

DISCOURSES OF THE *TABLIGHI JAMA`AT* IN GENRE STUDIES

Aina Al Mardhia Ismail
Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Selangor
ainaalmardhia@kuis.edu.my

ABSTRACT

The Tablighi Jama`at has been widely studied as a community in the area of Sociological and Anthropological studies. Most of the studies focus on the community's origins, activities, issues within the surroundings, issues relating to the Islamic context, and issues relating to Islamophobia. In regards to the sub field of Social Sciences, a smaller amount of studies has been focused on Genre Studies and the religious rhetorics of the the Tabligh Jama`at's discourse community. In Genre Studies, most works explored professional and academic discourse, especially in ESP (English for Specific Purposes). The review of past literature in Genre Studies as well as studies on the Tabligh Jama`at suggested that more studies should focus on the Tabligh Jama`at's communicative events such as their Bayan or public religious lectures.

Keywords: *Tablighi Jama`at, Genre Studies, Discourse Analysis*

INTRODUCTION

The *Tablighi Jama`at*, originating from India in 1925, is a widely studied community since the early 90s. This is relating to their dispersion and community membership worldwide; a number of parties may have negative interpretations of this community, while on the other side, the *Tablighi Jama`at* as well gain constructive criticism. Founded by Maulana Muhammad Ilyas al-Kandhlawi based in Nizamuddin India, currently the *Tablighi Jama`at* have broadened their *markaz* or centres of gatherings (which are usually Islamic mosques / *masjid*) around the globe. They also established Islamic education centres (*madrassa*) which usually place the *masjid* as the main focal centre. These *Tablighis* are of course part of the *Sunnis*. Their aim is not to just communicate the teachings of Islam to the Non-Muslims, but their focus is also to enhance the Muslims' practice of the Islamic teachings as well as to contemplate themselves to become better Muslims. The *Tablighi* movement claims no attachment to any particular political interest and there are no particular restrictions of who are to

become members or so. The community varies from their economic level, education background and also age. It is an obligation for every Muslim to convey the Islamic teachings to others, there are ranges of methods in doing so, the *Tablighis* claim that they try to replicate as similar as possible to the ways of the Prophet Muhammad. Usually dressed up in simple white clothing, the *kurta* or *jubah* during their *Tablighi* activities, members of this community also grow beard and wear the *turban* and head cap (following Prophet Muhammad's way of appearance).

The main activities or 'mottos' of the *Tablighis* as termed by Md Hanapi Md Noor in his *Tabligh: the Misunderstood Jewel of the Last Century* self-published travel account (2007), consist of the five *amal* of *masjid*, the yearly 40 days to 4 months *khuruj* (going out), every three years to Nizamuddin and subsequently to neighbouring or foreign countries, the individual daily morning and afternoon *zikir* (recitations toward the remembrance of God), the weekly *shabguzari* (weekly gathering) at the *mazkaz*, the *jur* (a minor gathering usually involving the elders and important figures in the *Tablighi* community), and the *ijtima'* (similar to the *jur*, but at a larger scale). The main agenda of these *Tablighis* during their *khuruj*, where they go out to nearby area mosques for 3 or 10 days (to other states and countries if it is 40 days or 4 months), is they will strictly engage to the five *amal* of *masjid*. In fact, this is supposedly practiced in their daily routine in their residency area where the centring hub is the *masjid* or Islamic holy centres. The practice engages the daily *fikri* or meeting session in the morning after the *Subh* prayer; matters of discussion cover details of the previous day's activities and also plans for upcoming agendas, and in addition this includes the readings of the *Fadilat Amal* and *Muntakab Hadith* (the *taalim*). The *taalim* is not just held after *Subh* in the morning; but also to be practiced daily at home with the family, usually after *Isya'* prayer later in the evening. The work in communicating the Islamic teachings (the *da`wah*) is realised in the daily two hours and a half or up to eight hours of activities visiting the neighbourhood community for their welfare and wellbeing. Another significant custom of this community is the weekly *ghast*: in residency area and neighbouring area, where these *Tablighis* will go from house to house, usually after *Maghrib* prayer in the evening. They will usually talk on the wonders and oneness of Allah, about the hereafter, and invite the Muslim males to attend the congregational prayers at the *masjid*. The residency host *Jama`at* will assist the other *Jama`at* (from other places) in *khuruj*. When they refer to the *Jama`at* involving ladies in this community, they will use the term '*masturat*'.

The *Tabligh Jama`at* is also distinctive in their *bayan* or public religious lectures during their gatherings mostly after *Subh* prayer in the morning and after *Maghrib* prayer in the evening, as part of their programme during their *khuruj*, and during gatherings (the *jur*, *shabguzari* and *ijtima`*). Other occasions related to the *bayan* may be the *bayan* as in briefing before the *khuruj* which is *bayan hidayat*, and the *bayan wapsi* after the *khuruj*, and *bayan* during the *Khatam Bukhari* in *Madrasas* (an occasion similar to convocation for those studying the Quran and Hadith, Islamic Revealed Knowledge).

Considering the discourse activities of the *Tablighi Jama`at*, the events can be categorised as the genre of missionary communication, specifically reviving the Islamic teachings worldwide; to Muslims and Non-Muslims. This review of past literature encompasses what has been delved in Genre Studies and the studies that have been done on the *Tablighi* community. The idea of this paper is to relate the past research in the field of sociology and communication, while at the same time highlighting the important areas that have less been explored and areas that should be scrutinised to better understand the *Tablighi Jama`at* and religious discourse in Genre Studies.

TRENDS IN GENRE STUDIES

Research on genre was developed in the 1980s and has flowered in the field of communication and linguistics since the 1990s. Swales (1990: 2-4), outlined the progress of ESP studies from register analysis to genre analysis. Leeuwen (1993), discussed on genre and field in the context of critical discourse analysis. Others explored different culturally patterned speaking practices in their analysis of communicative genres (Giiinthner and Knoblauch, 1995). In his discussion on genre analysis, Bhatia argued that language learners should be aware of the conversations of the disciplinary community to which they aspire to be a part of, and genre knowledge acquisition is necessary but not sufficient for any successive exploitation of generic conventions. In addition to this, genre knowledge should serve as a resource to make use of generic conventions to react to recurring and less recurrent rhetorical situations, rather than viewed as blueprint for reproduction (Bhatia, 1997a). Explaining and refining the concept of genre, Askehave and Swales (2001), discussed on genre identification and the concept of communicative purpose.

From the scope of world Englishes, Yunick overviewed the theoretical and applied resources in genre analysis and register analysis in relation to sociolinguistics (Yunick, 1997). Bhatia mentioned that in applied genre analysis, besides linguistic

input, contributions of sociolinguistics and ethnographic studies; psycholinguistics and cognitive psychology; communication research; studies of disciplinary cultures and essentially insights from members of the discourse communities are significant to answer the nature of language use of members of specific professional communities (Bhatia, 1997b, p. 1).

In the Australian context of genre research by systemic functional linguists, Martin (1997), explained about contextual metaphors and grammatical metaphors in analysing genres from the systemic functional linguistics framework. Rose (1997), explored discursive practices in science education as well as science industries and analysed the linguistic and cultural relationship of the genres. The study identified two types of English in the texts: technological English and scientific English. In formal institutions Iedema (1997), studied the use of directives in administrative matters. White's study on mass media news reporting covered the generic structures of news topics such as eruptive violence, accidents, natural disasters, terrorist attacks and other unfortunate coverage (White, 1997). Generic structure to naturalise and to obscure underlying ideological positions and the use of journalistic register were identified in the analysis. In pedagogic discourse SFL researchers have covered genres in early childhood curriculum genre and upper primary school curriculum macrogenres (Christie, 1997), scientific discourse in secondary school (Veel, 1997), historical knowledge within secondary school context (Coffin, 1997), and exploration of stories and narratives from the perspective of generic structure in pedagogical context (Rothery and Stenglin, 1997).

In ESP studies, the genre analysis framework has been widely exploited. Past research has applied the genre analysis approach in investigating the generic structures of business letters of negotiation (Santos, 2002). Derewianka (2003), highlighted on the trends and issues in genre-based approaches and emphasised that effectively designing syllabus, developing materials and providing professional development for teachers are required. Swales (2004), explored research genres in detail in terms of ESP in research world, the theoretical and methodological issues, Ph.D. dissertations and defence, talks relating to research discussions and again he revisited his 1990 explanation on research articles. Flowerdew (2005), integrated corpus-based and genre-based approaches to text analysis in EAP/ESP. On the other hand, Crossley (2007) applied the chronotopic approach to genre analysis in specifically studying ESP compositions. Henry (2007), evaluated language learners' response to web-based, data-driven, genre teaching materials. Ding (2007), studied moves in application essays to medical and dental schools. Swangboonsatic (2006), in his case

study of emails among professionals in the Asia-Pacific region also analysed the moves in the particular genre.

Harrell and Linkugel (1978), claimed that in rhetorical genre, generic research investigates rhetorical activity within designated categories. Genre based studies also covered discourse strategies and rhetorical differences between Italian and English sales promotion letters (Vergaro, 2004); investigation in persuasive marketing communication (Cheung, 2010); explication on the genre of intercultural rhetoric research in EAP texts (Connor, 2004); and analysis of prepared public speeches in English (Zhan, 2012). Bhatia (2008), argued that discursive and professional practices should be integrated to emphasise the function of interdiscursivity in critical genre analysis. As a review in the subject matter of linguistic research on genre, Ren (2010), concluded that the excessive attentions on texts focusing only one genre, and less on the texts which are generated by more than one genre, is a common deficiency in this area.

TABLIGHI JAMA`AT IN SCOPE

1970s literature on social studies has mentioned that the *Tablighi* movement was part of the dynamics of hierarchy in societal and economic structure in the northern regions of India (Ahmad, 1971). Studies claimed that the movement was being active in the protection and promotion of Muslim interests in India, and the movement encouraged those from rural vicinities to preach the Muslims in the municipality areas (Krishna, 1972). Issues relating to Muslim minorities in India also highlighted Urdu as the medium language or the lingua franca of all Indian Muslims, and the Deoband originated *Tablighi Jama`at* was also associated to this matter (Habib, Khan and Singh, 1976). Subject concerns at this point reflected that the discourse community has displayed its contributions to the Muslim world in India where the multilingualism of the people and different cultural traditions are the main background of discussion. The focus however was mainly on the Muslims as the minority, and the conversion of the Indians from the previous faith to another and its implications towards the social and economic stratification, while the issue of language which was additionally a major issue here, due to its importance in missionary communicative purposes were overlooked. It is important to re-state that one of the *Tablighi`*s main goals as a discourse community is to preach about Islamic matters in their missionary practices, and here starting in India itself, the medium language of choice and repertoire was already reflected among the community, and in the present as the *Tablighi Jama`at* has expanded worldwide; this issue is additionally emphasised. The question of the *Tablighi Jama`at* members of the Indian background

and the other worldwide nationalities is still an issue to be delved in the social study of this community.

From the discussions on Islamic revival and assimilation among the Muslims in India (Minault, 1984), studies have been seen as moving beyond, the *Tablighi Jama`at* in the 1980s was at that time studied in depth as a community traversing its members across other Islamic states, not just part of the explanation of the sociological phenomenon in India. Specifically, Malaysia was one of the states in focus in discussing the South East Asian Muslim state of affairs and in discussing the growth of the *Tablighi* movement, which was introduced back then in the 1950s by the Indian Muslims. Besides the *Tablighi* missionary movement in particular, other *da`awah* movements were also on the rise, but the *Tablighi Jama`at* was associated as the Indian *da`awah* by the 'pure Malays' (Nagata, 1980, 1982, 1984). The lectures of the *Tablighis* during the early days were in Urdu or Tamil, and translations in Malay were included, but later due to the increase of the Malay community in the *Jama`at*, Malay has become the main medium. Non-political in their activities, the *Tablighi* movement were regarded irrelevant to the Malaysian political progression (Bakar, 1981). Besides the Malaysian context, a comparison of the Islamic revivalism and Muslim missionary movements in the Sri Lankan background was altogether related to the political and social study in South East Asia (Ali, 1984). Even though, not individually studied, *Tablighi Jama`at* was part of the focal community in explaining the Malaysian political and social situation in the 1980s, as part of the religious movements on the rise during those times (Cheek and Sundaram, 1988).

To discuss about the *Jamaat-i Islami* in the context of Indian Muslims after the partition, the *Tablighis* and *Jamaat-i Islami* were compared side by side in their interest to political activities and their concept of *da`awah* missionary methods (Hasan, 1990; Troll, 1994). The *Tablighis* although silent and apolitical are not secularists in the western sense; they do not make a totalitarian conflation of religion and politics. Rather than universal and timeless blueprint for a political utopia, they believe that Islam is a way of life, providing a system of values, often blended by local culture and circumstances (Sadowski, 1996). The main aim of this particular movement is to involve common Muslims in accepting and considering a basic understanding of reformist Islam in to the masses (Robinson, 1997). In this sense the *Tablighi Jama`at* in the Libyan perspective, was claimed as a threat to the Arab nation and to Islam (Sammut, 1994). Yoginder Sikand (1999), elaborated about the women in the *Tablighi* movement, their role and practices within the community according to the ideally prescribed guidelines by the elders, and related the missionary practices to

the significance of women in general. This study lacks of a complete account, since to be involved in this fieldwork, ideally to participate in the *Tablighi Masturat* activities, one must be a Muslim woman. In this case the study may not be generalised, since depending on the perspectives of the informants may lead to biasness. Linguistic analysis should be hand in hand explained along with the discourse practices. The text, discursive practices and the social perspective should be synchronised as part of the explanation, rather than relying on selected observations and a few interviews.

In his Interview based sociological study, Van der Veer (1992), investigated the factors leading the success of the *Tabligh Jama`at* in South Gujerat with participants from varying socio-economic backgrounds. The *Tablighis* are not text oriented and not particularly prone to theological debate. They do not participate in the 'Sufi saint's day' Surat and Gujerat community practices, where prayers are offered to the dead saints. This is because they consider this as not in accord to the Islamic teachings. Moving to Africa, Beckerleg (1995), studied the *Tabligh Jama`at* in Watamu, Kenya in the early 1990s, and studied the impact of the movement towards the socio-economic activities and reviving Muslims, as well as the contributions of the movement in tackling the drug problems within the society. This movement is also playing its part in *da`awah* from Pakistan to Japan (Anis, 1998).

In a study on the impact of print technology to the Islamic world, Robinson (1993), claimed that oral culture is emphasised in the *Tablighi Jama`at* community, one of the representations of the Islamic society. Metcalf (1993), one of the western pioneers studying this community explored the *Fazail Amal* (texts compiled from the Hadiths) by Maulana Ilyas, and authored by his disciple Maulana Zakariya. These texts are not just to be read, but also to function as their model of daily life; the contents and messages conveyed are encouraged to be practiced. The text analysis was on the English translated version. Metcalf related the practices and ideas of the *Tablighis* and the content of the writings in the text compilations. Ethnographic interviews were also implemented on the *Tabligh* members of their usage of the texts. However, the framework of analysis was not linguistically based; perhaps the most relevant was Johansen (1991, as cited in Metcalf 1993), on language change and Amin Sweeney (1987, as cited in Metcalf 1993), on oral traditions.

Tablighi Jama`at was viewed as providing a public articulation of Muslim identity and sensibility that appealed to the educated middle class Muslims in Mumbai (Hansen, 2000). Ali (2000), argued that the majority community should encourage this quietist and peaceful in character movement rather than discouraging and fighting

against it. In Jordan, members of *Tabligh* are also potential recruits of the Salafi movement (Wiktorowicz, 2000). Some of the Salafis remain in *Tabligh* and attempt to use its organisational structure to promote Salafi thought, but usually when they were detected, they were driven out before they can affect the direction of the movement. According to Vahed (2000), in South Africa, *Tablighi* movement started in the early 1960s amongst Gujarati traders. Soon after, this movement attracted the Memon speakers from north Gujarat and some Urdu-speaking Muslims.

Metcalf (2003), explored the *karguzari* which is the oral report from the *Tablighi Jama'at's khuruj* activities. She mentioned that individual moral behaviour and the emphasis of teaching other Muslims are some of the themes of the *karguzari* accounts. The *Tablighi Jama'at's* emphasis of face-to-face itinerant approach was also highlighted in Jan Ali's study in 2003 (Ali, 2003). It was mentioned that Urdu is the lingua franca of Indo-Pakistani Muslims in Dewsbury *Madrasa*, one of the *Tablighi markaz* centres in England (Lewis, 2004; Gilliat-Ray, 2006). Eisenlohr (2006), on the other hand stated that in Mauritius the *Tablighi* Muslims want Islamic education to be in Arabic instead of Urdu, because of their Gujerati Indian Muslim identities. Other education and *Tablighi* community related studies include the Muslim community schools in Cape Town (Fataar, 2005), and the Islamisation of education in the Southern Philippines (Milligan, 2006, 2010). According to Alam (2005), the most devoted *Tablighi* members are among engineering tertiary level students.

In a case study of immigrant Muslim women in Oslo, Norway; the *Tablighi Jama'at* women were observed as family oriented Islamists (Predelli, 2004, 2008). The active development of this movement was also related to the ethnic minority and ethnic conflict in the context of Sri Lankan political quagmire (Ali, A., 2004, 2009; Mayilvaganan, 2008), related to migration, political and social strata in France and Germany (Boukhars, 2009; Kastoryano, 2004; Warner and Wenner, 2006), related to Muslim minorities in Fiji (Ali, J., 2004), related to their upsurge in Gambia (Janson, 2005), related to their current situation and spiritual activities in India and Pakistan (Reetz, 2006), related to the Sufism practices (Gaborieau, 2006), related to the Sufi *Tariqah* in South Africa (Haron, 2006), related to the development of the Balik-Islam group in the Philippines (Lacar, 2010), and also related to their plan to build a Mosque in East London (DeHanas, 2011). In Europe the movement was not viewed as terrorists but they are feared (Vidino, 2009). In South Asia, *Tablighi Jama'at* is more globalised, in the sense that it is present everywhere in South Asian Muslim diasporas (Gaborieau, 2009). Studies relating to the Islamic revival phenomenon and

the *Tablighi Jama`at* recently also covered the general African continent in context (Ahmed, 2008), in Johannesburg (McDonald, 2010), in South East Asia (Noor, 2012), in Bangladesh (Devine and White, 2013), and in Indonesia (Fauzia and Sakai, 2013).

CONCLUSION

Past research in Genre Studies has extensively explored the field of ESP; the professional contexts; the pedagogical area; and the academia communicative events. However, past literature in Genre Studies has displayed less focus on exploring the Islamic communicative events, especially in rhetorical religious speeches. Focus on the detailed discourse structures, rhetorical strategies and moves of this particular genre should be delved in further detail. In the case of the *Tablighi Jama`at* community, Metcalf's 1993 study on the *Fazail Amal* text and the *karguzari* or the personal *khuruj* journal in 2003 are the only academically published studies that focus on the *Tablighi Jama`at*'s communicative genre. More studies on their communicative events should be explored in depth to explain about the community, and to support most of the ethnographic research explanations and findings that were based on personal observations and insights of public opinion. As the Islamic discourse community from different continents most of the time includes more than one language medium (since Arabic is the language of the Quran scripture), it is important to also highlight and investigate further on their communicative events in multilingual contexts. The use of English and other varieties as the lingua franca should be analysed in the *Tablighi Jama`at*'s communicative events: especially their *bayan*. The *Tablighi Jama`at*'s different types of *bayan* should be analysed further in terms of its function, structure, and linguistic usage. Since less Applied Linguistics theories and approaches have been employed in studying the *Tablighi Jama`at*'s community, it is very much significant to delve further from the Applied Linguistics perspective in Multilingual Studies, as well as Communication Studies in general.

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