

Interdiscursivity Functions of Incident Reports

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ABSTRACT

Professional communication ensures efficient work procedures in the professional world. In understanding the professional world, discursive realities such as the use of professional genres, professional cultures and professional practices need to be highlighted. This will help to prepare learners for the real world as calls have been made to bridge the gap between what the academic programmes offer and what the professional world requires. One approach that will be able to bridge the gap is Interdiscursivity approach. This is especially true as research in the area have shown that Interdiscursivity was still under researched. This gap is apparent in the oil and gas industry as it is an important industry which fuels other industries. In this qualitative research, a study was carried out in order to identify Interdiscursivity functions of incident reports obtained from an oil and gas company. Interdiscursivity refers the relation that a discourse has to other discourses in realizing the meaning of professional genres. Data collection method involved the analysis of fifteen incident reports obtained from an oil and gas company. Findings from the incident reports suggested that the reports contained three main functions: descriptive, informative and instructional

KEYWORDS: Interdiscursivity, Interdiscursivity Functions, Incident Reports, Professional Communication, Professional World, Professional Culture, Professional Genre, Discourse Analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Studies on professional genres have shed some light on the language used in a professional setting [7, 9, 5, 4, 3, 12, 6, 10, 1]. These experts have shown that through genre studies, texts were shown to be influenced by the context in which they were used while institutional practices were reflected in the way the discourse types were used.

In [11] suggests that in order to develop a comprehensive and evidence-based awareness of the motives and intentions of disciplinary and professional practices, multiple discourses needed to be looked at closely. He further states that actions and voices of specific discursive practices are relevant within institutional and organizational frameworks in realizing those motives and intentions. Adding on to the view, in [1] states that the conventional systems of genres often used to fulfil professional objectives of specific disciplinary or discourse communities needed to be looked into.

These views have paved the way for the notion of Interdiscursivity[5] which asserts that the way professional genres are written reflects the professional practices of an organization. Since it is important to study professional genres through the contexts they exist, the interest in Interdiscursivity has grown over the years. Proponents of this approach assert that a genre is realized by the different discourse types present in them as they do not exist in isolation.

In addition, Interdiscursivity approach also asserts that the discourse types found in a genre could serve different functions. To provide an example of Interdiscursivity functions of a genre, advertorials are commonly cited as they contain discourse types such as informing, persuading or advertising [8]. Advertorials have shown that a genre could be realized through different discourse types which goes to show that Interdiscursivity is not about producing a genre alone. Rather, there are institutional norms and culture attached to the genre which needs further investigation [3].

The notion of Interdiscursivity emerges from Critical Discourse Analysis theory (CDA) proposed by [6] in order to explain how discourse is related to social practice. CDA views social practice and linguistic practice as constituting one another and focuses on investigating how societal power relations are established and reinforced through language use. In a broader sense, it asserts that a discourse must exist through two concepts: Intertextuality and Interdiscursivity.

Intertextuality is the shaping of the meaning of a text by other texts. It includes an author's borrowing and transforming a prior text or a reader's referencing of one text in reading another. Intertextuality is the concept of texts' borrowing of each other's words and concepts. This could mean as much as an entire ideological concept

or as little as a word or phrase. As authors borrow proactively from previous texts, their work gain layers of meaning.

On the other hand, Interdiscursivity refers to the implicit or explicit relations that a discourse has to other discourses. In [6] further states that Interdiscursivity had close affinity to recontextualization because a discourse often relies on another discourse in realizing its meaning.

In [2] states that Interdiscursivity refers to interactions across and between genres which is seen as “innovative attempts to create various forms of hybrid and relatively novel constructs by appropriating or exploiting established conventions or resources associated with other genres and practices and allows for mixing, embedding, and bending of generic norms in professional contexts”. His view indicates that Interdiscursivity has paved the way for a more holistic and flexible way of looking at the production of a professional genre as it can be seen as “appropriation of semiotic resources which exist at different levels namely textual, semantic, socio-pragmatic, generic, professional, cut across any two or more of these different levels especially those of genre, professional practice and professional culture in order to achieve private intentions”. These private intentions can be instances such as projecting positive image, maximizing profits or persuading customers. Hence, appropriations across professional genres, practices and cultures constitute interdiscursive relations which are bound and shaped by professional cultures and practices shared by members of the professional community.

To add to the discussion on Interdiscursivity further, in[15] presents his model of Interdiscursivity which attempts to bring together the production and interpretation of Interdiscursivity. The model asserts that when a producer of Interdiscursivity is involved in communication, he/she is either highly motivated with specific communicative purposes in mind or virtually automatic, adjusting himself/herself to certain communicative circumstances. Interdiscursivity is produced in order to adapt to variables of the physical world, variables of the social world and variables of the mental world. During this dynamic process, various kinds of communicative functions are realized as well.

Therefore, drawing on various views on Interdiscursivity, it can be concluded that this notion looks at the influence of institutional norms in producing a genre. Interdiscursivity suggests that it is no longer sufficient to analyze genres for its textual features alone as there are other resources which need to be studied. These resources refer to institutional norms such as professional practices and professional culture [3], which play a significant role in realizing professional genres. This realization requires more studies to be carried out in order to shed a better light on the influence of institutional norms in producing professional genres.

METHODOLOGY

This paper reports on Interdiscursivity functions of incident reports by looking at how the reports are produced based on the norms practiced by the organization. It draws the mainly from [3, 8] notion of Interdiscursivity in identifying the functions found in incident reports. The reports were obtained from an international oil and gas company based in Texas which undertook projects for well-known clients in the oil and gas industry around the world and was operating in Johor Baru at the time this paper was written. The name of the company was obtained from a business directory for the industries listed in Johor [14]. Incident reports refer to reports produced when the incidents happened. The incidents could be equipment failure, injury or natural disaster. Each section of the incident reports analyzed would carry a function that reflects the professional practices of the company under study. A total of fifteen reports were analyzed to identify their interdiscursivity functions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Incident Reports

The analysis of the reports is based on [12] CARS Model of article introductions. The model proposes three moves and in each move there are steps to explain the discourse used. In the first move, Establishing a Territory, the writer presents the topic as well-known, important, relevant, problematic or as having received research attention. The second move, Establishing a Niche, indicates a gap in the existing body of knowledge or addition to what is already known. The third move, Occupying the Niche, refers to announcing present research in which the writer presents research questions, summarizes methods of data collection, announces principal outcomes, states the value of the present research and outlines the structure of the paper.

Therefore, by analyzing the incident reports based on CARS Model, it was found that the reports contained between 2-4 sections. They were Description of Incident, Causes of Incident, Precautionary Measures and Potential Consequences. By mapping the sections present in the reports against CARS Model, findings of the structural analysis reveal a four-move structure of the incident reports which are:

- Move 1-Description of Incident
- Move 2-Causes of Incident

- Move 3-Precautionary Measures
- Move 4-Consequences of the Incident

The occurrence of the four moves is exemplified with Incident Report 8 (Table 1). Based on the discourse used, Move 1 provides a description of the incident and it is expected to include all the relevant details including time, date, name and designation of employee(s) involved as well as the location of the incident. More importantly, the description of the job performed and the incident that occurred must be described clearly.

Any incident in the oil and gas industry can lead to dire consequences in terms of performance, schedule, cost, etc. Thus, it is crucial that the causes of this incident be identified in order to rectify it later. This is carried out in Move 2 in which all the possible causes of the incident are identified and reported. For example, the causes can be procedure not followed; work permit did not specify requirement for tool box meeting prior to the job and others.

Move 3 reports on what can and has been undertaken to rectify the problems caused by the incident. This is also to ensure that the same incident will not recur in the future. Move 4 reports the consequences of the incident. In Incident Report 8, the consequence was a “major injury requiring hospital treatment and recovery at home” but fortunately there was “No damage to equipment, environment or reputation”. This will be considered by the management as hospital treatment regardless how minor involves cost.

The example stated in Incident Report 8 also shows the Interdiscursivity functions which have been identified in Incident reports but they will be discussed in the next section.

Table 1: Incident Report 8

| Report 8 | | |
|---|---|--|
| Moves | Example of Discourse | Function |
| Move 1: Detailed Description of Incident | | Descriptive-describing the incident |
| Time/date of incident | At approximately 18:00 hours, on the 13th June on board (name of vessel) | |
| Name of vessel | whilst preparing for pick up the 24” general electric panel, | |
| Name of job | an (name of company) Lead rigger (name of employee) | |
| Name/designation of employee | located on the stringer work platform | |
| Location | tried to free an 1.5” steel wire from the edge of the work platform with his boot. | |
| Job performed | The wire was freed but jumped up and hit underside of boot. | |
| Incident | | |
| Move 2: Causes of incident | Steel wire when freed jumped up and hit underside of boot | Informative-Informing the causes |
| Cause 1 | | |
| Cause 2 | Hazard not recognized | |
| | Procedure not followed | |
| | Work considered routine work (complacency) | |
| Cause 3 | Work permit did not specify requirement for tool box meeting prior to the job | |
| Cause 4 | Lead rigger was not aware that when wire was slackened it would be freed | |
| Cause 5 | No tool box meeting held | |
| Cause 6 | The Lead rigger did not seek guidance from his supervisory staff present at the scene | |
| Cause 7 | Insufficient safety awareness of Lead rigger | |
| | No guide roller for cable at stinger tip | |
| Move 3: Precautionary measures to prevent incident | Sheave arrangement will be fitted with prevent cable hang-up | Instructional-Describing steps taken to prevent future incidents |
| Precautionary measure 1 | | |
| Precautionary measure 2 | Work permits issued for this task or similar must state clearly that safety toolbox briefing will be carried out prior to start job | |
| Precautionary measure 3 | A checklist of safety items will be raised and attached to each work permit | |
| Precautionary measure 4 | The incident will be discussed in toolbox meetings to advise personnel of the dangers of these kinds of acts and the requirement for vigilance at all times | |
| Precautionary measure 5 | Hazard awareness training for all personnel | |
| Move 4: Consequences of the Incident | Major injury requiring hospital treatment and recovery at home | Informative-Describing consequences of incident |
| | No damage to equipment, environment or reputation | |

The analysis of the reports revealed that Move 1 occurs in all 15 reports, Move 2 occurs in 14 reports (93.3%) while Move 3 occurs in 10 reports (66.6%). However, Move 4 occurs only in six reports (40%). This can be seen in the summary of the 15 reports provided in Table 2. These findings highlight the fact that Moves 1, 2 and 3 can be considered as obligatory moves in incident reports while Move 4 can be considered as optional.

Based on the 15 Incident reports, three types of Interdiscursivity functions have been identified. They are 1) Descriptive, 2) Informative and 3) Instructional functions. Descriptive function is used to describe the incident; Informative function is used to state the causes and the potential consequences of the incidents. Finally, Instructional function is used to provide precautionary measures to prevent future incidents.

As summarized in Table 2, Incident Reports 1, 3, 4, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 contained all three functions while Incident Reports 2, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10 contained only two functions. The Interdiscursivity functions present in the reports show that they are the product of interdiscursive elements from different discourse types:

- i. Descriptive: to describe the incidents by providing accurate and factual details of the incident (Move 1)
- ii. Informative: to inform the causes of the incident (Move 2). It was also used to provide potential consequences of the incident both to the employees and equipment (Move 4)
- iii. Instructional: to give instructions on how to prevent future incidents (Move 3)

These functions will be explained further in the sections that follow. Table 2 provides a summary of moves and functions found in all the reports.

Descriptive Function of Incident Reports 1-15

The first function identified in the report was Descriptive function. In presenting the three functions found in the reports, Incident Report 8 will be used as an illustration because it contained the most number of moves and functions; four moves and three functions altogether. The report is shown in Table 2.

Incident Report 8 described the incident through descriptive discourse as seen below:

At approximately 18:00 hours, on the 13th June on board (name of vessel) whilst preparing for pick up the 24" general electric panel Lead rigger from (name of employee) a located on the stringer work platform tried to free an 1.5" steel wire from the edge of the work platform with his boot. The wire was freed but jumped up and hit underside of boot.

The discourse shows details of the work undertaken by mentioning the time "18:00 hours", date "13th June", place "on board of a vessel", the work and type of equipment "preparing for pick up the 24" general electric panel" who was involved in the incident "Lead rigger", the employee's location when the incident occurred "located on the stringer work platform" what he was doing "tried to free an 1.5" steel wire from the edge of the work platform with his boot", and what happened "The wire was freed but jumped up and hit underside of boot".

Therefore, based on the lexical phrases used in the discourse, the Interdiscursivity function was labelled as Descriptive function because descriptive discourse was used to describe the incident. It provided specific details of the incident such as the type of work undertaken, who was involved, details of the incident, what happened to the employee after the incident and the type of injury suffered. It was written with those details as they were important in describing as accurately as possible what led to the incident.

This descriptive function was present in all fifteen reports suggesting that it was a mandatory section to describe how the incidents happened. This function showed it was the most important part in the report as it appeared in the first section of the report. Hence, descriptive function showed that incidents that happened had to be reported as accurately and as factually as possible and no details should be left out. It could also suggest that since there were consequences of the incident to be borne such as injury to employees and additional cost to purchase new equipment, facts and details were mandatory when the reports were written. This strategic appropriation of socio-pragmatic space within the genre has lent support for the second, third and fourth moves (causes, precautionary measures and potential consequences) found in the reports.

Informative Function of Incident Reports 1-15

The second function identified in the reports was Informative function. Similar to the first function, it was identified through the second move type "Causes of Incident" and the fourth move type "Potential Consequences".

The informative discourse type used gave information about the causes of incident. Ten causes were stated and the incident was mainly caused by failure to comply with work procedures as seen in the informative discourse below:

1. Steel wire when freed jumped up and hit underside of boot
2. Hazard not recognized

3. Procedure not followed
4. Work considered routine work (complacency)
5. Work permit did not specify requirement for tool box meeting prior to the job
6. Lead rigger was not aware that when wire was slackened it would be freed
7. No tool box meeting held
8. The Lead rigger did not seek guidance from his supervisory staff present at the scene
9. Insufficient safety awareness of Lead rigger
10. No guide roller for cable at stringer tip

Similarly, Move 4, Potential Consequences, had Informative function. It informed readers of the consequences of the incident. Two consequences were stated in the report; negative and positive. Negative consequences stated the type of injury and treatment while the positive consequences stated no damage was done to equipment, environment or reputation. They can be seen in the Informative discourse below:

1. Major injury requiring hospital treatment and recovery at home
2. No damage to equipment, environment or reputation

Therefore, based on the Informative function found in the report, it can be concluded that this type of discourse gave factual information and details about the incident. Phrases such as “at approximately 18:00 hours” “on the 13th June”, “on board (name of vessel)” “while preparing to pick up the 24” general electric panel”, “lead rigger (name of employee)”, “located on the stringer platform”, hazard not recognized”, “procedure not followed”, “work considered routine work”, “sheave arrangement will be fitted with preventive cable hang up” and “Major injury requiring hospital treatment and recovery at home” and “no damage to equipment, environment or reputation” were aimed to offer readers factual information on the incident. They came mostly in the form of specific details of the incident such as the type of work undertaken, specification of employees carrying out the work, causes of the incident, measures taken to prevent future incident and potential consequences of the incident.

In this respect, such interdiscursive elements of facts and details can be compared with public relations discourse in [3] study on annual reports. This type of discourse gave facts and details were presented to inform stakeholders as well as public monitoring authorities about the performance of the company. Similarly, the Informative discourse found in the incident report had the same effect as the company needed to know details about the incident and eventually the stakeholders needed to know how effective the incident was handled so that future occurrence could be prevented. This would leave a positive impression on the company to its stakeholders when the company showed its capability in handling incidents.

Instructional Function of Incident Reports 1-15

The third function found was Instructional function which was denoted by the instructional discourse type. This discourse type gave instructions on how to prevent future incidents (Move 3-Precautionary Measures). For example, the report stated five measures to prevent future incident as seen in the Instructional discourse below:

1. Sheave arrangement will be fitted with preventive cable hang up
2. Work permits issued for this task or similar must state clearly that safety toolbox briefing will be carried out prior to start job
3. A checklist of safety items will be raised and attached to each work permit
4. The incident will be discussed in toolbox meetings to advise personnel of the dangers of these kinds of acts and the requirement for vigilance at all times
5. Hazard awareness training for all personnel

This function outlined the instruction given to employees on how to prevent future incidents. It was very specific in instructing employees on what to do through a sequence of steps. The steps included using additional equipment, briefing to be done before the work is undertaken and providing a checklist for the safety items to be used in the work undertaken. This orientation towards action rather than information is what distinguishes it from Descriptive and Informative functions.

Based on the Instructional function identified, a few points can be highlighted. Firstly, it was clear that the generic conventions of the genre was decontextualized from the other discourse types; Descriptive and Informative. This was done with the aim of reassuring the readers that the company had done what it was supposed to do in order to prevent future incidents. This recontextualization of the preventive measures provided a true representation of information on the measures and readers were unlikely to question such recontextualization of information as this function appeared in the same socio-pragmatic space as the Descriptive and Informative functions [13].

Secondly, Instructional function also showed the preventive measures were factual in nature and it occurred within the same socio-pragmatic space with the other two functions to lend reliability, credibility and integrity to

the genre as a whole as suggested by [3]. By placing descriptive, informative and instructional discourse types within the same socio-pragmatic space, readers could gain the positive impression towards the company through this interdiscursive proximity when it did what it was supposed to do to prevent incidents. Table 2 summarizes the moves and interdiscursivity functions of all the incident reports analyzed.

Table 2: Summary of Moves and Interdiscursivity Functions of Incident Reports 1-15

| Incident Report | No. of Moves | Type of Moves | No. of Functions | Type of Interdiscursivity Function |
|-----------------|--------------|--|------------------|---|
| 1 | 3 | Description of Incident Causes of Incident Precautionary Measures | 3 | Descriptive Informative Instructional |
| 2 | 2 | Description of Incident Causes of Incident | 2 | Descriptive Informative |
| 3 | 3 | Description of Incident Causes of Incident Precautionary Measures | 3 | Descriptive Informative Instructional |
| 4 | 3 | Description of Incident Causes of Incident Precautionary Measures | 3 | Descriptive Informative Instructional |
| 5 | 2 | Description of Incident Causes of Incident | 2 | Descriptive Informative |
| 6 | 2 | Description of Incident Causes of Incident | 2 | Descriptive Informative |
| 7 | 2 | Description of Incident Causes of Incident | 2 | Descriptive Informative |
| 8 | 4 | Description of Incident Causes of Incident Precautionary Measures Potential Consequences | 3 | Descriptive Informative Instructional |
| 9 | 2 | Description of Incident Precautionary Measures | 2 | Informative Descriptive |
| 10 | 2 | Description of Incident Causes of Incident | 2 | Descriptive Informative |
| 11 | 4 | Description of Incident Causes of Incident Precautionary Measures Potential Consequences | 3 | Descriptive Informative Instructional |
| 12 | 4 | Description of Incident Causes of Incident Precautionary Measures Potential Consequences | 3 | Descriptive Informative Instructional |
| 13 | 4 | Description of Incident Causes of Incident Precautionary Measures Description of Incident | 3 | Descriptive Informative Instructional |
| 14 | 4 | Description of Incident Causes of Incident Precautionary Measures Potential Consequences | 3 | Descriptive Informative Instructional |
| 15 | 4 | Description of Incident Causes of Incident Precautionary Measures Potential Consequences | 3 | Descriptive Informative Instructional |

CONCLUSION

Reports are important in the professional world as they are used to record progress in achieving organizational goals. For Incident Reports, they are written for specific purposes of monitoring, evaluating, improving and assigning accountability. This is necessary because a written record is required in the professional world in order to ease the everyday operation of an organization. The reports analyzed showed that they contained certain Interdiscursivity functions that reflected the organizational culture of the company under study as attested by [3].

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