EXPLORING AN APPROACH FOR TEACHING SUBJECT SPECIFIC GENRES IN CHINESE
THE CASE OF POST-COLONIAL HONG KONG

Mark Shiu Kee Shum, The University of Hong Kong

Mark S.K. Shum is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Education in the University of Hong Kong. He is currently Director of the Support Centre for Teachers Using Chinese as the Medium of Instruction (CMI Centre) at the University of Hong Kong. His teaching interests and major fields of research are Chinese language education, systemic functional linguistics and its application to language education, subject-specific genre and Chinese across the curriculum.

This research seeks both to describe Chinese genres found in a range of school subjects and to develop models of pedagogical principles for their teaching. Thus far, most of the research has been devoted to the teaching of genres for first and second language teaching, though there is a developing interest in research into the teaching of genres in teaching English as a foreign language. There is a need to develop genre-based research in languages other than English, in order to test the application of the theory to non-English speaking contexts. This paper reports on an approach to the study of Chinese genres for examination purposes, developed in Hong Kong, where, since 1997, official support has been given to the use of Chinese as a medium of instruction. The study is not yet completed, though there is some encouraging evidence that the genre-based approach is proving useful.

INTRODUCTION

Interest in genre pedagogies using systemic functional linguistic (SFL) theory is about 20 to 25 years old, much of the research having been done in Australia (Christie et al. 1990a; Christie et al. 1990b; Christie et al. 1992; Christie and Martin 1997; Feez and Joyce 1998; Martin and Rothery 1981; Martin and Rothery 1982). Such research has sought to describe types of spoken or written text (genres) in a range of school subjects and to develop models of pedagogy for their teaching. The collective body of research has excited international interest (e.g. Johns 2003; Hyland 2003), and genre theory can claim to have made a useful contribution to research on literacy. Most of the research has been about literacy in English, both as a first and a second language. In more recent years there has been some developing research, testing genre pedagogy for teaching English as a foreign language (e.g. Dang 2002), though more needs to be done. What is lacking, however, is research into genres and their pedagogy in languages other than English,
since the theory and its potential applications should be tested with other languages and contexts apart from English-speaking ones.

This paper aims at outlining a study devoted to aspects of genre pedagogy in Chinese. More specifically, it reports on an ongoing study that commenced in the late 1990s, which sought to develop accounts of written language students would need in undertaking examinations in Chinese at the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE). The study was initiated by the Support Centre for Teachers Using Chinese as the Medium of Instruction (CMI Centre) of The University of Hong Kong.

The adoption of aspects of genre pedagogy represented a new departure for Chinese teachers and students in Hong Kong, bringing new challenges. Under the new provisions that were made when Hong Kong returned to China in 1997, Chinese became the preferred medium of instruction for Hong Kong secondary schools, even though, in some cases, schools retained the right to use English. Significant educational changes were ushered into Hong Kong by the return to China, many of which are discussed by Tse et al. (in press). More work is needed to document the recent experience of Hong Kong. Reviewing the early findings of the genre-based study (Shum et al. 2002; Shum et al. 2004a; Shum et al. 2004b; Shum et al. 2004c), we can argue that genre pedagogy appears to be making a valuable contribution to teaching in Chinese in Hong Kong.

This paper is structured as follows. The first section will outline aspects of the policy for use of Chinese as the medium of instruction; the second will discuss the CMI Centre; the third will briefly review systemic functional (SF) grammar and its uses in analysis of subject-specific literacies; and the fourth will review responses to the work of the CMI Centre, suggesting that the results are at this stage encouraging.

**THE ADOPTION OF THE CHINESE MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION POLICY**

Hong Kong ended its period of colonial history in 1997, when it returned to China, and achieved status as a Special Administrative Region (SAR). Education in secondary schools in the colonial period was offered in English. For more than 100 years, local and international educators had advocated the use of Chinese as the medium of instruction in schools, yet this recommendation was not heeded (Tsui et al. 1999). Even by 1997, most secondary schools still used English. The teachers had been themselves taught in English, and while they often code-switched in the classroom, moving between Cantonese and English, they often preferred to handle concepts and ideas in English, because they had been taught the technical language of their subjects in English.
Soon after its appointment in 1997, the new government declared that as from September 1998 Chinese would be the preferred language of instruction for all junior secondary schools. The new policy did bring some gains. A strong case could be made for the importance of children being educated in their mother tongue. Two authorities on second language acquisition, Cummins and Swain (1986) for example, have argued the importance of establishing proficiency in literacy in the first language as a basis for transition into literacy in the second language. Such a claim was supported in Hong Kong by the fact that, especially at the secondary level, many students were known to struggle with the concepts they were learning in English; they found it difficult to learn them while also being burdened with the need to master aspects of a second language (Hong Kong Education Department 1990).

Despite the apparent benefits of education in the mother tongue, the adoption of the Chinese language as a medium of instruction also brought difficulties. Some parents were apprehensive about the possible loss of English skills in their children, fearing they would not obtain good jobs. Teachers – even those willing to take up Chinese as the medium of instruction – were often also very apprehensive, because they had learned the technical terminology in English and felt uneasy about teaching these specialist terms in Chinese. The latter problem was compounded by the lack of suitable textbooks and materials in Chinese, since the textbook market had catered for English. Even the matter of devising suitable examination questions in Chinese and of preparing students to handle these well was significant. Hence, in the transitional period after 1998, many teachers and students experienced difficulties, while parents were often vocal in their concerns. (Tse et al. 2000; Tsui et al. 2000)

**THE SUPPORT CENTRE FOR TEACHERS USING CHINESE AS THE MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION**

In Hong Kong the spoken Chinese is Cantonese, and though many Cantonese expressions can be expressed in written characters, the written form of the dialect is seldom used as a medium for formal purposes (Tse et al. 1995). The formal written mode in Hong Kong is referred to as ‘Standard Modern Chinese’, which is the same as the preferred spoken dialect of the north, Putonghua. In Chinese medium schools, students are taught in Cantonese, while they learn Standard Modern Chinese for the purposes of literacy, and they are also taught Putonghua and English. The official policy is one of ‘biliteracy and trilingualism’ (Hong Kong SAR Government 1999, 23-24).
The Hong Kong school system involves six years of primary schooling (Primary 1-6) and five years of secondary school (Secondary 1-5). At the end of the fifth year of secondary school, students sit the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE). Success in this examination determines whether the students can proceed to a further two years of schooling, and hence to the matriculation examinations. The HKCEE is set in Chinese and in English, and both Chinese medium students and English medium students have the right to select the language used for their examination. Since it determines entry to subsequent schooling that opens up the possibility of university entrance, the HKCEE examination is significant. It was for this reason that Shum and his colleagues (forming a genre research team) decided to focus, initially at least, on the examination genres in several school subjects in the HKCEE.

Tse, Shum, Ki and Tsui received the contract to create a research centre devoted to teaching in Chinese in 1998. With the support and approval of the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) the study commenced in 1999 by collecting copies of examination papers and students’ scripts, going back to 1995, when questions intended to have a communicative capacity component were introduced in the HKCEE papers. The first subjects selected were history, chemistry, physics and economics, phased in over 1999-2002, while geography and biology were added in 2003. The research team was joined by several teachers with expertise in the selected subjects. The papers in which the written texts occurred involved several kinds of questions, including multiple-choice. These were not the focus of this study. Rather, the focus of the study became the short written texts required in all school subjects, where marks are allowed for communicative capacity. The decision to award marks for some communicative capacity is relatively new in the Hong Kong educational system, since hitherto it was understood that content was all that mattered, and that students might write down sets of points or short notes in order to pass the examination (HKEAA 2003a).

As the work progressed on the texts for history, physics and later, chemistry, economics, geography and biology, an effort was made to analyse them using principles of SFL analysis, and adopting a great deal of the terminology provided by genre studies in Australia (Christie and Martin 1997; Unsworth 2000, 245-274). Broadly, the range of subjects selected drew on the social and natural sciences, though history represented the humanities. The research team brought together small groups of experienced subject teachers to conduct initial analyses of texts in each subject and to discuss with them what constituted acceptable examination genres in each subject. Genre names, such as ‘procedural account’, ‘descriptive report’, ‘sequential explanation’, ‘causal explanation’, ‘deduction’ and ‘exposition’, which were partly taken from the Australian research were adopted,
and/or in several cases adapted, for the local needs and conditions. The plan was that as the meetings with teachers modified or confirmed the examination genres that were emerging, resource books, CD ROMs, and a website would be created to inform the teachers. In addition, seminars and workshops were organised at least once a year in each subject area, bringing teachers into the CMI Centre to train them in recognizing the genres and in using some grammatical terms to analyse them.

Many teachers found the new approach interesting, though most acknowledged some concerns. A well-established belief existed in the minds of many subject specialists that they were teachers of ‘content’ and that the teaching of ‘language’ was the responsibility of language teachers. It was for some rather confronting to learn that since the examination genres were constructed in language (often with diagrams, tables and maps), it was language that they were in fact teaching. The other broad area that was of concern in working with teachers was that of the grammatical knowledge involved. All teachers had studied grammar at school, albeit of a traditional kind, but for most of them it was some years since they had used it. It was clear to the CMI Centre that the language knowledge used must be carefully selected, so that the teachers should not feel overwhelmed by grammatical knowledge.

USING FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR TO IDENTIFY THE EXAMINATION GENRES

Literacy experts have increasingly argued that there are many kinds of literacy – subject specific literacies in fact – found in the different subjects taught in schools. Each subject has its characteristic ways of shaping meaning, developing arguments, addressing questions and organizing systems of knowledge. It has been argued that teachers in all subject areas need to be prepared in such a way that they can recognise the different genres or text types used to package knowledge in their areas of specialization (Martin 1986; Veel and Coffin 1996). With these explicit understandings, teachers are better able to provide their students with opportunities to position themselves as powerful writers and readers of the subject areas.

This study sought to use SFL principles in investigating examination genres in Chinese, as there was a need to develop descriptions that identified functional elements in written Chinese for use with teachers. Considerable work has been done on functional descriptions of Chinese (Fang 1998; Halliday and McDonald 2004; Hu et al. 1997; Shum 2003, 229-254), and Halliday’s original work (1956) was on the grammar of Chinese. Despite this, no complete pedagogic functional grammar of Chinese is yet available. In practice, de-
criptions of the examination genres were provided both in English and Chinese. Reports on the research study needed to be provided in English, and many teachers found some advantage in seeing both Chinese and English versions of the examination genres.

Three examples of examination genres are shown here in Chinese (with their English translations given in brackets), demonstrating the level of detail with respect to the language that experience has shown teachers are willing to accept. These examples also demonstrate the kind of analyses carried out by the research team to classify the genre types and identify their respective linguistic features. The texts of the examples are separated into several stages, showing their organisation.

Text 1 is a theoretical explanation in physics (HKEAA 2002c, 24). The function of the genre is to explain the phenomenon with the help of a theory. The text is set out to reveal elements of the schematic structure and some of the salient language features that create each element.

The Direction is the opening element, marking its status as an examination genre. In the case of Text 1, the text would be intelligible without including the Direction, for the theoretical explanation could be stated simply by giving the other elements. However, for the most part, the connection between the Direction and the next element is more overt in other examination genres. The grammatical information listed for each element is intended to do no more than identify the most salient linguistic features, some recognition of which helps confirm the presence of each element.

Text 2 is a causal explanation in geography (HKEAA 2002b, 7). The function of the genre is to explain the cause of a phenomenon. In the text, the relationship of the figure and the verbal text is very intimate: hence the figure itself, and the Direction that accompanies it, are part of the genre.

The ability to answer the question correctly depends on an accurate reading of the figure, because the figure expresses essential information, and is part of the mode of communication. Undertaking such a task is a test of reading and interpretive capacity as well as capacity to write. The details provided of the most salient language features help indicate how the explanation is constructed.

Text 3 is a procedural account in biology (HKEAA 2002a, 40) which describes an experiment.

Space will not permit a detailed review of the range of genres across the various subjects. For science, apart from the explanatory genres (sequential, causal and theoretical, etc.) which are dominant for explaining science in different aspects, there are also procedural accounts for doing science (already shown in Text 3), descriptive reports for reporting science, and some expositions for arguing science, as suggested by Veel (1997).
Economics, which requires capacity to evaluate economic information, often requires judgment genres, and history also often requires evaluation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schematic Structure</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Language features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direction</td>
<td>氣體在體積維持不變的情況下，其壓強隨温度而上升。試根據分子運動學說加以解釋。&lt;br&gt;<em>(Based on the kinetic theory, explain why the pressure of a fixed mass of gas increases with temperature at constant volume.)</em></td>
<td>Circumstance of contingency &quot;在體積維持不變的情況下&quot; <em>(at constant volume)</em> specifies the condition.&lt;br&gt;Material process &quot;上升&quot; <em>(rises)</em> builds the action and Circumstance of Accompaniment &quot;隨溫度&quot; <em>(with temperature)</em> builds the circumstance that applies.&lt;br&gt;Verbal process and imperative mood &quot;解釋&quot; <em>(explain)</em> direct students' behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenon Identification</td>
<td>氣體在體積維持不變的情況下，其壓強隨温度而上升。這現象在分子運動學說中的解釋如下：&lt;br&gt;<em>(The pressure of a fixed mass of gas increases with temperature at constant volume. The explanation for this in terms of the kinetic theory is as follows.)</em></td>
<td>Relational process &quot;如下&quot; <em>(as follows)</em> directs attention to the following explanation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Theory</td>
<td>根據分子運動學說，氣體由非常微細但數量龐大的分子組成。各分子不斷地作無規運動。&lt;br&gt;<em>(according to the kinetic theory)</em> foregrounds the theory. Relational identifying process &quot;由…組成&quot; <em>(consists of)</em> establishes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Text 1a Theoretical explanation*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schematic Structure</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Language features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Theory (Cont'd)</td>
<td>(According to the kinetic theory, a gas consists of a large number of tiny particles, or molecules, which are constantly in random motion.)</td>
<td>the essential character of “氣體” (gas) as expressed in the large nominal group “非常微細但數量龐大的分子” (a large number of tiny particles, or molecules, which are constantly in random motion).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation Sequence</td>
<td>當溫度升高時，氣體分子運動的平均速率和其它動能增加。由於氣體的體積不變，分子將更頻密和更猛烈地撞擊容器壁，使容器壁受到更大的力；因而氣體的壓強增加。 (As the temperature rises, the average speed or the average kinetic energy of the gas molecules increases. Since the volume of the gas remains constant, the gas molecules hit the wall of the container in which they are held more vigorously and more frequently. Thus, the pressure of the gas increases.)</td>
<td>Circumstantial element “當溫度升高時” (as the temperature rises) opens the explanatory phase and sets out the circumstance for explanation. Nominal groups “平均速率” (average speed) and “平均動能” (average kinetic energy) build subject knowledge. Material process “撞擊” (hit) builds action while the expression “更頻密和更猛烈地” (more vigorously and more frequently) builds Circumstance of Manner. Conjunctive relation “因而” (thus) builds closing consequential connection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Schematic Structure</strong></td>
<td><strong>Text</strong></td>
<td><strong>Language features</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Direction</strong></td>
<td>圖 3a 顯示新界東沿岸地區。(Figure 3 shows a coastal area in East New Territories.)</td>
<td>Relational process “顯示” (shows) identifies what the figure does. Nominal group “沿岸地區” (a coastal area) identifies the participant and Circumstance of Place “新界東” (in East New Territories) identifies the location. Two verbal processes “描述及解釋” (describe and explain) identify the task and direct students' behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phenomenon Identification</strong></td>
<td>海灘和懸崖 (分別為 X 及 Y 地形) 是由不同的海浪作用所形成的。(Beach and cliff (respectively landforms X and Y) are formed by different kinds of wave action.)</td>
<td>Topical theme “海灘和懸崖” (beach and cliff) identifies the phenomenon that has to be explained. Relational process “是” (are) indicates judgement and builds description. Material process “形成” (form) identifies the relevant action.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Text 2a Causal explanation*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schematic Structure</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Language features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explanation Sequence 1</td>
<td>X地形位於向西海岸，位置掩蔽而不受盛行風影響。由於西面有陸地而吹程短，兼且沿岸水淺（濱外坡度平緩），導致海浪和海底產生大量摩擦，能量因而大為減弱。因此這裡主要出現建設性波浪，沖流比回流大。在這情況下，海岸物質不斷在海灣沉積而少被移走，因此最終導致海灣的形成。(Landform X is found on the west-facing coast which is sheltered from the prevailing wind) states the location of the beach. Causal process “導致” (causes) and causal conjunctions “由於” (as), “因而” (hence) and “因此” (therefore) build causal connections. Several nominal groups build technical language: “向西海岸” (west-facing coast), “盛行風” (prevailing wind), “吹程” (fetch), “濱外坡度” (offshore gradient), “建設性波浪” (constructive waves), “沖流” (swash), “回流” (backwash), “海岸物質” (coastal material), “海灣沉積” (coastal deposition). Circumstance of contingency “在這情況下” (under this circumstance) identifies the condition that applies. Last consequential conjunction “因此” (therefore) adds to the sense of consequence and helps bring this sequence to a close.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Text 2b Causal explanation (continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schematic Structure</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Language features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explanation Sequence 2</td>
<td>相反，Y地形位於向東海岸，面向盛行東風。這裡吹程長，灘外坡度陡峭，水很深，所以海浪和海底的摩擦很少，海浪的能量較強。因此這裡主要出現破壞性海浪，回流比沖流大。在這情況下，大量海岸物質被移走，沿岸不斷被海浪侵蝕，最後形成懸崖。 (In contrast, landform Y is found on the east-facing coast which is exposed to the prevailing easterly wind. The fetch is long. At the same time, the deep water offshore (offshore gradient is steep) causes much less friction between the incoming waves and the sea bottom, so waves with higher energy reach the coast. As a result, destructive waves are dominant, with swash much weaker than backwash. This causes a lot of coastal material to be removed from the coast. Coastal erosion by sea waves is the main landform process there. As coastal erosion continues, a steep sea cliff is finally formed along the coast.)</td>
<td>Contrastive conjunction “相反” (in contrast) signals the start of a new sequence. Consequential conjuctions “所以” (therefore) and “因此” (hence) build the sense of causation. Several nominal groups build instances of technical language: “向東海岸” (east-facing coast), “破壞性海浪” (destructive waves), “盛行東風” (prevailing easterly wind). Temporal conjunction “最後” (finally) helps round the text off.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Text 2**: Causal explanation (continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schematic structure</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Language features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direction</td>
<td>下圖顯示一朵豆花的切面： (The diagram below shows a section of pea flower.)</td>
<td>Relational process “顯示” (shows) directs attention to the diagram. Marked topical theme “在一個遺傳實驗中” (in a genetic experiment) builds the context for working and setting the problem. Mental process “想確保” (wanted to ensure) builds the desired action. Nominal groups: “豆花的柱頭” (the stigma of a pea flower) and “豆花的花粉” (pollen grains of a pea flower) build instances of technical language. Verbal process “建議” (suggest) and the use of imperative mood direct students’ behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aim</td>
<td>為了確保某朵豆花的柱頭只能接收另一朵豆花的花粉，以下的做法可達到這個目的。 (To ensure that the stigma of a pea flower only received the pollen grains of another pea flower, the following method could be used.)</td>
<td>Opening marked theme “為了確保某朵豆花的柱頭只能接收另一朵豆花的花粉” (to ensure that the stigma of a pea flower only received the pollen grains of another pea flower) opens the suggested procedure.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Text 3a  Procedural account
RESPONSES TO THE GENRE-BASED DESCRIPTIONS OF EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

Reports on the analyses of texts and genre descriptions in history (Shum et al. 2000), chemistry (Shum et al. 2002), economics (Shum et al. 2003), physics (Shum et al. 2004a), geography (Shum et al. 2004b) and biology (Shum et al. 2004c) have so far been completed. Data are being collected about the performance of students in Chinese and in English at the HKCEE, though it is not yet possible to state with confidence that the genre-based ideas have had a great impact on pedagogy. However, two broad sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schematic structure</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Language features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aim (Cont’d)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Technical language in nominal groups: “豆花的柱頭” (stigma of a pea flower), “豆花的花粉” (pollen grains of a pea flower).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steps</td>
<td>In flowers mature before the flower is dry, the style is removed and pollen grains are added to the stigma before further pollination is possible. (Firstly, remove the anthers from the flower before they are mature. Then use the brush to dust pollen grains of the other pea flower onto the stigma of this flower. Finally, cover the flower with the plastic bag to prevent further pollination.)</td>
<td>Temporal relations “在...前” (before...), “然後” (then) and “最後” (finally) build a strong sense of sequence in time in which steps are to be done. Series of material processes “除去” (remove), “用” (use), “撒上” (dust) and the use of imperative mood build suggested actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result</td>
<td>因此，某朵豆花的柱頭只能接收另一朵豆花的花粉。 (Thus, this pea flower will only receive the pollen grains of the other pea flower.)</td>
<td>Textual theme &amp; consequential conjunction “因此” (Thus) signals the start of the final element advising the effect of following the steps.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Text 3b: Procedural account (continued)
of information are available, both encouraging in their implications for future work, and for the potential impact of the genre studies on pedagogy. The first source of information comes from careful analysis of the examination scripts recently produced in the physics examination for the 2001 HKCEE, the other from teachers interviewed at training workshops of various subjects.

One general finding that emerges from the analysis of the physics texts – supported by teachers in other subject areas – is that it is important that students write a clear and confident opening element. That may be the General Statement in the descriptive report or the Phenomenon Identification in an explanation, while in certain expository texts in physics a Statement of Position is ideally put first. The point may seem rather obvious, but it is not necessarily so. Students in Hong Kong have not generally been encouraged to think in terms of the method of ordering their written texts, and the suggestion that they write a clear opening element around which the subsequent text might be built is an enlightening one. It seems attention to the opening element helps students successfully structure the subsequent elements.

Among the teachers interviewed at a workshop for teachers of economics (Shum et al. 2003), several acknowledged they had not given their students enough advice about ordering and organizing their writing. Others were interested in teaching students to think more carefully about causal connections between events and steps in their written genres, introducing work on the uses of conjunctions. Others still said they had a clearer idea of the language skills students needed to answer the various examination questions in their subjects, and they were focusing more on these in their teaching.

During the period between October 2002 to October 2005, pilot teaching of genre lessons in 6 different subjects, namely, chemistry, economics, biology, geography, physics and history, involving around 20 teachers and 1000 students were conducted (Shum et al. 2002, 43; Shum et al. 2003, 49-70; Shum et al. 2004a, 58-85; Shum et al. 2004b, 77-88; Shum et al. 2004c, 67-79). After these lessons devoted to writing examination genres, students were interviewed about their opinions on this approach to organising their writings, and made coincidental comments such as the following:

I’m used to being quite disorganised in my answers, but I’m much clearer now after these lessons.

Before I learnt about genres I didn’t know that I had to tell people about my position first, and this made my answers unclear. Now I’ve learnt about this and I know how to organise my ideas better.
I feel that I can express my thoughts more effectively after I’ve learnt about genres. If I’m clear in answering questions, I can probably get higher marks because the marker will have a better idea of what I’m writing.

The students (totally 1000) generally provided positive feedback towards the genre lessons and the above comments are the typical responses from them. The last comment seems significant to us: the overwhelming sense of the research team is that even where there is no stated requirement in examination questions for elements like the Phenomenon Identification or the General Statement, those students who write these generally receive good marks.

As seen in the above responses, the genre-based descriptions of examination questions were perceived by the students to be beneficial in helping them to organise their ideas and writings, and improve their communicative ability.

Due to the implementation of the new medium of instruction policy, more and more students in Hong Kong choose Chinese as the language of examination. As shown in Figure 1 below, there was an upsurge of candidates using Chinese to answer examination questions in 2003 and still a rise in 2004. The continuous increase in the percentage of students using their mother tongue in HKCEE causes a demand from teachers for support in mother tongue education.

After the HKCEE in 2003, we interviewed a small sample of students (12) about their usage of the genre approach in the examination. All students interviewed indicated their tendency to utilise the genre-based approach in answering examination questions and understand its usefulness. This is reflected in the selected interview extracts shown below.

Interviewer:

Now that you’ve gone through the whole HKCEE, did you apply in the examinations the skills you had learnt in the genre lessons?

Interviewee 1:

I did apply them. Before I learnt about such techniques, I would put down the answers on paper right away without thinking much about the organisation. After the lessons, I would decide what kinds of genre the questions belong to.
Figure 1
For references on the statistical information in the figure, please refer to the complete list of reports (HKEAA 2001; HKEAA 2002d; HKEAA 2003b; HKEAA 2004).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>50.3</td>
<td>54.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>60.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>64.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and think about the organisation before I wrote down the answers. I used the techniques consciously in examinations.

Interviewee 2:

I did it unconsciously. When you really understand what you have learnt about genre and get familiar to it, you can naturally apply the skills when you see a question.

Interviewee 3:

Yes, I’ll first decide which genres the questions belong to… the stages that follow are different in different genres. So, you have to know what kind of genre a question belongs to before you develop the answer.

Although the majority of the students involved in this study were supportive of the genre pedagogy, it is certainly the case that further investigation is needed to determine whether this approach has a role to play in contributing to improving overall students’ communicative ability in Chinese. Not only did students provide positive feedback towards our study, but also teachers expressed their support in the twelve genre seminars of various subjects that were held between 2000 and 2005. Each of these seminars attracted the participation of over 100 teachers from different schools in Hong Kong, with 180 and 150 teachers attending the biology and physics seminars respectively. In the seminars, subject specific genres in Chinese were introduced and genre approach teaching strategies and materials disseminated. In the evaluation surveys (with an average score of 4.1 out of a 5-point Likert scale), the teachers also indicated the usefulness of the seminars to their teaching and their interest in further genre workshops.

CONCLUSION

This paper has reported on a study set out from the perspective of systemic functional linguistic theory. This study of examination genres in several subjects for Chinese students in Hong Kong has been acknowledged as an innovative and pioneering work in helping students tackle difficulties in expressing subject specific concepts in Chinese. Teachers and students feel a renewed confidence in handling the written requirements of their various subjects, at least for examination purposes. Teachers in particular are developing
more skilled capacities to recognise and interpret the requirements of different subjects, and hence to teach for an understanding of these.

Beginning from the classification of different types of genre in different subjects and the characterisation of a variety of linguistic features that help students identify a particular genre, the research team, through the collaboration with in-service school teachers, has then developed genre pedagogy and put into practice the research findings through pilot teaching. The results of the several trials of genre teaching are encouraging as they reveal students’ improved performance and strengthened confidence in expressing subject specific concepts and ideas in Chinese.

Although the work done so far is already fruitful, there are areas that need further research. Firstly, as the present study is preoccupied with the HKCEE level (Secondary 4-5), the approach to genre pedagogy will need to be extended to the matriculation level (Secondary 6-7) and to move down the years of schooling, shifting away from the present preoccupation with examination genres to the earlier years of schooling. Secondly, more comprehensive accounts of a pedagogic grammar of Chinese will need to be developed for teachers to facilitate their teaching. Thirdly, an investigation of integrating the genre pedagogy into the existing curriculum will have to be undertaken in order to realise a full implementation of genre teaching in different subjects. It is believed that all of these studies, in addition to the current work, will provide further support to improve teachers’ teaching and students’ learning of skills essential to communicate ideas in an effective and logical way.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study was partly supported by the Research Grants Council (RGC) competitive earmarked grant of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China (Project No.: HKU 7162/01H).
ENDNOTES

1. A genre is spoken or written language staged to achieve a particular social purpose (Martin 1992, 546).

2. The term ‘Chinese’ refers to Cantonese as far as the spoken language is concerned and to the uniform writing system of Chinese as far as the written language is concerned.

3. Communicative capacity means the candidates’ ability in effective communication.

4. These comments were translated into English from the originals in Chinese.

5. The interviews were conducted in Chinese after the workshop on genres in economics (held in August 2004 in the Lutheran Concordia School) and the extracts were translated into English from the Chinese originals.

REFERENCES

Christie, Frances; Gray, Peter; Gray, Brian; Macken, Mary; Martin, Jim; Rothery, Joan. 1990a. Language: A resource for meaning - exploring reports (teachers’ book). Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanich.

Christie, Frances; Gray, Peter; Gray, Brian; Macken, Mary; Martin, Jim; Rothery, Joan. 1990b. Language: A resource for meaning - exploring procedures (teachers’ book). Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanich.


Dang, Thi Kim Anh. 2002. ‘Applying a genre-based approach in teaching the writing of the English discussion genre to Vietnamese EFL students at the tertiary level’. M.Ed. thesis, Melbourne, University of Melbourne.


Hong Kong Education Department. 1990. ‘Hong Kong Education Commission report no. 4’. Hong Kong: Government Printer.

Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA). 2001. ‘2001 Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination report’. Hong Kong: HKEAA.

Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) 2002a. ‘HKCEE questions papers: biology (1998-2002)’. Hong Kong: HKEAA.

Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) 2002b. ‘HKCEE questions papers: geography (1998-2002)’. Hong Kong: HKEAA.

Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) 2002c. ‘HKCEE questions papers: physics (1998-2002)’. Hong Kong: HKEAA.

Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA). 2002d. ‘2002 Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination report’. Hong Kong: HKEAA.

Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA). 2003a. ‘Examination report and question papers: 2003 Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination biology’. Hong Kong: HKEAA.

Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA). 2003b. ‘2003 Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination report’. Hong Kong: HKEAA.

Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA). 2004. ‘2004 Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination report’. Hong Kong: HKEAA.


Shum, Mark Shiu Kee; Tse, Shek Kam; Ki, Wing Wah; Wong, Chi Kin; Leung, Wai Ming; Lau, Man Shan. 2000. ‘Report of analysis of the use of language in HKCEE History examination scripts of F.5 graduates: A pilot study’. Working paper of Support Centre for Teachers Using Chinese as the Medium of Instruction. Support Centre for Teachers Using Chinese as the Medium of Instruction, The University of Hong Kong.

Shum, Mark Shiu Kee; Tse, Shek Kam; Ki, Wing Wah; Kwong, Wai Leung; Chan, Wai Fat; Lo, Wai Cheong; Chan, Hei Tao; Tse, Hon Cheung. 2002. *Subject specific genres of school Chemistry: a resource book*. Support Centre for Teachers Using Chinese as the Medium of Instruction, The University of Hong Kong. [In Chinese]

Shum, Mark Shiu Kee; Tse, Shek Kam; Ki, Wing Wah; Yu, Shuk Kwai; Chan, Mau Tak; Lai, Yun Wai; Chan, Hei Tao; Tse, Hon Cheung. 2003. *Subject specific genres of school economics: a resource book*. Support Centre for Teachers Using Chinese as the Medium of Instruction, The University of Hong Kong. [In Chinese]

Shum, Mark Shiu Kee; Tse, Shek Kam; Ki, Wing Wah; Chan, Wan Mo.; Shiu, Ngai Ming; Yu, Natalie So Sum; Tse, Hon Cheung. 2004a. *Subject specific genres of school physics: A resource book*. Support Centre for Teachers Using Chinese as the Medium of Instruction, The University of Hong Kong. [In Chinese]

Shum, Mark Shiu Kee; Tse, Shek Kam; Ki, Wing Wah; Lung, Wing Kam; Chan, Chun Wah; Yu, Natalie So Sum; Tse, Hon Cheung. 2004b. *Subject specific genres of school geography: A resource book*. Support Centre for Teachers Using Chinese as the Medium of Instruction, The University of Hong Kong. [In Chinese]

Shum, Mark Shiu Kee; Tse, Shek Kam; Ki, Wing Wah; Yuen, Ka Chung; Chan, Choi Yuen; Yu, Natalie So Sum; Tse, Hon Cheung. 2004c. *Subject specific genres of school biology: A resource book*. Support Centre for Teachers Using Chinese as the Medium of Instruction, The University of Hong Kong. [In Chinese]

Tse, Shek Kam; Chan, Wing Shek; Ho, Wai Kit; Law, Nancy. 1995. *Chinese language education for the 21st century: A Hong Kong perspective*. Hong Kong: The University of Hong Kong.

Tse, Shek Kam; Shum, Mark Shiu Kee; Ki, Wing Wah; Wong, Carol Pui Ching. 2000. ‘The transition from English to mother-tongue Chinese as the medium of instruction. Issues and problems as seen by Hong Kong teachers’. *L1- Educational studies in language and literature* 1 (1): 9-36.


Tsui, Amy Bik May; Tse, Shek Kam; Shum, Mark Shiu Kee; Ki, Wing Wah; Wong, Chi Kin; Kwong, Wai Leung. 2000. Implementing mother-tongue education in schools: problems encountered and support needed. Support Centre for Teachers Using Chinese as the Medium of Instruction, The University of Hong Kong.


Cite this article as: Shum, Mark Shiu Kee. ‘Exploring an approach for teaching subject specific genres in Chinese: The case of post-colonial Hong Kong’. Australian review of applied linguistics 29 (1) 2006. pp. 6.1–6.22. DOI: 10.2104/ara0606.