

## THE CONCEPT OF REGISTER AND FILIPINO

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

In preparing this paper I have been very much aware of the fact that I am not a sociolinguist or a language planner and, because of this, that I have very little credibility in discussing the issues of intellectualization and language planning. I will limit my role therefore to providing input from the field of language teaching, particularly from the perspective of English for Specific Purposes, a field of language teaching that came into existence out of the awareness that people do not speak *a* language but *varieties* of a language and that learning a language therefore means learning to use the language variety that is appropriate to the situation or to one's purpose. This is register simply put.

But appropriateness has other dimensions aside from the formal linguistic dimension, or the dimension of sounds, words, and sentence and paragraph structures. It is a fact that knowledge specialists have chosen for themselves the task of understanding and explaining different aspects of reality, and for these tasks they need ways of investigating and talking about these realities. When these ways of investigating and communicating specific realities become sufficiently conventionalized, they acquire linguistic status and are called registers.

This paper will discuss registers from the vantage point of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), particularly English for Science and Technology (EST). This decision was motivated by the fact that ESP is my particular area of interest and the fact that EST is the most studied register owing to its long history (long as far as the history of register studies go) and its acceptance as a crucial register for the learning and doing of science and technology worldwide.

In this discussion of register, we will first define and characterize it and then we will review the trends in register studies following the time frame used by Cheong (1976). Four examples of register studies are discussed to illustrate the trends of the past 35 years. Following a description of these developments in ESP, we explore the future

Diagram 1  
Suggested Categories of Diatypic Variety Differentiation

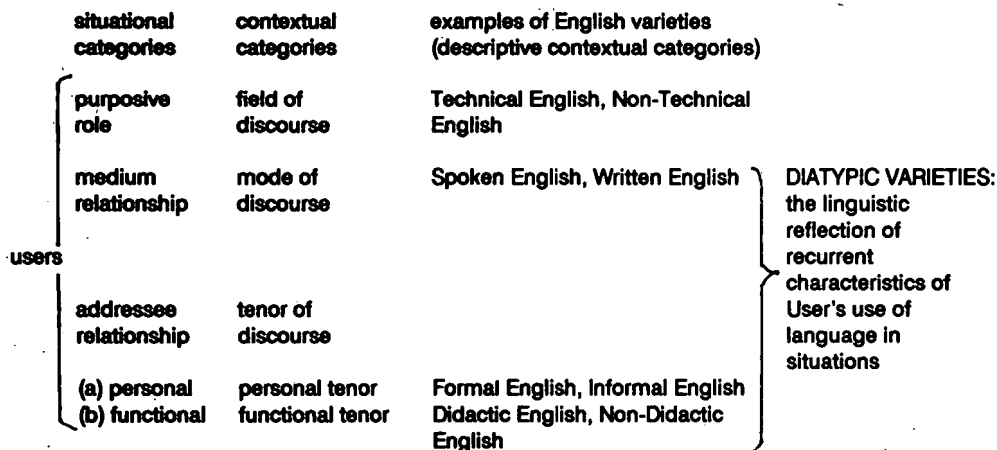
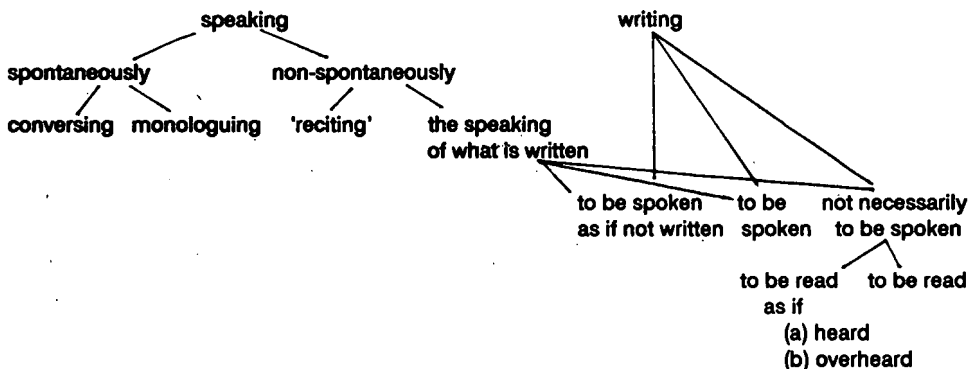


Diagram 2  
Suggested Distinctions along the Dimension of Situation Variation Categorized as User's Medium Relationship



direction of register studies and argue why a certain direction needs to be taken. Finally, we attempt to relate the experience and implications of register studies to the cultivation and dissemination of Filipino.

## 2. REGISTER DEFINED AND CHARACTERIZED

Although several people have attempted to define register, these definitions have not made any more specific the original definition given by Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens (1964). In their *The Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching*, they define register as the 'variety of language differentiated according to use' (77) as opposed to dialect, which is the variety of language differentiated according to user. They assert that it is the *formal* properties that define register, specifically its lexis and grammar, although they admit that the grammatical distinctions are not the most critical except in such registers as newspaper headlines, advertising, and the like.

Halliday et al. (1964) characterize register as having the following dimensions: field of discourse, mode of discourse and style of discourse. *Field of discourse* refers to

'the nature of the whole event of which the language activity forms a part'. Considering this dimension, we can then talk about two broad categories of register: technical and non-technical. *Mode of discourse*, on the other hand, distinguishes between written and spoken register, while *style of discourse* distinguishes registers according to participant relations. Thus, we may talk about casual, intimate, and formal or polite registers.

Still maintaining the framework put forth by Halliday et al. (1964), Strevens (1977) adds pronunciation among the formal properties that define register. He gives sports commentaries on radio and TV, oratory and public speaking, flight announcements at airports, and auctioneering as examples of registers defined primarily by features of pronunciation.

Building on the studies of Halliday et al. (1964) and Catford (1965), Gregory (1967) introduces the term *diatypic varieties* to refer to register, which he defines as 'the linguistic reflection of recurrent characteristics of the user's USE of language in situations'. In Gregory's account, style is now called *tenor*, a decidedly more appropriate term, and mode of discourse is given the elaboration which other writers before him had not done. Gregory's two diagrams categorizing register and elaborating on mode respectively are reproduced in Diagram 1.

Other works that discuss the nature of register but are not included in our presentation are Ure (1969), White (1974), and Palmer (1981).

Several questions arise from the definitions of register given so far. Are the three dimensions of field, mode, and tenor of equal value, or is any one more determinant of register than the others? Given a set of instances of language use, how does one determine whether these instances constitute one register or several registers? What constellation of features must be present before a separate register can be established? Some of these questions will be taken up again later in this paper. These questions notwithstanding, the validity of register as a linguistic construct is no longer questioned by linguists.

### 3. TRENDS IN THE STUDY OF REGISTERS

In this section we will use Cheong (1976) as a convenient framework for discussing the developments in register studies in the past three decades. Cheong divides the history of the linguistic study of English and Science and Technology (the EST register) into four periods: the pre-linguistic period, the linguistic analysis of lexicon and the linguistic analysis of syntax periods, and the discourse analysis period. The beginning of the first period is not ascertained, although Cheong suggests that it continued until the 1950s. This period was characterized by the attempt to make the language of science the object of appreciation in the same way that the language of literature was. The second period was characterized by frequency counts of vocabulary in scientific and technical texts and the study of word-formation patterns of scientific and technical words. This trend prevailed up to the early 1970s. The third period might perhaps be considered the beginning of linguistically legitimate register study, although, like the second period, frequency counting of items remained the predominant methodology used.

The more interesting work on register started in the early 1970s when the concern of analysts went beyond the sentence and into paragraphs and whole discourse types. This was also the time when Selinker and Trimble, the pillars of what became in the ESP circles as the Washington School, began publishing the results of their studies on the interaction between semantic notions and grammatical and rhetorical principles.

Since the last study discussed by Cheong (1976) was published in 1974, we will now discuss some studies that were done after this period. But before that, we reproduce in the following page Cheong's summary of trends in EST studies.

TABLE 1. Trends in the Study of EST

Level	Variable	School	Strategy	Advocate
General	Style/ Sensibility	Literary Traditional	Interpretation and Criticism	Leavis, Snow Savory, Rapoport
Word	Lexicon	Lexical- Semantic, Structural	Word Frequency Word-structure	Hogben, West, Flood Kucera-Francis Cowan et al.
Clause/ Sentence	Syntax	Structural T-G	-Frequency of patterns -deep-surface structure relationship	-Simpson, Barber, McConochie, Cowan et al.
		Systematic	-system-structure	Huddleston et al., Strevens, Gopnik
Inter Sentence /Paragraph	Conceptual Structure	Discourse Analysis	Rules of use/ rhetorical Plan (grammatical cohesion and rhetorical coherence)	Hasan, Gopnik, Widdowson, Selinker et al., Jones, Mackay Mountford

The studies which we will discuss were chosen at random to represent register studies between 1974 and 1987.

Bautista (1976) is a study of style, which she defines as 'the writer's recurrent exercise of certain syntactic options', and which Palmer (1981) categorizes as a subvariety of register in the same way that idiolect is a subvariety of dialect. She compared the styles of scientific and literary writing, using a corpus taken from three chemistry textbooks and three essays in a literature textbook. The T-units (or base clauses) of the corpus were isolated and the free modifiers (initial, medial, and final) counted. Her results show that literary writing uses more free modifiers than scientific writing (35% of total number of words in literary writing against 29% in scientific writing) and that literary writers use more final modifiers (58.82% against 29.33%). Scientific writers, on the other hand, use more initial modifiers (59% against 24.11%). From these results, Bautista then makes a recommendation to the effect that

...students in technical courses will need training in the use of free modifiers; students in the humanities and creative writing courses will need more training in the writing of cumulative sentences, sentences characterized by a lot of free modifiers at the end.

Without doubt this descriptive study has contributed to the understanding of the *what* of scientific and literary writing but it has offered nothing in the more important area of *why*--why a writer chooses one option and not the other. And since both kinds of writers--the scientific and the literary--use initial and final modifiers, it must be explained why in some sentences the initial modifiers are used and why in others the final modifiers are preferred.

Tarone et al. (1981) is a study of the use of the passive in two articles published in *The Astrophysical Journal*, both of which discuss the same topic--black hole accretion disks. Because of their very limited corpus and the specific logical framework in which their corpus is organized, the authors are cautious about generalizing their findings to apply to papers with different objectives and with different organizing frameworks.

Their frequency count shows that in these two articles the active verb forms are used much more frequently than the passive verbs, averaging 85% of all verbs, and that the active first person *we* verb form is used in strategic points. What these strategic points are are explained in the generalizations that they arrived at:

**Generalization I:** Writers of astrophysics journal papers tend to use the first person active *we* form to indicate points in the logical development of the argument where they have made a unique procedural choice; the passive seems to be used when the authors are simply following established or standard procedures, as in using accepted equations or describing what logically follows from their earlier procedural choice.

**Generalization IIA:** When these authors contrast their own research, they use the first person plural active for their own work, and the passive for the work being contrasted.

**Generalization IIB:** When these authors cite other contemporary work which is not in contrast to their own, they generally use the active form of the verb.

**Generalization III:** When these authors refer to their own proposed future work, they use the passive.

**Generalization IV:** The use of active as opposed to passive forms of the verbs seems to be conditioned by discursal functions of focus or by excessive length of certain sentence elements (201).

The authors suggest that the above generalizations, especially Generalizations I to III, need to be verified for other genres, which might differ in purpose and in logical development from the two papers that they investigated.

Tarone et al. (1981) is an example of the new development in register studies where frequency counts are still important but no longer take center stage. The register analyst is now much more interested in finding reasons for the presence or absence of certain items or features or why certain syntactic options are preferred over others. This is an example also of what Swales (1985) calls 'educationally relevant' research--research that is not only insightful but also relevant to the needs of the classroom.

Swales (1983) grew out of the author's dissatisfaction with teaching materials that deal with the writing of article Introductions. The study involved the analysis of 48 article Introductions from the 'hard sciences', Biology and Medicine and Social Science. This particular report of the study does not give a detailed picture of findings, but the author discusses two educationally relevant and important conclusions:

The discourse structure of article Introductions is predominantly a 4-move schema:

- |            |   |                                  |
|------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Move One   | - | Establishing the field           |
| Move Two   | - | Summarizing previous research    |
| Move Three | - | Preparing for present research   |
| Move Four  | - | Introducing the present research |
2. 'Article Introductions are essentially exercises in public relations'.

The main portion of the article discusses these two conclusions in detail.

The value of studies such as this lies in their ability to explain the communicative intent of the writer--surely a more helpful guide to learners than studies that simply concentrate on the formal properties of the language.

Like the Tarone et al. (1981) study, the last of the register studies to be discussed also used corpus from one discipline--pediatrics. It examined twenty experimental reports in order to find out 'whether tense usage in EST discourse is governed by (a) rhetorical functions unique to a particular genre... or (b) the same temporal meaning governing tense choice in General English'. To do this, she found it necessary to distinguish rhetorical functions into whether they fall on the referential axis of orientation or on the deictic axis. The referential axis covers the tasks involved in reporting an experiment--from describing procedures to relating findings to existing theories or principles or positing new theories or principles on the basis of findings. The deictic axis, on the other hand, points to the interaction between the writer and the reader, manifested in such expressions as 'Table I displays...', 'This paper asserts that...', etc.

Another dual concept that Malcolm (1987) posited in her attempt to find viable explanations for tense usage in scientific writing is the concept of *obligatory constraints*, which restricts the verb to only one temporal meaning, and the concept of *strategic choices*, which allows the writer to choose the temporal perspective he/she wants. Malcolm argues that tense usage in EST is more complex than our traditional understanding of it--that it is constrained not only by the temporal location of events but also by such factors as genre, deixis, and the rhetorical purpose of the writer.

From this brief review of register studies covering a period of approximately 35 years, it is clear that developments in this field have been dictated by trends in linguistic theory-building. The shift in the preoccupation with form to preoccupation with the relationship between form and meaning was brought about by the change in the understanding of the nature and purpose of language and by the results of research in language acquisition.

These developments have also affected the methodology of register studies. Early register studies focused on form and relied only on quantitative methodology, whereas recent studies, which focus on communicative purpose and organization, have by necessity adopted qualitative methods of research.

#### 4. THE FUTURE OF REGISTER STUDIES

Recent publications on register hardly use the term *register* anymore. In fact none of the studies reviewed uses the terminology. This could be interpreted as symptomatic of either one of the following situations: the term has been so widely accepted and understood that a label is no longer necessary, or register analysts have become aware of the problems of generalizing their findings and have found it safer to use the term *discourse analysis*, which is really more descriptive of methodology than of corpus. Whichever the case, it is clear that register studies, under whatever name they will be known, will continue to be done because, although descriptions of languages as *systems* abound, descriptions of language use in situations are still sadly lacking.

While writing about EST and not about registers in general, Swales (1985) suggests that genre (in the sense that Tarone et al. (1981) and Malcolm (1987) use the term), which he defines as 'a more or less standardized communicative event with a goal or set of goals mutually understood by the participants in that event and occurring within a functional rather than a social or personal setting', might be a more manageable target of analysis 'for it is only within genres that language is sufficiently conventionalized, and the communicative purpose sufficiently narrow, for us to establish pedagogically-employable generalizations that will capture useful relationships between function and form'.

There is much wisdom in this suggestion. Understandably, researchers have greater confidence generalizing about genres within registers, e.g. the experiment report,

than generalizing about registers, e.g. science and technology. It is easier to understand how experiment reports across the science disciplines are similar than to generalize about what is common among, for example, experiment reports, survey of related literature, and abstracts in Biology.

Genre-analysis will also make the issue of adequacy and representativeness of corpus irrelevant. The chance of specialists agreeing whether a piece of discourse is typical or representative of a particular genre is greater than the chance of getting them to agree whether a set of discourses from different register is representative of a particular register.

For the language teacher and the language student, genres are pedagogically more comprehensible because they at least have a physical reality. Swales (1983) is an example of genre-analysis.

## 5. REGISTER AND FILIPINO

Register analysis is of interest not only to the linguist, whose business it is to study language anyway, but also to users of language, especially those who are into situations of language use of which they are not familiar. No one speaks a language, only specific registers of that language, and very few, if at all, speak, or can ever hope to speak all the registers of a language simply because language users are necessarily limited in their milieu. If this claim is true, then it implies that speakers of a language need to continually expand their range of registers to meet the changing demands of language use in situations.

Filipino is a second language to most Filipinos. Such being the case, the majority of Filipinos will have to learn the various registers of Filipino if the language is going to be used appropriately by them in situations where they will have need of the language.

Register study presupposes the existence of a significant amount of corpus. Whether a corpus is significant or not will depend on whether the use of language in the situation or situations under question is perceived to have attained a level of conventionality. And before language use can become conventional, it has to be repeatedly employed by the participants and accepted as the way in which their events are realized.

As far as Filipino is concerned, significant corpora already exist for certain registers, e.g. literature, but not for others, e.g. science and technology. What seems to be needed now is to encourage language use in as many situations as possible and to allow time (and the intervention of language planners) to decide which instance of language use becomes conventionalized.

In the meantime register analysis should already be done in those areas where Filipino is already used to push further its cultivation and dissemination. One of these areas is Filipino for Teaching Purposes. While we agree with the recommendation of the Linguistic Society of the Philippines that to improve the implementation of the Bilingual Education Policy the teachers' knowledge of content or subject matter should be upgraded (LSP 1986), we maintain that training in how to communicate that subject matter is also essential. This practical application of register analysis will make it easier for teachers, especially non-Tagalogs, to use Filipino in the classroom. Hopefully, this in turn will allow the teachers to improve their overall proficiency in the language, thereby making them better models of language use, and more credible sources of linguistic input for their students.

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