GENRE ANALYSIS ON ENGLISH FRIDY SERMONS
PREPARED BY THE ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS COUNCIL OF SINGAPORE[1]

Liliek Soepriatmadji

Dosen Tetap FBIB Universitas Stikubank

Abstract

A Friday Sermon delivery is a strategic mechanism for a *Khatib* (Preacher) to disseminate the divine truths—either from the *quran, hadiths, Ijma'*, or *qiyas*, and to convey the rights and responsibilities of Islam followers in respect to religious, social, economic and even political affairs. It is the language that plays a very significant role in encoding the *Khatib*'s messages. Therefore a *Khatib* (or any institution) preparing a sermon text needs to equip himself with a communication system in order to encode his social purposes. The system may prevent him from abusing the language to provoke the *jama'ah* (congregation). It may also lead him to use appropriate linguistic features to support the purposes, and to organize the purposes into a culturally recognized pattern or schematic structure to indicate that a sermon is different from other genres. To understand and describe the system we need to conduct a genre analysis on Friday Sermons using the model genre analysis offered by Eggins and Slade (1997). The English Friday sermons prepared by the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore were chosen and used as the model sermons to portray how purposes were encoded and organized into a particular generic structure potential.

Key Words: Communication system, Social/Communicative Purpose, Linguistic Features, Schematic Structure, Genre analysis, Generic Structure Potential

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[1] **A thesis rewritten in a journal format**

BACKGROUND

There are two important participants in the delivery of a Friday Sermon—the *Jama'ah* (Congregation) and the *Khatib* (Preacher). For the *jama'ah*, a Friday Sermon is a mechanism to make themselves well-informed about those related to religious, social, economic and even political affairs. It is also a mechanism for them to "have a communication" with Allah through the scriptures delivered in the sermon. The adoption of that mechanism may result in two consequences. First, the *jama'ah* should equip themselves with a communication system that they could decode a sermon text. Second, their fanatical emotion may make the *jama'ah* rely much on what is presented in a sermon that they tend to comply with the proposals directed rather than refuse them. They tend to accept the proposals rather than reject them, and they tend to acknowledge the propositions rather than contradict them.

For the *khatib*, on the other hand, a Friday Sermon is a mechanism to disseminate the divine truths—either from the *quran, hadiths, Ijma', or qiyas,* and to convey the rights and responsibilities of Islam followers in respect to religious, social, economic and even political affairs.

So a *khatib* (or any institution) preparing a sermon text needs to equip himself with a communication system to encode the purposes. The system may prevent him from abusing the language to provoke the *jama'ah.* It may also lead him to use appropriate linguistic features to support the purposes, and to organize the purposes into a culturally recognized pattern that a sermon is different from other genres.

To describe the communication system of a sermon text we have to conduct a genre analysis. This coincides with what Fowler (1982) says that genre analysis provides a communication system for a writer in writing, reader in reading and critic in interpreting.

The research questions developed in this study, therefore, can be stated as follows:

(1) What communicative purposes are employed in English Friday sermon texts?

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(2) What linguistic features characterize the communicative purposes of the sermon texts?

(3) How are sermon texts organized into their schematic structure?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was motivated with a sermon's pedagogical value and function that it is important to highlight what a sermon is and does as a genre so as to answer the research questions formulated in the previous section of this writing.

A sermon referred to in this study is a written English Friday sermon prepared by the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (*Majelis Ugama Islam Singapura*). This written text is meant to be spoken / delivered prior to a Friday prayer throughout the mosques in Singapore. The text is realized as a genre of Friday sermon i.e. a communicative event or social activity in which language is used to exchange communicative purposes or social purposes—what the speaker or writer is doing or aims to do when s/he communicates—through a number of stages, each of which is given a functional gloss (Swales 1990: 58; Bloor 2002). It is a socially ratified way of using language in connection with a particular type of social activity (Fairclough 1995: 14); a staged goal-oriented, purposeful activity—the schematic structuring of a genre—in which speakers engage as members of a culture (Martin 1984: 25; Levinson 1979) or a social situation in which written or spoken language is used for communication between individuals or groups (Bloor 2002).

In order to recognize the social purposes of the genre of Friday sermon texts and how they are staged I adopt a genre model analysis offered by Eggins (1994) and Eggins and Slade (1997). I also apply the theory of systemic functional linguistics (Halliday 1985; Martin 1984) in order to further unfold the social purposes of the genre.

METHOD

Qualitative approach was applied to unfold the genre of prepared English Friday sermons. Simple quantification was also employed in order to show some tendencies in lexico-grammatical choices realized in the stages of the sermon genre.

The unit of analysis or description is the clause because the stratum of language to analyze is lexico-grammar (Eggins 1994). Mirador (2000: 47) uses the term move—the unified functional meaning of a sentence or group of sentences in a written or spoken text.

The Islamic Religious Council of Singapore is responsible for the preparation of English Friday sermon texts and their delivery (MUIS, 2001). This council, through its web site, also uploads the prepared sermons and summons people all over the world interested in Islam to register and make use of any information or provide some feedback to the council. This fact is advantageous that I registered myself and downloaded ten out of the English Friday sermon texts previously uploaded by the Council from September 2001 to December 2001. These data were then accepted and treated verbatim. This was to keep the lexical and grammatical items of the sermon texts in their own original conditions. The excerpts presented in this writing were also quoted verbatim from the data.

The data were analyzed using the genre model analysis offered by Eggins, (1994); and Eggins and Slade (1997). There were two integrated parts—the Schematic Structure Analysis and Lexico-grammar Analysis.

The Schematic Structure Analysis had these following steps:

- Recognizing the segments;

- Defining the communicative purpose of the segment;

- Dividing the sermon text into constituent stages on the basis of Functional Criteria;

- Specifying Obligatory and Optional stages;

- Devising a structural formula: the Actual Structure and the Generic Structure Potential (Structure Potential)

Whereas the semantic and lexico-grammatical analysis revealed how text types realized particular social or communicative purposes; how participants and participant relations were constructed; how the text systematically related to the contextual factors.

DISCUSSION

1. Purposes and their features

Each of these sub purposes was employed to express what the *khatib* was doing or aimed to do when directing proposals or propositions in a sermon delivery.

To thematize the sermon

We can recognize this sub purpose from the title of the sermon. That is why it was functionally labeled Title. According to Addison (1999) a title tells you what the text is about. It is just like a heading, printed at the top of a page to indicate the subject matter that is going to be discussed in a particular chapter, column or section. The title "Being the Master of Our Tongues", for instance, functions to represent or thematize the content of a sermon which is different from that in another religious service with a different title.

To praise Allah, to testify that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is His Prophet, to remind Islam followers to have *taqwa* and to pray for safety and prosperity

These sub purposes are culturally realized and expressed in Arabic in the opening prayer and closing prayer in order to begin and end every sermon. They are labeled Opening and Closing Prayers. Based on Madhab Syafi'i, the prayers in both the opening and closing sessions of a sermon are intended to convey several

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communicative purposes (Al-Habsyi 1999: 224). They are conventionally intended to (1) praise Allah; (2) testify that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is His Prophet; (3) remind Islam followers to increase *taqwa* to Allah; and (4) pray for the safety and welfare for all Moslems.

To embody an interpersonal attitude of the speaker to the audience

This purpose was functionally labeled Address, and recognized by the use of vocatives such as "My brothers in Islam". When using such kind of vocative, the *khatib* intends to address (Halliday, 1994: 54; Eggins, 1994: 65), he also intends to show his membership, identity marker or solidarity to the *jama'ah* (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 107). In this study The vocative "My brothers" was the most frequently used vocative in the sermon texts (58.14%). This means showing in-group membership and embrotherment is greatly emphazised in order to tighten the brotherhood and solidarity with the *jama'ah* as it is always accentuated in Islam teachings

Though made up of different constructions, the vocatives in the selected sermon texts used limited lexical items such as "brother", "Muslim", "Islam", "congregation", "dear", "beloved", "respected", "blessed". Whatever construction a *khatib* would use may indicate that he speaks within the concept of Islam brotherhood and solidarity that the one way communication between the *khatib* and the *jama'ah* happens on a familiar and frequent basis. This may mean that the social distance created between the *khatib* and the *jama'ah* is Minimal. Such a condition seems to be beneficial for conveying the messages contained in the sermon, and thus plays a significant role in taking part to achieve the overall and general purpose of the sermon.

To demand either the listener or the speaker himself, or both of them to perform some exchanges of goods and services

This sub purpose was functionally labeled Appeal. Linguistically appeal is used to demand either the listener or speaker, or both of them to perform some exchanges of goods and services that it is a resource for negotiating meanings in a dialogue. In the study this sub purpose is intended to invite both the *khatib* and the *jama'ah* to act according to Islam teaching, be from the *Quran, Hadiths, Ijma', and Qiyas*. Now consider the following examples: "Have *taqwa* in Allah s.w.t. who has bestowed upon you a blessing …". Here a service is negotiated to the *jama'ah* so that they are expected to comply with the proposal delivered in Jussive type "Have". In the appeal "May Allah protect us from this group", the service negotiates the third subject—Allah, and the Optative type proposal is much like of a prayer that He may comply with it. In the appeal "Let us strive to increase our taqwa to Allah …", an Inclusive type of proposal is addressed to both the *khatib* and the *jama'ah* to comply with the service being presented. So it is clear that the existence of appeals in the sermon texts indicates that they have the spoken style; and the interpersonal negotiation is created in the "exchange" in the services. However, if it happens, the compliance of the proposal is never noticed during the delivery of the sermon. When we go through the sermons, we would find that the only speaker is the *khatib*. You would not find any turn taking, as you usually would in a dialogic text because the *jama'ah* in a sermon delivery conventionally remain silent and keep listening. The *khatib* himself keeps appealing and of course doing other things such as addressing, reading the related scriptures, translating, and explaining. So I may conclude that the type of "interaction" is monologic, and the role of language is ancillary because the appeals are presented so that the *khatib* and the *jama'ah* would do some related activity in the future.

To capture the audience's attention to what is supposed to be presented in the sermon's body

This sub purpose can be recognized in propositions about the content of the sermon and intended to draw the attention from the *jama'ah*. Cheong (1999: 51) labels this purpose Gambit. This is an example: "Why is this so? Why are we reminded every week to have *Taqwa* to Allah? It is because, the *iman* of each individual can increase and decrease. And each person's *Taqwa* symbolizes as the key that determines whether the *Iman* of an individual is high or low. This is the very reason why in every Friday *Khutbah*, we are constantly reminded to increase our *Taqwa* to Allah, so that every Friday will be a day whereby we also increase our *Iman* to Allah". The example illustrates how the *jama'ah's* image about the importance of increasing *taqwa* is built.

To introduce the sermon's body

A proposition functioning to link the opening stage of the sermon to the body realizes this sub purpose. The following is an example: "How can we increase our *Taqwa* to Allah? What are the characteristics of a person who has *Taqwa*?" Transition is used to label this purpose (Cheong, 1999: 52). The example relates the opening stage to the body of the sermon because the proposition demands some information from the sermon body to describe or explain the other propositions in the opening stage.

To relate the sermon's subject to the scripture

This sub purpose was labeled Relation to Scripture and can be realized by the presentation of some verses of the Quran in the sermon text. Verbal Process "says" (84.62%) and Circumstantial Adjunct "in the Quran" (58.97%) were used to qualify this sub purpose. These are the examples: "Allah brings forth these in the verse 18 of

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Surah Al-Hasyr"; "In *Surah Al-Kahfi*, verse 49, Allah says". This implies that the scripture is really what Allah says or states and is accommodated in the *Quran*.

To present the meaning of the scripture written in Arabic

This sub purpose was often recognized by Relational Process (Equative class) "means", such as: "It means: There isn't a word that is said except that it will be recorded by the angels of Raqib and Atid." This was then functionally labeled Translation, and was also presented between quotation marks. It was usually presented to translate the Arabic verses that the *jama'ah* would find it easy to understand them.

To explain a proposition (or some part of it) presented in gambit, transition, or scripture by expanding it

This sub purpose was labeled Explanation and was intended to provide examples, clarifications, and detailed information to make the *jama'ah* understand of what is delivered in the sermon. The realization of the sub purpose can be in elaboration, extension, or enhancement, such as: "These, therefore, are the characteristics of those who have piety and *taqwa*. They are not only preparing themselves for the challenges of life, in fact, more importantly, they are preparing for themselves to face the life of the hereafter which is for eternity. Those that have *Taqwa* realized at every moment that life in this world is only temporary and that the life in the Hereafter is everlasting. They know very well that the promise of Allah is the truth and that death is certain. Therefore they are not the least bit attracted to the luxuries of life in this world that simply deceives and distracts".

To give judgement, opinion or description on an event or person

This purpose was labeled Evaluative Comment and possessed semantic properties such as expressions of attitudes or comments, expressions of incredulity,

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comparisons and predictions. Attitudinal lexis ("terrible", "ridiculous"), Mood Adjunct ("actually", "really", "verily", "indeed"), and Relational Process ("mean", "think") were often used to express evaluative comments. Halliday (1985: 184) describes the term as an expression of the speaker's subjective attitude, which represents an interpersonal element.

When saying "unfortunately" as in "Unfortunately there has been more and more amongst our young who forget their responsibility in doing their *solat*", the *khatib* wanted to show that something in the proposition did not please him. For him it is unfortunate to see more young people forget doing their *solat* and he thought this should not happen. In another occasion the *khatib's* personal evaluation may justify that something is certain or uncertain by using Mood Adjuncts such as "indeed", "verily", "in fact". Using one of these as in "In fact, he also reminded Muslims to continuously improve themselves by learning skills which will benefit them and the society in general", the *khatib* wanted to form an image that he is certain about his proposition. He is quite certain because it is a fact that he (The Prophet) continuously reminds Muslims to improve themselves. Also in another case the *khatib's* personal evaluation may justify that something may surprise, regret or touch him, as in "Sad to say, during these nights our desire will be highly tempted. During these last ten nights a group of Muslims will become more unmindful and heedless". Lexical item *sad* was used to show that the *khatib* regretted a condition when Muslims were so unmindful and heedless that they forgot the mosque during the last ten nights in the fasting month of *Ramadhan*. Of course he has some reasons to say that this should not happen.

The *khatib's* subjective attitude towards something realized in his personal evaluation, which represents an interpersonal element, may indicate that the texts had a spoken style. Such subjective attitudes as the ones in the selected sermon texts may also be presented so that the *jama'ah* possess the same or similar attitude towards the

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respected proposition. Or at least they may be expected to get impressed with what was presented in the proposition and then make some changes in the attitude.

2. Schematic Structure

On the basis of functional labeling the sermon texts were divided into several constituent stages, the Schematic Structure, that the pattern, be the actual or potential one could be realized. The following is an example of a linear description of the Schematic Structure of a sermon text: **T ^ OP ^ Add ^ App ^ G ^ Add ^ Tr ^ RS ^ Trl ^ E ^ RS ^ Trl ^ E ^ RS ^ Trl ^ E ^ RS ^ Trl ^ EC ^ RS ^ Trl ^ EC ^ RS ^ Trl ^ App ^ EC ^ Add ^ RS ^ Trl ^ App ^ CP**.

The caret means is followed by. T is Title. OP is Opening Prayer. Add is Address. App is Appeal. G is Gambit. Tr is Transition. RS is Relation to Scripture. Trl is Translation. E is Explanation. EC is Evaluative Comment, and CP is Closing Prayer.

Other sermon texts can also be written out in such kind of linear description. But the result does not help us much to see the pattern. The actual structures of the sermon texts need to be observed thoroughly and refined in order to picture a more general description of the sermon texts that it represents the genre of religious service. Halliday and Hasan (1989: 64) call this refined structure Generic Structure Potential or Structure Potential. Using this Structure Potential we can express the total range of optional and obligatory elements and their order that can accommodate every actual structure of the same genre.

After a thorough study of the actual structures of the selected sermon texts, I found that the Generic Structure Potential or Structure Potential of the genre of religious service is as follows: **T ^ OP ^ [↲(*Add) ↲*App *{(G) ^ (Tr)} ↲*{RS ^ Trl} ↲*E ↲(*EC)] ^ CP.** This Structure Potential appears to have accommodated the possibility of any actual structure of a sermon text. This structure potential can be a powerful device to generate a large number of possible structures.

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The following is a short way of reading the above structure potential: Title (T) [followed by] Opening Prayer (OP) [followed by] elements in square brackets [followed by] Closing Prayer (CP). Between the square brackets there are elements of optionality in sequence but are never equal to a complete freedom because the square brackets indicate the restraint. The elements in the square brackets then read as follows:

- Address (Add) may or may not occur. If it occurs it either precedes Appeal (App) or follows it.
- Appeal [followed by] Gambit (G) if there is any [followed by] Transition (Tr) if there is any.
- The curly brackets indicate that Gambit and Transition are fixed in order, and Relation to Scripture and Translation are too.
- The square arrow indicates iteration; the asterisk indicates unordered; and the brackets indicate optionality.

IMPLICATION

There are several sub purposes in each sermon text. Each of these sub purposes is employed to express what the *khatib* is doing or aimed to do when directing proposals or propositions in a sermon delivery. These "small purposes" then form and constitute the general communicative purpose of the selected sermon texts, i.e.: to disseminate the divine truths and Islam doctrines. All *khatib*, therefore, need to consider their speech role in exchange when directing a proposal or proposition for the sake of expressing a sub purpose that may lead them to choose and use appropriate proposals and propositions in their sermon delivery.

Understanding systemic functional linguistics may help those who are interested in the genre of Friday sermons to recognize the linguistic features in used in the sub purposes. Some features of spoken language such as "Address", "Appeal", and "Evaluative Comment", for example, are employed in attempting the sub

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purposes that the spoken style significantly colors the prepared sermons. The effort to include spoken features in any prepared sermon text is likely difficult to avoid because the prepared sermon text is intended to deliver orally.

The sermon texts are also organized in relatively different actual structures. Within each different actual structure, the stages, except those at both the beginning and end of the sermon, are very dynamic in occurrence and occurred in different places in the sermon texts. However, the sermon texts seemed to have a condensed statement of the structure, named Generic Structure Potential (GSP)—a powerful device to generate a large number of actual structures as the following: **T ^ OP ^ [↵(*Add) ↵*App *{(G) ^ (Tr)} ↵*{RS ^ Trl} ↵*E ↵(*EC)] ^ CP.** Less experienced people such as Students of Colleges of Islamic Studies may use this GSP to understand or write English sermon texts.

The habit of analyzing the genre of any texts may encourage SMU English teachers to train their students to familiarize themselves with the communication systems of those texts. This may familiarize them with the linguistic features, general communicative purpose, and the sub purposes or the accepted pattern of the text (be a recount, report, procedure, letter, etc.), and train them to create their own. This could be a way of introducing a genre-based approach to literacy teaching, and a significant way of preparing their students for the production test in their *Ujian Akhir Sekolah,*

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