

# Mapping Genres, Mapping Culture

Japanese texts in context

EDITED BY

Elizabeth A. Thomson  
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The purpose of this book is to contribute to our understanding of genre and genre variation in the Japanese language in order to bring to consciousness the nature of Japanese culture and the presuppositions, norms and values found within Japanese society. This type of knowledge enables interventions and agency, as knowing how language works within a culture makes it possible to consciously accept it or to influence and shape it into the future. The various chapters seek to explore social contexts and the norms, values and practices of Japanese culture through the language choices in analysed texts in literature, education, the workplace and in print-based media. These genres collectively form part of the cultural fabric of Japan. The book represents a first step in documenting a selected set of Japanese genres from a social semiotic perspective. It will be of interest to students and scholars in a wide range of linguistic fields, such as Japanese descriptive linguistics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, systemic functional linguistics and applied linguistics. It should also appeal to teachers and learners of Japanese and to media commentators, students of literature, cultural studies and journalism.

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## Mapping Genres, Mapping Culture

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### **Volume 281**

Mapping Genres, Mapping Culture. Japanese texts in context

Edited by Elizabeth A. Thomson, Motoki Sano and Helen de Silva Joyce

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# Mapping genres using systemic functional linguistics

Elizabeth A. Thomson, Helen de Silva Joyce & Motoki Sano

## 1. Introduction

Japanese has been described in *formal* terms quite extensively, but these formal descriptions have had little to say about the role of the language in context, nor the social purposes for which it is used, that is, language in use. Understanding language in use is achieved not through formal investigation but from a social semiotic perspective, such as that provided by Systemic Functional Linguistics (M. A. K. Halliday, 1985a and 1978). In the field of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), language is viewed as a form of social behaviour in that people use it to get things done in social contexts.

The term *genre* refers to groups of texts that achieve a common social purpose, with different genres achieving different purposes. While the task of identifying and describing genres in Japanese is a relatively new endeavour, the identification and analysis of these genres is based on the pioneering work of various linguists who mapped genres in English in the 1980s and 1990s. These include Ruqaiya Hasan (1996 and 1985), J. R. Martin (1992) and M. A. K. Halliday and J. R. Martin (1993). Their original work has contributed significantly to the broad field of linguistics and provides a theoretically sound basis for similar descriptive work in other languages.

The collection of chapters in this book aims to comment on cultural practices by demonstrating the bi-directionality between context and text (Hasan, 1985), that is, what can be gleaned about context and the norms, values and practices of a culture from the language choices in texts and vice versa. In the following chapters, Japanese language scholars describe factual genres in the humanities, education, workplace contexts and print-based media, as well as literary genres, including folk tales. These genres collectively form part of the cultural fabric of Japan and this book represents a step in mapping the genres of Japanese from a social semiotic perspective.

## 2. Language in context

What I have tried to make clear by analysis of a primitive linguistic text is that language is essentially rooted in the reality of the culture, the tribal life and customs of a people, and that it cannot be explained without constant reference to these broader contexts of verbal utterance. (Malinowski, 1923, p. 305)

Bronislaw Malinowski's work is the starting place for the explorations in this book on language, genre and cultural mapping. Almost a century ago, in groundbreaking anthropological fieldwork, Malinowski observed that it is difficult to translate oral language (his meaning of the term *primitive*) without acknowledging the physical situation in which the oral text occurs, which is itself contained within the social and behavioural norms of a group of people, within their *context of culture*. Language without context is not meaningful and its power and import lie in the fact that language is a form of social behaviour, rooted in culture.

The fact is that the main function of language is ... to play an active pragmatic part in human behaviour. Thus in its primary function it is one of the chief cultural forces and an adjunct to bodily activities. (Malinowski, 1935, Part IV, p. 7)

In short, when investigating culture, it is sensible to turn to an investigation of language but, as this book will argue, the focus is not isolated fragments of language, removed from the context or the co-text. Rather it is the investigation of coherent texts,<sup>1</sup> which achieve particular social purposes via conventionalised sets of meanings and which, in turn, are realised through particular lexicogrammatical choices. This investigation allows text analysts to say something salient and germane about cultural practices, social behaviour and relationships.

Coherent texts are patterned so that language users can recognise, understand and generate meaning in order to communicate with others and participate in the social order. These patterns are syntagmatic and paradigmatic within clauses (see Figure 1), and generic above the clause and serve to produce *populations of texts*<sup>2</sup> which achieve discrete social purposes. This discursive behaviour, or doing things via language, occurs across fields and in spoken and written modes. Language is viewed as “a resource for making meaning within the constraints of the culture in which it is embedded” (Thomson 2001a, p. 19).

1. The term *text* refers to “both an object in its own right and an instance – an instance of social meaning in a particular context of situation” (Halliday and Hasan, 1985:11). Coherence refers to how the text “hangs together” (Halliday and Hasan, 1985:48).

2. This term is borrowed from Chris Cl  irigh who, modestly, is not prepared to claim it as his own, but who, nonetheless, is not able to tell who coined it first. Thus, in the absence of information to the contrary, the term *population of texts* is attributed to Cl  irigh (2001).

Malinowski observed the impact of culture on behaviour, in particular, language behaviour. What people say is shaped by their culture and their culture is shaped by what they say. By understanding this perspective, people can be agents in their destinies and not just benign participants in their cultures and their times. The purpose of this book is to understand, in part, genre and genre variation in Japanese to bring to consciousness the nature of Japanese culture and the presuppositions, norms and values found within Japanese society. This type of knowledge enables interventions and agency, as knowing how language works within a culture, makes it possible to consciously accept it or to influence and shape it into the future.

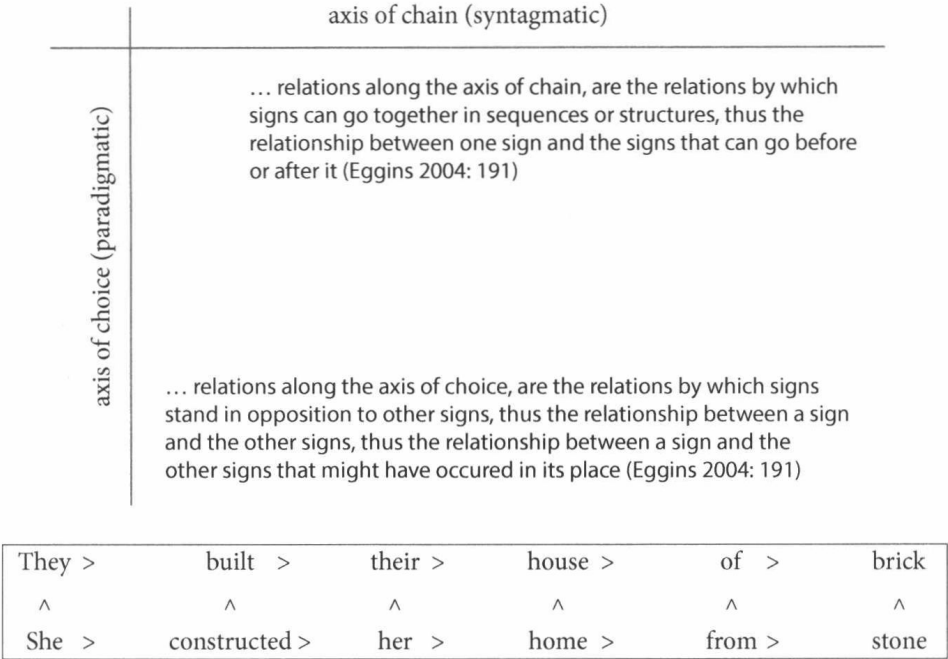


Figure 1. Syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations (adapted from Eggins, 2004, p. 191)

This volume describes the work of a number of Japanese language scholars who have examined Japanese culture from the point of view of genre. In each case, their linguistic analyses provide evidence for claims about the presuppositions, norms and values of Japanese culture. This chapter will provide a broad presentation of the theoretical framework that has informed the analyses in the following chapters. It opens with a discussion on the notion of genre and how genres are distinguishable through semantic and lexicogrammatical patterns, all of which arise from social purpose, the context of culture and the context of situation. It then presents a brief explanation of three aspects of language that have been used by the contributors to look into texts – Transitivity, Tenor and Appraisal – and closes



with a summary of some of the characteristics of Japanese culture that the genre analyses in this volume indicate. The following chapters, by no means, provide a comprehensive exposé of Japanese discursive cultural practices, but they do provide a partial and insightful picture of Japanese culture for consideration by those interested in language, culture and society.

### 3. The concept of genre

The concept of genre is the subject of considerable debate. This arises from the fact that the term *genre*, like the term *topic*, has a number of conceptualisations in different linguistic traditions. It is therefore helpful to define the conceptualisation of genre that is used in this volume and to present justifications for this choice. The conceptualisation of genre relevant to understanding the following chapters arises out of Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1994, 1985b and 1978; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004).

The research on genre from an SFL perspective derived in many respects from Malinowski, whose anthropological work demonstrated that, unless explanations of cultural practices were included as part of translation, a direct translation from one language to another was not possible. This need to annotate translation led to the notion of *context of culture*. However, while an understanding of the cultural paradigm is critical, it is equally critical to have an understanding of the *context of situation* in which language, particularly spoken language, is expressed. Language makes no sense unless listeners and readers know what is being talked about (field), who is talking (tenor) and how meanings are being transmitted (mode). The Malinowskian (1923) notions of *context of culture* and *context of situation*, were further developed by Hasan and Halliday (1985) as a theory of register. Essentially, meaning-making and thus lexicogrammatical choices are dependent on cultural norms and traditions and on the context of situation. Malinowski's shoal fishing example from the Trobriand Islands, given below, illustrates this point. For an understanding of the language used in fishing by the islanders, the anthropologist needs an understanding of the cultural practices of fishing and the situation at the moment of fishing:

The canoes glide slowly and noiselessly, punted by men especially good at this task and always used for it. Other experts who know the bottom of the lagoon, with its plant and animal life, are on the look-out for fish. One of them sights the quarry. Customary signs, or sounds or words are uttered. Sometimes a sentence full of technical references to the channels or patches on the lagoon has to be spoken; sometimes when the shoal is near and the task of trapping is simple, a conventional cry is uttered not too loudly. Then, the whole fleet stops and ranges

itself every canoe and every man in it performing his appointed task according to a customary routine. But, of course, the men, as they act, utter now and then a sound expressing keenness in the pursuit or impatience at some technical difficulty, joy of achievement or disappointment at failure. Again, a word of command is passed here and there, a technical expression or explanation which serves to harmonise their behaviour towards other men. The whole group act in a concerted manner, determined by old tribal tradition and perfectly familiar to the actors through lifelong experience. Some men in the canoes cast the wide encircling nets into the water, others plunge, and wading through the shallow lagoon, drive the fish into the nets. Others, again stand by with the small nets, ready to catch the fish. An animated scene, full of movement follows, and now that the fish are in their power the fishermen speak loudly, and give vent to their feelings. Short, telling exclamations fly about, which might be rendered by such words as: *Pull in, Let go, Shift further, Lift the net*; or again technical expressions completely untranslatable except by minute description of the instruments used, and of the mode of action. (Malinowski, 1923, p. 311)

The point being made through this example is that the language choices are patterned and are replicated, or versionised, each time these fishermen catch fish. Generalising from this example, it is reasonable to state that texts that achieve the same social purpose can be considered as a population of similar texts. The language of fishing continues to be used every time the Trobriand islanders catch fish because it is functional, purposeful and similar to the language used in other shoal fishing contexts. This similarity leads to the notion of *genre*. The same social purpose within a context of culture and within a similar context of situation will produce a genre. What this means is that patterns of social organisation in a culture are expressed as patterns of social interaction that are expressed as patterned language choices in texts.

The notion of genre within the SFL tradition has developed out of Malinowski's seminal work. His *context of situation* is modelled as three contextual variables within the SFL tradition. It consists of **field** which refers to what is being spoken or written about; **tenor** which refers to the social relationship established between the text and its audience and **mode** which refers to whether the text is spoken or written.<sup>3</sup> The context of situation of any language event is a particular configuration of field, tenor and mode, referred to as a register. In terms of field, language provides the meaning potential for people to share their experiences of the world in a logical way; in terms of tenor, language allows interactants to interact and share points of view and opinions and in terms of mode,

---

3. See Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004; Eggins, 2004 for fuller explanations of field, tenor and mode.

language ties meanings together into cohesive, comprehensible and coherent whole texts. In other words, language serves three generalised functions, arising from the context of situation, that are referred to as *metafunctions*. Field aligns with the ideational metafunction that selects lexicogrammatical resources that foreground “the construal of experience” (Halliday, 1996, p. 392). Tenor aligns with the interpersonal metafunction, which enacts social relationships; it provides “the subjective presence of writers/speakers in texts as they adopt stances towards the material they present and those with whom they communicate” (Martin and White, 2005, p. 1) and mode aligns with the textual metafunction that enables the ideational and the interpersonal to be logically expressed and understood. The relationship between the metafunctions, register variables and language is represented in Figure 2.

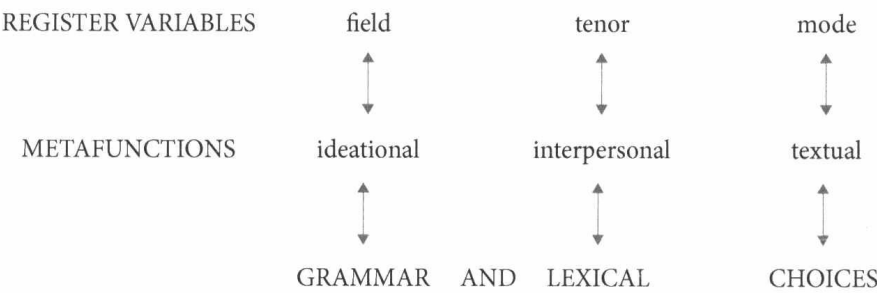


Figure 2. Relations between register variables and metafunctions

#### 4. Genre in SFL

This section briefly sketches the notion of genre as it has evolved differently within SFL theory, in order to set the scene for the analytical work in this volume. This will then be followed by a brief description of aspects of language that realise meanings in order to illustrate the link between the metafunctions through register to the patterning of grammatical resources. Each of the studies in this volume investigates patternings in texts to provide linguistic evidence of how texts form genre groups that reflect the broader cultural context.

##### 4.1 Genre Theory

Genre Theory is the term applied to the theoretical writings and practical teaching materials arising from the research of the Sydney School (Martin and Rose, 2008) led by Jim Martin during the 1980s and 1990s at the University of Sydney. The

development of genre theory was motivated by an interest in providing a model of context that could be used to inform literacy teaching in schools. This led to the “development of Australia’s distinctive genre-based literacy programs in primary and secondary schools” (Martin, 1999, p. 25).

Martin’s notion of genre is based on Gregory’s category of functional tenor (Gregory, 1967; Gregory and Carroll, 1978). Martin (1999) found the category of functional tenor to have a practical utility in that it introduced the notion of global purpose, with whole texts serving specific social purposes. He thus defines genre as “a staged goal-oriented social process” (Martin, 1986, p. 246), with genres modelled at the stratum of culture where they function through a patterning of field, tenor and mode. By taking this approach, the Sydney School models language in a social context as an integrated semiotic system with the *context of situation* modelled semiotically as register and *context of culture* as genre (Martin and Rose, 2008, p. 16).

This notion of genre enables texts to be organised into genre families which “enact the social practices of a given culture” (Martin and Rose, 2008, p. 6). For example, there is the family of storytelling genres, the family of procedural genres, the family of history genres and so on. These families exist in relation to other genre families and can be expressed as a network of social practices. It is this network that essentially maps the cultural practices realised through discourse in any culture. Figure 3 has been adapted from Martin and Rose (2008) in order to illustrate how these genre families can be used to map cultural practices. It presents two genre families and the variation within each family. The “subject matter of story genres is wide open” whereas those genres that constitute the discourse of history “have evolved within the institutional contexts of recording, explaining and debating the past” (Martin and Rose, 2008, p. 99). Variation distinguishes the genres and is evidenced by differences in field, tenor and mode and thus their respective lexicogrammatical patterns. For example, within the story genre family, the difference between a recount and a news story is the way *time* is managed grammatically. Events within a recount, structure the text by being presented chronologically, while in a news story the chronology of events does not contribute to the organisation of the story. Variation within genres is understood as a kind of gradience related to the degree of proximity between categories within similar genre types or families. Variation also accounts for mixed genres whereby one text may move through a number of social purposes by combining genres, for example a report may combine a procedural recount with an explanation genre in one text. The Sydney School has found this topological perspective to be very useful in education to reveal, compare and teach the different kinds of valued texts within primary and secondary schools.



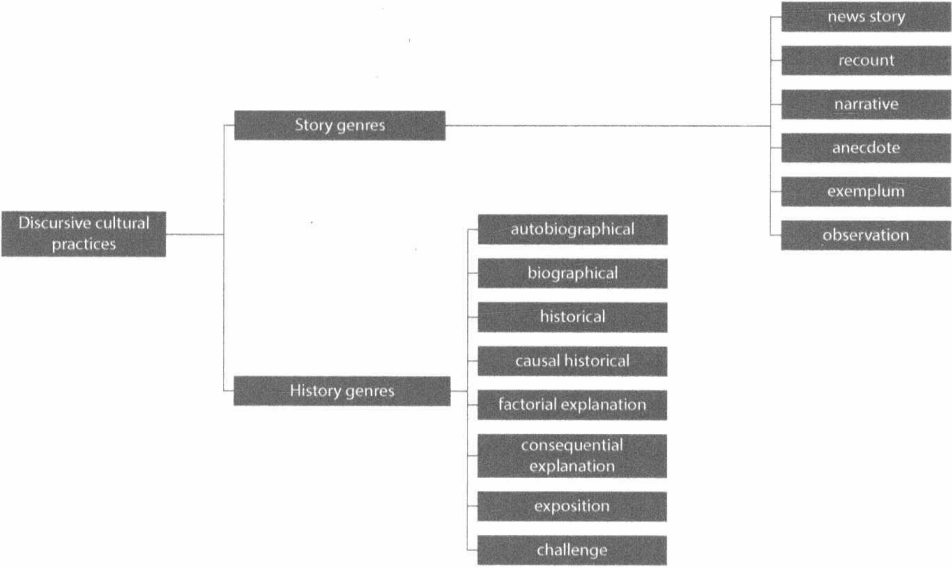


Figure 3. Network of genre families adapted from Martin and Rose (2008, p. 81 and p. 130)

4.2 Generic Structure Potential

Within the same theoretical framework, but in contrast to Martin’s model of genre, Hasan (1996) postulates the notion of *Generic Structure Potential* (GSP). This is an abstract categorisation that attempts to state the structural potential of texts that occur appropriately within certain contextual environments of field, tenor and mode. Hasan (1996, p. 53) describes GSP as:

descriptive of the total range of textual structures available within a given genre. It is designed to highlight the variant (optional) and invariant (obligatory) properties of textual structures within the limit of one discrete genre and the GSP must be capable of specifying the following facts about text structure:

1. it must specify all those elements of structure whose presence is obligatory
2. it must enumerate all those elements whose presence is optional
3. [it] must also specify the obligatory and optional ordering of the elements vis-a-vis each other, including the possibility of iteration

For Hasan, the GSP represents the total potential structure of a genre and an actual text is but one instance of the genre, reflecting one possible configuration of the genre type. The GSP is thus analogous to a system, while the actual structure of an individual text is just one possible instantiation of some particular path allowed by the GSP. Hasan considers that, provided all obligatory structures are present in a text, it can be considered an instance of the genre.