

A Genre Analysis of Food and Beverages Industry Menu

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ABSTRACT

Genre studies have its reach in almost all of the written materials available either through printed copies or online publication. Studies of genre provide a glimpse of the structure and order in which the written or spoken text are constructed. The importance of genre studies and analysis of written or spoken materials through the lens of its genre cannot be understated. The study aimed at investigating the textual features that identify restaurant menus as a genre. From the analysis of moves/steps and lexicogrammar, five main communicative purposes of menu have been identified. These purposes are; to inform, impress, make a statement, suggest, and give a disclaimer. The findings of the study can serve as a guide and reference to the people in the food and beverages industry and the field of genre studies.

Keywords: *genre studies, genre moves, communicative strategies.*

Introduction

Many scholars have proposed a definition of genre, and it differs greatly from one scholar to another. The definitions of genre show where the scholar stands in the three major schools of genre theory. These schools are; North American New Rhetoric, Australian Systemic-Functional Linguistics and ESP. With extensive studies being done to explain the genre theory in exhaustive detail, this study will only look at the definition of genre in general and how it is applied to the study at hand.

Miller (1984) proposes genre as a social action, and it is a response to social needs. Lee (2001) suggests that genre is the level of text categorisation which is theoretically and pedagogically most useful and most practical. Swales (1990) in Flowerdew (2010), on the other

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hand, defines genre as staged, structured, communicative events, motivated by various communicative purposes, and performed by specific discourse communities.

Using restaurant menu as a genre, this study will look at the definition of menu given by scholars from the food industries. Menus infer several interpretations for both the buyers and sellers. "Menu is statements" of the food and beverages item provided by a food service establishment, primarily based on consumer needs and demands and designed to achieve organisational objectives (Khan, 1991). Menu can also be a list of the product range that a restaurant offers, and at the same time, it can be a piece of literature or display used to communicate the product range to the customer (Mooney, 1994), (Kreck, 1984).

A study on the restaurant menu is done by Zwicky and Zwicky. However, they only look at the style and layout of the restaurant menu in America and analyse it without using the framework of genre analysis. The result shows that the menu has conventionalised format concerning ordinary conversational language. They also suggest that menu supply their information in a list of the noun phrases with heavy usage of modifying past participles.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the textual features that identify restaurant menus as a genre.

Approaches to Genre Analysis

Hyon (1996) in Swales (2009) notes that works in literary genres could be distinguished in three separate ways by researchers and practitioners with different backgrounds that represent other parts of the world. The three schools are; the international ESP Tradition, North American New Rhetoric and the Australian Systemic-Functional schools. Hyon's article provides an important definition of these schools to those studying genre studies, especially in the mid-1990s. However, according to Swales (2009), by 2007, the division among the three schools had somewhat amalgamated, and the difference had become less sharp in what had become the genre movement. Although the approaches to genre analysis can sometimes be overlapping, this study will only discuss the approach to genre analysis by the ESP school.

The ESP Approach

According to Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993), in Flowerdew and Wan (2010), genre is a type of communicative event with certain purposes which is identified by its discourse community.

Genres are staged events, and that they develop through a sequence of what Swales and Bhatia refer to as *moves* and component *steps*. Swales adds that some moves might be optional, some may occur in different orders, some may be embedded, and some may be repeated.

Bhatia (2004) proposes a critical genre analysis model in analysing a written discourse. There are four perspectives considered in the analysis. They are; *textual, ethnographic, socio-cognitive, and socio-critical*. Textual procedure entails the following criteria; linguistic description and analysis, corpus-based analysis of texts, analysis of cohesion and intertextuality and studies of generic conventions and practices. Ethnographic procedure includes the following; observational account of expert behaviour lived experiences of members of the community of practices, convergent narrative account of active professionals, textography of discursive practice and account of the recipient of genres.

As for the socio-cognitive procedure, it focuses on the aspects of accounts of practitioners' advice, manuals, etc., studies of social structures and interactions, history of beliefs, goals of disciplinary structures, analysis of text intertextuality linked, analysis of other contributing genres, studies of audience reception, studies of relevant disciplinary cultures and studies of reading and interpretive behaviour. The socio-critical procedure accounts for the accounts of language, ideology and power, discussion of language and social culture, studies of social changes reflected in discourses, studies of social practices, identities and motives, studies of organisational behaviour, and studies of studies of socio-cultural background.

This study will incorporate one procedure from Bhatia (2004) critical genre analysis model, which is the *textual* procedure.

Another study on genre analysis from the ESP school is by Ellis and Johnson (1994). They propose a framework for analysing academic texts. Some of the criteria in analysing the genre are; *sentence structure, function, grammatical structure, and lexis*.

Conceptual Framework

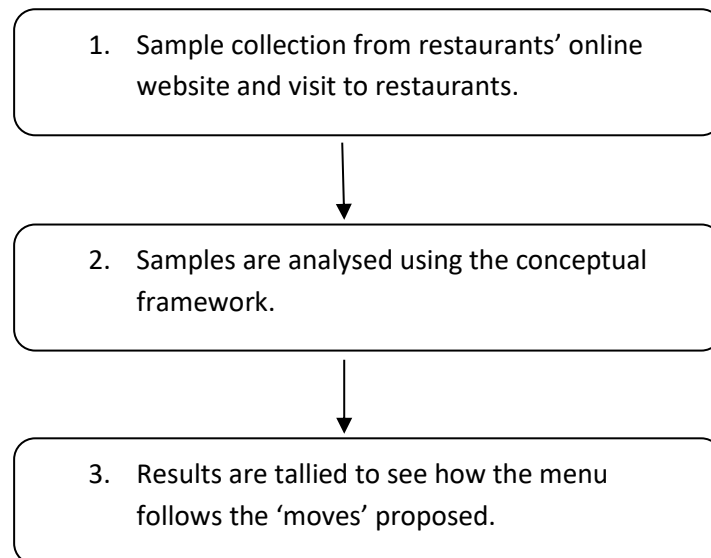
This study will incorporate the procedure proposed by Bhatia (2004) and the framework suggested by Ellis and Johnson (1994). The conceptual framework that is being developed is to use the *textual* procedure to describe the 'moves' that appeared in the genre and the framework by Ellis and Johnson (1994) to explain the social context, communicative purposes and linguistic markers and signals.

Methodology

The number of menus being analysed is 12. All of the menus were randomly chosen. The menus can be classified as Western, Japanese, Arabic, Italian, Indian, Chinese, and also the fusion of those mentioned. The list of the samples of restaurant menus chosen can be referred in Appendix A. The classification of the menus is based on the type of food offered at the restaurant and its possible origin. The classification is not conclusive, and it is still subject to change. All of the menus chosen are in written form. This study will only analyse the menu that appear on the hardcopy of the menu, and if the restaurant does offer off-menu food choices, it will not be included in the analysis.

The menu of restaurants were chosen as samples because of the important role they play in the success and failure of a restaurant. Menu also proves to be an interesting piece of writing that serves many purposes, as discussed in the introduction section. Analysis of menu can be done from many perspectives; as this study goes, it only looks at the menu's linguistic feature. Other aspects of study such as Design and Psychology can be used to analyse this sample.

The procedure of analysing the menu is as follows:



Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of the twelve restaurant menus is divided into two parts: the moves/steps of the text in the menu and the lexical-grammatical feature of the menu (Suen, 2009).

Moves/steps structure

From the analysis, there are five moves and three steps identified. The moves are; identifying the brand, introducing the meal course, stating the name of the dish, listing the price and stating the disclaimer. The steps are; providing the enticement, identifying the serving portion and identifying the semiotic features. The frequency of moves are represented in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Move/Step Structure	Obligatory/Optional	Frequency	Percentage
1. Identifying the brand	Obligatory	12	100%
2. Introducing the meal course (category)	Obligatory	12	100%
3. Stating the name of the dish	Obligatory	12	100%
3.1 Providing the enticement	Optional	10	83%
3.2 Identifying the serving portion	Optional	12	100%
4. Listing the price	Obligatory	4	33%
5. Stating the disclaimer	Obligatory	12	100%
5.1 Identifying the semiotic features	Optional	4	33%

All five moves are obligatory, whereas the steps stated in Table 1 are optional. The appearance of moves in the menu is not in the order indicated in Table 1, but it can appear in other orders.

Lexical-grammatical analysis

Table 2

Move 1: Identifying the brand	
Criteria	Description
1. Sentence structure	No sentence structure is involved as it is only the name of the restaurant.

2. Function(s)	To highlight the name and ownership of the restaurant.
3. Grammatical Structure	Novel name, usually a noun. It can sometimes be the name of the signature dish.
4. Lexis	Uses of article to show uniqueness.

Table 2 shows move 1, which identifies the brand. The name of the restaurant is usually being put on top of the menu to establish the brand. The brand/name is also unique and has a novel element to it.

Table 3

Move 2: Introducing the meal course	
Criteria	Description
1. Sentence structure	In note form.
2. Function(s)	To inform.
3. Grammatical Structure	Uses of noun.
4. Lexis	Combination of English and other foreign languages. E.g., <i>entree</i> , <i>main dish</i> , <i>dessert</i> , <i>beverages</i> , <i>etc.</i>

In table 3, the move described is introducing the meal course. It is done in note form with the function to inform and to categorise the meal. The lexis involved is usually in English, but sometimes in other languages, to help the customer choose which dish to order.

Table 4

Move 3: Stating the name of the dish	
Criteria	Description
1. Sentence structure	In note form.
2. Function(s)	To inform, to impress, to make a statement.
3. Grammatical Structure	Noun phrase.
4. Lexis	According to the speciality of the restaurant. The Italian name, etc. E.g.: <i>Aglio Olio Peperoncino</i> , <i>Pita and Hummus</i> , <i>Shrimp Tempura Toji Don</i> , etc.

Table 4 depicts move 3, which states the name of the dish. It is done in note form with the function to inform, impress, and make a statement. The name of the dish could also be in noun phrase. The lexis involved is based on the speciality of the restaurant. If it is an Arabic restaurant, the name of the dish will have an Arabic touch to it. For instance, the name of the dish is; hummus, falafel, etc.

Table 5

Step 3.1: Providing the enticement	
Criteria	Description
1. Sentence structure	Short phrases, uses of brevity, omission of article.
2. Function(s)	To inform, to impress.
3. Grammatical Structure	Past Participle Modifier. E.g., <i>broiled</i> , <i>poached</i> , <i>seared</i> , <i>blanched</i> , <i>grilled</i> , etc.
4. Lexis	Tasty adjectives. E.g., <i>hot</i> , <i>fresh</i> , <i>savoury</i> , <i>tasty</i> , etc.

Table 5 shows step 3.1, providing the enticement. In the frequency analysis in Table 1, the percentage of this step is 83 per cent or ten out of 12 samples. It can be stipulated that this step could also act as a move in certain circumstances, given the high percentage of occurrence in the sample. It could also probably be a step under move 3, as shown in table 5. The problem in genre construction can appear due to the small number of samples, and the analysis might not be conclusive to show the moves involved in the chosen genre, in this case, restaurant menu.

The sentence structure of step 3.1 involves the use of short phrases, brevity and omission of article. This could be because it will give curiosity to the customer to know more about the dish. Step 3.1 functions to inform as well as to impress. Uses of past participle modifiers are also heavily noted.

Table 6

Step 3.2: Identifying the serving portion	
Criteria	Description
1. Sentence structure	In note form.
2. Function(s)	To inform, to suggest.
3. Grammatical Structure	Noun phrase.
4. Lexis	Uses of numbers and classifiers.

Table 6, on the other hand, provide the description of step 3.2, which identifies the serving portion. The serving portion is considered as a step due to its small number of frequency in the samples. It appeared in note form with the function to inform and to suggest. The lexis used is numbers and classifiers.

Table 7

Move 4: Listing the price	
Criteria	Description

1. Sentence structure	In note form.
2. Function(s)	To inform.
3. Grammatical Structure	Uses of number.
4. Lexis	Uses of number. Omission of the currency symbol.

As for table 7, it shows move 4, which lists the price. It is obligatory in the sample as it appeared in all the samples collected. The function is to inform through the use of numbers. Although price tags in any merchandise include the currency symbol, it appears to be missing in the sample. The omission of currency symbol depicts a purpose, and it can serve as a point to be analysed in future research.

Table 8

Move 5: Stating the disclaimer	
Criteria	Description
1. Sentence structure	Complete sentence.
2. Function(s)	To inform.
3. Grammatical Structure	Noun phrase and verb phrase.
4. Lexis	Uses of hedges and politeness strategy. E.g., <i>kindly, please, may, etc.</i>

Table 8 shows move 5, stating the disclaimer. It is done in a complete sentence with the purpose to inform the customer. The grammatical structures involved are noun phrases and verb phrases. There is evidence of the hedges and politeness strategy used in move 5. Examples can be seen in table 8.

Table 9

Step 5.1: Identifying the semiotic features	
Criteria	Description
1. Sentence structure	In note form.
2. Function(s)	To inform.
3. Grammatical Structure	Noun phrase.
4. Lexis	Category of food and symbols to show variants of the food offered. E.g., <i>vegetarian, vegan, hot, spicy, etc.</i>

Table 9 depicts step 5.1, which identifies the semiotic feature. It appeared in note form, and the function is to inform. The lexis used are the category of food and sometimes symbols to show the variety of the dish. For example, vegetarian, hot, kids, etc.

Conclusion and Implication

From the analysis of moves/steps and lexicogrammar, five main communicative purposes of menu have been identified. These purposes are; to inform, impress, make a statement, suggest, and give a disclaimer. The analysis is based on Bhatia's (2004) critical genre model and Ellis and Johnson (1994) framework in analysing academic text. All of the results of the analysis help in defining restaurant menu as a genre.

The implication of this research can be seen as providing insight into the textual features of language used in generating menus. It can serve as a guideline to those interested in the food industry and those working closely with food.

Future research can look into the perspectives of ethnographic, socio-cognitive and socio-cultural procedures to obtain a more comprehensive view of the genre.

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