Chapter 3 Genre theories and the present study

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed contrastive rhetoric as a field of study and the new orientations of contrastive rhetorical studies that have emerged from the criticisms on traditional contrastive rhetoric and new developments of discourse analysis and composition research. In addition, it reviewed contrastive studies between Chinese and English writing, especially with regard to expository writing, and relevant contrastive studies on media discourses. This chapter moves towards a theoretical review of the previous genre studies and discourse studies relevant to this project. The chapter reviews different traditions of genre theories with the aim of establishing a theoretical framework for the present study. These theories mainly cover new rhetoric, systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) perspectives on genre. These perspectives are considered as complementary rather than contradictory in terms of analytical applications in this study.

3.2. The genre-based view of discourse

Genre has been defined in different ways in the field of applied linguistics. The most influential definitions are from three different traditions of genre studies. The first definition is from the tradition of new rhetoric genre studies. Miller (1984/1994) argues 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. The second definition of genre is proposed by Martin from the perspective of systemic functional linguistics. Martin (1984, p.25) describes genre as “a staged, goal-orientated, and purposeful social activity that people engage in as members of their culture”. The third is from English for Specific Purposes (ESP) proposed by Swales. Swales (1990) proposes 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. This definition is extremely influential in ESP work on genre analysis. SFL and
ESP traditions of genre studies put much emphasis on identifying structural elements in texts and make statements about the patterning of these elements.

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. Bhatia (2004, p.23) summarized some of the common ground of genre studies as follows.

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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’.
5. 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.
6. 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, Bhatia (2004) put 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. (P.23)

This definition is relevant to the present cross-cultural, cross-language study which has as its aim the examination of discursive features of Chinese and English newspaper commentaries on terrorism in two different socio-cultural settings. Newspaper commentaries on terrorism are regarded as the genre realised in a conventionalised communicative setting (newspaper presses) in order to give expression to a specific set of communicative goals.

In terms of analytical orientation, genre studies can be roughly put onto a continuum of those that focus on textual analyses at the one end and on contextual and social analyses at the other (Flowerdew, 2002). These two ends of the continuum could be regarded as interrelated to each other, but not opposed nor entirely separate from each other. A detailed textual analysis and a contextual analysis should complement each other in helping to develop a better understanding of the genre under investigation.

Genre analysis has drawn increasing attention in recent contrastive rhetoric research (Connor, 2004). When it comes to genre analysis, much of this work focuses on textual or structural analysis. Genre analyses in contrastive rhetoric research largely focus on generic superstructures and rhetorical functional analyses, such as ‘moves’, ‘stages’, ‘schematic’ or ‘generic’ structure. Thus, typical organizational structures are still the major concerns of genre-focused contrastive rhetoric studies (see details in Chapter 2). These studies have produced many insights and contributed greatly to traditional genre and contrastive rhetoric studies. This is not, however, enough to understand the whole picture of genre which is concerned with how writers use different languages to “accomplish things…in a culturally specific way” (Martin, 1984, p.28).

To argue for genre as social action is especially relevant to the present study. The newspaper commentaries under investigation in the study may be seen as social action taken in different socio-cultural contexts in response to the events of terrorism. Genre
in the present study is employed as a descriptive and analytical rather than as a prescriptive tool. This includes not only descriptions of the characteristics of actual texts, especially organizational structures, but also a contextualised perspective on genre which includes consideration of how the texts were produced (Kress & Threadgold, 1988; Threadgold, 1988, 1989, 1994; Devitt, 2004). This perspective on genre suggests that generic meanings are construed between and across texts in both reading and writing. In addition, the context in which a genre is produced and used is another focus in genre analysis. In other words, this perspective regards “genre as rhetorical and dynamic, integrating form and content, product and process, individual and society” (Devitt, 2004, p.6), rather than as simply a classification system and formula of language structures.

Along with their view of genre analysis as a study of situated linguistic behaviour in institutionalised academic or professional settings, the genre theories referenced above provide the basic theoretical underpinnings for the present study. As for the conceptionalisation of genre in this study, a crucial concern is how genre can be analysed and described using various linguistic and non-linguistic techniques developed in different schools of genre analysis. What follows is a brief review of the major theoretical contributions and analytical techniques in new rhetoric genre studies, systemic functional linguistics and ESP genre studies, which inform the analytical framework of the present study.

3.3. New rhetoric genre studies

New rhetoric genre researchers hold that genre emerges from repeated social action in recurring situations which give rise to regularities in form and content (Bazerman, 1988, 1997; Devitt, 2004; Miller, 1984/1994, 1994). While some definitions of genre have focused on textual regularities, especially in literary works, such as comedies, tragedies and novels, new rhetoric genre studies based in North America, which tend to concentrate on non-literary texts, probe further than this. Without abandoning earlier conceptions of genre as ‘types’ or ‘kinds’ of discourse, characterized by similarities in content and form, new rhetoric genre theorists focus on “tying these linguistic and substantive similarities to regularities in human spheres of activities” (Freedman & Medway, 1994, p.1). In other words, this view of genre has been used to
relate regularities in discourse types with a broader social and cultural understanding of language in use.

Miller’s 1984 essay on ‘Genre as social action’, which is regarded as a defining treatise in new rhetoric genre theory, identifies some specific features of genre common to writing. These features can be summarised as follows.

First, new rhetoric sees genre as “a conventional category of discourse based in large scale typification of rhetorical action” (Miller, 1984/1994, p.37). That is as a form of social action. That means that a genre can be understood as a frequently repeated social action by an individual social actor or group of actors for fulfilling their rhetorical purpose. Second, as meaningful action, genre is interpretable by means of rules. That indicates genre is rule-governed to some degree. Third, genre is distinguishable from form. Miller explains that form is the more general term than genre, and “genre is a form at one particular level that is a fusion of lower level forms and characteristic substance” (Miller, 1984/1994, p.37). Fourth, genres serve as recurrent patterns of language use and help constitute a culture. That implies genres are not only parts of a culture, but also, in some ways, shape the culture. Fifth, “A genre is a rhetorical means for mediating private intentions and social exigence” (Miller, 1984/1994, p.37). Thus, a genre is a mediating force between the individual and society. By examining genres, we can explicate the social process in which writing by individuals is influenced or mediated by contextual factors. For example, in the present study the commentaries written by individual writers are examined in conjunction with social factors which may influence or mediate their writing.

In addition, Miller (1984) argues for an open principle of genre classification based on rhetorical practice, in contrast to genre studies, which focus more on structure, content or aim of the genre. Furthermore, Miller advocates a kind of ethnomethodological approach to studying genre. That is an approach which “seeks to explicate the knowledge that practice creates” (Miller, 1984/1994, p.27). In her view, to understand how a genre has developed and how it works, researchers must consult the interpreters of both the genre and the situation.

In her 1994 article ‘Rhetorical community: The cultural basis of genre’, Miller further describes what she means by genre as a ‘cultural artefact’. She suggests that genres
are bearers of “knowledge of the aesthetics, economics, politics, religious beliefs and all the various dimensions of what we know as human culture” (Miller, 1994, p.69). That suggests that to fully understand genres, we should understand the culture of which they are constituents. Genre, in this sense, could be regarded as part of social processes by which knowledge, and ‘facts’ are made (Freedman and Medway, 1994). In this regard, new rhetoric genre theory differs significantly from the Sydney School of genre study, which focuses more on textual features of genre.

The notion of action, thus, plays a central role in Miller’s discussion of genre, as well as the notions of situation and motive. She states, “human action, whether symbolic or otherwise, is interpretable only against a context of situation and through the attributing of motives” (Miller, 1984/1994, p.24). The notion of action in her view implies both situation and motive, both of which are seen as being socially constructed. In this regard, Miller regards genres as social actions mediated by both situation (an external force) and motive (an internal force).

Miller’s definition of genre goes a long way in helping us theorise recurrent ways of using discourse. From this perspective, researchers can examine textual products for shared formal characteristics and bear in mind that recurrent forms have cognitive consequences for their users. Moreover, researchers should consider the actual work or social action that a genre coordinates. Thus, Miller elaborates a theory of a genre that could be taken up from textual, cognitive, and contextual or rhetorical perspectives.

Furthermore, as Miller suggests, her original purpose in ‘Genre as social action’ is somewhat contradictory. She wants “to make of rhetorical genre a stable classifying concept” and at the same time “to ensure that the concept is rhetorically sound” (Miller, 1984/1994, p.23). Later she suggests that if genre is conceived as conventional “ways of acting together”, “it does not lend itself to taxonomy, for genres change, evolve and decay” (Miller, 1984/1994, p.36). Although she does not seem to resolve this problem explicitly, she tries to put the argument further by stating that “as a recurrent, significant action, a genre embodies an aspect of cultural rationality” and “genres can serve both as an index to cultural patterns and as tools for exploring the achievements of particular speakers and writers” (Miller, 1984/1994, p.39). That is genres may become ways to theorise about complex, evolving discourse
practices which may be ‘stabilised-for-now’ or ‘stabilised-enough’ sites of social and ideological actions (Schryer, 1993, p.208). In other words, genres not only respond to particular social contexts, they also shape and in a way, stabilize (for a while) social contexts.

This theoretical rethinking of genre has been accompanied by many empirical studies of academic and professional writing. Many researchers in the field of new rhetoric have adopted ethnographic rather than linguistic methods for providing detailed descriptions of the contexts surrounding genres and the actions they perform within these contexts. These studies include Myers’ (1985,1990) study of the writing of professional biologists; Devitt’s (1991) study of documents produced by tax accountants; Bazerman’s (1988) study of the production of experimental articles; Smart’s (1992, 1993) study of the texts produced at a central Canadian bank; Yates’ (1989) and Yates and Orlikowski’s (1992) studies of the evolution of the memo and the business report; Freedman’s (1989) study of writing for the disciplines at university; and Dias et al.’s (1999) multi-site comparative study of writing in different university courses and matched workplaces. Attempts have been made in these studies to explain the evolving and contextual nature of genres. These researchers have also sought to understand how the interests, goals, and shared assumptions of different discourse communities impact on the genre writing process.

In genre studies from the new rhetoric tradition, three pieces of work are outlined and reviewed below. The first is Paré and Smart’s (1994) proposal for a research method concerned with how genres may function as both modes of thought and heuristics for the process of studying genre. The second is Berkenkotter and Huckin’s (1995) sociocognitive perspective on genre presented in their book Genre Knowledge in Disciplinary Communication: Cognition/Culture/Power. The third is Yates and Orlikowski’s (1992) discussion of genre from a sociohistorical perspective and issues drawn from ideas in the area of structuration theory.

Paré and Smart (1994) define genre as a distinctive profile of regularities across four dimensions: a set of texts, the composing processes involved in creating these texts, the reading practices used to interpret the texts, and the social roles performed by writers and readers. This interpretation of genre implies that writers’ tasks may be affected by their knowledge and consideration of genre, and that this may figure in the
decision-making process that writers experience. With regard to the present study, the meanings of ‘regularities in textual features’ and ‘regularities in social roles’ are reviewed below.

According to Paré and Smart (1994), repeated patterns in the structure, rhetorical moves and styles of texts are the most readily observable aspects of genre. In this way, individual components of a text, their usual sequence and their function or purpose can be identified. Similarly, texts within a genre employ particular rhetorical moves. ‘Move’ is a term adopted from English for Specific Purposes genre studies, especially Swales (1990), to indicate a stage of text taken to realize a rhetorical function. Paré and Smart believe that “the acceptable use of these moves is often governed by community conventions” and “modes of argument vary from community to community and, within communities, from one type of discourse to another” (Paré & Smart, 1994, p. 148). This suggests that for example, some types of evidence or claims for causation are acceptable in one discourse community, but not acceptable in others. Moreover, Paré and Smart argue that a common style is often observable in texts. For example, sentence and paragraph length, use of the active and positive voice, reference to self or to readers, and so on may remain relatively constant across the texts within a genre.

A further important contribution to discussions of new rhetoric genre theory can be found in Berkenkotter and Huckin’s (1995) book Genre Knowledge in Disciplinary Communication: Cognition/Culture/Power, in which they present a sociocognitive view of genre. Their thinking is based on eight years of rhetorical and linguistic analysis of case study data that foreground individual writers’ language-in-use. They suggest that writers in a discourse community acquire and employ genre knowledge as they participate in their field’s knowledge producing activities. For Berkenkotter and Huckin, genre knowledge refers to the repertoires of ‘situationally appropriate responses to recurrent situations’ (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995, p.ix); that is the knowledge that is needed in order to communicate successfully in a particular discourse community. This genre knowledge, they argue, is acquired through communication in the context of the genre and discourse community.

Berkenkotter and Huckin have developed five principles that constitute a theoretical framework for genre study. The first of these principles is that genres are dynamic
rhetorical forms which have been developed in response to recurring situations and that serve to stabilize experience. In addition, genres are capable of modification over time in response to their users’ sociocognitive needs. In other words, genres undergo changes when the discourse community and its members’ perceptions of the world change as well.

Their second principle is ‘situatedness’. Situatedness means that genre knowledge is acquired by participating in the knowledge producing communicative activities of the members of a discourse community. Knowledge of genres, for them, is derived from and embedded in participation in the communicative activities of daily and professional life. Berkenkotter and Huckin point out that genre knowledge, “rather than being explicitly taught, is transmitted through enculturation as apprentices become socialized to the ways of speaking in particular disciplinary communities” (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995, p. 7).

The third principle is that genre knowledge includes both form and content. This includes how appropriate the content is for a particular purpose in a particular situation at a particular point in time (localised in both time and place). Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995, p.14) further argue that “what constitutes true genre knowledge is not just a knowledge of formal conventions but a knowledge of appropriate topics and relevant details as well.”

Their fourth principle is that, as people use genres and engage in professional institutional activities, they both constitute and reproduce particular social structures. Berkenkotter and Huckin call this principle duality of structure, following the work of the sociologist Giddens (1979, 1984). Duality of structure refers to the medium and outcome of the reproduction of practices. In other words, when individuals use genres to engage in professional and institutional activities, they construct social structures in such contexts as well as, at the same time, reproduce these structures. This highlights the reciprocal relationship between social structures and communicative activities.

Berkenkotter and Huckin’s fifth principle is called ‘community ownership’. This principle states that a discourse community’s norms, epistemology, ideology and social ontology are symbolised by genre conventions. Genres are seen as part of a larger context of disciplinary or professional activities conditioned by the norms and
values of the communities. People assimilate the values and perspectives of a discourse community as they learn to use the genres required of them.

Berkenkotter and Huckin come from a sociocognitive perspective on genre, whilst Yates and Orlikowski’s work (1992) is done from a sociohistorical viewpoint. In their 1992 article ‘Genres of organizational communication: A structurational approach to studying communication and media’, Yates and Orlikowski draw on new rhetorical genre theory and structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) as a way of studying organizational communication. They propose genres of organizational communication as a concept that is useful for studying communication embedded in social processes rather than the result of isolated rational actions. Genres, in this sense, are “typified communicative actions characterized by similar substance and form and taken in response to recurrent situations” (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992, p. 299). This suggests that genres evolve over time in mutual interaction with institutional practices and individual actions. A genre is a typified communication action invoked in response to a recurrent situation. In understanding the ‘recurrent situation’, Yates and Orlikowski argue that the history and nature of established practices, social relations, and communication media within organizations should be examined. Taking a request for a recommendation letter as an example, this communication action or genre assumes the existence of an employment procedure that includes the evaluation and documentation of prior performance. The resulting genre is characterized by similar substance and form. For them, substance refers to “the social motives, themes, and topics being expressed in the communication” (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992, p. 301). In the case of the recommendation letter, substance involves a positive or negative recommendation and the supporting characteristics of the recommendee. For Yates and Orlikowski, form refers to “the observable physical and linguistic features of the communication” (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992, p.301). In the above case, it may include the structure of the letter or the format of address and salutation on the letter.

Drawing on Giddens’ (1984) notion of social rules, Yates and Orlikowski (1992) posited that genres are “enacted through rules, which associate appropriate elements of form and substance with certain recurrent situations” (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992, p.302). They called these rules genre rules. The ways in which these rules influence the generation of specific communication is very important to an understanding of
genre as enacted within communities. Yates and Orlikowski (1992) further suggest “genres emerge within a particular sociohistorical context and are reinforced over time as a situation recurs… these genres, in turn, shape the future response to a similar situation” (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992, p.305). This view of communication practices within sociohistorical contexts is compatible with Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory, which has been widely discussed as a background sociological theory in new rhetoric genre studies (see e.g. Miller, 1984/1994; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Yates & Orlikowski, 1992).

In structurational terms, genres can be regarded as social institutions that are produced, reproduced, or changed when individuals employ genre rules to engage in communicative activities. Moreover, structuration theorists take a dialectical view of the relationship between genre and communicative action. This implies that as social institutions, genres both shape and are shaped by communicative action. As Barley and Tolbert (1988, p.2) point out, genres are “by-products of a history of negotiation among social actors that results in shared typification which gradually acquire the moral and ontological status of taken-for-granted facts.” They suggest that the processes of structuration not only reproduce genres over time, but change genres as well (Barley & Tolbert, 1988). This tells us that, even though genres facilitate and constrain communicative choices, genre rules are not rigid. During individuals’ enactment of genres, they have opportunities to challenge genre rules and even change them. Barley and Tolbert recognize three modes of enacting already-established genres – maintenance, elaboration, and modification. When individuals are enacting genres by using the rules of substance and form without change, they are maintaining established genres. When they are adopting existing genre rules to reflect new conditions without substantially altering the genre rules, they are elaborating existing genres. When they are departing from the rules of existing genres significantly, they are modifying existing genres.

Sometimes, individuals modify some of the rules of existing genres for catering for material or perceptual changes in recurrent situations. Substantial and significant modification of the rules of an existing genre may result in the emergence of a new or modified genre. The structurational account of genre production, reproduction and change over time helps us to describe and interpret changes in communicative
practices. It also provides us with a lens to understand the complex relationship among individual practices and the social context of writing practices through the concept of genre.

In new rhetoric genre theory, particular attention has been given to exploring sociocultural aspects of genre. In this regard, two major perspectives of examining genres have been reviewed above. Their advocacy of genre as a social action and their concern with connecting linguistic regularities in discourse type with a broader social and cultural understanding of language in use greatly inform the present study.

3.4. Systemic functional genre studies

Systemic functional genre studies are often known as ‘the Sydney School’ of genre studies (Hyon, 1996). The Sydney School view of genre is based on the work of systemic functional linguists such as Halliday (1994); Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), Halliday and Hasan (1976, 1985); and Martin (1984, 1992). Systemic functional linguistics considers language primarily as a resource for making meaning, rather than as a set of rules.

Systemic grammar is an analysis-synthesis grammar based on the paradigmatic notion of choice. It is built on the work of Saussure, Malinowski, and Firth, Hjemslev, the Prague school, and the American anthropological linguists Boas, Sapir, and Whorf; the main inspiration being J. R. Firth. It is a tristratal construct of semantics (meaning), lexicogrammar (wording), and phonology (sound). The organizing concept at each stratum is the paradigmatic ‘system’: A system is a set of options with an entry condition, such that exactly one option must be chosen if the entry condition is satisfied. Options are realized as syntagmatic constructs or structures; a structure is a configuration of functional elements – functions or function bundles. The functions are motivated (nonarbitrary) with respect to the options they realize; the grammar as a whole is motivated with respect to the semantics. The only line of (relative) arbitrariness is that between content and expression (between the lexicogrammar and the phonology). (Halliday, 1985, p.30)
Systemic functional linguistics developed by Halliday involves the notion that language consists of a set of systems which offers the writer/speaker choices in expressing meanings. The view of language within systemic functional linguistics is both rich and complex. It is a modelling of language that sees discourse as text-in-context and attempts to separate text from its context as an (useful) abstraction. This abstraction is seen as useful for the purpose of analysis in order to deconstruct text-in-context and to put on display different strata of meaning and the meaning-making resources deployed at each stratum. According to Eggins (1994), systemic linguists make four main theoretical claims about language: that language use is functional; its function is to make meanings; meanings are influenced by social and cultural context; the process of using language is a semiotic process in which people make meanings by making linguistic choices. Systemic functional linguistics is concerned with how people use language and how language is structured for use. Further, systemic functional linguistics views meaning as social. That social meaning impacts on linguistic forms. In other words, the role of form is to serve a social function.

Systemic functional linguistics has been employed as an analytical tool for a detailed and systematic description of language patterns in texts in various studies. The following section discusses relevant theoretical claims in systemic functional linguistics. The contribution of systemic functional genre analysis is, then, illustrated. Finally, Martin and Rose’s (2003) model for analysing discourse is presented.

The first important claim in systemic functional linguistics is that using language is a social semiotic. That means that language is a meaning-making system. As Thompson states (1990, p.285):

‘Semiotic’ is a very general term. It is fundamentally concerned with sign, or more properly, with systems of signs and can be understood as the study of the relations between the elements which compose a symbolic form or sign, and of the relations between these elements and those of a broader system of which this symbolic form may be a part.

In the case of language there is another stratum of meaning – the wording (or lexicogrammar) – which allows the language user to make an infinite amount of
meanings from finite lexical and grammatical resources. Semiotics in this case is not the study of signs alone but of the sign system or system of meaning. As Halliday and Hasan (1985, p.101) state:

> A culture is expressed by the totality of what is meaning; this domain of meaning has been formed by the various semiotic systems – systems that cover ways of being, saying and doing. These formed meanings construct significant situational values; and it is the operation of the semiotic systems that permits the perception of what is or is not a significant situational variable.

So the semiotic nature of language allows for language to be meaning creating. We are not limited to a finite set of set meanings, or mirroring a fixed reality. Instead language operates as a meaning generating system, a resource or potential to mean that is drawn upon by the speaker and in which the speaker is enmeshed through the need to communicate, i.e. to express meanings the speaker has to express in the semiotic environment (Halliday & Hasan, 1985).

The second theoretical claim is that language is a social process. In relating language to the social Halliday states that language is “the only semiotic system that embodies all human experience and all human relationships” (Halliday, 1998, p.2). The description of language as social, then, foregrounds the need to see language not as some monolithic entity separate from its social contextualised use, but to see it as part of the social system (or culture).

In systemic functional linguistics, it is claimed that the forms of language are shaped by key features of the context of situation which can be described in terms of register variables: field, tenor and mode (Egging, 1994; Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Hasan, 1985). Field refers to what is happening, i.e. the activity that is going on. Tenor refers to who is taking part, i.e. the relationship between participants. Mode refers to what part the language is playing, i.e. the channel of communication. Moreover, in systemic functional linguistics language has three metafunctions, which relate to three meanings that people need to make in the social world. These are the ideational – construing human experience, the interpersonal – enacting human relationships, and the textual – creating discourse. Thus, labels given to language features in systemic
functional analyses are described in terms of what they are doing in functional, rather than grammatical, terms.

These three metafunctions (ideational, interpersonal, and textual) in systemic functional linguistics are the interface between language and what is outside language (that is field, tenor, mode in the context of situation). In relation to context the ideational metafunction realizes field at the semantic level. At the lexicogrammatical level it is primarily realized in the transitivity system. The interpersonal metafunction realizes tenor at the semantic level and is realized at the lexicogrammatical level primarily in the ‘mood’, ‘modality’ and ‘appraisal’ systems (see below). The textual metafunction realizes mode at the semantic level and at the lexicogrammatical level is primarily realized at the ‘theme/rheme’, ‘identification’ and ‘periodicity’ system (see below).

With regard to genre studies, the major contribution of systemic functional linguists is the analysis of ‘micro-genres’; that is, smaller text types such as ‘recounts’, ‘narratives’, ‘reports’, ‘descriptions’, ‘arguments’, ‘procedures’, ‘explanations’, that make up more complex texts, or ‘macro-genres’, such as news stories, research reports and classroom genres (Christie, 2002; Martin, 1997). Systemic functional linguists (e.g. Knapp & Watkins, 2005; Hammond, Burns, Joyce, Brosnan & Gerot 1992; Derewianka, 1990; Gerot & Wignell, 1994), especially those who work with educational linguistics, describe these elemental genres in terms of social functions, generic (schematic) structures and specific lexicogrammatical features. These descriptions examine the choices that are available to language users to achieve their particular goals.

For example, Gerot and Wignell (1994, p.194) describe ‘recount’ as having the social function “to retell events for the purpose of informing or entertaining”. A ‘recount’ usually follows a generic (schematic) structure such as ‘orientation’ ^ ‘events’ ^ ‘re-orientation’. In addition, Gerot and Wignell (1994, p.194) describe significant lexicogrammatical features of a ‘recount’ such as

- Focus on specific participants
- Use of material processes
- Circumstances of time and place
• Use of past tense
• Focus on temporal sequence

Here participants refer to ‘doers’ or ‘actors’ in a text. Their roles are usually realised by nouns. Material processes refer to ‘doing’ (actions) and are realised by verbs. Circumstances refer to how, when and where actions take place and are usually realised by prepositional phrases.

As Eggins (1994) argues, what is distinctive to systemic functional linguistics is that it seeks to develop both a theory about language as social process and an analytical methodology, which permits the detailed and systematic description of language patterns. According to Martin (1992) and Martin and Rose (2003), five key systems have been deployed to explore texts in detail. These are ideation, appraisal, conjunction, identification and periodicity. These systems provide further linguistic tools for researchers to analyse discourses and genres at a more delicate level. These systems are summarised below.

As Martin and Rose (2003) explain, “Ideation focuses on the ‘content’ of a discourse – what kinds of activities are undertaken, and how participants in these activities are described, how they are classified and what they are composed of. Ideation is concerned with how our experience of ‘reality’ – material and symbolic reality – is construed in discourse” (Martin & Rose, 2003, p. 66).

Appraisal is a system of interpersonal meaning, which relates to tenor of register. “Appraisal is concerned with evaluation – the kinds of attitudes that are negotiated in a text, the strength of the feelings involved and the ways in which values are sourced and readers aligned” (Martin & Rose, 2003, p. 22). Authors employ the resources of appraisal for negotiating their social relationships, in other words, how they feel about things and people involved in the discourse.

According to Martin and Rose (2003), a range of resources is available for analysing the appraisal system of discourse: first to study how the author expresses attitude, next how to amplify attitudes and then how to attribute attitudes to sources. And there are three main types of attitudes—expressing emotion (AFFECT), judging character (JUDGEMENT) and valuing the worth of things (APPRECIATION). Appraisal
analysis has become a vital research area in SFL. Important research in appraisal analysis includes White (1998, 2002), Martin (2000), and Martin and White (2005). Their work is further discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis.

In systemic functional linguistics, conjunction is regarded as part of the discourse semantic system, in which not only traditional conjunction words are included but other kinds of wordings. Examples of this are *even, still, yet, also,* etc. “Conjunction looks at inter-connections between processes—adding, comparing, sequencing, or explaining them” (Martin & Rose 2003, p.110). While ideation is a system used to represent experience, conjunction is used to link these experiences together and make text coherent. Conjunction, thus, is concerned with mode of register, and related to the textual metafunction of language use.

According to Martin and Rose (2003, p. 145),

Identification is concerned with tracking participants—with introducing people and things into a discourse and keeping track of them once there. These are textual resources, concerned with how discourse makes sense to the reader, by keeping track of identities.

Keeping track of participants in a text, no matter whether they are people or things, is a way of making sense of the text. There are two basic choices of identification: one is ‘introducing’ and the other is ‘tracking’. In technical terms, introducing identity is called ‘presenting’, which is usually related to the use of ‘a’, ‘some’ or nothing before the identity. Tracking identity is called ‘presuming’, which is usually related to the use of pronouns, proper nouns, or ‘the’ before the identity. Identification is employed as an analytical tool in this study and is further discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis.

Another key concept in Martin and Rose’s (2003) framework is periodicity. “Periodicity is concerned with information flow – with the way in which meanings are packaged to make it easier for us to take them in” (Martin & Rose, 2003, p.175). The main technique for analysing periodicity of text is to identify ‘theme’ and ‘new’ at different levels. At the clause level, ‘theme’ is, broadly speaking, what the clause is ‘going to be about’. ‘New’ refers to new information about the point of the clause. It
represents ‘this is what I’m saying about it’. ‘Theme and new’ tell us where we are coming from and where we are going. Analysis of ‘themes and news’ aims to capture the regularity of information flow of texts.

According to Martin (2002, p.55), “the result of these reformulations is a semantic stratum of text-oriented resources dedicated to the analysis of cohesive relations as discourse structure”. According to Martin (2002), these resources can be aligned with metafunctions in the following proportions:

- Ideation: Experiential meaning
- Appraisal: Interpersonal meaning
- Conjunction: Logical meaning (one sub component of ideational metafunction)
- Identification: Textual meaning
- Periodicity: Textual meaning

In systemic functional linguistics, social context is modelled through register and genre. Following Halliday (1978) a natural relation is posited between the organization of language and the organization of the social context, built up around the notion of kinds of meaning (Matthiessen, 1993). Interpersonal meaning is related to the enactment of social relations (social reality), or tenor; ideational meaning is related to the construction of institutional activity (naturalized reality), or field; and textual meaning is related to information flow across media (semiotic reality), or mode.

In sum, systemic functional linguistics’ view of genre and the interpersonal and textual metafunctions offers a strong level of specificity for genre analysis. These have been used as a framework for investigation and as analytical tools for the present study to examine the genre under investigation.

3.5. The ESP perspective on genre

ESP genre analysis has its origins in Swales’ (1981, 1990) studies of the discourse structure and linguistic features of scientific research articles. ESP research has the tradition of serving ESP instruction by describing the language and discourse features
of specific genres. The information acquired in the analysis is then applied in
curriculum design and ESP teaching materials. In the ESP perspective, discourse
structures are usually described in terms of moves, and communicative purpose is
given an important role.

At the same time, the ESP approach to genre is some way influenced by new rhetoric
genre theory. Miller’s notion of ‘genre as social action’ is highly influential in ESP
research. In this view, a genre is defined, not in terms of “the substance or the form of
discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish” (Miller, 1984, p.151). In Swales’
(1990) book *Genre Analysis*, which is an extensive account of the origins, concepts
and directions of ESP genre research, a genre (Swales, 1990, p.58) is defined as “a
class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of
communicative purposes”. Swales (1990, p.58) further states “these purposes are
recognised by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and therefore
constitute the rationale for the genre”. Later Askehave and Swales (2001) observed
that uncertainties surrounding communicative purpose undermined its claimed role as
a means of assigning genre membership. They suggest that it would be prudent to
abandon communicative purpose as an immediate or even a quick method for sorting
texts into generic categories. They propose that genre analysts can and should retain
the concept of communicative purpose as a valuable and long-term outcome of the
analysis (Askehave and Swales, 2001).

‘Discourse community’ is an important notion which is closely associated with
Swales’ interpretation of genre. Swales (1990, p24-27) proposes six defining
characteristics for identifying a group of individuals as a discourse community: a set
of common public goals; established mechanisms of intercommunication; information
and feedback through a participatory mechanism; one or more genres to further the
community’s aims; specific lexis; membership includes both ‘apprentices’ and experts
with suitable degree of relevant expertise. The example that Swales describes, a
hobby group called the Hong Kong Study Circle, meets all the above criteria in a
perfect manner.

ESP genre analysis has produced a series of studies over the last 20 years and has
been used widely as a link between the basic concerns of text and discourse analysis
and ESP needs, such as supplying a basis for elaborating materials for classroom use,
for syllabus design and needs analysis. Initially it was tied to pedagogical concerns. However, working in the tradition of the genre analysis established by Swales, Bhatia (1993) argued for combining language insights with socio-cognitive and cultural considerations. In his 2004 book ‘Worlds of written discourse: A genre-based view’, he further argues that these factors contribute to genre construction, interpretation, use and exploitation. He attempts to move the focus of genre study from a predominantly pedagogic direction to studying genres in their professional and institutional settings – the real worlds of written discourse. A different concept of genre thus follows – genre is not considered as something pure with distinctly established boundaries and limits, necessarily attributed to a specific discourse community. Bhatia (2004) argues that the tension between mixing and embedding of genres and yet preserving their generic integrity is the key to how professional expertise is acquired and this has not been put forth in available literature. Bhatia considers genres in all their complexity: vertically as super-genres and sub-genres, horizontally as genre sets, and their interrelations and relatedness to features of context. Bhatia (1993, 2004) bridges the gap between the other two schools of genre studies (new rhetoric and systemic functional linguistics) and maintains that generic integrity is not static but developing in concordance with a particular generic event. He advocates a multidimensional approach for analysis of the intricacies of academic, professional and institutional discourse by drawing on various discourse and non-discourse techniques that offer new perspectives and insights into how the real world of the written discourse is represented in the generic structuring of texts (Bhatia, 2004).

Bhatia’s (2004) multidimensional approach to real world discourse informs the present study in three ways. First, it provides a clear and comprehensive definition of genre as a specific view of looking at discourse in conventionalised communicative settings. Second, it provides a clear elaboration of the relationship between discourses in the real world and in the world of application. That is, it differentiates the real from the ideal – the actuality of written discourse in academic, professional and institutional contexts from idealistic representations of the genre. Third, it provides a framework for the examination of genre by addressing textual, socio-cognitive and social factors. This framework allows for different analytical perspectives to be applied to the same set of texts; that is a textual perspective (genre as a reflection of discursive practices in disciplinary communities), an ethnographic perspective (genre
in action, grounded in narrated insightful experiences of expert members of the community), a socio-cognitive and a socio-critical perspective (historically and structurally grounded accounts of the conditions under which genres are constructed and interpreted by members of the discipline to achieve their typical goals). Bhatia also provides basic steps for a multi-dimensional and multi-perspective analysis of genre. These steps commence with a textual analysis and extend to the socio-cognitive and socio-critical space, emphasizing intertextuality and interdiscursivity in order to go beyond the lexico-grammatical and rhetorical resources into the use of the text in real life contexts and its rhetorical performance.

Along with this line, attempts have been made to incorporate many perspectives into the present study. For instance, from a textual perspective, linguistic analytical tools from systemic functional linguistics and new rhetoric genre studies are employed to investigate the genre, which is considered as a reflection of discursive practices. In this analytical process, special attention has been given to interpersonal and intertextual practices of the texts (see details in Chapters 5, 6 and 7). From a socio-critical perspective, the conditions under which the genre under investigation is constructed and interpreted to achieve its typical social goals are explored. In sum, a multi-dimensional and multi-perspective analysis of the genre aims to provide a much detailed picture of the genre under investigation and also how the genre is realised and used in different socio-cultural and socio-political settings.

3.6. Summary

Genre in the present study is employed as a descriptive and analytical rather than as a prescriptive tool. Genre theory has also been widely applied as a pedagogical tool in the above-mentioned schools of genre studies. Due to the nature and design of its application in language teaching and learning, the development of genre theory in these streams has often led to the use of simplified and idealised genres. However, the real world of discourse is complex, dynamic and unpredictable. There is always tension between the real world of written discourse and its representation in applied genre-based literature. The major aim of this study is to capture something of the essence of the real world genre of newspaper commentaries. Various analytical perspectives and tools from different schools of genre and discourse analysis are drawn on to do this.
Genre, thus, includes not only descriptions of the characteristics of actual texts, classes of texts, or as systemic potential modelled from other texts, formulated as generic structures, generic structure potential (Hasan, 1978). More importantly a contextualised perspective on genre which includes consideration of how the texts were produced has been adopted in the present study as well. It is a theory of genre in which generic meanings are construed between and across texts (Kress & Threadgold, 1988; Threadgold, 1989, 1994; Devitt, 2004) (see Chapter 4 for intertextuality). This theory attempts to “describe the way in which practices of reading and writing and of text-making produce that subject and the social world that s/he inhabits” (Threadgold, 1994, p.1409). In other words, it not only tries to describe linguistic characteristics of actual texts and the genre concerned, but also attempts to reveal how the genre has been produced and consumed in relation to its sociocultural context. That is, it aims to capture the dynamic and ‘stabilized-for-now’ status of the genre in different social contexts.

The following chapter will extend the theoretical literature review into a discussion of socio-critical perspectives on discourse – critical discourse analysis, and the area of intertextuality with the aim of taking a genre-based view of discourse into the larger picture of current concerns of discourse analysis.