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Representation of Experiential Meaning in Forestry Professional Report Genre

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Abstract:

Despite previous genre studies investigating various professional report genres in different contexts, disciplines and languages, the professional report genre in the forestry discipline remain the least explored, particularly from a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) perspective. This study explored how language represents the forest resource report genre's communicative roles and its predominant linguistic features. This qualitative genre analysis study utilised SFL analytical frameworks in which six reports written in Malay were used as research data in this study. The findings on process types reveal that Action processes are dominant in the forest resource report genre, which indicates that the genre's central concern is on the physical activities and events happening in the forest areas. The role of the genre is to provide preliminary observation and information to assist the forestry department when deciding future directions and planning of forestry-related matters. Results obtained from the study are hoped to illuminate future research on Malay professional texts while simultaneously enriching present knowledge on prominent linguistic features of the professional report genre, particularly on the discourse of forestry discipline.

Keywords: Forestry, SFL, Scientific Text, Professional Genre, Transitivity, Malay Language

Introduction

The report genre has been explored both in academic and professional contexts (Bhatia, 1993; Nwogu, 1997; Forey, 2002; Flowerdew and Wan, 2010; Friginal, 2013) and continue to be the subject of interest among those exploring the relationship between language and text types and between forms and functions of a given genre. However, studies focusing on professional report genres are generally scarce due to the difficulties faced by researchers in gaining access to professional texts, which are often restricted by confidentiality issues and the reluctance of professionals to permit such explorations to be conducted (Candlin, 2002; Louhiala-Salminen, 2002; Hanford and McCarthy, 2004; Sarangi, 2002). Although researchers have investigated how language is used in professional reports in various disciplines (Forey, 2002;

Flowerdew and Wan, 2010; Nwogu and Bloor, 1991), some disciplines remained the least explored, including the forestry discipline.

Few researchers (Leipold, 2014; Winkel, 2012) attempted to address the relative lack of literature in forestry-related studies, but only a few studies focused on analysing professional report genre in the forestry discipline from a linguistic perspective (Joseph et al., 2014; Friginal, 2013) while the majority of forestry-related studies were mainly exploring forest discourses from a Foucauldian discourse perspective focusing on forest policies and its governmentality (Garzon et al., 2020, 2021; Winkel, 2012; Leipold, 2014; Arts et al., 2010). Forestry is a multi-disciplinary field that incorporates many scientific disciplines; soils, wildlife, civil engineering, economics, ecology, agriculture, environmental science, recreation, silviculture and utilisation of timber products (Green, 2006). With such complexities of the discipline, analysis of professional report genre in forestry is most opportune in hope to uncover the nature of the discipline, the prominent linguistic features as well as the ways in which language is used and how language functions and realises the communicative roles of forestry report genre in its context of use through the analysis of experiential meaning.

Sustainable forest management (SFM) has become a primary concern of forest professionals worldwide. SFM practices and governance are achieved through a comprehensive system of legislation, policies and standard guidelines. However, studies investigating how SFM is achieved and performed by forest professionals from a linguistic perspective are lacking. In Malaysia, the Forestry Department of Peninsular Malaysia (FDPM) is entrusted to perform SFM practices through the issuing of forest harvesting reports which delivers information on potential forest areas to be harvested and systematically sustained. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) was used as the analytical framework for analysing how language is used by forestry professionals in representing their experience of managing over 4.8 million hectares of forest lands in Peninsular Malaysia.

Objective(s)

In order to understand how language is used to accomplish the functions and communicative goals of achieving SFM reported in the forest resource report genre, this paper investigates the process types represented in the professional forestry report in realising experiential meaning in the genre from an SFL perspective. To achieve this, Halliday's (1994) framework for analysing experiential meaning was selected to be used in the study along with the SFL framework of Malay process types established by Idris (2012; 2013). The latter draws heavily on Halliday's (1994) view on the representation of human experience through language. The following objective was outlined to guide the current study:

1. To examine the process types represented in the forest resource report genre realised through the experiential meaning.

Methodology

This study analysed six forest resource reports written by forestry professionals working at the southern district forestry departments in Malaysia, consisting of 236 clauses. The forest resource report genre issued by forestry professionals working at the Forestry Department Peninsular Malaysia is considered an important genre to be studied. It is one of the most important documents concerning the administration, management, and conservation of tropical forests in Peninsular Malaysia. Analysis of the functions of the forest resource report genre was informed inductively and deductively through the data obtained from the analysis

on experiential meaning. Halliday (1994) asserts that experiential meaning expresses the representational meaning of a speaker's particular situation through transitivity analysis. Findings obtained from the experiential meaning were conducted to identify the functions of the genre elements represented in forest resource reports.

The theoretical foundation of Idris' study (2012) draws heavily on Halliday's (1994, pg. 37) view that 'in all languages, the clause has the character of a message; it has some form of organisation giving it the status of a communicative event' and that 'our most powerful impression of experience is that it consists of 'goings-on – happening, doing, sensing, meaning, being and becoming...sorted out in the grammar of the clause' (Halliday, 1994, pg. 106). Apart from using Halliday's functional grammar as a theoretical framework to analyse the language function, Idris asserts that his study also takes into account the views of Za'ba (1958), Asmah (1986) and Azhar (1993) on their categorisations and descriptions of Malay sentences and its grammatical elements. This study employed Idris' (2012) Malay process types categorisation in the experiential meaning as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Summary of Malay Process Types (adapted from Idris, 2012; 2013)

Process Type	Function	Domain	Example
Action (<i>Lakuan</i>)	Represents physical action (including metaphors)	Involves a physical force	<i>yang airnya mengalir ke Sungai Ria.</i>
Mental (<i>Minda</i>)	Involves processes of sensing	Represents experience of mental actions related to the mind, thoughts, perception, etc.	<i>Kawasan ini dianggap kurang ekonomik untuk diusahahasil.</i>
Verbal (<i>Verbal</i>)	Represents process of speaking or utterance	Serves to transfer a message through language	<i>Balai Pemeriksaan A dicadangkan untuk kutipan cukai.</i>
Situation (<i>Keadaan</i>)	Expresses condition or Situation of experience	Highlights the state of condition or Situation of the experienter	<i>Kawasan dipohon terletak di sebelah Barat.</i>
Description (<i>Perihal</i>)	Describes the relationship between the subject and the predicate	Restricted to descriptive particles <i>ialah</i> and <i>adalah</i>	<i>Luas kawasan dipohon adalah seluas 100 ekar.</i>
Existence (<i>Kewujudan</i>)	Represents the state of experience	Introduces existence of something	<i>Tiada penempatan orang asli di kawasan ini.</i>
Relational (<i>Pertalian</i>)	Construes relations between participants	Enables a speaker to relate or equate two elements of participants	<i>Taburan dirian pokok yang mendominasi di kawasan ini tidak terlalu rapat.</i>

Results

Analysis of experiential meaning provides insights into how we represent reality in language (Eggins, 2007) and the content of the message (Thompson, 2014). Table 2 illustrates the results of the functions accomplished by the various process types represented in the genre.

Table 2 Summary of Roles of Process Types in Forest Resource Report

Process Type	Frequency (%)	Function
Action	38.56	To present information on the fieldwork activities performed by district forestry officers and the actions affecting material and abstract entities (e.g. rivers, access roads).
Situation	27.12	To express conditions or situations experienced by forest areas in terms of describing the geographical conditions and its surrounding areas and to express the forestry department management plans and the protected areas outlined in the National Forestry Act (1984).
Mental	16.53	To express the disapproval of the application for forest harvesting activities.
Verbal	10.59	To express the suggestion on the respective forest monitoring stations assigned for fieldwork monitoring and tax collection activities.
Relational	3.81	To represent attributes of tree poles recorded in terms of its size and estimation of its quantities per hectare.
Existence	2.54	To inform the existence of entities (e.g. tree species, <i>orang asli</i> settlements and cemeteries and other entities found in forest areas).
Description	0.85	To provide further details regarding the context surrounding the forest areas described.

Overall, the findings obtained on the experiential meaning represented in FRR genre corroborate with the findings attained from previous studies conducted focusing on similar elements observed in the study. Action processes appear to be most dominant in the reports similar to the findings obtained by Idris and Benazir Tanjung (2014) on the dominant use of Action process in Malay scientific and social science journals. As shown in Table 2, Action processes are dominant in all reports analysed (38.56 per cent). This indicates that the genre is centrally concerned with physical activities and events and the participants who carry them out. Action processes related to human participants are used in the genre to indicate the physical actions and activities performed by forestry officers in their fieldwork and in evaluating forest areas for approval of forest harvesting activities. Action processes involving material entities, on the other hand, relate to events experienced by material entities such as rivers as well as representation of abstract entities such as water pollution and accessible roads surrounding the forest areas.

Table 5.1 also shows that FRR also uses a high proportion of Situation processes (27.12 per cent). The Situation process represents a situation or a condition of an experience (Idris, 2012). The use of Situational processes in the genre constructs forest areas as participants that are most affected by the forest harvesting activities that will be taking place, to portray the geographical conditions of the forest areas as well as to relate how forest areas are considered concerning the forestry department's sustainable forest management plans and gazetted areas.

Description processes are also significantly used in the reports, with roughly equal proportions of Description processes (16.53 per cent) across all reports analysed. Description

processes in Malay are represented through descriptive particles '*adalah*' and '*ialah*' (Idris, 2012). To reiterate, descriptive particles used in Malay are not equivalent to to-be verbs in English, such as 'is' or 'are', which represent Relational processes in English (Safiah, 1995). In forest resource report genre, the Description process *ialah* is used to inform the size of the forest areas, while *adalah* is used to describe the terrain condition, the distribution of tree stands in terms of the tree species and the types of forest in which particular forest areas are classified.

The genre also utilises the use of Existence processes (10.59 per cent) although less dominantly compared to other process types. The Existence process concerns the representation of a state of existence (Idris, 2012). In the genre investigated, Existence processes are used to acknowledge the existence of material entities found in the forest areas concerning the existence of rivers, flora, fauna, *orang asli* settlements or cemeteries, and other elements found in the surrounding areas.

Another type of process used in the genre is the Relational process. As illustrated in Table 2, Relational processes occur less frequently (3.81 per cent) in all reports analysed. Relational processes concern the expression of equivalence and attributes of entities (Halliday, 1994). In the forest resource report genre, Relational processes are used to relate the distribution of tree stands and their attributes in terms of the types of tree species and their qualities (diameter, size) found in the forest areas.

Verbal processes (2.54%) are also used in the genre, as shown in Table 2. Verbal processes represent processes of utterance (Idris, 2012). In the reports analysed, the Verbal process (e.g. *mencadangkan* – suggest) is used to portray forestry officers' thoughts through verbal projections concerning the suggestions made for fieldwork monitoring plans to be executed in the forest areas. However, the Verbal process observed in the reports only occurred once in each report (2.54%). This indicates that the genre is not concerned with conveying thoughts or perceptions but rather presenting factual information related to the forest areas.

The final process type represented in the genre is Mental processes which occurred the least in the genre (0.83 %). Mental processes represent processes of sensing involving the mind, thoughts, perception and cognition, which does not involve any physical action (Idris, 2012). The relative lack of Mental processes in the genre suggests that the reports are not concerned with the conscious cognition of the writer but rather on the physical actions or events relevant to the goings-on in the forest areas.

Discussion

This paper reports the findings of an investigation into one professional forestry report genre used in the Malaysian context, the forest resource report. Overall, the findings on process types reveal that Action processes are dominant in the genre, indicating that the genre's central concern is on the physical activities and events happening in the forest areas. Other process types were also represented in the forest resource report genre, with each serving specific roles in the genre investigated in this study (see Table 2).

The use of linguistic elements such as specialised terminology, nominalisation, and passive voice in forest resource reports corroborates with typical conventions of scientific texts. These linguistic elements also help to represent the experiential meaning in the reports that conform to the functions and roles assumed by the genre in providing necessary information required for the evaluation of forest areas for the potential for forest harvesting activities as well as for the implementation of sustainable forest management practices of forestry department depicted in the forest resource report genre. The forest resource report is an

example of a scientific text used in the forestry discipline. Scientific disciplines often use a specialised linguistic code which is realised by i) use of specialised terminology and notation, ii) use of nominalisations, iii) syntactic complexity and iv) use of passive voice (Halliday and Martin, 1993).

The forest resource report also bears a resemblance to the specialised linguistic code in typical scientific texts. This is evident in the reports analysed where specialised terminologies related to the forestry discipline can be observed. Such use includes, among others, the use of forestry terms such as *kompartment* – compartment, *Rancangan Tebangan dan Rawatan Tahunan* – Annual Felling and Treatment Plan, *taburan dirian pokok* – distribution of tree stands, *spesis pokok* – tree species, *kawasan tadahan air* – water catchment area, *usahahasil* – harvesting, etc. Although widely used in the discipline, these terms are likely to be unfamiliar to many outside of the discipline.

Another linguistic element observed in the realisation of experiential meaning in forest resource reports is the use of nominalisation. Forey (2002) noted that nominalisation is used in texts to control the negotiability of texts through its complex packaging of information. In the genre analysed, nominalisation is used to represent participant roles such as the use of *aktiviti usahahasil* (harvesting activity), *bancian* (census), *semakan* (inspection), *zon penampungan* (buffer zone), which are all represented as Goal in the reports. Apart from that, nominalisation is also used in the forest resource report to represent circumstantial elements such as *projek tanaman* (plantation project), *kutipan cukai* (circumstance of Cause), and *tadahan air* (water catchment) (circumstance of Location). According to Halliday (1994), nominalisation facilitates the taxonomy of scientific terms while simultaneously compacting complex information and allowing for the development of reasoning. Thus, the use of nominalisation representing participant roles in the forest resource reports genre is seen as a resource for creating technical entities to be presented which allows complex information to be developed throughout the reports.

The use of passive voice in forest resource reports can also be observed in this study. A total of 24.15 per cent of the clauses analysed in the study were written in passive voice. Halliday and Martin (1993) lament that passive voice in scientific text projects the 'objective' character of scientific knowledge and is more frequently used in such texts than everyday writing. Passives in Malay are often construed from the use of genuine passive of prefix *di-* (Asmah, 2014), in which the process associated in the clause emphasises the object as the element that is being described (Safiah and Wong, 2015).

Conclusion

Overall, this study elucidates the potential for SFL to be applied to professional writing in the Malay context, complementing that of Idris (2012). Since the exploration of Malay texts from an SFL perspective is still in its infancy, more contributions on developing relevant frameworks and analytical approaches are needed to extend the literature on the use of Malay in accomplishing various communicative tasks. It is hoped that the findings discussed may contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the forestry professional report genre specifically and Malay professional text in general. Findings of this study have indeed shed some light in the genre of report writing found in the forestry discipline which has been found lacking in linguistic exploration of the nature of the discipline particularly from an SFL perspective. Results obtained from the SFL analysis in exploring the SFM practices of forestry professionals in the forest resource report genre has also expanded our knowledge in how

language helps to explicate the forestry professionals' concerns and practices in achieving forest sustainability.

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