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Worlds of Written Discourse

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General Editors’ Preface

This editorial which accompanies Vijay Bhatia’s Worlds of Written Discourse: A Genre-Based View marks the closure of the Advances in Applied Linguistics Series. In our original blurb for the Series we had signalled that there would be opportunities for key scholars to write individually authored books which would focus cumulatively on their scholarly contribution to a field of study. In a sense, advances in disciplinary knowledge, or genre, cannot be assessed in separation from advances made by individual scholars in a committed way over a considerable period of time. This present volume by Bhatia is an example of just such a commitment in the field of genre studies, with regard to both its analytic expansion and application potential.

Genre studies have to an extent reached a certain plateau in applied linguistics. Scholars and practitioners have acknowledged the distinctive perspectives that the study of genre offers: as typified rhetorical and social action (Miller 1984); as a staged, goal-oriented social process (Martin 1985); as a conventionalized communicative event closely associated with communities of practice (Swales 1990). They have acknowledged a range of analytical perspectives on an increasingly broad range of genres, including close textual and linguistic description focusing on specific choices of lexico-grammar and discursive structures; ethnographic accounts of critical moments in key sites from institutional, professional and organizational perspectives displaying how particular genres are characteristic of such cultures, their aims, objectives and constraints; socio-cognitive perspectives exploring tensions in the construction of genres between personal and professional intention. In his earlier influential book, Bhatia (1993) made a plea for an integration of different perspectives in the overall descriptions of genre in particular sites and contexts. This present book both consolidates such a position and anticipates future challenges to genre studies.

The main challenge facing genre studies comes with the changing times. In the face of extensive and pervasive hybridity in terms of textual realization and modes of representation, a stable notion of generic integrity belies the evidence. As Bhatia indicates, the real world of discourse does not neatly fit into the established theories and practices of genre analysis. The suggestion that genres are clearly
demarcated and closely and identifiably attached to particular communities of practice can hardly be maintained. This is in large measure a consequence of the extraordinary contemporary flux in certain communities of practice as their own boundaries become less secure in response to social pressures and to changes in their own institutional, professional and organizational structures, or simply because of the sheer accretion of knowledge. As a prime example, a glance at the textbooks of fifty years ago in even one field, say, in nursing, or in business studies, or in law, would suggest that there has been a considerable shift in the discourse practices of such professionals, in terms of what they regard as useful knowledge, the view they take of the novice and expert practitioner, the purposes assumed for the profession, the stance they take towards their audiences, and the like. By a similar token, especially in fields like advertising, we note the deliberate and engaged construction of hybrid genres, mixing in different configurations discourse features of promotion and information. By extension, other fields of practice, not themselves within such a domain as advertising, have willingly borrowed some of its key generic characteristics for their own purposes, academic institutional writing being only one such example (Fairclough 1993).

Genres are not only complex internally, with uncertain boundaries. Their increasing complexity derives also from the company they keep, whether this is in terms of what Bhatia has called ‘colonies’ or systems of genre, or in terms of the chaining of genres. As an example of the latter, we notice in the healthcare context in hospitals, how registration forms are linked to patient notes, to requests for specialist treatment or analysis, all tightly linked institutionally in a well-defined process of what one might call organizational sequencing. It is worth remembering that this complexity also derives from the now pervasive multi-modality of genres — while in the early days there may have been a natural concentration on the written (usually printed) text — this is, and can no longer be, the case. As Scollon (1998) points out in his work on news discourses, and quite generally in the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), as genres are multi-modal in practice they need also to be so in their analysis.

It is against this background of intense intertextuality and interdiscursivity that Bhatia’s present book makes an important and original contribution. He begins from variation, hybridity and dynamism in the accounting for genres, and focuses on how such complexity can now be recognized as co-occurring with increasing hybridization of organizational life, and how to analyse such hybrid genres with view to their application potential. In this sense, his book is much more than an exercise in specialized text or discourse
analysis. Indeed, it is very much more than a book about genres. The main title *Worlds of Written Discourse* is an invitation to recognize that shift in genre studies we have alluded to above. There is also another shift to be discerned: one away from the overwhelmingly pedagogic orientation of earlier work on genre, concerned with, and indeed driven by, practices in the field of teaching foreign languages for specific purposes, towards one engaged with new audiences concerned with the exploitation of genres in their social and institutional space.

We envisage that new fields of applied linguistic endeavour, for example in professional and organizational communication, will find much in this book to underpin their field research and analytic gaze, as well as their own applications to practice. At the same time, we believe the book will sit well with current engagements with discourse in the sociology of work, especially in exploring orders of discourse in the workplace, as with the critical analysis of, say, how genres can be deliberately designed as obligatory performance targets as a way of apprenticing workers into conforming to organizational objectives. That such processes are not unproblematic is evidenced by internal struggles over ideology which are in themselves prime motivators for precisely the generic hybridity and instability that Bhatia identifies and illustrates here. As just three examples, we might point to current research and publication over the issue of GM (genetically modified) foods where scientific, political, and plain consumer-persuasion genres are inextricably and deliberately confounded in public presentation; or in the field of alternate dispute resolution, where more therapeutically grounded genres have been melded with the more adjudicatory, as mediation specialists construct a novel professional identity from the fields of counselling and law (Candlin & Maley 1997); or in Swales' genial study of the genres within an academic building in terms of what he calls its 'textography' (Swales 1998). We have, then, an increasingly rich store of data on just such generically evidenced contestation and hybridity. It is against this background that this book presents a critical and explanatory, as well as a descriptive and interpretive dimension.

There are two other areas which warrant identifying, however, from the arguments in this book. One has to do with the increasing interest in *creativity* in discourse (Carter 2004), where the argument that demotic creativity as a property of everyday talk (and writing) is gaining considerable applied linguistic interest over the study of more canonical forms of literary and artistic creativity, the property of stylistics. If, as Carter argues, we are all in some sense creative artists, then it is our manipulation and dynamic utilization of the construct of
genre which enables us to warrant this creativity. As all artists work within certain frames, if only to fracture them, so there is value in genre studies in establishing by all manner of descriptive means what those boundaries might be, however metaphysical, as much as there is value in exploring how they are creatively contravened and breached. Bhatia’s book has much to contribute here in his discussion of what he calls tactical space. Secondly, we may point to the preponderance of genre analyses in the past which have focused on performance and production. Of equal interest, as Sarangi (2004) indicates, is the interpretative potential of genres. What interpretations do they evoke, which are in fact taken up, and which constrained? Here, of course, we return to that socio-cognitive perspective on genre we referred to earlier, but with a twist. The socio-cognition here is not merely psychological, it is tightly connected to the exigencies of the social, once more reinforcing the social and critical perspective of this innovative contribution to the Advances in Applied Linguistics series, and widening considerably its audiences. Although the Series ceases to exist under this label, we are confident that the philosophy and principles underlying the Series will continually inform future scholarship in the field of applied linguistics.

References


Christopher N Candlin
Srikant Sarangi
General Editors
Introduction

Genre theory in the past few years has contributed immensely to our understanding of the way discourse is used in academic, professional and a variety of other institutional contexts; however, its development has been quite understandably constrained by the nature and design of its applications, which have invariably focused on language teaching and learning, or communication training and consultation. In such narrowly identified and restricted contexts, one often tends to use simplified and idealized genres. The real world of discourse, in contrast to this, is complex, dynamic, versatile and unpredictable, and often appears to be confusing and chaotic. These aspects of the real world have been underplayed in the existing literature on genre theory and practice. As a consequence, we often find a wide gap between genre analyses of texts in published literature, emphasizing the integrity and purity of individual genres, and the variety of rather complex and dynamic instances of hybridized genres that one tends to find in the real world. This tension between the real world of written discourse and its representation in applied genre-based literature, especially in the context of the present-day academic, professional and institutional world, is the main theme of this book.

The book addresses this theme from the perspectives of four rather different worlds: the world of reality, which is complex, ever changing and problematic; the world of private intentions, where established writers appropriate and exploit generic resources across genres and domains to create hybrid (mixed or embedded) forms, or to bend genres; the world of analysis, which proposes a multidimensional and multi-perspective framework to explore different aspects of genre construction, interpretation and exploitation; and finally the world of applications, where we focus on the implications of this view of genre theory, interpreting applied linguistics rather broadly in areas other than ESP and language teaching. Each of these worlds forms the basis of each of four sections of the book. In addition, there is the introductory section, which consists of the first chapter, which provides an overview of the field and proposes a four-space genre-based model of analysis of written discourse.

The overview in Chapter 1 claims that the present work in genre analysis has been the result of a systematic development of discourse
Introduction

analysis, which has gone through three main stages of ‘textualization of lexico-grammar’, ‘organization of discourse’ and ‘contextualization of discourse’. Based on this historical development of genre theory, the chapter then proposes a four-space model of genre analysis, which looks at language as text, language as genre, language as professional practice and language as social practice.

The following two chapters then look at the real world of written discourse. The main argument is that the complexity of the real world can be viewed in terms of two rather different but related views of the world; one looks at genres within specific disciplinary domains, highlighting disciplinary differences within specific genres, whereas the other considers genre relationships across disciplinary domains, highlighting similarities across disciplines. The first one thus focuses on individual genres within disciplines, whereas the second one considers constellations of genres, which can be seen as ‘genre colonies’ across disciplinary boundaries. Both these views of the real world of discourse are useful for a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of the real world of written discourse.

Section three incorporates Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 explores a further dimension of written discourse which distinguishes genre construction, interpretation and use based on ‘socially recognized’ conventions from a careful ‘exploitation’ or ‘manipulation’ of shared genre conventions. Taking this view, on the one hand we find a range of genres in a variety of interacting relationships with one another, unfolding rich and often complex patterns of interdiscursivity, whereas on the other hand we find expert members of professional cultures exploiting this richness to create new forms of discourse, often to serve their ‘private intentions’ within the constructs of socially recognized communicative purposes as realized through specific genres. The chapter also takes a closer look at two of the many interesting examples of generic appropriation and conflicts, the first from the context of fundraising, where generic resources are appropriated from the discourse of marketing, creating conflicts between the corporate and the philanthropic cultures, and the second from legislative writing from two rather distinct legal systems, where two different socio-legal contexts coming in contact with each other create potential conflicts in the interpretation of similar genres. The chapter thus introduces greater complexity within the tactical space, leading to the appropriation of linguistic resources across genres, often encouraging expert writers to exploit conventions to ‘bend’ genres to their own advantage, sometimes giving rise to conflicts in generic interpretation. This also results in the creation of hybrid genres (both mixed and embedded).
These manipulations of established conventions raise legitimate questions about the integrity of genres and the extent of freedom that professional writers have when they choose to bend generic norms and conventions in order to create new forms. This brings into focus the underlying tension between ‘generic integrity’, ‘generic appropriation’ and ‘generic creativity’, which lies at the very centre of applied genre theory. Chapter 5 highlights the fact that ‘generic integrity’ is not something which is static or ‘given’, but something which is often contestable, negotiable and developing, depending upon the communicative objectives, nature of participation, and expected or anticipated outcome of the generic event. The chapter also focuses on two other related aspects of genre theory, the relationship between professional genres and expertise in particular professional fields, and how expert professionals acquire such expertise in their specialist fields and what role genre knowledge plays in this acquisition.

The emerging picture thus looks very much more complex and dynamic than what we had been familiar with in typical genre-based analyses of professional discourse. To investigate such a world, we need to have an equally complex, multidimensional and multi-perspective model of genre analysis. The next section, incorporating Chapter 6, is an attempt to provide a possible answer to the issues raised and proposes a multi-perspective and multidimensional framework for extending the theory and scope of genre analysis in an attempt to see ‘the whole of the elephant’, as they say, rather than approaching it from any specific point of view for a partial view. The chapter also illustrates the use of such a framework by undertaking analysis of a real text, highlighting some of the advances that the proposed framework claims.

The final section of the book takes up some of the implications of genre theory and identifies specific areas of application. In the context of applications, there is an attempt to give applied linguistics a much broader interpretation than language teaching and learning. In a similar manner, ESP is interpreted to cover language learning at work, either as part of what Lave and Wenger (1991) called Legitimate Peripheral Participation, or as communication training in the context of specific workplace practices.

With the rapid pace of economic development in recent years, the world has become a much smaller place; socio-political boundaries are being consistently undermined in an attempt to create global markets, which have created opportunities for interaction across linguistic boundaries. This development has created contexts where translation and new forms of information and document design have assumed a much greater importance than at any time in the history of our
Introduction

civilization. Genre theory, as part of its objective to understand language use, has a valid contribution to make in this area as well. Thus teaching of language is no longer seen as an end in itself; it is increasingly seen as a means of acquiring professional expertise associated and integrated with the discursive practices of the workplace and professional cultures, whether they relate to the construction and interpretation of professional documents, designing of information through the new media, or translation across languages and cultures. In this sense, genre theory has become increasingly popular and powerful in the last few years.

In order to cope with these demands in broadly interpreted applied linguistics, the tools for analysing language are also becoming much more comprehensive and hence powerful in two ways at least. On the one hand, advancement in the field of computational linguistics has made it possible to process large corpora of language use and draw more reliable conclusions. On the other hand, interdisciplinary interests in the use of language have encouraged analysts to look for more meaningful relationships between language descriptions and institutional, professional and socio-cultural processes that shape the use of language in society, giving immense power to expert professionals and writers. If genre brings power, can we afford to ignore the politics of genre? Genre theory has significant implications for the politics of language use, and therefore the final chapter pays some attention to the exploitation of genres in the maintenance of power and the politics of language use in professional contexts.

In this book I have made an attempt to take my understanding of genre beyond my earlier concept of genre, which was restricted by my pedagogic concerns of the classroom. I have deliberately and consciously tried to turn my back on the classroom to face the world of discourse as it really is: complex, dynamic, changing, unpredictable and sometimes chaotic. I have tried to develop a model of genre analysis which adds to my earlier work and also to that of a number of other researchers. I see this as an attempt to integrate various frameworks and views of genre theory, rather than as an entirely new development.

Vijay K. Bhatia
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OVERVIEW
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1 Perspectives on written discourse

I am using the term *discourse* in a general sense to refer to *language use* in institutional, professional or more general social contexts. It includes both the written as well as the spoken forms, though I will be mainly concerned with written discourse in this book. Discourse analysis refers to the study of naturally occurring written discourse focusing in particular on its analysis beyond the sentence level. As a general term, discourse analysis therefore can focus on lexico-grammatical and other textual properties, on regularities of organization of language use, on situated language use in institutional, professional or organizational contexts, or on language use in a variety of broadly configured social contexts, often highlighting social relations and identities, power asymmetry and social struggle.

1.1 History and development

In this opening chapter, I would like to give some indication of the way analysis of written discourse has developed in the last few decades. There are a number of ways one can see the historical development of this field. Viewing primarily in terms of different perspectives on the analysis of written discourse in academic, professional and other institutionalized contexts, one can identify a number of rather distinct traditions in the analysis of written discourse, some of which may be recognized as *discourse as text, discourse as genre, discourse as professional practice* and *discourse as social practice*. On the other hand, it is also possible to view the chronological development of the field in terms of three main phases, each one highlighting at least one major concern in the analysis of written discourse. The first phase can be seen as focusing on the *textualization* of lexico-grammatical resources and the second one on the regularities of *organization*, with the final one highlighting *contextualization* of discourse.

There is some value attached to both the views, and therefore I would like to highlight some aspects of the field based on the chronological development first, and then make an attempt to integrate them into a coherent argument for treating the field of written
discourse analysis as a gradual development in the direction of a number of specific perspectives on the analysis of written discourse. The chapter therefore represents historical development of the field on the one hand, and increasingly thicker descriptions of language use on the other.

The three phases that I have referred to above in the historical development of analysis of written discourse thus are:

- Textualization of lexico-grammar
- Organization of discourse
- Contextualization of discourse

In discussing these three rather distinct phases in the development of analysis of written discourse, I would like to further distinguish them in terms of various stages, some of which will show occasional overlaps; however, the purpose of the discussion is to highlight the nature of the development of the field, and more importantly the influence of relevant insights from disciplines other than descriptive linguistics, which was the main influence in the early descriptions of language use. Let me discuss some of the important aspects of what I have referred to as the chronological development of the field.

**Textualization of lexico-grammar**

The analyses of language use in early days, especially in the 1960s and the early 1970s, were overly influenced by frameworks in formal linguistics, and hence remained increasingly confined to surface-level features of language. These analyses were also influenced by variation studies due to the interest of many linguists in applied linguistics and language teaching (Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens 1964). Without getting into a detailed history of language variation and description, I would like to highlight some of the important stages of such a gradual development.

As part of the study of language variation as ‘register’ (Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens 1964), the early analyses of written discourse focused on statistically significant features of lexico-grammar used in a particular subset of texts associated with a particular discipline. Barber (1962) was probably one of the earliest studies identifying significant grammatical features in a corpus of scientific texts. Computational analytical procedures were not developed at that time, and hence the analytical findings were confined to only some of the significant features rather than a complete analysis of the corpus as such. Similarly, Gustafsson (1975) focused on only one syntactic feature of legal discourse, i.e. binomials and multinomials. In a similar manner
Spencer (1975) identified yet another typical feature of legal discourse, *noun-verb combinations*. The trend continued with Bhatia and Swales (1983) who identified nominalizations in legislative discourse as their object of study. In all these preliminary attempts, one may notice two concerns: an effort to focus on the surface level of specialized texts, and an interest in the description of functional variation in discourse by focusing on statistically significant features of lexis and grammar. Both these concerns seemed to serve well the cause of applied linguistics for language teaching, especially the teaching and learning of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). There was very little attention paid to any significant comparisons of different varieties, perhaps because of the focus on ESP, which often concerned a well-defined group of learners from a specific discipline.

Some of the early analyses of lexico-grammar in specialized texts used in language teaching and learning gave an incentive to investigations of functional values that features of lexico-grammar in specialized texts represent, though often within clause boundaries without much reference to discourse organization. Functional characterization of lexico-grammar or textualization in terms of discoursal values within the rhetoric of scientific discourse was investigated in Selinker, Lackstrom and Trimble (1973). During this phase there was a clear emphasis on the characterization of functional values that features of lexico-grammar take in written discourse. Swales (1974) investigated the function of en – participles in chemistry texts; Oster (1981) focused on patterns of tense usage in reporting past literature in scientific discourse; and Dubois (1982) analysed the discoursal values assigned to noun phrases in biomedical journal articles. Swales (1974) documents one of the most insightful analyses of functional values of ‘bare’ attributive en-participles in single-noun NPs, both in the pre- and post-modifying positions, in a corpus of chemistry textbooks. He assigns two kinds of functional values to pre-posed uses of *given*, that of clarification of the ‘status’ of the sentence or that of exemplification by the author. The following text (Swales 1974: 18) contains the use of an en-participle for clarification:

> A *given* bottle contains a compound which upon analysis is shown to contain 0.600 gram-atom of phosphorous and 1.500 gram-atom of oxygen.

He explains that the function of *given* is to prevent unnecessary and irrelevant enquiries of the following kind:

- Is this a typical experiment?
- Who did the experiment?
How large was the bottle?

Since attribution is an important convention in science, the role of given here is to signal unmistakably that the convention is being suspended. On the other hand, given in the following sentence is used as a crypto-determiner to assign a very specific meaning to the noun:

Figure 9.5 shows how the vapour pressure of a given substance changes with temperature.

Swales (1974: 19) rightly claims that any of the ordinary language substitutions for a given, such as a certain or a particular, in a case like this will make the reading ‘insufficiently generalized’, whereas a substitution such as any or every will lead to over-generalization. This leads Swales to conclude that this particular en-participle performs a very specific rhetorical function, which is unique to scientific discourse.

It is possible to extend such a study of textualization of lexico-grammatical features to other genres, often comparing their use across different genres. In an earlier study (Bhatia 1991), while investigating the use of nominals in professional genres such as advertisements, scientific research reports and legislative provisions, I discovered that although nominals were used overwhelmingly in all these genres, they were markedly different not only in their syntactic form, but also in their rhetorical function. In advertising, nominals typically take the form (Modifier) Head (Qualifier), where modifiers are realized primarily in terms of a series of linearly arranged attributes as follows:

(Determiner) (Adjective) (Adjective) (Adjective) ... Head (Qualifier)

Since one of the main concerns in advertising is to offer a positive evaluation of products or services being promoted, and nominals, in particular noun phrases, are seen as carriers of adjectives, we are likely to find an above-average incidence of nominals in such genres. The following is a typical example of this:

The world’s smallest and lightest digital camcorder
that’s also a digital still camera

On the other hand, nominals in academic research genres, especially in the sciences, are used to create and develop technical concepts. These nominals take the form of nominal compounds that have the following structure:

(Modifier) (Modifier) (Modifier) ... Head (Qualifier)