Some Problems in Classification of English Text Types

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The great leader Comrade **Kim Jong Il** said as follows.

"Now is the age of science and technology, and unprecedently fast speed is the major characteristic of the development of modern science and technology."

("**KIM JONG IL** SELECTED WORKS" Vol. 12 P. 199)

In the linguistic fields as well as in other fields, a great wave of research is arising, with the result that new linguistic areas are being developed more and more, such as text linguistics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, and so on.

To cope with the changed situation of the world of science and technology, the linguists and language teachers in our country should try harder to do more research work and introduce what has been achieved in it to our education, and thus bring up more competent students who will make really great contribution to the building of a powerful nation.

The ultimate goal of language studies lies in proper communication in a certain language, which leads to concentration on the text, the basic linguistic unit for communication.

Classification of English text types, which constitutes part of text typology, will contribute to English writing and translating as well as to comprehension of English text. This is, therefore, posed as more important in the field of English wring and English translation.

First of all, English text typology is closely related with English writing, which is, in fact, writing an English text.

There are certain principles which are generally applied to writing an English text; the constitutive principles and regulative principles.

The former is necessary to make a text a unique, cohesive and coherent in its form, with a definite point or subject running through the whole. It includes the principles for selecting the means and ways that will provide the structural and semantic completeness.

The latter includes the principles for selecting and using the means and ways for expressing writer's intension most effectively and clearly so that the expressiveness of the text is fully provided in accordance with the given situation.

In order to write an English text by applying such principles, the type of the text to be written should be decided accurately. In other words, deciding what type of text to write is the prerequisite to good English writing.

English text typology is also closely related with English translation. Translation is an activity of putting a text in one language into that in another language, which is not a word-by-word translation but requires reflecting, in the translated text, not only the content but even the intension of the writer and the cultural sense of the original text. This means that, the equivalence in translation should be made based on due consideration of such elements as the text type, the context, and social and cultural background reflected in the original text, as well as the choice of vocabulary and grammar. The type of the original text will help to decide all the necessary equivalents for good translation.

The study on English text types and their classification has been done so far in many ways, but

mostly on different basis. The linguists have pointed to a number of classificatory categories which, in their own right (and together), can be used to classify as well as explain ways in which types of text may usefully be categorized and accounted for.

The theory that language varies with its function led to descriptions of "varieties" of language with 'register' as criterion. Reid (1956), Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens (1964) divided language into user-related varieties, also termed dialects, and user-related varieties known as registers. User-related varieties comprise geographical, temporal, social (non)standard dialects and idiolects, while registers comprise an open-ended set of varieties (or styles) of language typical of occupational fields, such as the language of religion, the language of legal documents, the language of newspaper reporting, medical language, technical language, etc.

If we categorize the text type based on register, it is easy to classify the text types; political and newspaper text, legal text, medical text, text of science and technology, text of literature, and so on.

This classification of text types, however, can not be said to be most comprehensive. It is accounted for by the fact the term 'register' itself is defined in a variety of ways. For example, the following are the definitions of "register" given in different English dictionaries.

－ "*The level and style of a piece of writing or speech, that is usually appropriate to the situation that is used in.*" (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary)

－ "*The words, style and grammar are used by speakers and writers in a particular situation or in a particular type of writing. There are formal and informal register.*" (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English)

－ "*A variety of language or a level of usage, as determined by degree of formality and choice of vocabulary, pronunciation, and syntax, according to the communicative purpose, social context, and standing of the user.*" (The New Oxford Dictionary of English)

"*In stylistics, a socially defined variety of language, such as scientific or legal English.*" (The Cambridge Encyclopedia of English Language)

There is, of course, a common thing in those definitions that register refers to the use of language "in a certain context or situation", but they refer to different ranges of language use.

These definitions given from slightly different angles allow some linguists to use such terms as "employer's register" or "written register", which causes some confusion among the people about the types of English texts.

On the other hand, we can find, in our everyday life, the texts written for the purpose of informing people of something, which we can call "expository texts", and the texts with argumentative points, which we can call "argumentative texts", and so on. This means that we can classify the text types on the basis of other criteria.

Genre is another thing that can be noticed in the classification of text types, or in text typology.

As Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines; "genre is a particular type or style of literature, art, film or music that you can recognize because of its special features".

Genre analysis has a long-established tradition in literary studies. It dates back to Aristotle, who distinguished genres as classes of texts, a view which still prevails.

With the transition of form-based study of language to use-and user-based one, new fields of

language study appeared such as text linguistics, pragmatics and discourse analysis and the term "genre", which was formerly used as "a distinctive type or category of literary composition" is quite easily used as the text categories readily distinguished by mature speakers of a language, referring to a distinctive category of text of any type, spoken or written, with or without literary aspirations.

As register is not a comprehensive category with which to classify the text types, so genre is not a perfect criterion for classification of the texts. The texts classified under the category of register are the distinctions of texts according to the identity or similarity of content, while the texts under the category of genre are classified according to the purpose and ways of social communication.

For instance, an article related with scientific research such as experimental report belongs to the texts of science and technology, which is classified in terms of register. The content of that article can be delivered to other people in the form of a dialog in a lobby of a university or to the students in classes; it can also be discussed between students themselves after school through the network; it can be released in publicity. The texts of the same topic, used for the different purposes in different situations are distinguished by genre.

Similarly, legal texts include legal documents such as laws, regulations and contracts; the language spoken at the court by the judges, lawyers, juries and witnesses; the texts contained in the textbooks of law; and the language used between lawyers and other legal people like lawyers and non-legal people.

The best way of classifying text types seems to be on stylistic basis. Text and style are in inseparable relationship.

Stylistics constitutes one of the linguistic areas in which the different communication styles and the stylistic means and ways are studied.

Traditionally, the study of style was limited to variations in usage among literary and other texts; now, it focuses more on any systematic variation, in either writing or speech, for high level of expressiveness.

In stylistics, the stylistic means and ways should be studies in close relationship with specific context or situation, because the expressiveness of language is realized not through an isolated word or phrase by through the specific context or situation.

One of the English magazines once carried an article with a title "Soul to sole", which is an example of "pun", one of the stylistic ways, used to attract readers' attention to the article which is an introduction of sports shoes. This title, separated from its context, cannot be analysed in a stylistic way, nor can it render its expressive effect.

People use their languages in a certain, specific situation with specific communication purpose. For a good language communication, the language users should keep in mind the right type of text so as to choose the right means and ways of expression most suitable for the communication field and purpose.

All these clearly show that English texts are closely related with the style, and, therefore, the text types should also be studied and classified in an integrated way.

Classification of English text types on a stylistic basis means classifying the texts according to the communication fields, communication purpose and the ways of communication.

According to the communication fields, English texts can be classified into political and news texts, science and technology texts, literature texts, documentary texts, everyday English texts, and so on. Each sub-category differs from others in expressive effect it pursues; political and newspaper texts need political keenness and sensibility, while the texts of science and technology pursue high level of logic sense and sequences as well as accuracy.

According to the communication purposes, English texts can be classified into narrative texts, expository texts, argumentative texts, persuasive texts, and so on, which are distinguished from each other in the choice of stylistic devices and ways suitable for different communication purposes. For example, in expository texts a variety of connective devices are used to express the contents in most logical way, and in argumentative texts the devices for expressing comparison and contrast are commonly used for the realization of their communication purpose.

According to communication ways, English texts are classified into spoken texts and written texts, which are clearly distinguished in the use of stylistic devices and ways. For example, English spoken texts are characterized by the frequent use of ellipsis and contraction, informal and neutral words, and short, simple sentences, whereas written texts are characterized by the use of formal words of highly abstractive meaning and borrowed words, and the use of long complex sentences to express complicated contents.

We should make further study on text typology, to provide better contents and ways of language education for bringing up students who have acquired useful language knowledge and skills.