Chapter 1  Introduction

1.1. Introduction to the study

The terrorist attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001 have generated discussions in a range of different fields of study. In the area of language and discourse research, a large number of journal articles and academic papers emerged which discuss the media coverage of, and commentaries on, the events of 9/11. Among them, a special issue of “Discourse and Society” in 2004 (Vol.15: 2-3) was devoted to this issue. Working with the theme of language and ideology, analyses in that collection are restricted to texts produced in specific social cultural settings. For instance, Achugar (p.291) considers “the events and actors… as seen from Uruguay”, through analyses of two dozen newspaper editorials that appeared mid-September 2001 to the end of that month in Uruguay. In the same issue, Martin (p.321) analyses in some detail the texture of an editorial from a Hong Kong magazine published ten days after the events of 9/11. However, no cross-cultural or cross-language studies seem to exist of the media coverage on the events of 9/11 and their aftermath.

As far as cross-cultural studies are concerned, although a large amount of studies in contrastive rhetoric and discourse research have examined similarities and differences between Chinese and English writing (e.g. Cahill, 1999, 2003; Cai, 1993; Kaplan, 1972; Kirkpatrick, 1993, 1995, 1996, 1997; Kong, 1998, 2005; Liu, 2005; Matalene, 1985; Mohan & Lo, 1985; Scollon, 1991, 1997a,b, 2000; Scollon & Scollon, 1997; Scollon, Scollon & Kirkpatrick, 2000; Taylor & Chen, 1991; Zhang, 1990; Zhu, 1997, 2000), these studies have primarily focused on specific texts and text styles such as linearity and circularity, and structural moves of texts (see a detailed review of this in Chapter Two). Although these studies contribute much to the understanding of differences between English and Chinese writing, especially in terms of structural patterning, they are far from enough to establish an overall picture of writing
practices in these two languages in relation to their respective socio-cultural and socio-political contexts.

Consequently, I was motivated to construct a cross-cultural study of Chinese and English texts. As countries where Chinese and English are used as the primary languages and also where I have lived in recent years, China and Australia became the social and linguistic contexts where the present study became located. The question, then, was how to construct the study in a systematic way and what the focus of the research should be. In order to construct the cross-cultural and cross-language study of Chinese and English texts, I needed a ‘common platform’ of subject matter on which these two languages could be compared and contrasted. This led my attention to the events of 9/11, which, although they happened in New York and Washington in the United States, are events of international significance that have had a huge impact across the world. As for the comparability of the ‘platform’, it can be argued the 9/11 as an international event occurred in the United States of America generated simultaneous news reportages to China and Australia under the modern communication and broadcasting system.

From a preliminary observation, it seemed that although both China and Australia took an anti-terrorism stand after September 11, Australia seemed to be much more involved emotionally, politically and certainly militarily in this issue than China, possibly due to historical and political factors. Nevertheless, newspaper commentaries on terrorism produced after the events of 9/11 in China and Australia seemed to provide a comparable platform for a cross-cultural and cross-language analysis which could provide insights into understanding how the same genre on the same topic is realised in the two different sociocultural and linguistic settings.

As Van Dijk (1996, 1998b) argues, newspaper opinion discourses including commentaries have a formidable influence upon political opinion-formation, not only of the ordinary, everyday reader but also of institutional and/or elite members of
society, for example, politicians and corporate executives. In modern societies, newspaper commentaries, (which in this study refers to opinion articles written by expert writers or journalists), have an important communicative function in that they contribute to the formulation of certain, ‘preferred’ viewpoints about the world. The function of these commentaries within the larger context of newspaper coverage is to offer newspaper readers a distinctive and sometimes authoritative voice that speaks to the public directly about matters of public importance. Along with other newspaper opinion discourses such as editorials that represent the institutional voice, and letters to the editor, newspaper commentaries have received less theoretical and empirical attention by scholars than ‘hard’ news stories, the conventional journalistic standards of fairness and objectivity of which have been scrutinised and challenged (see e.g. Fowler, 1991; Scollon & Scollon, 1997; van Dijk, 1988; White, 1998).

Newspaper commentaries are usually written by academics, journalists and other experienced native language writers. What they wrote in the newspaper commentaries in response to the events of 9/11, the linguistic strategies they employed in their writing and why they wrote what they did is of interest to the people working in the area of intercultural rhetoric and discourse studies. A study such as this, I hope, will provide an understanding of language use in the two socio-cultural settings and make useful contributions to intercultural rhetoric and discourse studies.

In recent contrastive rhetoric studies, journalistic texts have become a popular focus of examination. Scollon et al. (2000) have argued that there are several reasons why researchers turn to journalistic texts for answering questions raised in contrastive rhetoric studies. For Scollon et al., the main reason is that journalistic texts are a highly salient example of public discourse that influences public opinion and, for this reason, need to be examined. A second reason is that journalistic texts are readily available and appear to form a relatively similar genre across languages and cultural groups. A third reason they mention is that journalistic texts generally exemplify widely accepted standard forms and are less variable than other writing.
As a research framework, genre has been used widely in contrastive rhetoric studies (Connor, 2003, 2004). One fruitful line of genre studies has been to explore the linguistic as well as rhetorical patterns of particular genres in order to identify their typical structural patterns. The view of genre adopted in this study, however, is not just one of organizational structures. It is also an examination of how and why the genre is produced as it is in the two particular sociocultural settings.

1.2. Aims of the study

This thesis is primarily a cross-cultural and cross-language contrastive genre study. An integrated analytical approach which is informed by systemic functional linguistics, new rhetoric genre studies, critical discourse analysis and other theories in media studies is taken to examine the genre under examination. This study, thus, aims to capture how writers use different rhetorical strategies to achieve particular social purposes, how writers employ different linguistic devices to position themselves in relation to the events of 9/11, as well as how they manipulate the topic and address their readers in the different social contexts.

Connor (2004, p. 293) points out that contrastive rhetoric has, in more recent years, moved to “emphasize the social situation of writing”. As well as analysing what texts may mean, we also need to understand how they construct these meanings. Bazerman and Prior (2004, p.6) propose three questions to guide the analysis of written texts: “What does the text talk about? How do texts influence audiences? And how do texts come into being?” Against such a backdrop, the present study proposes the following main research question:

- How do the Chinese and English writers construct newspaper commentaries on terrorism in Chinese and Australian newspapers?

Both Chinese and English writers referred in this study are all expert writers in their languages. While it can also be assumed that the Chinese writers are all first language
writers, some of the writers of the English newspaper commentaries may be second language writers.

By adopting a contextualised perspective on genre analysis (Kress & Threadgold, 1988; Threadgold, 1989, 1994; Bhatia, 1993, 2004), this study attempts to go beyond the ‘surface structural’ description of organisational patterns of texts, and examines the interpersonal and intertextual aspects of genre construction. That is, by detailed linguistic analyses, it aims to explore how the writers position themselves in relation to the topic, how they manipulate the topic and address their audience, and also how they draw on other sources to construct their own writing. The study also aims to identify possible socio-cultural and socio-political factors that may influence and mediate the textual and intertextual features found in the study.

1.3. Notions relevant to the study

This study analyses the newspaper commentaries at the textual, intertextual and contextual levels. It draws on systemic functional linguistics and rhetoric studies in order to examine textual features of the texts. This includes micro-genres, generic and rhetorical structures, key participants in the texts and authorial stances that reveal how the writers position themselves in relation to the event, manipulate the topic and address their audience. In its intertextual analysis, this study incorporates discussions of intertextuality from the perspectives of systemic functional linguistics and new rhetoric studies to capture this aspect of the genre under investigation. It draws on critical discourse analysis and theories in media studies to explore the roles of the mass media and opinion discourses and how they influence the production of the texts. Some notions that are key to the study are described below.

The first and most important of these is genre. Genre in its broadest sense refers to social action (Miller, 1984). This study takes the newspaper commentaries on terrorism that appeared in China and Australia as a social action that took place in
these two specific social settings. Consequently, the social sphere of the genre under investigation is a major focus. Genre also:

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, p.23).

In other words, a study of genre aims to capture how writers achieve their social purposes by using various structural forms, constructing different focuses and manipulating topics and readers by using various linguistic devices, all of which are aspects of the dynamic and ‘stabilized-for-now’ (Schryer, 1993) status of genres. Genre theories are reviewed in Chapter Three of this thesis.

A number of scholars have provided different definitions of the terms discourse and text. Here I will provide the definitions of these two concepts that are used in the present study. Discourse (Gee, 2005, p.7), refers to language as it is used to enact activities, perspectives, and identities. Discourse in this sense is not just about language use; it is also about activities and identities that have been constructed by the use of language. If we take genre as the general term to capture the social action of newspaper commentaries in this study, it specifically draws our attention to various forms of language use. Discourse in this study, then, focuses on various aspects of language use in reflecting different understandings and interpretations of the events of 9/11. In this vein, Chapter Eight of this thesis explores how discourses of terrorism are represented in the texts from these two different sociocultural settings – China and Australia. Text refers to the physical entity of language use. When we talk about a text, our attention is often on the structure and language of the text.

In order to examine the rhetorical strategies that the writers of newspaper commentaries use in this study, the notion of micro-genre (Martin, 1997) is employed
as a way of categorising texts in the study. This notion is aligned with what Biber (1989) calls text types, that is, a way of classifying texts according to their rhetorical functions, such as explanatory exposition and argumentative exposition. The classification of micro-genres used in this study is presented in Chapter Six.

To examine organisational patterns in the texts, the notions of generic structure and rhetorical structure are employed in the study. Generic structure here refers to the way that particular texts develop typical and recognizable textual structures; that is, the surface stages the texts move through in order to achieve their particular goal such as headline, subheadline, body, and conclusion. Rhetorical structure is a term used to refer to underlying textual structures which account for the stages or steps for realizing rhetorical functions of the texts such as thesis statement, arguments, evidence, and conclusion. Figure 1.1 illustrates the relationship between these two terms as they are used in this study. Here is the example of a letter to the editor, drawn from my previous work on Chinese and English writing.

Figure 1.1. Generic structure and rhetorical structure of a letter to the editor (Wang, 2004, p 78)
Last but not least, the term *intertextuality* is used to account for the interrelationship between texts. Although the notion of intertextuality in its broadest sense offers a perspective on both reading and writing texts as processes of interacting with prior texts, writers, readers, and conventions, this study adopts a narrower view. Here intertextuality is used to focus on how writers draw on other sources to construct their text. A detailed linguistic analysis is employed to illustrate these relationships. The notion of intertextuality is reviewed in Chapter Four.

### 1.4. Significance of the study

This study goes beyond the traditional contrastive rhetoric search for rhetorical patterns and explores other discoursal features such as interpersonal and intertextual aspects of the two sets of texts. The study also explores the relationship between these discoursal features and the socio-cultural and socio-political contexts in which they occur. These explorations are in line with in contextualised perspectives on genre analysis, and recent developments in contrastive rhetoric and critical discourse analysis. Drawing on contrastive rhetoric, systemic functional linguistics, and new rhetoric genre theory, this study uncovers rhetorical preferences and intertextual practices across the two languages and cultures. It also extracts the underlying social and cultural reasons from the discoursal features of the texts by drawing on critical discourse analysis and other theories in media studies. All of this provides a ‘thicker’ picture of the genre under investigation in the hope of fostering cross-cultural understanding of language use in Chinese and English.

Taking newspaper commentaries on terrorism published in China and Australia in the three months after 9/11 as a *tertium comparationis* (a shared platform) (Connor, 2004; Connor & Moreno, 2005), this study examines not only the frequencies of the newspapers commentaries on terrorism in these two socio-cultural settings, but established two comparable sets of data with equal newspaper commentaries published at different levels of circulation in the two socio-cultural settings. This
study draws on different yet complementary theoretical perspectives and analytical frameworks to examine micro-genres, generic and rhetorical structures, key participants, and interpersonal and intertextual practices in these two sets of texts.

At a theoretical level, this study establishes a textual-intertextual-contextual model for analysing genre. This model goes beyond the textual organisation oriented tradition of contrastive rhetoric research, and even beyond contemporary appeals in contrastive rhetoric to focus on text-context relation (Connor, 2004). It considers interpersonal and intertextual features of the genre in relation to its specific socio-cultural and linguistic contexts – an aspect of genre seldom discussed in contrastive rhetoric studies. This model can be adopted and incorporated into other contrastive rhetoric and discourse studies.

Ultimately, this study argues that the more important differences between Chinese and English writing do not lie in the textual organisational features such as circularity and linearity of argument, but in other discursive features such as different micro-genres, and different interpersonal and intertextual devices in constructing a genre in different socio-cultural contexts.

1.5. Structure of the study

The next three chapters of this thesis, Chapters Two, Three, and Four review the literature dealing with substantive and theoretical issues surrounding the study. Chapter Two shows how the current study is linked to prior research as well as indicating the gaps the current study attempts to fulfil. This chapter focuses on the following areas: contrastive rhetoric, previous contrastive studies on Chinese and English writing and previous contrastive studies of media discourse that are related to the present study.

Chapter Three moves to a theoretical review of genre theories from the perspective of applied discourse studies. Genre has been widely used as an analytical approach in
contrastive rhetoric (Connor, 1996, 2002, 2004). This chapter reviews different traditions in genre theories with the aim of laying the ground for the theoretical framework used in the study. This focuses mainly on new rhetoric, systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and English for Specific Purpose (ESP) perspectives on genre analysis.

Chapter Four reviews theoretical frameworks underpinning critical discourse analysis (CDA). Specifically, critical discourse analysis highlights the necessity of exploring the social contexts for understanding discourse. This chapter also reviews different perspectives and approaches to the study of intertextuality. Intertextuality is not only a way in which texts are interrelated, but is also a social practice that involves particular socially regulated ways of producing and interpreting discourse (Fairclough, 1992b,c, 1995b). There is no single approach to analysing the complex phenomena of intertextuality in writing production and interpretation. Approaches to the analysis of intertextuality range from those that focus on linguistic conventions such as White (2002a) and Bazerman (2004) to those that examine social conventions such as Lemke (1995). This review discusses different approaches to the analysis of intertextuality focusing on linguistic conventions such as the work of White (2002a) and Bazerman (2004). Their work provides different linguistic frameworks for analysing the intertextual relations between texts.

Chapter Five presents the overall research methodology for this study. First, it elaborates on the main research question and breaks it into subsidiary questions at the textual, intertextual and contextual levels. Then, the method of data collection and corpus design is presented. Next, the analytical framework used in this study is illustrated and details of how the data will be analysed at the different levels is presented.

Chapters Six, Seven and Eight form the heart of the study. They present the analytical findings of the study at the textual, intertextual and contextual levels respectively.
Chapter Six presents the textual analytical findings of the study. First, this chapter identifies the micro-genres employed in each of the texts. Next, the chapter tracks participants in the texts by carrying out an ‘identification’ (Martin & Rose, 2003) analysis in order to examine which kinds of participants are foregrounded in each text. Finally, the chapter considers the attitudes adopted by the writers towards the topic ‘terrorism’ and their audience by applying an ‘appraisal’ (Martin, 2000, 2004; Martin & Rose, 2003) analysis of each text. In this chapter, only ‘attitude’ and ‘graduation’ in ‘appraisal system’ are considered. ‘Engagement’ of the ‘appraisal system is discussed in Chapter 7 in relation to intertextuality.

Chapter Seven presents the intertextual analysis of the study. Drawing on Bazerman’s (2004) perspective on intertextuality and White’s (1998, 2002a) framework for analysing ‘attribution’ in appraisal systems (Martin, 2000; Martin & Rose, 2003; White, 1998, 2002a), an intertextual analysis is applied to the texts examined in the study. Perspectives on intertextuality presented by Fairclough (1992b, c, 1995b), Goffman (1974, 1981) and Scollon (2004) are incorporated into this intertextual analysis. The patterns of intertextual practice presented in this study are compared and contrasted in the later part of this chapter.

Chapter Eight, the contextual analysis is the final stage of the study. It considers the textual and intertextual findings of the study in relation to their respective socio-cultural and socio-political contexts. In particular, the roles of the media and the discourses of terrorism in each of the particular settings are examined with an attempt to explore how the particular socio-cultural and socio-political contexts mediate and influence the rhetorical and discursive practices found in the two sets of data.

Chapter Nine discusses the analyses as a whole and draws conclusions from the study. It starts with a concluding summary of the analytical findings at the three levels of analysis. Then, the chapter discusses the contributions of the study in relation to three different domains. First, it considers newspaper commentaries on terrorism as social
action in China and Australia. Second, it considers similarities and differences between Chinese and English writing practice. Third, it discusses theoretical contributions to contrastive rhetoric and discourse research presented in the study. This chapter also discusses limitations and constraints of the present study as well as possible directions for further research. Finally, this chapter ends with a conclusion of the thesis.