



Genre Analysis Of Students' English Hard News Story Writing In A Thai EFL University Context

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Abstract

The generic structures of students' hard news stories were analysed in an English for Journalism course. The course lecturer used some material on hard news and feature stories to teach students how to write such stories. More specially, this study focused on the genre analysis of some hard news stories written by 154 students participating in the project. The detailed analysis of the generic structures was based on three selected student texts with one from each of high, mid and low levels. The analysis was based on hard news generic structures identified in a systemic functional linguistics framework. The findings indicated that all samples wrote their own hard news stories effectively to varying degrees. They could construct texts that mostly conformed to the typical generic structures identified in the literature. It was also found that they could use language structures such as clause complexity effectively on average but some structures still needed further developments. In addition, other language structure developments were needed for all groups of students so they could write more interesting, compelling and complete stories. Therefore, a recommended action is frequent writing practices for students and applications of local and world current news stories to be integrated into the syllabus to further develop students' writing proficiency and news repertoire. In future courses, there should be greater integration of training and modelling on the teaching and learning cycle, resources of appraisal framework and the metafunctions of systemic functional linguistics; experiential, interpersonal and textual functions.

Keywords: genre analysis, hard news story writing, journalism, Thai EFL context.

1. Introduction

Writing a news story as news discourse is a sophisticated, communicative and rhetorical genre that can improve students' language abilities. This type of writing requires more continuous training and practice as it involves different modes of segmental developments which are related to the preparation and creation of authorial voice, linguistic structures and journalistic styles which are different from other kinds of writing (Dijk, 1988). In a global context, this important issue has been explored extensively as news and media discourse (Dijk 1988, Fairclough 1995, Benarek & Caple 2012, 2017, Kress & Leeuwen 2001). However, in the Thai EFL university context, there have been no reported studies attempting to explore how students write hard news stories based on generic structures and media discourse. Most studies (Charoonthawatchai 2011, Kongpetch 2006, Srinon 2011, 2019, 2020, Mingsakoon and Srinon, 2019) investigated the generic developments of academic essays rather than the writing productivity in mass media communication such as hard news story. Specifically, no studies have attempted to analyse

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hard news stories written by Thai EFL students in terms of generic structure developments and linguistic resources. Therefore, this study focused on how students develop their own writing on hard news stories as assigned in a university course on English for Journalism provided to students who majored in English. It is argued that the generic structure potential and development is essential for writing a hard news story. It is a central focus when the news story is constructed. Therefore, in this study, the notion of genre analysis together with linguistic resources based on the Sydney genre-based school and systemic functional linguistics are integrated as the main theoretical framework to analyse students' news story writing (Martin and Rose 1994, Feez, Iedema and White, 2008).

1.1 Literature review

It is argued that media genre literacy is important to students at university level because it motivates them to learn how to read and write news stories. Many studies (Erjavec 2009, Lunberg 2001, Feez, Iedema and White 2008) advocate that media genre literacy plays a major role in better worldwide communication in different contexts. In a linguistic context, language experts and linguists (Jabbari and Farokhipour 2014) investigated the role of genre literacy in media and found that it is very important because people learn and perceive media information from the clear presentation of the writers. Therefore, in this study, it is proposed that genre analysis of hard news stories leads to better understanding on how to develop students' competency in news story writing. In this literature review, some issues related to this study are reviewed as follows.

1.1.1 Genre analysis and systemic functional linguistics

Genre is a term used to refer to a text type which serves a particular purpose in a situation or context. Martin (1984) stated that a genre is "a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our cultures". In this regard, Martin and Rose (2003) further proposed that a genre is a staged, goal-oriented social process. They argue that it is the 'social' effect because we participate in genres with other people; and it is 'goal-oriented' because people use a genre to get something done and they consider it to be 'staged' because it usually takes a few steps to reach the goal. In addition, Martin (2009) argues that it is 'staged' because it usually takes more than one phase of meaning to work through and people feel a sense of frustration or incompleteness if stopped and it is 'social' because genres involve interacting with others. In the current study, genre analysis on hard news stories is essential because once student writers can achieve generic structures in a hard news story, they can achieve their goal of communication in media literacy.

In systemic functional linguistics, it is argued that news story genre writing is based on some main metafunctions: 1) experiential function deals with what is happening in our world, 2) interpersonal function deals with how people communicate from their position and 3) textual function deals with how the text is constructed (Martin and White 2005, White 2008). In addition, White (2008) proposed that the generic structures of the hard news story consisted of three main parts: 1) introduction, comprising a lead, 2) body, comprising a series of event reporting in the news body and 3) conclusion, comprising an ending of the story. Therefore, in this study, the analysis is based on these entities which are the main components of the news generic structures.

1.1.2 Hard news story writing

Writing a hard news story is a requirement for students in the fields of English, media, linguistics and applied linguistics. A hard news story is a text type that needs special training and practice as it involves special characteristics involving facts being reported in a systemic view. It is argued by researchers (White 2012, Martin and White 2005, Dijk 1988) that news story is a genre which is constructed from multiple inquiries of resources such as situations, interviews and field study where all information is gathered systematically. In the current study, the samples had never learnt how to write a hard news story; therefore, it was presumed that the samples would acquire their learning writing skills from the course material provided in the study.

1.1.3 Studies on hard news writing and genre analysis

The literature contains many studies undertaken within the news and media communication and the genre literacy. Tongsibsong (2012) investigated a genre analysis of English editorials regarding hard

news in broadsheet and tabloid newspapers focusing on move analysis. The aims of the study were to investigate the structural organization of those editorials through examination of common move structures, similar and different attributes in the move structures of the genre, and the communicating intentions of the genre. The data consisted of 30 English editorial texts from broadsheet newspapers and 30 texts from tabloid newspapers. Analysis of the moves revealed that there was one common move structure in the broadsheet newspaper editorials consisting of four moves. In the editorials of the tabloid newspapers, there were two common move structures of which the first was similar to the structure in the broadsheet newspaper editorials. However, Tongsibsong found that the second common move structure was different. Six similar features were found in the genre analysis of the editorials in the broadsheet and tabloid newspapers: 1) the total number of moves found in texts of both *The Washington Post* and *New York Post*, 2) the number of common moves, 3) the number of optional moves, 4) the communicative purposes of common moves, 5) the communicative purposes of an optional move and 6) the writing style of the text. In addition, there were three different features in the texts: 1) the number of common moves, 2) the number of common move structures and 3) consistency of a common move structure. Furthermore, the study identified that the communicating intentions in the genre of English editorials are mainly to motivate and persuade readers to consider ideas or to give opinions that oppose or support the information provided in those editorials, as well as to express strong opinions in order to stimulate some reaction from readers.

Jabbari and Farokhipour (2014) conducted a contrastive genre analysis between English newspapers written in Iran and in the USA in order to find the major rhetorical similarities and differences between them. The analysis was based on a corpus of 120 news reports from two sets of newspapers (*Iran Daily* and *Tehran Times* from Iran and *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* from the USA). Utilizing an analytical framework, the researchers analysed the variability of rhetorical and structural patterns within the Iranian and US news reports. It concluded that these news reports were different in their rhetorical and structural organizations because in the Iranian news reports, unlike their American counterparts, certain moves were absent due to their different position, purpose and institutional practice. Consequently, this study provided pedagogical implications for teaching journalistic English, EFL students and teachers and news translators.

Lunburg (2001) described a genre analysis for on-line newspapers, revealing how their mediating form affected news-related activities. During the analysis, a repertoire of elements was developed to describe three on-line newspapers. The repertoire consisted of content, information structure and interaction elements together with a repertoire of mediation roles. The analysis in terms of the repertoire of elements revealed that the papers supported activities that were not supported by the printed papers, constituting a genre development. The analysis suggested that the genre was still a variant of the newspaper. It revealed a considerable space for development of the genre, supporting novel news-related activities. However, it also revealed some problems which had to be overcome by the mediators, if the papers were to be developed along the suggested line. Furthermore, it revealed some problems when using these popular formats for other purposes at other sites, as well as problems with their current treatment of the digital material.

In another context of news genre analysis, Bonyadi (2012) explored the moves used in the editorials for certain communicative purposes. The results of the study indicated that newspaper editorials make use of certain moves that are usually textually realized through specific linguistic forms. The study suggested some pedagogical implications for EFL/ESP teachers.

White (2012) explored the axiological workings of 'reporter voice' news stories (attribution and attitudinal positioning). He argued that understanding those texts could be enhanced by referencing some key insights emerging from what is termed the 'appraisal framework', involving an approach to the analysis of the evaluative language developed within the Systemic Functional Linguistics paradigm of Michael Halliday and his associates. White further argued that understanding of the workings of these texts could be enhanced by referencing proposals in the appraisal literature with respect to as White termed it 'implicit' or 'invoked' attitude and by reference to an account of attribution and so-called

'evidentiality' which is grounded in the Bakhtinian notion of dialogism, rather than in notions of truth functionality and certainty-of-knowledge claims.

From the review of the literature, most studies were involved in move analysis rather than generic structure which is identified in the Sydney genre-based school and systemic functional linguistics. In addition, no studies were undertaken in the context of hard news story writing in the EFL classroom. Most studies of genre analysis of news stories were investigated in the professional contexts of journalism and media outside the classroom context and the student writer. Therefore, the current study attempted to fulfil this gap in the EFL context and anticipated the applications of the genre analysis and systemic functional linguistics as a guide for those in the SFL community or in other fields related to the development of student writing.

1.1.3 *Research questions*

1.2.1 What are the generic structures of hard news stories written by Thai EFL students?

1.2.2 What are the linguistic resources used in hard news stories by Thai EFL students?

2. **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this project was to analyse the generic structures of the hard news stories written by Thai EFL students. The study also involved the analysis of language features and linguistics resources used in the students' hard news stories associated with a literacy-development syllabus which focused on the verbal styles, the text types and the communicative purposes associated with news, current affairs and lifestyle journalism, especially in the writing genre of hard news story.

The project involved a longitudinal study of the literacy development of students participating in a course deploying these materials. While this study focused in part on the general issues of vocabulary development and grammatical accuracy, the primary focus was on tracking developments in the students' ability to meet the particular communicative demands associated with mass communicative texts, for example, their ability to deal with news media-related experiential domains, to construct appropriately staged texts (generic structures) and to produce texts which are interpersonally appropriate and effective.

3. **Method**

One of the authors (as the lecturer) presented the course and materials through different stages of news story writing which covered hard news stories and feature writing in the second semester of the 2013 academic year at the English Division, Faculty of Liberal Arts and Science, Kasetsart University, Kamphaeng Saen campus, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand. Teaching and learning on writing news story were mainly based on the concept of genre which focused on three main stages: modelling of the text, joint construction of the text and independent of the text, as discussed in the Sydney genre-based school (Martin and Rose, 1994). The teaching and learning also used the typical structures of news such as the Glass Hour theory to develop the skills of students in news story writing. The analysis was based on samples from course work done by fourth-year students majoring in English.

3.1. *Sample/Participants*

The study period involved the first seven weeks of the English for Journalism course taught in the second semester of the 2014 academic year at the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Science, Kasetsart University, Kamphaeng Saen campus, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand. Three groups of students majoring in English were involved in the study: Group 700 (51 students), Group 809 (48 students) and Group 810 (55 students) equalling 154 in total.

3.2. *Instruments*

The syllabus used in the class was based on the text produced in China (Peking University, 2008). The book covers writing a hard news story and features. The lecturer followed the guidelines in the book but created new assignments more suited to current situations familiar to the students. Supplementary materials consisting of news stories extracted for newspapers current at the time the course was presented and a PowerPoint presentation detailing the principles of writing a news story were added to the teaching and learning processes.

3.3. *Data collection procedures*

The students were asked to work in small teams (4 to 5 per team). Each team produced a hard news story that were collected at the end of the six weeks of the teaching and learning process. In each of the three groups, three stories were selected based on the standard of English writing (high, mid, low) according to their use of the genre-based perspective and linguistic resources such as sentence construction and clause complexity. Subsequently, detailed analysis was undertaken on the best story in each group (3 stories in total).

3.4. *Data analysis*

The three samples of hard news stories were analysed in terms of the generic structure and language features.

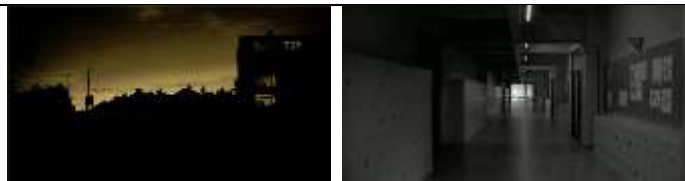
4. **Results**

The findings and interpretation from the analysis of the three chosen texts from the students are presented in the following sections.

4.1 Group 1 hard news story analysis and findings

Table 1. Analysis of News story 1 (actual student text)

Headline	Heavy rain causes the power outage in the University
Lead	"On Sunday night, it had heavy rain at Kasetsart Kamphaengsaen Campus and it made a power outage then the students were in trouble" The guard, said.
Body 1 (main event 1) Body 2 (main event 2)	Kasetsart Kamphaengsaen, September 13 th at 8.30 pm. In Kasetsart Kamphaengsan's dormitory had heavy rain and storm. It caused a big problem to the student. The tree fell and hit the electricity post then it made the power outage. The power outage stayed for 6 hours. The student can't go outside because of the rain and it made all of student who lived in dormitory feel very bad. The heavy rain made many trouble like the repair mans were hard to come in for repair the electronic because the tree blocked the way then the students must sleep and can't charge their mobile phone for the next day because of power outage. So some student went to friend's dormitory. Next, the electronic came back at 2.00 am and it became to regularly situation.
Point elaboration	"Unfortunately, I have to review a Japanese for tomorrow's quiz, but it can't see anything." Nisachol student of the Kasetsart University, said.
Point elaboration	"I'm taking a shower and then everything came into the dark. I'm very scared." Thunchanok student of the Kasetsart University, said.
Conclusion	No one was injured from the storm. KU KPS official noticed the student in the University that avoided the route and used other way. Finally, the electricity came back at 2 am.
Photos (provided by the student team)	



4.1.1 Human activity and interests

From the analysis, it is observed that the students produced their stories from their different interests which focus on human activities and social topics. The students wrote different news stories upon their interests as an individual and group such as natural phenomenon, car accidents, student university life etc. This trend of writing news stories is discussed as the typical genre which are related to metafunctions; field, mode, tenor. In this regard, Field (what) refers to institutional setting in which a piece of language occurs, and embraces not only the subject-matter in hand but the whole activity of the speaker or participant in a setting; Tenor (who) refers to the relationship between participants, not merely variety in formality; Mode (how) refers to text construction, looking at whether it is based on written or spoken form of communication. When analysing the new stories written by all groups of the students, all groups of students presented different news generic structures as follows;

4.1.1 News story headline and lead

The students presented the headline first as “Heavy rain cause the power outage in the University”. However, the headline has a broken form for its verb. For the generic structure analysis, the students presented the headline line first, then the lead and the body and the conclusion, respectively. In detail, the students presented the headline with a single clause that is structurally broken. For the lead, they presented it with some words that indicated the outage of electricity on the Kamphaeng Saen campus. To analyse the quality of the headline, it is observed that the student presented the headline quite effectively in terms of clarity and language use. The student presented the headline in the present tense which is correct in terms of the news headline pattern studied in class.

4.1.2 News story body

The students presented the body of the news story by presenting the brief of the news. It is like a background to the story. Then, they presented a series of how the story related to the heavy rain and electrical outage, respectively. However, to present the story with on-the-spot reality, the students quoted the view of the people who were affected by the event. From the presentation of the student’s body of the news story, it is observed that the body was presented with a clear generic structure containing two bodies and a series of elaborations.

4.1.3 News story conclusion

At the end of the story, the students presented the conclusion by referring to the warning and the notice of the KU KPS official about the electrical outage and then ended the story by referring back to the normal situation for electricity. It is observed that the student presented the conclusion quite well and the events were summarized comprehensively.


4.1.4 Generic structure development and linguistic development in the news story

The student constructed the generic structure effectively. The story was constructed in the form of a pyramid in which the most important information was presented first down to the least important. From the analysis, the students presented the text effectively according to the format of a typical news story. However, the text was poorly constructed in terms of language use. Even though it met the required generic structures, the language use was not fully developed. It is argued that in this case, knowledge of linguistic development still needs further development.

In terms of linguistic development, it is observed that the student presented the language structure well in terms of clause complexity and sentence construction. Nonetheless, there are some errors in their writing.

4.2 Group 2 hard news story analysis and findings

Table 2. Analysis of News story 2

Headline	Damaged pick-up under crash with caravan	
Lead	A long-truck crashed into a pick-up in Nakhon Pathom caused two people injured yesterday.	
Body 1 (main event 1)	According to the police report, two people injured in the pick-up are Supawat Dindukorn and his son, Supakrit Dindukorn. Their heads were hit by the mirror of their car severely. Moreover, his son's leg was broken and he has been in coma at a hospital.	
Body 2 (main event 2)	A witness, Somsak Damdee, who saw this accident, said "The accident happened around 7.30 am. While I was driving, I saw a long-truck turned right immediately. Then, the pick-up was coming so fast and it crashed into the truck across another street isle."	
Conclusion	The police investigated and charged the driver of the long-truck, Kritsada Madee. He was 35-years-old. He told the police that he drove fast to follow the truck which was in front of him. He further explained that he didn't see the truck which was coming slowly. Then, he could not stop and he turned right immediately and crashed into the pick-up car.	

4.2.1 Headline and lead

The students presented news about a car accident. The story was introduced by the headline. Then, the students presented the lead with a sentence giving some brief detail about what, when, and who. From the headline and the lead, it is observed that the students made good use of the typical news story structure studied in the class. However, in the lead, the writers did not include all elements of 5W, as although the What, Where, When and Who are provided, the Why is missing.

4.2.2 The body of the news story

Then, the students presented the body of the story which described the event. The students quoted the story by referring to the source (the police). In the second body of the story, the students presented the witness's quote that elaborated on the incident. From the body, it is observed that the writers attempted to narrate the story by referring to people involved such as the police and a witness to make the story flow in a good manner.

4.2.3 Conclusion of the news story

The students ended the story by referring to the police summary of the incident. Most sentences are constructed in terms of reported speech in which the police and the driver were identified.

4.2.4 Generic structure development and linguistic development in the news story

The students developed the generic structure of hard news story effectively. Then, the students presented the language structures well in terms of linguistic variation. The structure used in the headline was well organized as a noun phrase. It indicates the stylistic features of the hard news story which highlights the main points of the story. It is observed that the writers attempted to focus on the main point by using the noun phrase in context. For the lead, the students used the simple past tense to narrate the story. In the

body, the students presented the series of the story using the simple past tense also which included the structure of the passive voice.

In the next paragraph, the students presented the rest of the story by referring to the witness. They mainly used the simple past tense to elaborate the story. Interestingly, the students used a quotation by the witness to present the event which follows the guideline of writing a news story. At the end of the story, the students presented the story by using the simple past tense and reported speech as indicated in the text. The structures were construed quite well in terms of reporting the story.

4.3 Group 3 hard news story analysis and findings

Table 2. Analysis of News story 3

Headline	Increasing Number of Off-campus Dorms, KU-KPS
Lead	Off-campus dormitories have grown up because of the increasing number of freshmen and insufficient on-campus dorms, said a businessman.
Body 1 (episode 1)	In 2014, since the number of the freshmen increases one fold from the last year and on-campus dorms are not enough to the student, the seniors have to move out to off-campus dorms because of the facilities they offer—refrigerator, cable TV, wifi, air-conditioner.
Body 2 (episode 2)	Mr.Komsan, the owner of PP dormitory said that “the investment of dorms has great opportunity to succeed and the number of freshmen will increase continuously each year, so now my new dorms are under construction.
Body 3 (episode 3)	Amonrat, the first year student, said that “on-campus has not enough facilities such as refrigerator and TV. And it is not private; I have to share my room with other students. Another 3rd student said “Even though on-campus dorms’ cost per semester is cheaper than off-campus around 3000baht, the register system of on-campus dorms is boring. Last year almost half of the rooms are available for the seniors, so the seniors have to draw luck to get the rooms or to move out.”
Conclusion (episode 4)	Off-campus dorms of KU-KPS tend to increase continuously in the future and the competition of off-campus dorms business will be more violent, so the owner business of dorms has to accommodate the facilities for attracting the students.

4.3.1 Headline and lead

The students of this group presented the news about the increasing number of off-campus dormitories for the Kasetsart University, Kamphaeng Saen campus. The news covers the situation of dormitory building business to facilitate the number of freshmen at the university. The writers of this news story set the headline “Increasing Number of Off-campus Dorms, KU-KPS” which is in a phrase form.

4.3.2 The body of the news story

From the analysis, the students in this group set the body into three paragraphs. The first episode is the background of the situation of student numbers and the dormitory business around the campus. The next episode is an interview of a businessman about the dormitory business. The next episode covers an interview of a student regarding living in the dormitory. In general, the student writers of this news story presented the body well.

4.3.3 Conclusion of the news story

From the analysis, the students in this group concluded the story in one paragraph detailing that “*Off-campus dorms of KU-KPS tend to increase continuously in the future and the competition of off-campus dorms business will be more violent, so the owner business of dorms has to accommodate the facilities for attracting the students.*” This demonstrates that the student writers attempted to summarize the story by way of a prediction regarding the dormitory business to attract students in the future. It is observed that the student writers wrote the story effectively to some degree.

4.3.4 Generic structure development and linguistic development in the news story

The students developed the generic structure of the hard news story effectively to some degree. That is, they presented the language structures in terms of reporting genre well in terms of linguistic resources such as clause complexity and the use of the tenses. The structure of the headline was presented in the form of a noun phrase covering the story which meets the basic requirement of headline construction. It is observed that the student writers attempted to focus on the main point by using some key words such as increasing and off campus dorms to cover the story well. For the lead, the students used the present perfect tense to narrate the story. In the body, the students presented the series of the story by mostly using the simple past tense for narration.

In the concluding episode, the students presented the story using the simple past tense, future tense and complex sentences. The structures were construed quite effectively in terms of the language structures needed for the reporting style with authorial voicing at the end of the story. This shows that the student writers could apply what they learnt in the class in their news story writing.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

From the analyses of the three texts, the students presented the texts effectively in terms of the generic structure of the news story and the language features needed for the news reporting genre. It is concluded that all three texts of the student writers were fully developed and well-constructed although there were some incomplete language structures to some degree. The analysis indicated that some students needed further development on writing a good news story while others could use the basic components of writing a hard news story. Therefore, the study outcomes are summarised in the following.

5. 1 All the samples could write their hard news story effectively in terms of typical generic structures of the stories. However, there were some aspects in which their generic structures differed. The high group could produce text which mostly conformed to the typical generic structures identified in the literature, whereas the other two groups produced text that only partly conformed to the typical generic structures. This demonstrates that the levels of generic structure of news story writing and the perceptions of the students in each group were different. This may have resulted from some effects in the teaching and learning process in class. It is argued that this results in some difference in students' learning of news repertoire.

5.2 All groups of the students could use suitable language structures suitable in their writing, although some poor structures were observed and needed further development. This demonstrates that the course was effective to some degree. Interestingly, the student writers could demonstrate the authorial voice effectively, thus meeting the basic requirements for writing a hard news story and media discourse.

6. Recommendations and implications

6.1 From the analyses of the texts, it is recommended that the teacher or the department should provide a continuing course on journalistic writing or English in Mass Media for students every semester. This should further develop the skills of the students in English writing through news stories or other related topics. It is also recommended that the teacher should provide students with some training by or via special seminars from people with related skills and experience in field work associated with mass media or newspapers, such as inviting journalists and news reporters from both Thai and foreign news agencies to address the students. This should help expose students to the direct experience of those who have direct and special knowledge and expertise on writing a news story.

6.2 It is also suggested that future research should involve a larger corpus of student texts to ensure that the analysis and interpretation are more valid. In addition, it is suggested that the issue of clause complexity should be discussed in the future study as it will help to improve understanding on meaning and the ways in which students can construe the context of the new stories in different situations and fields.

6.3 It is recommended that students' news stories should be promoted through different media such as websites or social networks to expose their performance and ability to the broader public. This will help generate student writer pride and motivation as well as long-term writing development as some researchers (for example, White 2002, 2012 and Srinon, 2011) suggest that writing can be developed through different kinds of text types, media and genres.

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