

## A Review on Directions for Discussing Forest Governance and Discourses from a Linguistic Perspective

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### Abstract

Studies investigating forest discourses both from within and outside the forest discourse community have seen a growing interest in how forest policies and their governance affect forest communities, the people, and the countries. There has been a debate on whether these studies, which claimed to be studied following Foucault's concepts of discourse, power, knowledge and governmentality have contributed to deriving empirical findings on how forest discourses have impacted and affected those involved in the implementation of the discourses. More recently, the importance of investigating the needs of forestry communities in terms of understanding how forest information is used, by whom and for what purpose have been of significant value for forest sustainability. To date, little is known about those involved in forest discourses, what functions the discourses serve to those involved, and their impact on the forest community in general. This study adopted a document analysis approach to review previous research published related to forestry discourse studies from discourse and linguistic perspectives. Findings from the review suggest that studies investigating forest discourses thus far lacked sound theoretical and analytical methods of analysing forest discourses, requiring a more critical and empirical evidences concerning essential components within the forest-related discourse that makes them an integral part of understanding the nature and practices of forest governance. Consequently, this paper provides relevant details on the concepts of discourse from a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) perspective, an approach that is viewed as particularly useful as a theory and analytical framework to uncover how language is used within its context to serve its communicative purpose. The paper concludes with the possible inclusion of another possible direction for further studies in forest discourses, particularly from a linguistic perspective on forest discourses concerning forest policies and governance.

**Keywords:** Forest Discourse, Forest Practices, Forest Governance, Linguistic Perspective, Systemic Functional Linguistics

**Introduction**

A growing number of studies investigating forest discourses have seen researchers take on what is perceived to be a discourse approach to studying forest policy and governance. However, these studies, as discussed by Leipold (2014); Winkel (2012); Arts and Buizer (2009) and Arts et al (2010), remain fuzzy and unsystematic, particularly in their concepts, theoretical and methodological approaches to analysing forest-related discourses. Over the past decade, geographers, anthropologists and policy analysts who are mostly affiliated with European and North American universities have explored forest policy analysis drawing mainly from a Foucauldian discourse perspective (Winkel, 2012). Nonetheless, the term discourse used within forest-related discourse studies has been derived mostly from an anthropological perspective, which is the social end of the spectrum, as opposed to the other end of the spectrum, the linguistic perspective. Although this review is not focusing on forest policy analysis per se, it is essential to note that forest-related discourse studies lack empirical findings on how texts are produced, the kind of functions they serve to the community and how these functions are achieved in meeting its communicative purposes. The review is thus an initial attempt to look into these concerns with the following aims; (1) to examine the current trends and discussions on forest discourses, (2) to fill the gap in understanding the concept of discourse from a linguistic perspective and (3) to suggest possible ways of understanding forest discourses and policy governance from a linguistic perspective.

**Discussions on Forest Discourses**

The emergence of the interest in discourse studies in the context of forest policy analysis is the acceptance of scholars, in large part, of the concepts introduced by Foucault on discourse, power, knowledge and governmentality (Winkel, 2012). These studies are conducted with a mutual purpose of aiming at seeing changes within political and scientific perspectives and go beyond merely applying purely analytical analysis in their studies. Although Foucault's concepts have entered the field of forestry, Winkel contends that Foucault's concepts and ways of analysing forest discourses and policy analysis were 'hardly provided by Foucault himself' and that his concepts are difficult to be operated and are often used 'in a confusing or even contradictory manner' (2012:82).

Foucauldian concepts concerning discourse, power, knowledge and governmentality have been thoroughly discussed by Winkel (2012) in his study. However, as his findings revealed, out of the 39 studies that claimed to reflect on Foucauldian concepts and ideas, only one study critically reflected and analysed the Foucauldian concept regarding forest policy analysis. Winkel further asserts that this could result from the thought-provoking perspective presented by Foucault that is inclined toward a 'philosophical world view' (2012: 90) rather than as a theory or framework that can be systematically applied. This philosophical view thus allows researchers to use Foucault's concepts in combination with others or reduce his concepts to be applied within a workable theory or framework of analysis (Winkel, 2012). Despite this, Winkel concluded that all the studies he reviewed share common features, one of which is 'an understanding that language and knowledge need to be addressed as aspects of power'. Winkel suggested that future analysis could be conducted by concentrating on the subjects regarded as the 'discursive elites, marginalised and mainstream groups to investigate 'how they produce, influence, interact with, and are constrained by hegemonic or counter-hegemonic knowledge orders' (2012: 90).

Criticism on how the discourse concepts and methods are used in studying forest discourse is debatable (Winkel, 2012; Leipold, 2014; Arts & Buizer, 2009; Arts et al., 2010). Leipold (2014) corroborated Winkel's findings on the concept of discourse and its use within forest discourses. In her study, Leipold conducted a review of forest-related discourse studies, which found that many of the studies conducted investigating forest discourses are motivated by 'general ideas from discourse research'; thus, they lacked clearly-defined discourse concepts and methods and are not 'applied in a systematic manner' (2014: 18). The concept of discourse, as Leipold noted, is instead applied as 'an umbrella term' which is used when debating ideas presented in the academia and society as well as in discussions 'at all societal levels (local, regional, national and international) and in various time periods' (2014: 14). Her findings, along with Winkel's (2012) findings are in line with the findings obtained by (Arts et al., 2010). They also found that many discourse studies on policy analysis were based on diverse theoretical orientations and disciplines in which discourse concepts and methods were often inconsistent and unsystematic.

Leipold (2014) claims that how forests are spoken impacts how they are governed. However, as she noted, forest discourses 'have rarely been approached from a more sociological perspective' (2014: 15). In order to allow clarity on the theories and methods applied in analysing forest discourses and presenting contextualised results and findings, Leipold suggests that more 'theoretical and methodological rigour and innovation' are required to find answers to 'where and by whom discourses are circulated, and who and what are required for their institutionalisation'. In doing this, she asserts more profound insights into 'how control over forests and people is and can be organised through the application of language' (2015: 19).

Discussion on forest discourse thus far has looked at the analysis of forest policy from a Foucauldian perspective which, as noted by Winkel (2012), is conducted by those outside of the forest sector (geographers, anthropologists). Scholars from the forest discipline have also pointed out the need for studies that could probe into the kind of information required by those involved in the decision-making process and investigate the goal, purpose, and use of forest information within the forestry community (Kleinn & Stahl, 2006). Scholars from the forest discipline perceive forests as 'complex systems' that can be perceived in two ways; as a system of resources or an ecosystem. They acknowledge that for such a system to be 'fully understood for specific management resources, information is required' (Kleinn & Stahl, 2006: 71).

Researchers from the forestry discipline have frequently acknowledged that forest information, be it inventories of forest resources, forest health assessment, forest goods and services, or inventories of a nation's forest resource, is highly demanded from various stakeholders. This information is sought after by various parties who are 'responsible either for the management of the resource itself or for defining the regulatory framework for resource usage and management' (Kleinn & Stahl, 2006: 71). However, such information, as pointed out by Kleinn and Stahl has mostly been on technical issues of optimisation of efficiency- statistical, economy efficiency or both. The arguments made by Kleinn & Stahl showed that within forestry, a variety of genres are being used by the community and demanded by various parties. Questions raised by Kleinn and Stahl on the role of these genres showed a significant gap that needs to be addressed, particularly from a linguistic perspective,

as language can be analysed to investigate the role of genres within their use apart from conducting ethnographic methods to probe into this issue.

The argument made by Kleinn and Stahl has also been echoed by Duvemo and Lamas (2006), who suggested that emphasis should also be put on 'the lesser technical-statistical topics more seriously on forest inventory planners and scientists' research agendas'. These include asking the following questions; 'How is forestry inventory data and information (and which part of it) being used and for what purpose?', 'What data is required for different users?', 'How do information requirements and information usage interact with other factors such as professional experience, academic and professional education, and position and power within the institution' and 'How to optimise communication strategy?' (Kleinn & Stahl, 2006: 76). In order to be able to find answers to these questions, experts from the forestry field 'need to resort to and integrate expertise from various disciplines from the social sciences, such as sociology, psychology, cultural anthropology, etc.' (Kleinn & Stahl, 1996: 76).

Based on the discussion on the current trends and directions that have been explored and suggested, it is relevant to include an approach that is theoretically and methodologically sound to investigate forest discourses and their governance consistently and systematically. One of the possible directions that could be taken is an exploration of forest discourses from a linguistic perspective. Therefore, this review attempts to look into possible directions to the study of forest discourse from a linguistic perspective that allows a thick description of the nature of forest discourses and the use and functions of language within the context of use in forest policy and its governance.

### **Understanding the Concepts Of Discourse and Genre from a Linguistic Perspective**

In the strata of language, discourse is a stratum located above genre. It encapsulates the entire context of culture and situation in a broader sense and relates them to a particular discourse community's social and cultural values and beliefs. As iterated earlier, discourse encapsulates the social aspect of human relations where the concepts of power relation and social order are among its primary concerns. Discourse studies investigating the nature of power relations within the society will employ a qualitative approach which will include interviews and observation as their research methods. One of the most frequent methods of discourse studies, particularly within forest-related discourse studies is Hajer's (1993, 1995) Argumentative Discourse Analysis (ADA) which is used within the study of forest policy and aims to identify the discursive strategies and storylines used within the context of sustainable forest management and climate change in Germany.

Hajer's ADA (1993, 1995) is a combination derived from the concepts of discourse and power as well as the analytical perspective on the positioning and actions of discourse coalitions and how discourses manifest themselves in societal institutions (Hinkel et al., 2011). Hajer (2005) defines discourse as 'an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena, and which is produced and reproduced through an identifiable set of practices' in which discourse is studied interpretively within a specific environment and that no immediate access to actors interpretations are possible to be included (Winkel et al., 2011). Although Hajer's ADA has been helpful over the years in investigating forest policies, particularly within the context of Germany, it should be noted that the approach lacks an insider's view on how these actors

play their roles within the context of forest policy and their practices and to what extent does their actions follow the standard guidelines, policies and forestry acts. Thus, a closer look into how practices within forest disciplines among professionals involved in the practice and planning of forest policies and governance is needed for a better understanding of the nature and practice of forest professionals when performing their duties. Thus, it is proposed that the first step in understanding forest discourses and their policy governance is to conduct a study that focuses on the stratum below the discourse level, genre.

The notion of genre has gained considerable attention from theorists from various genre studies in the 1980s from the significant works of Michael Halliday's 'Language as Social Semiotic' (1978); Carolyn Miller's 'Genre as Social Action' (1984) and also (Mikhail Bakhtin's 'Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, 1986). These influential theorists seize on the notion of genre as pivotal in understanding language use, especially concerning social, functional and pragmatic dimensions of language. Bakhtin (1986) highlights that genres are still being identified initially through their structural /textual regularities (Bakhtin, 1986:60-63). They are now being understood as having a functional relationship between that structure and the situation. Moving forward from the traditional theory of genre that focused primarily on the discursive form, the theory has evolved towards focusing on 'the discursive structures of a genre functionally, as standard responses of a recurring type of rhetorical situation' (Coe & Freedman, 1998:41).

Coe and Freedman (1998) succinctly explain how a complete genre needs to have at least three crucial aspects:

1. the standard form of the discourse,
  2. the type of recurring situation that evokes it,
  3. the functional relation, namely,
    - i) understood as a strategy for responding to,
    - ii) inquiry about the evolving, situated, motivated relationship among
      - a) language/style/form,
      - b) rhetorical situation, context of situation and culture, and
      - c) function/ use/ effect/ ideology.
- (Coe & Freedman, 1998: 41)

The aspects highlighted above would enable us to 'understand discourse as a social process, which we may both shape and be shaped by, which directs and deflects attention, constitutes subject positions, opportunities and constraints, community and hierarchy' (Coe & Freedman, 1998, p 41). Thus, analysing genres within these aspects would enable us to understand the nature of a particular genre and how it serves and achieves its functions to the people of the community and identify its meanings within its context of use.

Several linguistic approaches to the genre have emerged due to their differing theoretical orientations, opinions and method of analysing genre. Genre within linguistic approaches emerged partly as a response to the definitions and critiques of the notion of genre within the literary traditions (see Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010) as well as from the critical works of scholars such as (Miller, 1984; Swales, 1990; Halliday, 1978). Based on the work done within the literary traditions, an understanding has emerged among scholars and researchers that genre involves 'readers, writers, text and contexts; that sees all writers and readers as both unique

and as necessarily casting themselves into common, social roles; that sees genres as requiring both conformity with and variation from expectations, and that sees genres as always unstable, always multiple, always emerging' (Devitt, 2000: 715). Genre has now been seen as 'an 'actualiser' of discourse, transforming general discourse into a socially recognised and meaningful text by endowing it with what Foucault calls a mode of being or existence' (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010: 27) and that the concept of genre has gone beyond the literary context.

Three influential approaches to genre analysis thus emerged and have continued to be used in the study of various genres across various disciplines and contexts, namely the Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Although varied in their theoretical orientations, emphasis and analytical frameworks, these genre approaches share the fundamental view of genre as being a social phenomenon, both shaped and constrained by conventions in which the members of the discourse community share certain characteristics in relation to textual features and structure, the purpose of communication and intended audience which take into account the situational context in which the genre is used (Helan, 2012). Despite their shared basic tenets on the understanding of genre, these approaches differ from one another, particularly in terms of their concerns with the formal description of texts and how the social contexts surrounding the text are taken into consideration. Yunick (1997:328) aptly summarises the differences between RGS, ESP and SFL; 'with respect to drawing relations between language and its social functions, RGS focuses on the social purposes end of the spectrum, while genre analysis in ESP brings more focus to moves in discourse structure. Australian linguistics explicitly and theoretically hooks up grammar and lexicon as well as discourse structure to social function'. In forest discourses and policy governance, studies analysing various genres (forest policy, forest inventories, forest resources reports, etc.) would yield significant insights into the kind of work involved within the forestry discipline and professional contexts. As highlighted by Winkel (2012); Arts et al (2010); Leipold (2014), studies investigating forest discourses thus far lacked sound theoretical and analytical methods of analysing forest discourses. Studies of forest-related discourses through investigation of forestry genres from a linguistic approach is thus an attempt to fill in the gap evident within the context of forest-related discourse studies and in the investigation of the critical and essential components within the forest-related discourse that makes them an integral part of understanding the nature and practices of forest professionals within the scope of their professions. The following section discusses one of the possible ways of analysing forest-related discourses and their policy governance through the study of forest-related genres, which is the theoretical and analytical framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics in analysing forest-related genres.

### **Possible ways of Understanding Forest Discourses and Policy Governance**

In order to investigate forest-related discourse from a linguistic perspective aiming at uncovering how language is used within its context to serve its communicative purpose, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) fits well as a theoretical framework and as an analytical tool as it takes the researcher, forest professionals and other parties involved beyond the boundaries of the sentence and allows those involved to analyse and discuss language at a text level (Burns, 1990: 62). Within SFL, 'meaning is given priority over form and texts over sentences' (Berry, 1996: 61). Discussions on how meaning is achieved are the primary concerns within SFL, and it is worthy to note that from the systemic perspective, genres are

seen as 'making meaning; they are not simply a set of formal structures into which meanings are poured' (Martin et al., 1994:236). Halliday (1994) highlighted that SFL is 'a theory of meaning as choice, by which language of any other semiotic system is interpreted as networks of interlocking options (p. xiv). The notions of choice, of complete texts and of, the interrelationship of the context and how these aspects affect the choices people make to realise meaning make SFL an attractive theory of language to be used, particularly for those interested in studying language and how it is used in various contexts and cultures.

Every language used worldwide offers its users (speakers/writers) abundant options for construing meaning. SFL is a linguistic theory that views language as a system of meaning-making resource 'through which language shapes, and is shaped by the contexts in which it is used' (Schleppegrell, 2012:21). As a theory, SFL facilitates how meaning can be explored in context 'through a comprehensive text-based grammar that enables analysts to recognise the choices speakers and writers make from linguistic *systems* and to explore how those choices are *functional* for construing meanings of different kinds' (Schleppegrell, 2012:21, *author's emphasis*).

Within SFL, language is approached according to the belief that 'language is as it is because of the functions it has evolved to serve in people's lives; it is to be expected that linguistic structures could be understood in functional terms. Nevertheless, to understand them, we must proceed from the outside inwards, interpreting language by reference to its place in the social process' (Halliday, 1978, pp. 4-5). Thus, SFL associates language to its social context with four theoretical claims regarding language; i. language is functional, ii. its function is to make meanings, iii. these meanings are influenced by the social and cultural contexts in which they are exchanged, and iv. the process of using language is a semiotic process that involves making meaning by choosing (Eggins, 2007, p. 3). Hence, language is perceived from the SFL perspective as functional, semantic, contextual, and semiotic. Thus, it takes a functional-semantic approach to language, which examines language through its social context and purpose. As argued by Eggins (2007), the distinct feature of SFL is that it aims at developing both a theory of language as a social process and an analytical methodology that could allow a comprehensive and systematic description of language patterns within its context of use. SFL, as a theory of language which regards language as a system of meaning, also probes into how language is used within its social context by analysing how language construes experience by looking at the social actions that are taking place (ideational). SFL also looks into how language is used to enact social roles by analysing the role relationships within a text (interpersonal) and how language is organised and plays its part by analysing the text's coherence with its context of situation (textual).

SFL's theory of language claims that language is functional and enables people to create meanings. The meanings that people make within a language are influenced by the social and cultural contexts in which it is used. The entire process of language use is a semiotic process that involves making meaning by choosing (Eggins, 2007). In this regard, Halliday (1978; 1985; 1994; 2002) postulates that language evolves across cultures to express simultaneous kinds of meanings to perform three generalised functions popularly referred to as metafunctions. The metafunctions are ideational (clause as representation), interpersonal (clause as exchange) and textual (clause as message), which express three independent semantic choices. In order to investigate how language is used to accomplish these metafunctions, an

analysis of clauses is conducted to analyse how speakers (both in written and oral contexts) interact with their addressee(s) to accomplish specific communicative and social purposes.

Firstly, the ideational metafunction expresses the representational meaning of the speaker's particular situation involving a particular process and participant (Fontaine, 2013) through TRANSITIVITY analysis involving the analysis of process (verbal group), participants (nominal group) and circumstance (prepositional phrases or adverbials). Analysis of TRANSITIVITY will allow insights into how meaning is represented within the clause and show how speakers encode their mental picture of reality and account for their experience of the world around them through language (Fontaine, 2013). The interpersonal metafunction, on the other hand, expresses the interactional meaning of the speaker's action and interaction with the addressee (Fontaine, 2013) through MOOD analysis involving the analysis of the Subject (nominal group) and Finite (verbal group). The Mood analysis allows insights into how speakers use the language to interact with others in terms of how the speaker's views are expressed through modalities of modalisation (probability and usuality) and modulation (obligation and inclination) (Fontaine, 2013). Additionally, Mood analysis allows us to see how speakers express meanings related more directly to interaction through mood choices in asking questions, giving information, or making requests (Fontaine, 2013). Thus, Mood analysis representing clause as exchange identifies the selection of particular roles in the speech situation of the writers and the addressees (Halliday, 1973). The final metafunction, which is textual metafunction, expresses the message's organisation in terms of the speaker's means of organising the message and creating text through THEME analysis involving the analysis of Theme (the point of departure of the clause) and Rheme (the remainder of the clause). Textual analysis helps identify the speaker's means of organising the message and creating text. The theme functions as a means of 'grounding what (the speaker) is going to say' (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004:58). Thus, an analysis of the Theme will provide insight into how the text is developed and how meanings are maintained and progressed in the text (Fontaine, 2013).

Based on the discussion made, it is suggested that a possible contribution to the study of forest discourses is to include a more linguistic and textual perspective on forest-related discourse studies such as forest policies, regulations, governance, etc., which could potentially yield systematic, reliable and feasible findings as a result of employing a workable theory and analytical framework. More recently, few researchers have attempted to uncover the field of forestry from a linguistic perspective (Hussain et al., 2020; Fakhruddin et al., 2021:2022). Fakhruddin et al (2022) explored the experiential meaning portrayed in the forestry professional report genre. They found that the central concern of the genre is to portray the physical activities of managing forest lands among forestry professionals who are practising sustainable forest management practices and the geographical and topological conditions of the forest areas being managed by the Malaysian forestry professionals working at the Forestry Department of Peninsular Malaysia. Fakhruddin et al (2021) also explored the generic structure potential of forestry annual reports from an SFL perspective which revealed that Malaysian forestry annual reports mainly represent information regarding various aspects of forest-related concerns, including forest resources and its management, efforts taken in forest conservation and environmental protection, forest harvesting activities, forest productions, socioeconomic and economic contributions as well as human resource development.



Thus, more studies should be carried out to investigate how a particular text is produced to serve its communicative purpose while simultaneously seeking an understanding of why it is constructed the way it is, the functions it serves to those involved, and how meanings are served within its context of use as well as the roles genres play within its use and to those involved within the production and dissemination of forest genres. Findings obtained from such studies will allow insightful findings on the nature of forestry discipline and how language is used within forestry to serve its communicative purpose, particularly among the contributors and recipients of forest-related discourses and forestry governance and its practice among the forest discourse communities.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has briefly reviewed studies investigating forest-related discourses and the criticisms received from those within and outside the forestry disciplines concerning its implications and results from various studies conducted, mainly in European countries and more recently, in Asian countries. While forest discourses have received extensive attention from an anthropologist's view of discourse, particularly from the concepts presented by Michel Foucault on discourse, power, knowledge and governmentality, forest discourses have remained fuzzy as findings obtained from these studies lacked systematic theoretical and analytical foundations that are essential in establishing valid and reliable findings. Thus, understanding the concept of discourse is essential regardless of the orientations and theoretical underpinnings of studies interested in uncovering forest discourses and their impact on the discipline specifically and on others in general. Studies on forest discourses and their governance have focused on the social spectrum of discourse investigating power relations between the forestry discourse community and the society. This paper reviews a possible direction which has a mutual aim of investigating forest discourses, although it proposes the other end of the spectrum, which includes a linguistic and textual spectrum along with the discourse continuum through the possible inclusion of forest-related discourse studies from a Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) perspective. Through SFL, forest-related discourses and their policy governance could be studied and critically analysed by analysing how meanings are made and how communicative purposes are achieved by analysing the linguistic features evident within forest-related genres. By analysing language use and its distinct linguistic features in specific forest-related genres, such as the writings of forest policies, forest inventories, forest resources reports, etc., forest discourses could be uncovered through instances of language use in the establishment of particular forest discourses. The view of language from an SFL perspective as being shaped by the context in which it is used and that language is used by people to construe experience, enact social roles and how they are coherently bound within the text in its context of use allows insightful findings on the nature and practices of forest-related discourses within the forestry discipline. It is hoped that findings obtained from forest-related discourses and its policy governance from a linguistic perspective could contribute to the body of knowledge of forest discourses specifically and the understanding of forestry discipline in general and its massive contribution to the forest ecosystem, political and economic stability and environmental wellbeing worldwide.

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