

**FOOD AND DRINKS TRANSACTIONS IN CONTEXT:
A COMPARATIVE GENRE ANALYSIS**

by


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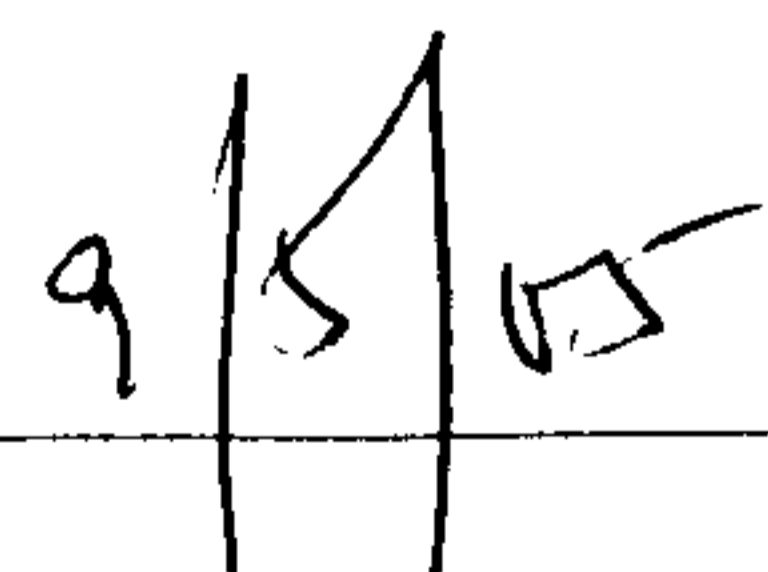
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ABSTRACT

Food and drinks transactions in context: A comparative genre analysis

This ethnographic study looks at the relationship between language use and social contexts in the Malaysian context. It is concerned with investigating how people make use of their social knowledge when interacting with other people in social contexts. As such, this study sought to find out how language is used to achieve pragmatic goals in service encounters in our local coffee shops and international fast food chains. A more detailed account of this study aims to find out the generic structures and associated language features of spoken texts (i.e. transactional conversations). This study also seeks to find out the impact of three variables of contact of situation that is field, tenor and mode on language use. To achieve these objectives, a few local coffee shops and international fast food chains were identified in Kuching where people from all walks of life are their patron. For this purpose of this study, local coffee shops refer to the air-conditioning local coffee shops such as Yi Seng Corner whereas the international fast food chains refer to fast food outlets that operate internationally such as Pizza Hut. The waiters, waitresses and customers are the subjects of this study where the language that they use during transactional conversations were recorded and later on transcribed for analysis purposes. A total of ten transactional conversations (six from local coffee shops and four from international fast food chains) are recorded and transcribed where the results of the analysis are compared in term of generic structures and associated language features of both genres. The impact of field, tenor and mode on language used in both genres are also compared.

The findings reveal that spoken texts used in both genres tend to unfold in stages. Some of the stages (generic structures) are obligatory for instance, 'Greeting' in the service encounters in international fast food chains. Others such as 'Offering' are optional. On the other hand, 'Greeting' is not the defining element of service encounters in local coffee shops as far as this study is concerned. The stages or generic structures of both genres under study are characterized by associated language features. For instance, in both genres, interrogatives and imperatives are used to offer food or drinks and place orders in the 'Offering' and 'Ordering' stage respectively. The impact of field, tenor and mode on the language use is also discussed. Field impacts language choices. For instance, the service encounters in the local coffee shops are marked by colloquial words such as *peng* (iced), *kaw* (thick) and *tapau* (pack) but not in international fast food chains as far as this study is concerned. Similarly, tenor also impact language use. For instance, in international fast food chain, the waitress addresses her customer as 'Sir' or 'Mem'. The mode of communication also impact language use and in this study is marked by action words such as *tapau* and take away in service encounters in local fast food chains and international fast food chains respectively.

ABSTRAK

Transaksi makanan dan minuman di dalam konteks: Pembandingan analisis laras bahasa

Kajian ini bertujuan menyelidik perkaitan diantara penggunaan bahasa oleh seseorang penutur and konteks penggunaannya di dalam situasi yang tertentu. Dalam erti kata lain, ianya mengkaji dengan lebih mendalam cara-cara seseorang penutur bahasa menggunakan pengetahuan sosialnya apabila berinteraksi dengan orang lain mengikut konteks penggunaan bahasa tersebut untuk mencapai tujuan interaksi tersebut. Secara terperinci, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji struktur generik sesuatu teks percakapan and juga ciri-ciri bahasa yang terkandung di dalam teks percakapan yang berkenaan. Kajian ini juga mengkaji dengan lebih mendalam lagi kesan situasi yang berlainan seperti topik perbualan, hubungan di antara penutur bahasa dan percakapan samada dalam bentuk lisan terhadap penggunaan bahasa di dalam konteks penggunaannya. Untuk mencapai objektif kajian ini, beberapa buah kedai makanan tempatan dan restoran antarabangsa telah dikenalpasti di bahagian Kuching. Kedai makanan tempatan merupakan kedai yang berhawa dingin seperti Yi Seng Corner manakala restoran antarabangsa merupakan restoran rangkaian makanan segera antarabangsa seperti Pizza Hut. Pengunjungnya pula terdiri daripada pelbagai bangsa. Pengunjung ini termasuk para pelayan merupakan subjek kajian ini dimana bahasa yang mereka gunakan akan dikaji dari segi struktur generik dan ciri-ciri bahasa yang berkaitan dengan struktur generik berkenaan. Hasil kajian mendapati struktur generik sesuatu teks dan juga ciri-ciri bahasanya berbeza mengikut situasi dan konteks penggunaannya. Sebahagian dari struktur generik seperti menyambut pelanggan dengan ucapan "Selamat petang" adalah wajib semasa berlakunya interaksi diantara pelanggan dengan pelayan di rangkaian restoran makanan segera antarabangsa. Walaubagaimanapun, kajian ini tidak mendapati bahawa struktur generik tadi wujud semasa berinteraksi dengan pelayan di kedai makanan tempatan. Kajian juga mendapati ciri-ciri bahasa yang digunakan disesuaikan dengan struktur generik laras bahasa yang biasanya disesuaikan dengan situasi yang tertentu. Sebagai contoh, semasa menempah makanan dan minuman di kedai makanan tempatan, pelanggan menggunakan perkataan seperti *bungkus*, *meri* dan *tapau* untuk mengarahkan pelayan berbuat sesuatu. Begitu juga semasa berinteraksi dengan pelayan di rangkaian restoran antarabangsa, pelanggan menggunakan perkataan seperti *give* (beri) dan *take away* (bungkus) untuk mengarahkan pelayan berbuat sesuatu. Impak situasi, perhubungan dan perbualan (lisan) juga didapati mempengaruhi penggunaan bahasa di dalam kedua-dua konteks. Sebagai contoh, *peng* (ais) dan *kaw* (pekat) dikaitkan dengan situasi memesang minuman di kedai makanan tempatan manakala *coke regular* dan *vanilla milkshake* di rangkaian restoran makanan segera antarabangsa. Selain dari situasi, perhubungan diantara pelanggan dan pelayan dan cara perbualan iaitu lisan juga mempengaruhi penggunaan bahasa di dalam konteks memesang makanan dan minuman di kedai makanan tempatan dan rangkaian restoran antarabangsa.

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“MAY GOD BLESS ALL OF YOU ABUNDANTLY”

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	i
ABSTRAK	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
Introduction	1
Background of study	1
Significance of study	4
Purpose of the project	5
Limitations of the study	5
Definitions of key term	6
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	
Introduction	9
Theory of Genre	10
A social theory of language	13
The value of SFL in analyzing transactional conversations	14
Language and contexts	15

Review of related literature	19
Implication on education	22
Summary	24

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction	26
Theoretical approaches to analyzing transactional conversations	26
Participants	27
Research Design	27
Techniques	27
Data collection	30
Data analysis	31
Limitations of study	32
Conclusion	32

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Introduction	33
Context of study	34
Analysis of findings	34
Summary of generic structures and associated language features	67
Comparing and contrasting the genres of ordering food and drinks between local coffee shops and international fast food chains	69
Summary	74

**CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS**

Introduction	76
Summary of study	76
Implications of study	78
Recommendations	80
Conclusion	80
REFERENCES	82
BIBLIOGRAPHY	84

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	Data Collection	30 - 31
2	Generic structures of ordering food and drinks in local coffee shops and international fast food chains	67
3	Language features associated with field, tenor and mode in the genres of ordering food and drinks in local coffee shops and international fast food chains	68 – 69

LIST OF FIGURE

Figure	Page
1 The model of language	18

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Chapter one presents sections on background of the study, research objectives, significance of the study, limitations of the study and the definitions of key terms. The background of the study focuses on earlier studies on the analysis of service encounters (e.g. Hasan, 1984, 1985 cited in Eggins & Slade, 1997, pp. 54 -55 & Ventola, 1987 cited in McCarthy & Carter, 1994, p. 24). It also describes briefly the theory of genres (Martin, 1992 cited in Eggins & Slade, 1997; Eggins and Martin cited in Eggins & Slade, 1997; Martin & Rose, 2003) and the theory of language in context (e.g. Halliday, 1994, xvii cited in Cullip, 2004; Cullip. 2004). The research objectives provide readers with the general view and focus of the study respectively. The significance of the study tells the readers the importance of this study by looking at the relationship between language and context and implications on education. The limitation of the study inform the readers of certain constraints that may affect the research particularly data collection. The key terms are defined to enable readers to understand difficult and ambiguous terms used in presenting this report.

1.1 Background of the study

Earlier studies on the analysis of staging in service encounters (e.g. Hasan, 1984, 1985 cited in Eggins & Slade, 1997, pp. 54 – 55; Ventola, 1987 cited in McCarthy & Carter, 1994, p. 24) looked at the generic structures of service encounters associated with a particular genre. The

generic structure of service encounters (e.g. Hasan, 1985, p. 64 cited in Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 55) is identified as follows:

[(Greeting) (Sale initiation)] followed by [(Sale Enquiry ”) {Sale Request followed by Sale Compliance}” followed by Sale] followed by Purchase followed by Purchase Closure followed by (Finish).

Ventola (1987 cited in McCarthy & Carter, 1994, p. 24) has also analyzed service encounters within a post office, a small souvenir shop and a travel agency. A typical generic structure of buying stamps from the post office is identified (e.g. Sale initiation followed by Sale inquiry ... Finish)

According to Eggins and Slade (1997), not many studies have been carried out on the analysis of genres that occur in natural conversation. This means that how people use language in a real life situation such as service encounters in food and drinks transactions is less researched. Burns (2001) seems to support the above claim when she states that the insights gain from genre analysis for naturally occurring spoken text is still new. As such, this proposed study looks at how the context of culture and context of situation motivate language use in two different cultures namely local coffee shops and international fast food chains.

In this study, the genres of ordering food and drinks in local coffee shops and international fast food chains are analyzed in terms of their generic structures and language features. It also looks at how context of situation (e.g. field, tenor and mode) influences language use.

Genres are “stage, goal oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture” (Martin, 1992 cited in Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 56). Eggins and Martin (cited in Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 56) describe genre as a “theory of the unfolding structure texts work

through to achieve their social purposes”. More recently, Martin and Rose (2003, p. 7) refer to genre as “different types of texts that enact various types of social contexts”.

Language that people use in interaction are embedded in the social context in which they are used. In another sense, language use does not occur in isolation but build around everyday interaction such as buying and selling in a market. Halliday and Hasan (1985) claim that all language is embedded in the context of culture and in context of situation. The context of culture and context of situation limit the types of texts and language choices in any particular situation if communication is to be meaningful.

The theory of language in context explicitly describes how language is used in everyday situation to negotiate meanings (Halliday, 1994, xvii, cited in Cullip, 2004). These meanings are motivated by the social and cultural context in which the language is used.

Systemic functional linguistics which is based on the theory of language in context is concerned with how language is used to make meaning (Halliday, 1994, xvii, cited in Cullip, 2004). It describes how language use corresponds to the activities of the given culture, such as ordering food in a coffee shop. The words and sentence patterns (lexicogrammar) of a particular language enables language users to construct meaning for purposeful and meaningful interactions and as Butt, Fahey, Feez, Spinks and Yallop (2000, p. 7) suggest systemic functional grammar is “a way of describing lexical and grammatical choices from the systems of wording so that we are always aware of how language is being used to realize meaning.”

1.2 Significance of the study

This study looks at relationship between language and context in Malaysian context (commercial transactions for food and drinks in Malaysian context). It also looks at the generic structures and language features of spoken texts in local coffee shops and international fast food chains.

The educational emphasis is that language teachers and based on analytical works (comparing two different genres in term of generic structures and language features) will have insights on how language works to make meaning in two different context namely local coffee shops and international fast food chains. On the part of students and also language users, this study will give insights into how language use varies according to context, how people use real language for real purposes, how language is involved in the construction of meaning and how texts (spoken and written) are structured in different ways to achieve their purposes.

Palmer and Bladford (1924 cited in Burns, 2001) express the view that analyzing genuine spoken interactions is important in the course of studying a language. Both emphasize that language study should also be based on every day's talk. As such, this study is significant to both teachers and students who wish to enrich their language repertoire. More importantly, they must know how and when to be linguistically appropriate in certain circumstances such as when they are in a coffee shop or in an international fast food chain.

The findings of this study have some impact on education. The outcomes of the data analysis enables language teachers to teach their students to recognize and identify a typical generic structures and language features of spoken texts in particular in the context of culture mentioned. And as language learners, we too need to learn what choices (words and sentence patterns) are appropriate to make meaning in coffee shops and international fast food chains.

1.3 Purpose of the project

The study highlights how language is used in context within the culture of local coffee shops and international fast food chains in the Malaysian context. Therefore, this study aims to find out;

- i. the generic structures of the spoken texts of service encounters in local coffee shops and international fast food chains
- ii. the associated language features of the spoken texts in service encounters
- iii. the impacts of field, tenor and mode on language use in the service encounters in different context of culture namely local coffee shops and international fast food chains.

1.3 Limitations of the study

This study is limited by the following factors.

- a. The data recorded on tape (spoken texts) may not be clear because of background noise (e.g. piped-in music in the fast food chains and big screen televisions in the coffee shops).
- b. Participants' voices are too soft to be recorded
- c. The student researcher is not an expert in the field of genre analysis. The only course related to genres that he had attended was an English Language Teaching (ELT) Writing Course conducted in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) for a period of three months only. As such, his knowledge in genre analysis particularly in comparing genres of ordering food and drinks in local coffee shops and international fast food chains may

be limited as he depends solely on his reading for information and his supervisor for guidance and constructive advice.

1.5 Definitions of key terms

Certain terms related to the proposed study are defined below.

i. transaction

Transaction is a series of actions that involves meaningful and purposeful interactions between two or more people (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1992). In describing language use, it refers to the activities people carry out in specific situations and in the case of this study: the interaction between waiters or waitresses and their customers. The language use requires a particular transaction: taking customers' order and serving them.

ii. context

Context refers to social interaction in which language is used (Butt, et al., 2000). Halliday and Hasan (1985) define context as context of culture and context of situation.

iii. Context of culture

Context of culture refer to cultures, communities and institutions in which language plays a significant role (Cullip, 2004). The context of culture can also be described as the “sum of all meanings it is possible to mean in that particular culture (Butt, et al., 2000, p. 3). In this study, the context of culture refers to the cultures of local coffee shops and international fast food

chains where transactional conversations or service encounters take place between speakers of a particular language.

iv. Context of situation

Context of situation refers to a more specific situation in which language is used within the context of culture (Cullip, 2004). For instance, within the culture of education, there are many situation namely history lesson, geography lesson and writing report. Butt, et al. (2000) state that within the context of culture, speakers and writers use language in many more specific contexts or situations. Similarly, within the culture of local coffee shops and international fast food chains, people use language for a particular purpose such as ordering food and drinks in coffee shops. There are three variables that impact language use within the context of situation namely field, tenor and mode.

v. Field

Field according to Butt, et al. (2000) refers to on going web of interests and also the purpose of the text (spoken or written). Examples of field are ordering food, taking customers' order and serving the customers (food and drinks transactions)

vi. Tenor

Tenor is the term used to describe the relationship between the speakers and the hearers and also writers and readers (Butt, et al., 2000). It also encompasses role, status and affect. In this study, this relationship is obviously between waiters and customers.

vii. Mode

Mode is the kind of text either spoken or in written form (Butt, et al., 2000). It is reflected by spoken words as in the case of this study. For instance, action words such as ‘Give’ is used for the purpose of getting thing done.

viii. Genre

Martin defines genres as “staged, goal oriented social processes” (Martin, 1997, p. 13). Examples of genres in this study are genre of international fast food chains and genre of local coffee shops.

ix. Register

Halliday views register as “set of meanings, the configuration of semantic patterns, that are typically drawn upon under specific conditions, along with words and structures that are used in the realization of these meaning” (cited in Ghadessy, 1993, p. 23). In short, register is a speech variety used by certain group of people in the society such as waiters or waitresses, teachers, lawyers, farmers and soldiers.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents sections on related literature of the study. Section one presents the theory of genre (e.g. Cullip, 2004; Eggins & Martin, 1997; Martin, 1992; Martin & Rose, 2003). In general, the theory of genre is discussed in term of its functions as viewed by Systemic Functional Linguistics there after refers to as SFL. Section two talks about the theoretical approaches to analyzing transactional conversations. In this section, the spoken data of the transactional conversation are analyzed from the perspectives of SFL. (e.g. Hasan, 1985, p. 64, 1985 cited in Eggins & Slade, 1997, pp. 54 -55; Ventola, 1987 cited in McCarthy & Carter, 1994, p. 24). Section three presents the value of SFL for analyzing spoken data. In this section, readers will be presented with an overall view of the significance of SFL to the field of language study specifically in transactional conversations (Burns, Joyce & Gollin, 1996). The next section that follow presents the relationship between language use and contexts and explains how language is used in context (e.g. Halliday, 1994, xvii, Martin, 1997 cited in Cullip, 2004; Cullip, 2004; Martin & Rose, 2003). It provides insights on how language is socially constructed and embedded in social contexts namely, context of culture and context of situation. It also includes the register variables of the context of situation within a wider context of culture and how all these motivate language use. Section five presents earlier studies on analyzing genre in SFL namely analyzing staging (generic structure) of service encounters (e.g. Hasan, 1985, p. 64 cited in Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 54 and Ventola, 1987 cited in McCarthy & Carter, 1994, p. 24). It also presents the finding on the generic structure of service encounters (e.g. Hasan, 1985, p. 64

cited in Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 54). Finally, the last section of this chapter presents the educational significance of carrying out the study in relation to the importance of analyzing genre within different contexts.

2.1 Theory of genre

Within functional linguistics, the theory of genre has enabled us to understand the nature of language use in context. Systemic functional linguists view language as a set of tool for purposeful interaction in order to fulfill certain functions (Cullip, 2004). These functions determine the words and grammatical patterns of the texts that are used as people communicate with each other.

Martin (1992 cited in Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 56) defines genre as “stage, goal oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture.” Eggins and Martin (cited in Eggins & Slade 1997, p. 56) state genre as a “theory of the unfolding structure texts work through to achieve their social purposes.” More recently, Martin and Rose (2003, p.7) refer to genre as “different types of texts that enact various types of social contexts. In other words, genre is specific text-type, socially constructed used for meaningful interactions.

Genre in the form of spoken and written texts, for instance lectures and catalogues respectively differ in their generic structures and associated language features. Lectures and catalogues serve to impart knowledge to students and persuade readers respectively. In formal learning institutions (e.g. schools, colleges and universities), the genre of education include narratives, procedures and explanations that serve to inform readers, tells us what to do or how to do something and explain to us how and why things occur respectively.

Other genres of education also include spoken genres such as forum, debates and public speaking. While all the above specific texts represent genres of education, there are other texts that represent other genres such as religion, sports, judiciary, trade and commerce. In the genre of religion, for instance, holy masses, bible class and Koran recital serve to instruct followers (e.g. to pray, to respect, to do good deeds). Whereas in the genre of sport such as live telecast of a football match, sports documentaries and preview matches serve to inform and entertain viewers.

In order to achieve social purposes, texts unfold in stages. Cullip (2004, p.12) noted that genres are staged and there are steps (stages) to follow systematically before we can actually achieve our intended goals. Each text also has its own distinctive linguistic characteristics beside the generic structures, for instance, text 1 which is an educational genre of a narrative serve to entertain readers.

Text 1: Snow White and an old woman

Once upon a time, there lived a girl named Snow White. She lived with her aunt and uncle because her parents were dead.

One day, she heard her guardians talking about leaving her in the jungle because they don't have enough money to raise her. So, she ran away into the forest because she did not want to burden her guardians.

In the deep forest she saw a wooden cottage. She knocked on the door and was greeted by an old woman. The old woman has no children so she invited Snow White to stay with her.

Snow White accepted her offer because the old woman looked friendly. Snow White and the old woman live happily ever after.

(Adapted from Gerot & Wignell, 1994)

The generic structure of text 1 can be characterized in the following ways;

Orientation: Once upon a time, there lived a girl named Snow White.
 She lived with her aunt and uncle because her parents were dead.

Complication:

One day, she heard her guardians talking about leaving her in the jungle because they didn't have enough money to raise her. So, she ran away into the forest because she didn't want to burden her guardians.

In the deep forest she saw a wooden cottage. She knocked on the door and was greeted by an old woman. The old woman has no children so she invited Snow White to stay with her.

Resolution:

Snow White accepted her offer because the old woman looked friendly. Snow White and the old woman lived happily ever after.

Grammatically, the text is characterized by the use of material processes (e.g. lived, talking, ran), relational processes (e.g. was), circumstances (e.g. Once upon a time, into the forest) and the use of past tense (lived, heard, accepted).

Halliday's functional grammar as a resource for making meaning is explained below:

Every text – that is, everything that is said or written – unfolds in some context of use; furthermore, it is the uses of language that, over tens of thousands of generations, have shaped the system. Language has evolved to satisfy human needs; and the way it is organized is functional with respect to those needs – it is not arbitrary. A functional grammar is essentially a 'natural' grammar, in the sense that everything in it can be explained, ultimately, by reference to how language is used.

(Halliday, 1985a cited in Nunan, 1994, p. 44)

The generic structure and language features identified in any text may account for typical or different genres. We learn to identify and differentiate the typical genres by looking for similar pattern in wordings and sentence structures in them. Such recognizable patterns can differ from simple language resources we use to greet people for instance to more complex meanings we may find in academic writing such as informational reports, explanation and discussion (Martin

& Rose, 2003, p.7). The idea that there are identifiable and recurrent generic structures that are present in particular groups of texts within certain genres is an important one in language learning. It is consistent with language theory that points a relationship between language use and contexts.

Another fact to consider is – genres are culturally and socially determined which has resulted in language variation or registers. Butt et al. define register as follow;

When texts share the same context of situation to a greater or lesser extent, they will share the same experiential, interpersonal and textual meanings and so they belong to the same register.

(Butt et. al., 2003, p. 9)

It is important for language users to know that language variety exists in different context of culture and situation. This has implication for language teaching and learning because learners ought to know when and how to use language in their conversation or written form that is appropriate to the contexts of its use.

Cullip (2004) noted that text and context could be related through consideration of field, tenor and mode that are discussed in the following section.

2.2 A Social theory of language

The emphasis for much language learning has been on learners doing things with language than knowing things about language (Joyce, 1992). Joyce (1992) claims that the social theory of language enables learners to speak and write English because it makes explicit to both teachers and learners the connections between language and the social contexts of language use. In other sense, the context of culture and context of situation motivate language use.

The social theory of language that is largely based on SFL enables teachers to teach their learners how to be linguistically appropriate i.e. having the sub-conscious knowledge of grammar, texts and contexts which makes them competence and effective language user in social situations.

Systemic Functional linguists view language as a resource for people to use to make meaning within the context of culture and context of situation. Systemic Functional Grammar is designed to account for how language is used to make meaning (Halliday, 1985a: Xiii cited in Joyce, 1992, p. 24). Language is a tool used to fulfill different purposes (e.g. to order food and drinks, to argue and to negotiate) within literate societies in social contexts.

2.3 The value of SFL in analyzing transactional conversation.

Burns et al. (1996) notes the significance of SFL to the field of language study as follows.

- a. It highlights the functional nature of language that systematically links language use to the social contexts (context of culture and context of situation).
- b. It identifies how context of culture and context of situation and the language work together through the register variable.
- c. It explains the relationship between the vocabulary and grammatical items which speakers jointed construct.
- d. It identifies the generic structure and language features of the spoken texts.
- e. It identifies how the register variables of field, tenor and mode are realized in the lexicogrammatical choices of the spoken texts
- f. It differentiates spoken texts from written texts.