

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE GENERIC STRUCTURE POTENTIAL OF MALAYSIAN BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS BROCHURES

7.0 Introduction

This chapter proposes the generic structure potential (GSP) for the genre of Malaysian b2b brochures. It will begin by describing the obligatory and optional super clusters of the genre (Section 7.1). Based on the description of the super clusters, Section 7.2 establishes the GSP for the genre and subsequently discusses the GSP in the context of other GSPs of print advertisements proposed within systemic functional theory (Section 7.3). Section 7.4 provides a summary of the chapter.

7.1 The Obligatory and Optional Super Clusters of B2b Brochures

Hasan (1984) describes the Generic Structure Potential (GSP) of a particular genre as “a statement of the structural resources available within a given genre.” (Hasan,1984:23). Such a structure statement must specify what elements are obligatory and what elements are optional, as well as the ordering of all elements vis-a-vis each other. Therefore GSP recognizes and also incorporates the possibility of variation.

This study will identify the obligatory and optional super clusters in order to come up with the GSP of b2b brochures. This is accomplished by tabulating the percentages

of occurrences of the super clusters in the Malaysian business-to-business brochures. 100% occurrence of a particular super cluster in the brochures entails that it is an obligatory super cluster while one which is not found in all of the brochures is labeled as an optional super cluster. A particular super cluster is noted to be present in a business brochure whenever there is a presence of any of the clusters identified as belonging to a particular super cluster. For example, in calculating the percentage of occurrence of the 'justifier' major cluster, the presence of the clusters that realize the super cluster, that is, the introduction, objective, purpose and benefit clusters, are tabulated and cumulative percentages of occurrence of all will be obtained. This would be taken as the percentage of occurrence for the super cluster (Appendix 4). Table 7.1 identifies the obligatory and optional super clusters of Malaysian b2b brochures.

7.1.1 The Obligatory Super Clusters

Obligatory super clusters are those that realised the prototype of the brochures for they are compulsory elements of the genre and as such these super clusters are present in all the brochures. Therefore, the obligatory super clusters of this genre are:

1. Title
2. Programme information
3. Signature
4. Response solicitation
5. Credibility

Table 7.1
The obligatory and optional super clusters

No	Super cluster	% of occurrence	Obligatory/ Optional
1	Title	100%	Obligatory
2	Programme information	100%	Obligatory
3	Signature	100%	Obligatory
4	Response Solicitation	100%	Obligatory
5	Value	34.9%	Optional
6	Justifier	96.8%	Optional
7	Attention-getter	88.7%	Optional
8	Incentive	63.5%	Optional
9	Credibility	100%	Obligatory

What is compulsory or obligatory in Malaysian b2b brochures is to identify the programme advertised and to provide information about the programme. These obligatory characteristics correspond to the functions identified by the discourse community in the interview with them. They stress the need for much information to be included in the business brochures even at the expense of visuals and other persuasive elements (Chapter 5). It is also crucial to identify the company organising the programme and to establish its credibility. Establishing credibility is a unique feature of this print advertisement as print advertisements in general do not have this feature. Finally, Malaysian business brochures also make it obligatory to persuade the reader to respond to the advertisement as the response solicitation super cluster also recorded 100% occurrence. It is interesting to note that unlike other print advertisements, visuals are not obligatory in the business-to-business brochures. The

only hint of visuals in the obligatory super clusters could be in the signature major cluster where the company logo could be found or in the credibility clusters where the emblem of accreditation would be included or in the response solicitation cluster where visual focusers are used to persuade the readers. These visuals are comparatively small in size and usually not saliently placed. Furthermore, they are optional elements in the clusters.

Two of the super clusters, namely the title and the signature super clusters are realized by one cluster each. These clusters register 100% occurrence in the brochures. The programme information, response solicitation and credibility super clusters are realised by more than one cluster. Within these obligatory super clusters, some of the clusters are not always found in the brochures thus rendering them as optional. These optional clusters contribute to the variations within the composition of the respective super cluster. Thus, each of these super clusters is like a genre of its own, having its own obligatory and optional elements contributing towards its own generic structure potential.

This study thus provides the empirical evidence for the notion of mini-genre or also known as primary genre as proposed by Bakhtin (1986) and further illustrated by Baldry and Thibault (2006) within the notion of cluster type. The mini-genres “are basic prefabricated text-making resources” (Baldry and Thibault, 2006: 83) which are combined to form a more complex genre also known as secondary genres. In this study, the super clusters are the mini-genres or primary genres which are combined to form the secondary genre which is the business-to-business advertising genre.

7.1.2 The Optional Super Clusters

Table 7.1 shows that there are four optional super clusters in the brochures. Optional super clusters are those which are not found in every brochure and these super clusters contribute to the variations in the design of such brochures. The optional super clusters are:

1. Value
2. Justifier
3. Incentive
4. Attention-getter

Among the obligatory super clusters, the value super cluster has one cluster that realised its presence while the attention-getter, justifier and incentive super clusters are realised by more than one cluster. However, unlike the obligatory super clusters, all the clusters of the optional super clusters are optional. Nevertheless, it is possible to determine through frequency count which of the optional super clusters are more commonly found than others. Table 7.2 summarises information about the optional super clusters and their frequencies of occurrences.

Table 7.2 shows that the justifier super cluster and the attention-getter super cluster are more commonly found than the other optional super clusters. The justifier super cluster recorded 96.8% occurrence while the attention-getter is present 88.7% of the time in the brochures. Due to their rather high frequency of occurrence, these super clusters are very close to being obligatory super clusters. The incentive and value super clusters are not as commonly found in the brochures. Important optional

elements are therefore, the justifier and the attention-getter super clusters and sometimes the incentive super cluster.

Table 7.2
Optional super clusters and their frequency of occurrences

No	Super cluster	% of occurrence
1	Justifier	96.8%
2	Attention-getter	88.7%
3	Incentive	63.5%
4	Value	34.9%

In comparing the obligatory with the optional super clusters of the brochures, it can be concluded that the focus of the obligatory super clusters is on providing information about the programme and the company providing the training, establishing credibility and soliciting responses from prospective participants. The focus of the optional super clusters is to further promote the programme by justifying the relevance of the programme and drawing the attention of the readers to the incentives and value of the programme. Even though these brochures are advertising texts, visuals are not salient as they are usually optional elements in the brochures. Finally, it can be concluded that b2b brochures are unlike b2c print advertisements in terms of the amount of information the b2b brochures has and that visuals are not salient features of b2b brochures.

7.2 Sequencing Super Clusters in the Generic Structure Potential of Business Brochures

Genre, in systemic functional terms, is described as a staged, goal-oriented process (Martin, 1994) consisting of a sequenced set of functional elements - both obligatory and optional. However, multimodal texts like the brochures in this study, do not normally behave in a sequenced pattern even though they possess a set of obligatory and optional elements. The business-to-business brochures meet the readers with multiple layout designs, different types of typography interspersed with different forms of attention-getters. These resources could suspend any form of sequence that may exist with regard to the super clusters. Although sometimes these brochures resemble a linear form of pages as in brochures 1-5, the different types of salience in terms of typography, framing and attention-getters used in the composition of the text would affect the linearity in reading that eventually blur the presence of the stages in the genre.

However, these same types of salience can bring out the obvious in terms of what is called the most recognizable super cluster of the brochures. In this study, the most recognisable super cluster is the title cluster for it usually has the largest font and is placed in the middle of the top half of the brochure, a very salient placement. The other recognizable super cluster is the response solicitation super cluster for it is usually found to be the last super cluster in most of the brochures. However, other super clusters in the genre do not present themselves in any recognizable pattern for conclusions to be made. This study would therefore make a conclusion about what can be described as recognisable super clusters rather than to make an attempt to sequence these super clusters in the stages of the genre. Such an attempt would not

do justice to the multimodal composition of the brochures. Therefore, the GSP for b2b brochures can be captured as:

***Title + [programme info + (justifier) + credibility + (attention-getter)
+ (value) + (incentive) + signature +] + *response solicitation**

In this condensed statement of the GSP for business advertising texts, the round brackets () signifies optionality, * stands for recognisable cluster in terms of placement and + denotes possible combination. In SFL, ^ is usually used after each element to denote sequence. This study argues that sequence and linearity seem to be suspended between the title and response solicitation super clusters in the genre, hence, ^ is replaced by + to denote possible combination of elements. Square brackets ([]) denote that the super clusters enclosed in them are mobile, that they could come together in many possible combinations to form variations of the genre. This statement on the GSP of business advertising texts will be compared with the GSPs of other print advertisements in the following section.

7.3 Generic Structure Potential (GSP) of B2b Brochures in Comparison with GSPs of Print Advertisement within the Systemic Functional Framework

Business-to-business brochures are printed materials whose function is primarily to provide information to educate the readers, who are usually corporate customers, of the products or services advertised. When dealing with such customers, establishing credibility is another important function of the brochures. Nevertheless, being a type of advertisement, elements of persuasion are also evident in these brochures. This study would like to consider the GSP of other print advertisements within the systemic functional framework to compare them with the GSP of another type of print advertisement, the business-to-business brochures as proposed in this study. It

hopes to bring forth the similarities and differences of these GSPs to further enrich the field of genre especially that of the promotional genre in the systemic functional linguistics framework.

In making the comparisons, Hasan's (1996) and Cheong's (2004) proposals for the GSP of print advertisements would be compared with the GSP proposed in this study. It must be pointed out that there are only a few genre studies pertaining to print advertisements within the systemic functional theory of language that consider some form of visual analysis. Comparisons will only be made between the elements of the various generic structure potential and not with the sequenced order of the various elements as this study does not made conclusions about the order of the elements of the genre (Section 5.5.4). Table 7.4 lists the GSPs of print advertisement as brought forth by the three studies identified.

With regard to the GSP of print advertisements, Hasan (1996) proposes three obligatory elements while Cheong (2004) proposes two obligatory elements and five optional elements. This study puts forward five obligatory elements and four optional elements in the GSP of business-to-business advertisements.

In her GSP of print advertisement, Hasan (1996:41) proposes the element 'capture', which functions

“to attract attention...realized in the written mode through the management of the visual layout, the typeface patterns and/or the presence of pictures.”

This element is rather similar to Cheong's 'announcement' element which is described as the most salient linguistic item which has prominence in scale, colour,

font and size and functions to capture and convey the essence of the intended message wish to foreground (Cheong, 2004).

Table 7.3: The elements of the GSPs of print advertisements analysed within the systemic functional framework

Proposer of GSP	Hasan (1996)	Cheong (2004)	Fauziah (2008)
Element 1	(ne)	Lead *	(ne)
Element 2	Capture*	Announcement	Title*
Element 3	Justification*	Enhancer	Justifier
Element 4	Focus*	Display	Attention-getter
Element 5	(ne)	Emblem*	Signature*
Element 6	(ne)	Tag	Program information*
Element 7	(ne)	Call and visit information	Response solicitation*
Element 8	(ne)	(ne)	Value
Element 9	(ne)	(ne)	Incentive
Element 10	(ne)	(ne)	Credibility*

(ne) : no equivalent * obligatory element

This study proposes an element, the title super cluster, which has similar functions and realisations as the elements proposed by Hasan and Cheong. Hasan's 'capture' element and this study's title super cluster are obligatory elements while Cheong's 'announcement' element is optional. The most prominent obligatory element in Cheong's GSP is the lead, a very salient visual element, which is not found in Hasan's and Fauziah's GSPs of print advertisements.

In this study, the 'justifier' super cluster is similar to Hasan's 'justification' and Cheong's 'enhancer'. They are verbally realised in order to give a "detailed account of other elements of structure for an advertisement" (Cheong, 2004:181) and are usually in paragraphs. These elements function to persuade and influence the readers to purchase the product. Like Hasan's, this super cluster is an optional element in the GSP proposed by this study while Cheong's is an obligatory one.

Hasan's 'focus' which is visually realised and functions to single out which is being advertised and Cheong's 'display' element which is also always visually realised as it is described as a photographic display of service/product advertised, are again quite similar. These two elements resemble the attention-getter super cluster of this study for it is also visually realised. However, unlike the two elements, the attention-getter of this study illustrates not only the title of the programme, the product to be advertised, but also other information in the brochures. The attention-getter super cluster and Cheong's display element are optional unlike Hasan's which is an obligatory element.

Cheong's emblem and call-visit information elements and this study's signature and response solicitation super clusters are similar in realisations and purpose. Both the emblem element and the signature super cluster identify the company that advertised the product/service while call-visit information and response solicitation super cluster encourage readers to contact the company. These elements are obligatory in the two studies. Hasan's study, however, does not have these elements.

This study also identifies three other elements namely the value, credibility and incentive super clusters which are not found in the GSPs proposed by Hasan or

Cheong. The three super clusters, therefore, are unique to the GSP of print advertisement proposed in this study and thus differentiate it from the other two GSPs discussed. As such, value, credibility and incentive elements characterised business-to-business advertising from business-to-consumer advertising. It must be pointed out that establishing credibility is of importance in business-to-business advertising as it is an obligatory element in its GSP. Both the data in Hasan's and Cheong's studies are from advertisements targeting consumers in general.

The GSPs of print advertisement within the systemic functional theory of language are similar and yet in a way they are different. They are similar since all of Hasan's elements in her GSP can be found in Cheong's GSP and in the GSP proposed in this study and all of Cheong's GSP elements except one can be found in the GSP of this study. However, they are different for Hasan's GSP does not include four of Cheong's and six of the GSP of this study. In addition, Cheong's study does not include three elements that are present in the GSP of print advertisement of this study.

One reason for the differences could be that in this study, business-to-business brochures are used as data while Hasan's and Cheong's data are from one-page advertisements which are a much shorter form of advertisement. Furthermore, this study analysed a much larger sample of data making it possible for a more detailed and richer description of the genre as evident in the system network proposed in this study. Another possible reason is that Hasan and Cheong analysed business-to-consumer advertisements unlike this study which looks at business-to-business brochures, advertising texts common in the business market like the human resource training provider community in Malaysia. Elements like establishing credibility,

highlighting value and offering incentives emerged from the analysis of such brochures which are peculiar and unique to the genre of business-to-business brochures as compared to the GSPs of Hasan and Cheong. The three elements reflect the characteristics of business markets which are especially concerned with relationship building, value focused and information loading to educate the target audience (Murphy, 2007) in their selling-buying process. It must be noted that two of these elements, relationship building and information loading realize the functions outlined by the discourse community and that as reflected in the visual and verbal components of the brochures.

7.3.1 Summary

This chapter focuses on describing and discussing the GSP of b2b brochures. The findings show that five obligatory and four optional super clusters make up the GSP of Malaysian b2b brochures. This study recognises that the sequencing of the super clusters in the GSP is based on the beginning-middle-end pattern where the most recognisable title super cluster forms the beginning and the other recognisable super cluster, the response solicitation super cluster is placed at the end of the GSP. The other super clusters form the middle of the GSP with no particular sequence as sequence seems to be suspended in the multimodal texts of the study. Comparison with the other GSPs of print advertisement within the systemic functional framework shows that establishing credibility, highlighting value and providing incentives are three identifying elements of the genre of Malaysian b2b brochures not available in other print advertisements.