. Hence, this article compares definitions and analyses of the main approaches, specifically textual, contextual and critical ones, to studying academic discourses by novice researchers and highlights the similarities and/or differences in the analysis procedures. As a result, researchers could identify which approach can be appropriately used to achieve their research goals and interests.

Keywords: academic discourse, approaches, discourse analysis

1.   Introduction

The field of discourse analysis has attracted multidisciplinary interests in the early seventies, thus developing into multiple approaches. Linguistically, discourse analysis has been identified as text-linguistics, text analysis, conversational analysis, rhetorical analysis, functional analysis, and clause-relational analysis (Bhatia, 2013). The main purpose of all these studies has been to explore and interpret the structural and functional use of language to communicate meaningfully (Bhatia, 2013). Within linguistics, discourse analysis may focus on formal and sometimes functional aspects of language use, including semantics and pragmatics. Register and genre analysis within the systemic linguistic framework are examples of this tradition. At the other end, discourse analyses can focus on the institutionalized use of language in socio-cultural settings with a heavy emphasis on communication as a social action. Examples are analyses of spoken interactions in the ethno-methodological tradition and analyses of professional and academic research genres by Swales (1981) and Bhatia (1982). Second, discourse analyses can be found in either the everyday conversation, analyses of written discourse in terms of descriptive, narrative, argumentative writing or in the specific direction analyses of research article introductions, legislative provisions, doctor-patient consultation and counsel-witness examination as genres. Third, studies of discourse have been directed towards applying language in teaching, particularly for the teaching of ESP.

Researchers interested in analysing academic discourses, according to an interview with Hyland, are usually varied in their ways or interests when analysing corpora (Viana, Zyngier,

& Barnbrook, 2011). A first group of analysts considers writing as a kind of cognitive performance, whereas others are interested in the influence of the local contexts of writing and the actions of writers. Another group of analysts is interested in exploring the cultural and institutional context with the purpose of identifying the ideologies and power relations expressed by writing. Other socially-oriented linguists, such as Hyland, are interested in the texts and exploring the community preferences in using the rhetorical practices that are adopted by a group of writers. Thus, Hyland himself is interested in what people do, when they write, and why they do it (Viana, Zyngier, & Barnbrook, 2011). This latter kind of interest could give us an idea about the speaker's experience of language domain with empirical evidence about language choices and community practices rather than individual writers or individual texts. In other words, the writer's experience and perception of the audience, and being a member of a certain community can shape the way of structuring information, making arguments, and expressing opinions.

2.   Approaches to Analysing Academic Discourses

Analysing and understanding the academic discourse is supported by an integrative theory or a concept. Hyland (2009) summarized three main approaches to conduct studies on the academic discourse, including Contextual, Critical, and Textual Approaches, as illustrated in Figure 1.
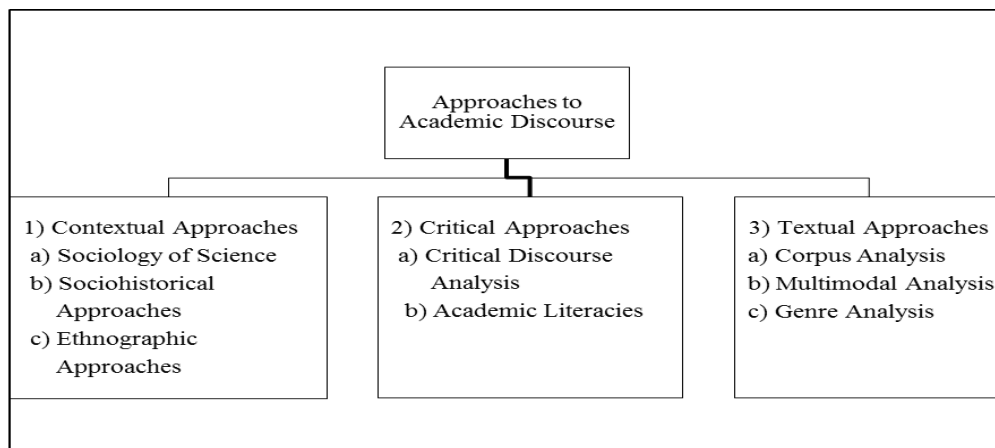

Figure 1. Approaches to academic discourse (adapted from Hyland, 2009)

2.1 Contextual Approaches

Linguists under the contextual approaches who are interested in analysing texts might go beyond the page or the screen in order to explore how the discourse is represented in the users' cultures. The contextual approaches seem to represent these linguists by establishing the discourse's contextual elements. Under these approaches, Hyland (2009) selected the sociology of science, the sociohistorical approaches, and the ethnographic approaches.

In *the sociology of science*, researchers started looking for a social basis of knowledge through relying on ethnographical techniques, such as participant observation and conversation analysis in order to create knowledge. Within this context, researchers in the field of academic discourse are more interested in preparing academic papers to be published after being socially situated in the context of the society and the institution (Hyland, 2009).

In *the sociohistorical approaches*, things are true only at a specific time for a particular group of people. In order to understand the academic discourse of a certain period, the cultural practices should be situated in their social context. This means that the conventions of writing have been developed with time in order to cope with the changes in the social situations. The linguistic practices associated with presenting the experiment have been modified and altered toward reports with more emphasis on the methodology and the involved experiments. This implies that research articles are dynamic textual reports rather than static in order to meet the changes in the practices and the norms of the disciplines.

In *the ethnographic approaches*, the individual's behaviors and practices are described through collecting data from varied sources in their natural occurring conditions during a period of time (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). By adopting such an approach, human language and its context constitute a significant part of the setting. The results that are obtained and recycled over a long period of time through adopting multiple sources are verified through member checking technique. However, the ethnographic approach has been criticized for lacking accuracy, involving more subjectivity and focussing on practices only would be insufficient (Gardner, 2012).

On the other hand, supporters of the ethnographic approaches claim that this approach presents rich information of first-hand- interpretation on the basis of the interaction within the local context. This approach has been used widely in the educational research. For example, Prior (1998) conducted a study to explore the effect of the context, including seminar discussions, tutor feedback, interviews with tutors and students, academic practices, and students' personal experiences on the academic writing of graduate students studying at a US university. According to Coffin and Donohue (2012), there is a kind of relative similarity between the ethnographic approaches and the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) under the genre analysis of the textual approach. Both, SFL and the ethnographic approaches, derive their concepts from anthropology. In addition, SFL has another common feature, where it is best described as an ethnographically-informed text analysis with an etic perspective on the surrounding context of the academic text**.** This implies that researchers could utilise both, SFL and ethnographic approaches, to present a comprehensive description of the study under investigation.

2.2 Critical Approaches

The second category includes the Critical approaches which do not have a specific theory or a group of methods to analyse data, rather they can be best described as an attitude towards a discourse and a way of thinking about texts. The most important approaches in this aspect include *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA) and *Academic Literacies* (Hyland, 2009). According to Fairclough (1989), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) considers language as a form of social practice. Based on this view, CDA associates language with the activities surrounding it, focusing on how social relations, knowledge, and identity are constructed through either spoken or written texts (Hyland, 2009).

Young and Harrison (2004) argue that CDA and Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1985, 1994) share three basic features: A) Language is viewed as a social construct, where society is considered as fashioning the language. B) A dialectical view in which 'particular discursive events influence the contexts in which they occur and the contexts are, in turn, influenced by these discursive events'. C) A view which focuses on the importance of the

aspects of culture and history on meaning. Thus, SFL offers CDA an advanced way of analysing the relations between the social contexts and language. However, CDA has been criticized for selecting only particular features of texts to confirm certain aspects of the analyst's prejudices, and at the same time, it reduces the pragmatics to semantics. In other words, CDA practitioners are limited by their linguistic bias which directs them towards the textual linguistic analysis of the discourse (Widdowson, 2000).

The second approach under the critical approach includes Academic Literacies. Although Academic Literacies and CDA are classified under the critical approach (Hyland, 2009), the perspective of Academic Literacies has a different understanding of 'critical' to that advanced by CDA. Academic Literacies is a way of influencing teaching and learning, and a way of conceptualizing through rethinking literacy with the purpose of taking into consideration both cultural and contextual components of reading and writing. This shared concept by CDA and AL implies looking at language as a discourse practice that is used in a particular context rather than as a group of separate skills (Ivanic, 1998; Lillis, 2001).

One of the dominant features of the academic literacy is the necessity to change practices in accordance with the setting in order to display features of a genre, handle meanings and display identities that suit each setting. Thus, students' challenges in academic writing is not because of grammatical aspects and organisation, rather they are associated with students' varied learning strands interacting with each other and students' previous experiences (Jomaa & Bidin, 2017). Therefore, students moving from a spoken genre to a written academic one have to make a kind of a cultural shift in order to position themselves as members of a certain community (Hyland, 2009). Thus, the main focus in Academic Literacies is students' lived experiences of the development of the academic writing practices over time. Despite this extending focus in Academic Literacies, text still occupies a significant status in Academic Literacies Approach.

2.3   Textual Approaches
The third approach is represented by the Textual approaches which focus mainly on the choices of language, patterns, and the meanings of these patterns used in texts, based on a corpus analysis, a multimodal analysis, and a genre analysis.

2.3.1 Corpus Analysis
According to Halliday and Webster (2009), a collection of texts which are chosen and ordered based on certain criteria, such as representativeness, sampling, and balance, can be called a corpus. This corpus may be a mono-generic corpus or a multi-generic one, such as the Corpus of American English. A corpus analysis is different from the qualitative variants of genre analysis because a corpus analysis is based on large databases, about millions of words of electronically encoded texts. Therefore, such a corpus analysis represents a solid base for describing a specific genre (Hyland, 2009). What a corpus analysis can offer is presenting insights into familiar patterns of language use which might be unnoticed. Thus, it can be said that in corpus studies, qualitative and quantitative methods are adopted and supported by further evidence such as frequencies of occurrence in order to present more interpretations for the patterns and features of languages.

Generally, the concept of frequent occurring words in the context of academic field seems to be acceptable. Corpus studies reported the most frequently used words in English and found that '*the, of, to*' are the top three words, making up about 10% of the actual use in a corpus of

400-million word Bank of English corpus (e.g. Kennedy, 1998). These words are assumed to help university students cope with the requirements of the academic environments. However, significant issues were ignored, including the collocations of words, the semantic association, and how words are really used in the actual academic field. Such an issue possibly causes students a kind of misunderstanding and misuse.

Therefore, Hyland and Tse (2007) examined Coxhead's (2000) Academic Word List in order to explore the distribution of its 570 word families in a corpus consisting of 3.3 million words across different genres and disciplines. Coxhead's (2000) Academic Word List (AWL) is believed to be beneficial for students in meeting their academic requirements in different fields and domains of knowledge because the words in this (AWL) will help students distinguish academic from general English. All the 570 of the Academic Word List (AWL) word families occurred in the academic corpus, covering 10.6% of the words. Although the list covered a good percentage of the academic corpus, the distribution was not even, particularly in the students' corpus of sciences, indicating that students would 'stumble over an unknown item about every five words' (p.6), thus resulting in an incomprehensible text. These variations in words usage could suggest that some disciplines, such as sciences, need more technical and specialized vocabulary. However, a difficulty arises in compiling a so-called common core of academic vocabulary because a list of such words should include frequency, range of criteria and their similar usages across the different disciplines. Hence, contextual factors are very important in language choice because members of the research communities communicate as social groups (Hyland & Tse, 2007).

As a result, Corpus analysis has been criticized for not containing any new theories about language and for presenting only a partial explanation of the language use and for describing the text as a product rather than as a process (Hyland, 2009). In addition, the researchers in the field of corpus analysis are more concerned with the most commonly and frequently used words in a certain genre rather than with what can occur. However, the evidence of frequency utilized by the corpus analysis is possibly not appropriate. For instance, the frequent use or overusing some linguistic features by novice writers might not be in accordance with the principles and conventions of a particular academic community. Moreover, the concordances used in the corpus analysis are based on displaying all instances of a search word or a phrase as a list of unconnected lines of text (Hyland, 2006).

2.3.2 Multimodal Analysis
According to some linguists, linguistic discourses are not only limited to the linguistic forms but also include several varieties of meaningful semiotic activity (e.g. Blommaert, 2005). This variety includes not only the verbal but also the visual elements of genres in journals and advertisements. Both aspects are important elements of many academic genres. Therefore, there seems to be an integrated view to study this new trend through adopting multimodal analyses (Hyland, 2009). Limited studies have discussed the interaction between the verbal and the visual elements in the different genres. Therefore, there can be much to learn about the influence of adopting such visual devices (Hyland, 2009). For instance, students' writings through social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Whatsapp, can be purposefully explored adopting the multimodal analyses.

2.3.3 Genre Analysis
The French word 'genre' meaning 'type' or 'kind' has been used to refer to literary categories, including novels, novellas, short stories, and prose; this classification is based on

the features of the style of writing and the structural patterns (Moessner, 2001). However, the term 'genre' is not only limited to literary categories but also includes non-print media, such as films, stage drama, and graphic art or other written texts, such as newspapers editorials, letters, and other different types of academic texts (Bruce, 2008). These genres can be either written, such as research articles, conference abstracts, undergraduate essays, submission letters, book reviews, PhD theses, and textbooks or spoken genres, including seminars, lectures, colloquia, student presentations, conference presentations, PhD defenses, and admission interviews (Hyland, 2009).

In the following discussions, there is more elaboration on the three types of genre analysis presented by Hyon (1996). Genre analysis has got much attention in the field of applied linguistics, where three main approaches for analysing genres have emerged, including English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and EAP, North American New Rhetoric studies, and Sydney School of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). In spite of their differences, *"all three traditions can be recognised as socio-pragmatic discourse analysis, as they consider text in relation to social practices and practical, purposeful mediators"* and the three traditions are concerned with academic discourse (Sawaki, 2016, p.3). Hence, as Swales (2009) states, the boundaries between the three traditions are not clear-cut. Figure 2 presents three types of genre analyses.
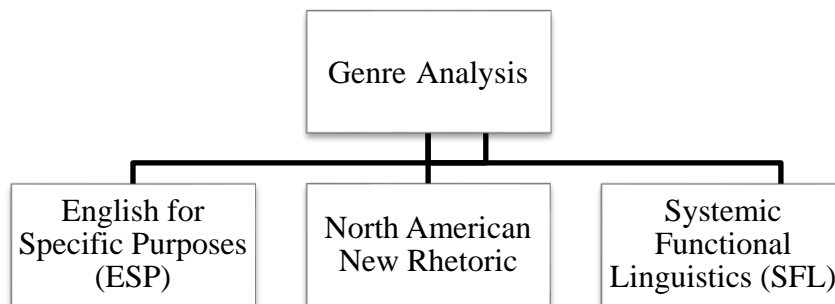

Figure 2. Types of genre analysis (adapted from Hyon, 1996)

Hyon's (1996) study revealed that ESP and the Australian SFL genre research provide instructors of English as a Second Language (ESL) with insights of the written texts' linguistic features (e.g. Jomaa & Bidin, 2016) as well as advantageous guidelines to present these linguistic features in the classroom. On the other hand, the North American New Rhetoric School provides language instructors with a full perspective of the institutional contexts surrounding the professional and academic genres, as well as the functions of these genres in these settings.

2.3.3.1 English for Specific Purposes (ESP)
The first emerging approach was based on the work of Swales (1981) in the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (see Dudley-Evans, 1989, 1994; Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993; Hyland, 2006, 2009). The interest of researchers in the school of ESP has been in using genre as a tool to analyse and teach non-native speakers the spoken and written language in the academic and professional settings (Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993), as well as applying the theory of genre, English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and English for Professional Communication (EPC) in classrooms.

However, scholars and researchers in the scope of ESP have been more interested in analysing the texts, giving more attention to the formal features of genres, the teaching of genre structures and grammatical features, and less focus to the specialised functions of texts and the social context. Consequently, under ESP, the traditional teacher-centred approach was changed into a student-centred approach (Jayalakshmi, 2017). An example of this genre analysis is using structured move analyses in describing the organisational pattern in genres of experimental research articles and examining the grammatical features at the sentence level, including aspects such as verb tense, hedges, and passive voice. Consequently, the researching practices that adopt the ESP/EAP tradition of generic structures represented by Create a Research Space (CARS) Model still need a lot of improvement due to presenting a fixed structure. Hence, such methods should take into account the variety in genre (Sawaki, 2016).

2.3.3.2 New Rhetoric Studies
The second emerging approach is called the 'North American New Rhetoric' studies, that is mostly prominent in North America (Bazerman, 1988; Hyon, 1996). Scholars adopting this approach are different from those of ESP in conceptualizing and analysing genres that are concerned with L1 teaching, including composition studies, professional writing and rhetoric. In addition, scholars of the New Rhetoric differ from those of ESP in emphasizing more on the genres' situational contexts and the social purposes or actions fulfilled by these genres rather than the forms of these genres. Martin (1992) argues that people are usually socialized into the language that expresses social class or gender. Thus, student writers are socialized into the language of academic thinking and academic disciplines. Consequently, knowing how physicians, chemists, linguists, and other specialists read and interpret their disciplines requires exploring their perspectives through conducting interviews which could lead to rich information about their performance.

Miller's (1984) article entitled ''Genre as Social Action'' had an effect on shaping New Rhetoric genre theory in L1 disciplines. Miller argues that the focus must not be on the substance or the form of the discourse but on the action. Other scholars in the New Rhetoric fields adopted ethnographic methods for analysing texts, such as interviews, document collection, and participant observation, rather than linguistic ones, thus presenting detailed descriptions of both, the professional and the academic contexts of the genres (Schryer, 1993; Jomaa & Bidin, 2017). Gledhill (1996) and Hyland (1998) are among the other researchers who relied on interview data to supplement their corpus analyses. For instance, Gledhill (1996) adopted an ethnographic approach by consulting specialist informants on which texts they considered to be most representative of the field in order to obtain a balanced corpus. Meanwhile, Hyland (1998b) has consulted specialist informants on the use of hedging devices in a corpus of 80 research articles.

The New Rhetoric school views genres as 'fluid and dynamic', but at the same time, these genres are 'stabilized for now'. Genres are considered as a form of social actions. This implies that forms of social actions, rather than forms of the discourse or the substance in these genres, are not stable, but they are always open for change and negotiation (Hyland, 2006, p.48). Scholars' work in the New Rhetoric area began to influence the practice and genre theory of ESP. The New Rhetoric supporters are against considering genres as materially objective things and against teaching texts as fixed templates because genres evolve and develop in order to meet the changing requirements and needs of technologies, situations, and communities (Hyland, 2006).

2.3.3.3 Systemic Functional Linguistics

Though the Australian genre theories have developed at the same time with the ESP and the New Rhetoric studies, these Australian genre theories were independent of the ESP and the New Rhetoric studies. In addition, these Australian genre theories have centred within a larger theory called Systemic Functional Linguistics that was developed by Michael Halliday, who founded the department of linguistics at the University of Sydney in 1975. Hence, his theory had an effect on education and language theory in Australia (Hyon, 1996).

Halliday and Martin (1993) presented five orientations that summarise the specific features of the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). **Rule/resource**- SFL is concerned with describing the language as 'a resource for meaning rather than as a system of rules' (p.25). Hence, SFL focuses on the meaning potential of what the speaker can mean. **Sentence/text**- SFL focuses on texts rather than sentences since the text is the unit that is used to negotiate meaning. In this regard, Coffin and Donohue (2012, p.65) argue "*in SFL, text refers to units as small as a clause or as large as an entire academic monograph*''. **Text/context**- The focus of the Systemic Functional Linguistics is on the solidary relationships between the text and the social contexts and the social practices they realize. In other words, the text is not looked at as a decontextualized structural entity. For example, the science as a text and the science as an institution are two complementary perspectives on the scientific discourse. **Expressing/constructing meaning**-SFL focuses on the language as a system that is used to construct meaning. Hence, language is viewed as meaning-making rather than a channel to express thoughts and feelings. **Parsimony/extravagance-** The orientation of the SFL is toward extravagance rather than parsimony. In other words, SFL is concerned with developing a model where the universe, life, and language can be viewed through semiotic and communicative terms.

According to Bruce (2008), the Systemic Functional approach in classifying texts is derived from the concepts of the social anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, whose proposal implies understanding the language within the local situation and the cultural context. The concept adopted by Hyland as a socially-oriented linguist who is interested in what people do and why they do it and the preferences of the academic community can possibly be similar to the basics of the Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1985). Thus, this approach emphasises the social use of the language and its interpretations as a discourse, revealing the implication that language is a social-semiotic system that is able to express the potential meaning used by the society. The stratified theory of text in context is illustrated in SFL as a series of nested circles, as in Figure 3 (Halliday, 1985; Martin & Rose, 2008).
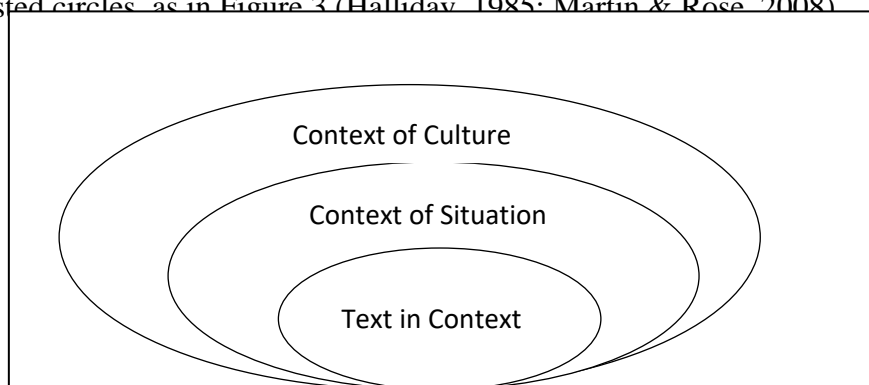

Figure 3. A Stratal interpretation of the relation of language to social context

SFL is a theory of semiotics from a social-semiotic perspective. In this regard, language is considered as a semion realized in two contexts: the situational and the cultural contexts. Halliday has characterized the three dimensions of situation as follows: Field, Tenor, and Mode which constitute the register of a text. When this register changes or varies, the patterns of meanings in the texts also change and vary (Halliday, 1985; Halliday & Hasan, 1985). Overall, tenor, field and mode are called the register variables (Halliday & Martin, 1993; Martin & Rose, 2008). Field refers to what is happening, the core of the social action that is happening, and what the participants are engaged in. Tenor refers to the participants, their roles and status, whereas mode refers to the symbolic realisation of the text and the part of language that has a role to do within the context (Halliday, 1985; Eggins, 1994).

These three context variables: field, tenor, and mode simultaneously work together to produce a kind of configuration of meaning. This configuration, in its turn, has its role in determining both, the form and meaning of its text, including three dimensions of meaning: ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings. Thus, in SFL, a close relationship is between the three aspects of context of situation: field, tenor, and mode, and the concepts of language metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal and textual (Halliday, 1985; Halliday & Martin, 1993; Eggins & Martin, 1997).

Field is associated with the ideational metafunction that is concerned with the logical relation of one going-on to another and with constructing experience: what is going on, including who is doing, what, to whom, where, when, why and how. Under the logical relations of clauses, Halliday (1985) assumes that the notion of 'clause complex' presents a full description of the functional organization of the sentences. The sentence is defined as a clause complex, and the clause complex is the only grammatical unit above the clause. Thus, the sentence is a constituent of writing recognized orthographically between two full stops, whereas the clause complex represents a constituent of grammar.

Tenor is the second register variable that is associated with the interpersonal metafunction that is concerned with the discourse's social meaning, including both the interactional and the transactional meanings; how people are interacting, including the feelings they try to share. Halliday (1985) states that language is used to establish a relationship between the speaker and the addressee. To establish this relationship, different speech roles are adopted. These are clarified in Table 1.

Table 1. Speech Role

SPEECH ROLE	COMMODITY EXCHANGED	
	Information	Goods and services
Giving	Statement	Offer
Demanding	Question	Command

Adapted from Eggins (1994)

Statement, question, offer, and command are the four basic move types that refer to speech functions. Hence, each dialogue includes these speech functions. If a person wants to make a statement, he will use a clause with a declarative structure. Exploring the Mood structure under the interpersonal metafunction focuses on how clauses are structured to exchange information. A clause usually consists of two components: MOOD and RESIDUE. MOOD

involves a 'Subject' and a 'Finite, whereas RESIDUE includes a 'Predicator', a 'Complement', and an 'Adjunct'.

The third register variable is associated with the textual meaning which refers to how semions and symbols are organised to express the ideational and interpersonal meanings. In other words, the textual meaning is concerned with information flow; the ways in which ideational and interpersonal meanings are distributed in waves of semiosis (Halliday & Martin, 1993; Martin & Rose, 2008). According to Halliday (1985), the textual meanings encompass the ideational and the interpersonal meanings. Hence, the clause is organized as a message, in which two elements are employed. One element is called THEME that is the familiar type of information, whereas the other part is called RHEME, representing the new type of information.

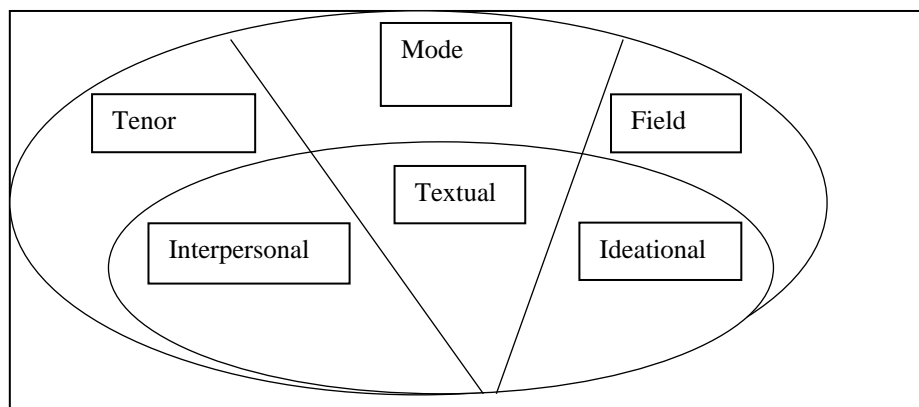Figure 4 illustrates the relationship between Tenor, Mode, and Field and the three language metafunctions.

Figure 4. Field, tenor, and mode in relation to language metafunctions (adapted from Halliday, 1985)

In Martin's terms (1996, 2000), each metafunction is associated with a particular concept; ideational meaning with particulate structures, textual meaning with periodic structures and interpersonal meaning with prosodic structures (Martin & Rose, 2008). In the particulate structure, the segments are organized either in orbital, similar to the solar system and atoms with only one nucleus and having other segments depend on it or in serial patterns, where each segment depends on one another in a chain but without having one main nuclear element multi-nuclear structures. The other point implies the association of textual with periodic structure, whereby meaning, whether orbital or serial structure, is organized in a form of information waves. The third metafunction, interpersonal, is associated with the prosodic structure, where the writer/speaker attempts to color his/her discourse with different colors using descriptive and evaluative lexis, such as *sweet, loving, very loved.*

Prosodic structures are mapped onto discourse in two ways: saturation and intensification. For saturation, the writer tries to realize a meaning through using attitudinal adjectives to express his/her feelings and stance, whereas for intensification, the writer attempts to give strength for his/her feeling by means of using modifiers, such as *very loved*, or using iteration, such as *loving, cute, and sweet*. A third way to map prosodic structure over several patterns of a discourse is to link it with a position or an attitude adopted by the experiencer to express his/her stance toward, for example, a trip to somewhere by saying, *it was very fun.*

Overall, textual meaning encompasses both interpersonal and ideational meaning together, making a kind of reconciliation between periodic, prosodic, and particulate structures (Martin & Rose, 2008).

These three elements, tenor, field, and mode, that constitute the social context determine the language register. Thus, Halliday's (1978) main concern was register and he treated genre as an aspect of mode, whereas Martin and Rose (2008) argue that each genre involves a particular configuration of the three variables: mode, field, and tenor. Thus, genre is modeled at the culture stratum beyond the level of register, as in Figure 5.
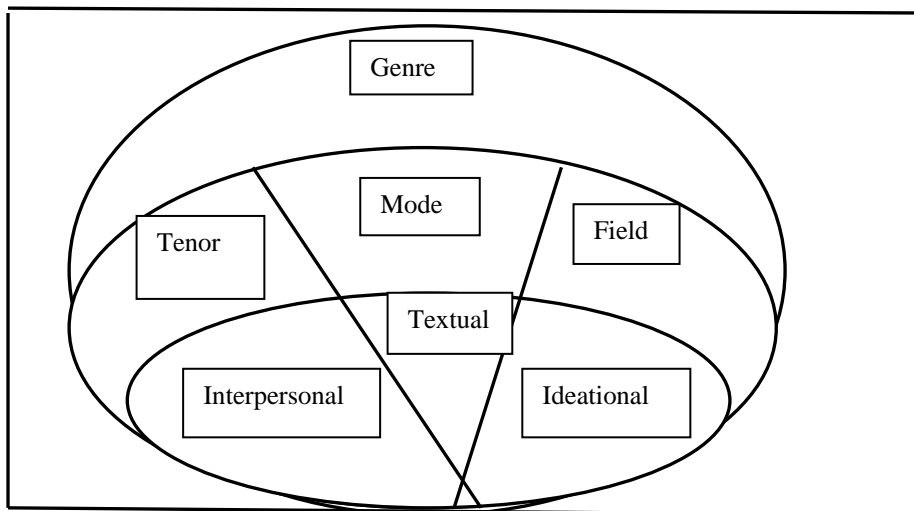

Figure 5. Genre as an additional stratum of analysis beyond tenor, field, and mode (adapted from Halliday, 1978; Martin & Rose, 2008)

SFL of genre analysis has a great effect on teaching English as the first and second language in Australia (see Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Webster, 2009). Several basics support SFL: A) When writers or speakers choose a language, the context is interrelated with this choice. B) Meaning is created through language as a resource. C) Each text or utterance has three types of meaning: textual, ideational and interpersonal (Halliday & Webster, 2009). D) Language can be explored as a tool system or a specific text.

Basically, text in context is the main unit of analysis in Systemic Functional linguistics research, but less focus is paid to the lived experiences of writers and readers or their views toward texts (Coffin & Donohue, 2012). According to Coffin and Donohue (2012), SFL is equipped with the capacity of using features of the texts to make a generalization of the genre represented by the text structure or the register represented by the language choice. Lillis and Scott (2007) argue that researching the academic writing is characterized by the focus on the text and the absence of practice and this is considered problematic.

Systemic Functional Linguistics can be used for researching and teaching academic literacy within the first and second language contexts. As a consequence, analysing a text in SFL is not conducted without taking the context of use into consideration with an etic perspective

(Coffin & Donohue, 2012). In this regard, Woodward-Kron (2004) and Gardner (2012) revealed the advantage of using ethnographic approaches in providing a description of the academic genres and the student writing's context. Thus, it is argued that the ethnographic methods that are associated with the academic practices of the university students and the linguistic methods that are associated with the systemic Functional Linguistics must be conducted together (Gardner, 2012).

3.   Conclusions

In brief, two major points should be mentioned. First, no perfect research design or a research approach can be used by researchers for analysing academic discourses. In other words, using a research approach is based mainly on the purpose of the study and its context. Therefore, employing only one approach might not lead to comprehensive explanations of the issue. Second, approaches are inseparable since each approach could have similar patterns and characteristics with other approaches; therefore, conducting further research could be successful and result in rich data when integrating approaches that share similar norms and principles. Researchers might choose a certain approach based on how they look at discourses, the underlying concepts of investigating discourses, the purposes, assumptions, research interests of analysing discourses, the kinds of the research questions, and the data required to answer those questions. Hence, the conclusions implied in this article include guidelines of our views towards discourses, thus refining our perspectives and clarifying our thoughts. It is clear that the complexity of both academic and non-academic discourses could probably require using multiple approaches and methods in order to obtain either emic or etic perspectives from a writer, a context or set of texts through employing varied lenses.

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