Towards a Theory of Genre? Reflections on the Problems and Debates on Theorising 'Genre'

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Abstract

The concept of a theory of genre continues to be elusive. The criterion used for the generic classification of texts (both spoken and written) as belonging to given genres seems to continue to be clouded in ambivalence. Current scholarship in its divergence implicates criterion based on either communicative purpose (Swales, 1990: Chandler, 1997) or purpose and audience/discourse community (Driscoll, 2004 & 2005). Other scholarship argues for a content based approach - often including the context as well - (Bhatia, 1981: Chandler, 1997) whereas others argue for a classification based on linguistic structure. On the other hand, recent scholarship has taken a more stylistic approach that adopts a features discrimination (Widdowson, 1998: Bhatia, 1981, Halliday 1994). This paper examines the weaknesses of these approaches working independent of each other and proposes an approach that synthesises tenets from mainstream genre analysis, discourse analysis and linguistic stylistics to create a holistic and more concrete approach to generic segmentation of texts. It argues that the creation of a theory should be based on an established/establishable 'general bundle of tenets' that explicate the primary concerns of the theory and that these should be concrete. It therefore adopts a discourse analysis – mainstream genre analysis – linguistic stylistics dialectic approach to suggest a possible 'bundle' of basic tenets for use in the generic discrimination of texts within a theory of genre. It suggests that 'genre' theorisation from the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) perspective offers a possible way out of the theoretical conflicts with 'genre' theory.

Key words:Genre, Genre Theory, Genre Classification, SFL, Genre Theoretic Conflicts

Introduction

The study of 'genre' is a vastly researched field. The term 'genre', according to Chandler (1997/2000), comes from the French (and originally Latin) word

for 'kind' or 'class'. The term, he argues, is widely used in rhetoric, literary theory, media theory, and more recently linguistics, to refer to a distinctive *type* of 'text'. Broadly defined 'genres' are often easily identified and classified based on professional uses of language, such as within the law (legal texts), within medicine (medical texts) within politics (political texts) and so on. Theorising how genres must/should be identified through a theory of genre however continues to be problematic. Bawarshi and Reiff (2010:3) argue that, 'despite the wealth of genre scholarship over the last thirty years, the term genre itself remains fraught with confusion, competing with popular theories of genre as text type and as an artificial system of classification'. They postulate that part of the confusion has to do with whether genres merely sort and classify the experiences, events, and actions they represent (and are therefore conceived of as labels or containers for meaning), or whether genres reflect, help shape, and even generate what they represent in culturally defined ways (and therefore play a critical role in meaning-making). As Chandler (1997, 2000) observes, the concept of a theory of genre continues to be elusive. The criterion used for the generic classification of texts (both spoken and written) as belonging to given genres seems to continue to be clouded in ambivalence.

Theoretical 'conflicts' in genre theoretic perspectives

Evidence from existing scholarship in its divergence argues for criterion based on either communicative purpose (Swales, 1990: Chandler, 1997/2000) or purpose and audience/discourse community i.e. that the discourse community of the text determines how the writing will be approached, consumed and understood and also determines the overall purpose of the text (Driscoll, 2004 & 2005). Other scholarship argues for a content based approach i.e. what is actually being said in the text, often including the context as well (Bhatia, 1981: Chandler, 1997/2000) whereas others argue for a classification based on linguistic structure i.e. how the content is organized for presentation of information and for the purposes of argumentation. On the other hand, recent scholarship has taken a more stylistic approach that adopts a 'features discrimination' i.e. the language and vocabulary that is used in a text, and which also incorporates structure (Widdowson, 1979:

Bhatia, 1981; Halliday 1994). Devitt, Reiff and Bawarshi (2003) examine the weaknesses of these approaches working independent of each other and propose an approach to generic classification of texts that synthesises tenets from mainstream genre analysis, discourse analysis and linguistic stylistics to create a holistic and more concrete approach to such a generic segmentation of texts.

Wang (2007) also observes that these 'conflicts' of/for [a] theory of genre stem from differences in the traditions from which 'genre' as a concept is perceived. Wang (2007) notes that the most commonest of these traditions are; (a) New Rhetoric Genres Studies, 'which argue for genre as rhetorical action based on recurrent situations and for an open principle of genre classification based on rhetorical practice, rather than a closed one based solely on structure, substance, or aim. Genre studies in the new rhetoric focus less on features of the text and more on relations between text and context often by employing ethnographic research or case study methods' Miller (1984/1994), (b) English for Specific Purposes (ESP) genre analysis studies, proposed by Swales (1990) which 'proposes the perception of 'genre' as 'a class of communicative events with some shared set of communicative purposes.' These purposes are recognised by members of the professional or academic community in which the genre occurs, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre' (Swales 1990, Wang 2007) and (c) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) studies of genre, which largely seek to 'describe genre as a staged, goal-orientated, and purposeful social activity that people engage in as members of their culture' (Martin, 1984/1997).

Swales (1990) defines 'genres' as communicative events within discourse communities. Accordingly, these communicative events as Swales (1990) contends are characterised by their communicative purposes and their varieties of linguistic patterns, including structure, content and intended audience. Santosa (2009) contends that these communicative purposes are characterised by the structural moves of the communicative events, which vary across goals, so that in different discourse communities there exists different kinds of functionally and structurally distinct genres. In light of this,

Swales (1990) observes that the number of genres is as many as the number of communicative events a discourse community has. Devitt, *et al* (2003) identify four broad parameters through which, as text types, 'genres' can be categorised into taxonomies. Devitt, *et al* (2003) thus identify such parameters as:

- *Rhetorical purpose and audience*: The discourse community of the text determines "how" the writing will be approached i.e. what discourse community is the text from? What specific "markers" in the text help us determine this? What does the writer assume about the readers of the text? (assumptions about what a reader knows, doesn't know, what attitudes or assumptions a reader may bring to a text) What type of "image" or "persona" does the writer create for herself or himself? What "role" does the text invite the reader to play? Which rhetorical modes are used: narration, description, definition, summary, classification, illustration, process analysis, comparison/contrast? What is the effect of one or another means of developing the writer's point? What are the specific purposes of this text? What is the argument that the text is making?

- *Content*: "What" is actually being said in the text? What types of evidence are being used to make the argument? What types of appeals are being used to make the argument? What material is included? What material is omitted and why? How does the writer establish his or her credentials? How does the author use primary and secondary sources? How are quotations used and integrated into the text? Does the author use metaphors? How do these metaphors contribute to the effect of the writing? Or are there repeated images or themes that tie the piece together and contribute to the overall meaning?

- *Structure*: How the content is organized for presentation of information and for the purposes of argumentation. How is the piece structured? How do the parts connect to each other? How do the parts "add up" to the overall point? Where in the text is the argument being made? In general, how long are the sentences? How long are the paragraphs?

- *Linguistic features*: The language and vocabulary that is used in a text. Does the writer use first person (I, me) or prefer terms such as "one" or "the investigator"? What is the effect of this stylistic choice? Are

the verbs generally active or passive and why? What types of terminology and language are being used? Is any of the language "in group jargon" for a particular discourse community? How can the author's language be described? How does the writer's language help or hinder his/her purpose?

In line with the propositions made by Devitt, *et al* (2003), Richards and Schmidt (2002) also note that 'genre', as a communicative event, is a type of discourse that occurs in a particular setting, that has distinctive and recognisable patterns and norms or organisation and structure and that has particular and distinctive communicative functions. Quite a number of aspects have been raised in these definitions regards what 'genre' is and how 'genres' are recognisable. In short, the consensus seems to be that a text within a given 'genre' must be distinctive and contain recognisable patterns and that these particular structures serve a particular communicative function. (Chandler, 1997/2000) also concurs that conventional definitions of 'genres' tend to be based on the notion that they constitute particular conventions of content (such as themes or settings) and/or form (including structure and style) which are shared by the texts which are regarded as belonging to them. In a related definition, Martin and Rose (2003) observe that 'genre' as a staged, goal-oriented social process, refers to the various types of social contexts. They note that it is social because we participate in genres with other people, goal-oriented because we use genres to get things done and staged because it usually takes us a few steps to reach our goal. Chandler (1997/2000) furthermore argues that, from the perspective of many scholars, genres first and foremost provide frameworks within which texts are produced and interpreted.

Semiotically, according to Chandler (1997/2000), 'a genre can be seen as a shared code between the producers and interpreters of texts included within it'. (Fowler 1989: 216) quoted in Chandler (1997/2000) goes so far as to suggest that 'communication is impossible without the agreed codes of genre'. In other words, writers/speakers of texts occurring within a particular genre characteristically must share communicative goals and a code with their

readers/listeners. This is also the case because within the genres, texts embody authorial attempts to 'position' readers (technically the discourse community with shared communicative goals) using particular 'modes of address' (the shared code – linguistic and structural). The propositions made here are that the writer attempts to connect with his readership through a shared code and in an attempt to fulfil a set of communicative purpose(s) and these manifest themselves especially through the linguistic aesthetics/resources chosen for such expression. (Kress 1988, 107) observes that:

> Every genre positions those who participate in a text of that kind: as interviewer or interviewee, as listener or storyteller, as a reader or a writer, as a person interested in political matters, as someone to be instructed or as someone who instructs; each of these positionings implies different possibilities for response and for action. Each written text provides a 'reading position' for readers, a position constructed by the writer for the 'ideal reader' of the text.

Thus, according to Chandler (1997/2000), embedded within texts are assumptions about an 'ideal reader', including their attitudes towards the subject matter and often their class, age, gender and ethnicity. Cited in Chandler (1997/2000), Kress (1988) alluding to the same, defines a genre thus, as 'a kind of text that derives its form from the structure of a (frequently repeated) social occasion, with its characteristic participants and their purposes'.

Theoretical synthesis as solution?

In light of these observations that 'conflicts' within genre studies result from theoretical differences Wang (2007) observes however that these approaches to the analysis of genres have much in common, with considerable overlap, even though they deal with different issues and sometimes have different theoretical concerns. Wang (2007) presents, as argument for the commonalities Bhatia's (2004, 23), summarisation of some of the common grounds of genre studies across different theoretical traditions as follows.

(a) Genres are recognizable communicative events, characterized by a set of communicative purposes identified and mutually understood by members of the professional or academic community in which they regularly occur.

(b) Genres are highly structured and conventionalised constructs, with constraints on allowable contributions not only in terms of the intentions one would like to give expression to and the shape they often take, but also in terms of the lexico-grammatical resources one can employ to give discoursal values to such formal features.

(c) Established members of a particular professional community will have a much greater knowledge and understanding of the use and exploitation of genres than those who are apprentices, new members or outsiders.

(d) Although genres are viewed as conventionalised constructs, expert members of the disciplinary and professional communities often exploit generic resources to express not only 'private' but also organizational intentions within the constructs of 'socially recognized communicative purposes'.

(e) Genres are reflections of disciplinary and organizational cultures, and in that sense, they focus on social actions embedded within disciplinary, professional and other institutional practices.

(f) All disciplinary and professional genres have integrity of their own, which is often identified with reference to a combination of textual, discursive and contextual factors.

Based on the understanding of the three traditions of genre theory discussed above and the propositions they make for the framework(s) for theorising 'genre', Bhatia (2004) puts forward a comprehensive definition of genre.

Genre essentially refers to language use in a conventionalised communicative setting in order to give expression to a specific set of communicative goals of a disciplinary or social institution, which give rise to stable structural forms by imposing constraints on the

use of lexico-grammatical as well as discoursal resources. (Bhatia, 2004: 23).

Martin and Rose's (2003) understanding of genre discussed above is informed by Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Appraisal theories. They define 'genre' as a process taking place within a particular social context serving a particular social function. Within SFL, the notion of 'genre' refers to meaning that results from language which does a particular job in a particular contextual configuration (Halliday and Hasan, 1985). Van Leeuwen (2008) also defines 'genre' as a type of text or communicative event and 'genre analysis' as a study that aims to bring out the characteristics of types of texts. The use of 'genre' as a concept in SFL also differs in two major respects with the conventional linguistic perceptions of it. Eggins and Martin (1997) argue that, linguistic definitions of 'genre' draw largely from the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's (1986) identification of speech genres as relatively stable types of interactive utterances. Bakhtin (1994) argues that 'speech genres develop as language patterns in particular contexts become predictable and relatively stable'. He argues that,

> We learn to cast our speech in generic form and when hearing other's speech we guess its genre from the first words, we predict a certain length, that is, the approximate length of speech and certain compositional structure(s), we foresee the end that is, from the very beginning we have a sense of the speech wholes which is only later differentiated during the speech process. (Bakhtin, 1994: 83).

Underlying Bakhtin's argument is that, we are able to recognise texts as belonging to particular genres based on their textual and structural organisation. In other words, texts within a given genre share particular defined, recognisable and predictable linguistic patterns and contexts. Secondly, within the theoretical scope of SFL, genres are different ways of using language to achieve culturally established tasks, and texts of different genres in this regard are texts which are achieving different purposes in the culture (Eggins and Martin, 1997). In short, Eggins and Martin (1997) explain

that within SFL, variations between texts are 'realised through the sequence of functionally distinct stages or steps through which it unfolds'. What we discern from such an argument is that within SFL, genres are differentiated by the 'staging structure of texts'.

In line with the arguments posited by Chandler (1997/2000) about the problematic nature of creating a taxonomy for genres within an occupational or professional discourse, observing the problems that come with definitions, Swales (2004) prefers the notion 'metaphor' than definition when talking about genres because definitions are not 'true' in all possible worlds and all possible times and they may prevent us from seeing newly explored or emerging genres for what they really are. Further compounding the problem on the definition or description of genres, Bhatia (2004) observes that genres vary in terms of their typicality such that a text may be a typical example of a genre or less typical yet still an example of a particular genre. Added to that, relating to what he calls genre embedding, one genre can be placed in another.

This is an argument that Chandler (1997/2000) argues for when he explains that there is a tendency for genres to overlap into other genres. Chandler (1997/2000) observes that defining genres, as situated linguistic behaviour in institutionalised academic or professional settings defined in consistency of communicative purposes (e.g. Swales, 1990 and Bhatia, 2004) is problematic because of such overlaps. This points to the fact that there are 'genres' within genres and that sometimes it is difficult to draw a line between genres as well as between genres and sub-genres. This then brings to the fore, the arguments raised by Chandler (1997/2000) for the existence of supergenres, supragenres, genres, subgenres, sub-subgenres and so on. Thus, for instance, if one takes media discourse as a genre there are sub-genres like newspaper discourse, television discourse, radio discourse and so on, all of which can also be divided into sub-genres and possibly sub-subgenres.

This overlap is amplified by Gledhill (1985, 60) who argues, in line with this observation, that there are no 'rigid rules of inclusion and exclusion' for particular texts to be recognised as belonging to a given genre and that

'[g]enres... are not discrete systems, consisting of a fixed number of listable items'. Chandler (1997/2000), observing this argument, argues that it is difficult to make clear-cut distinctions between one genre and another: genres overlap, and there are 'mixed genres'. For example it is not unimaginable within newspaper discourse to find particular linguistic structures and patterns permeating through more than one genre or subgenre. The categorisation of texts into genres based on linguistic and or other structural or contextual resemblances to one another thus becomes problematic. Chandler (1997/2000) thus observes,

> Contemporary theorists tend to describe genres in terms of 'family resemblances' among texts (a notion derived from the philosopher Wittgenstein) rather than definitionally (Swales 1990, 49). An individual text within a genre rarely if ever has all of the characteristic features of the genre (Fowler 1989, 215). The family resemblance approaches involves the theorist illustrating similarities between some of the texts within a genre. However, the family resemblance approach has been criticized on the basis that 'no choice of a text for illustrative purposes is innocent' (David Lodge, cited in Swales 1990, 50), and that such theories can make any text seem to resemble any other one (Swales 1990, 51). In addition to the *definitional* and *family resemblance* approach, there is another approach to describing genres which is based on the psycholinguistic concept of *prototypicality*. According to this approach, some texts would be widely regarded as being more typical members of a genre than others. According to this approach certain features would 'identify the extent to which an exemplar is *prototypical* of a particular genre' (Swales 1990, 52). Genres can therefore be seen as 'fuzzy' categories which cannot be defined by necessary and sufficient conditions.

The major argument that Chandler raises here is that '[s]pecific genres tend to be easy to recognize intuitively but difficult (if not impossible) to define'. Bhatia (1994) sees 'genre' as 'a recognisable communicative event that

regularly occurs'. In his view, 'genres' are 'highly structured and conventionalised constructs which constraint the contribution, the shape people will take and the lexico-grammatical resources'. Bhatia's notion of genre here emphasises on repetitiveness and structural uniqueness, especially in terms of linguistic resources – use of lexis and lexico-grammatical categories. On a basic level, the argument furthered here is that we should be able to recognise a text as belonging to a particular genre by paying particular attention to its features. Particular features which are characteristic of a genre however, are not normally unique to it; it is their relative prominence, combination and functions which are distinctive (Neale 1980, 22-3). It is easy to underplay the differences *within* a genre. Neale (1980) declares that 'genres are instances of repetition and difference' (Neale 1980, 48). He adds that 'difference is absolutely essential to the economy of genre' (Neale 1980, 50): mere repetition would not attract an audience. Tzvetan Todorov cited in Chandler (1997/2000) argues that 'any instance of a genre will be *necessarily* different'. In line with this perception of 'genre' Chandler (1997/2000) observes that, from the perspective of many scholars, genres first and foremost provide frameworks within which texts are produced and interpreted. Semiotically, a genre can be seen as a shared code between the producers and interpreters of texts included within it. Fowler (1989) goes so far as to suggest that 'communication is impossible without the agreed codes of genre'. Thus, within genres, texts embody authorial attempts to 'position' readers using particular 'modes of address'. Gunther Kress observes that:

> Every genre positions those who participate in a text of that kind: as interviewer or interviewee, as listener or storyteller, as a reader or a writer, as a person interested in political matters, as someone to be instructed or as someone who instructs; each of these positionings imply different possibilities for response and for action. Each written text provides a 'reading position' for readers, a position constructed by the writer for the 'ideal reader' of the text. (Kress, 1988: 107).

The argument here is that embedded within texts in any given genre are assumptions about the 'ideal reader', including their attitudes towards the

subject matter and often their class, age, gender and ethnicity. Kress (1988:183) cited in Chandler (1997/2000) defines a genre as 'a kind of text that derives its form from the structure of a (frequently repeated) social occasion, with its characteristic participants and their purposes'. Bhatia's (1994) conceptualisation of genre resonates with this perspective as well. Bhatia defines genre in this instance as,

> *…a recognisable communicative event, characterised by a set of communicative purpose(s) identified and mutually understood by the members of the professional or academic community in which it regularly occurs. Most often it is highly structured and conventionalised with constraints or allowable contributions in terms of their intent, positioning, form and functional value. The constraints are often exploited by the expert members of the discourse communities to achieve private intentions within the framework of socially recognised purpose(s). (Bhatia's, 1994: 14).*

What we discern from Bhatia's definition is again the same principles that seem to resonate in most of the definitions discussed in this chapter that texts belonging to a particular genre must share structural resemblances and that they should share functional value, (i.e. rhetorical purposes) and a shared code. This definition points to a typological framework for categorising structurally and rhetorically similar texts into generic groupings.

Kress and Threadgold (1988) view the notion of 'genres' as referent to texts that occur in particular and given social contexts and/or events. In a sense resonating with Hymes' (1962) 'Ethnography of Speech Model', for Kress and Threadgold (1988), the social event that defines texts as belonging to a given genre is characterised by a number of participants, their social relations and roles, specific goals for interaction, setting/location as well as a set of social practices. Fetzer and Lauerbach (2007) argue that 'genres' vary across cultures, historical eras, social classes and sub-cultures and they are also indicators of social change. This implies that even though genres might be important as they provide a context for understanding the communicative meaning at the particular point in time as texts themselves offer varied reading positions,

the terms 'genre' or 'genre analysis' are in themselves problematic. This is, as Kress (1998) explains, due to the fact that since there are no static social structures and social practices, genres are not static too but are in constant mutation. This aspect of genre dynamism implies that differences of genres are not necessarily taxonomic, philosophical and logical in nature but are due to differences of social rules which result in differences in social practices and ultimately differences in linguistic features.

The question of whether any given discourse is a genre with distinct patterns and norms thus still poses some theoretical problems for genre taxonomy creation. Of course, it should also be noted that there are some authorities who still insist on maintaining a static view in conceptualising 'genre'. These tend to largely view 'genres' from the prototypical text point of view. This is a largely prescriptive perception of 'genre' impressing on prototypicality in genres, a concept similar to the aspect of repetition discussed by Bakhtin (1986, 1994), Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1994). Burton (2002) for example argues, in line with this prescriptivist outlook on genres, that 'the building blocks of genres, its elements as well as the messages that genres communicate all depend on being repeated so that they continue to be known and they continue to be known by the audience.' Burton (2002) reinforces this argument by observing that a genre can become self-perpetuating once its key elements are established. In other words, the thesis established here is that the more texts continue to be prototypical, the easier it is for the discourse community to begin to identify it as belonging to a given genre. This research however, argues that despite these theoretical and text segmentation issues, there are recognisable patterns and norms of organisation and structure in given texts within a given discourse which can assist us categorise texts into distinct genres and subgenres. 'Genre' is distinct from 'discourse' and from 'style' though the same text can be analysed in all three of these ways (van Leeuwen, 2008).

Theorising 'genre' in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL): A solution?

This section briefly discusses how the notion of 'genre' is conceptualised within SFL. This is done in a bid to contextualise the current study's major theoretical propositions within the existing corpus of genre literature. The

study suggests that conceptualising 'genre' from an SFL perspective could prove a worthy solution to the theoretical debates on 'genre' theory. Within the conceptual framework of SFL and Appraisal theory, or Hallidayan linguistics (which is the theoretical framework informing this study), 'genre' is conceptualised as 'a meaning which results from language which does a particular job in a particular contextual configuration' (Halliday and Hasan, 1985). Within SFL, according to Santossa (2009) the term 'genre specific semantic potential' is used to define the generic grouping of texts. In line with Halliday and Hasan's (1985) definition, Martin (1997) also observes that within SFL, 'genre' is closely related to the notion of 'register' though 'genre' is, unlike register, set up above the level of analysing the metafunctions of language (ideational, interpersonal and textual). In other words, what register is concerned with is the manner in which the variables of field, mode and tenor are 'phased together in a text'. SFL employs genre as part of a project to relate language use to its social context, in particular, 'the context of culture' (Mey, 2009).

The definition of genre proposed by Martin (1984) from the perspective of SFL describes genre as 'a staged, goal-orientated, and purposeful social activity that people engage in as members of their culture'. Kress (1988) explains this further by observing that the social occasions of which texts are part, 'have a fundamentally important effect on texts. The characteristic features of those situations, purposes of the participants, the goals of the participants all have their effects on the form of the texts which are constructed in those situations. The situations are always conventionalised'. Interest in the study of genre and theorising genre within SFL is argued by (Mey, 2009) to have arisen due to the realisations of 'the inadequacies of the concept of 'register' in explaining the 'contextual aspects of text.' The claims made by 'register' are that features of given texts are predictable because variations within texts are defined through an analysis of three variables of 'field' (subject matter), 'tenor' (relationship between participants in the interaction) and 'mode' (whether the text is written or spoken).

The analysis of the genre of a text within SFL thus assumes that the overall purpose of the text is achieved through a sequence of stages, each achieving an intermediate purpose (Mey, 2009). The SFL specialist thus analyses a text and by observing 'a number of related communicative events, first in identify

which ones are optional and which ones are obligatory as well as their possible chronological order.' What the SFL genre analyst does, according to Mey (2009), is to gather texts of a particular genre, examines their structure breaking each example into purpose driven stages. These stages, because they all have different purposes, it can be assumed are realised differently linguistically. Bawarshi and Reiff (2010) possibly provide the most apt conceptualisation of genre within SFL when they observe that,

> …[m]ore recently and, again, across various areas of study, genre has come to be defined less as a means of organizing kinds of texts and more as a powerful, ideologically active, and historically changing shaper of texts, meanings, and social actions. From this perspective, genres are understood as forms of cultural knowledge that conceptually frame and mediate how we understand and typically act within various situations. This view recognizes genres as both organizing and generating kinds of texts and social actions, in complex, dynamic relation to one another. Such a dynamic view of genre calls for studying and teaching genres beyond only their formal features. Instead, it calls for recognizing how formal features, rather than being arbitrary, are connected to social purposes and to ways of being and knowing in relationship to these purposes. It calls for understanding how and why a genre's formal features come to exist the way they do, and how and why they make possible certain social actions/relations and not others. In short, it calls for understanding genre knowledge as including not only knowledge of formal features but also knowledge of what and whose purposes genres serve; how to negotiate one's intentions in relation to genres' social expectations and motives; when and why and where to use genres; what reader/writer relationships genres maintain; and how genres relate to other genres in the coordination of social life. (Bawarshi and Reiff, 2010:4).

What we can discern from such perceptions of genre is that within SFL's conceptualisation of 'genre', 'language structure is integrally related to social function and context'. In other words, language is organised the way it is within a culture because such an organisation serves a social purpose within that culture. In further contextualising this argument Bawarshi and Reiff (2010) define SFL in a manner that perceives "Functional" as a referent 'to the work

that language does within particular contexts'. "Systemic" in this context denotes 'the structure or organisation of language so that it can be used to get things done within those contexts'. "Systemic" then refers to the "systems of choices" available to language users for the *realisation* of meaning. This resonates well with Leech and Short's (1981) notion of 'linguistic choice'. The concept of "realisation" is especially important within SFL, for it describes the dynamic way that language *realises* social purposes and contexts as specific linguistic interactions, at the same time as social purposes and contexts *realise* language as specific social actions and meanings. In short, as Wang (2007) observes this perspective also regards 'genre' as 'rhetorical and dynamic, integrating form and content, product and process, individual and society' (Devitt, 2004), rather than as simply a classification system and formula of language structures.

Conclusion(s)

Defining and theorising 'genre' continues to be a tedious exercise, largely because of the host of theoretical insights that seem to be always in conflict. As the paper has discussed, the problems inherent in the field of genre theory are largely culminating from the differences in the criteria to classify and segment texts. The research suggests that the conceptualisation of 'genre' from a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach - which describes genre as 'a staged, goal-orientated, and purposeful social activity that people engage in as members of their culture' - (Martin, 1984) could be the panacea to the problems inherent in the theorisations of the concept of 'genre'. What has emerged from the research is that the SFL approach to genre seems to subsume all the theoretical propositions explicated from the host of theoretical insights discussed in this paper.

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