

Genre: definitions

Genres are ways in which people 'get things done' through their use of spoken and written discourse. *Genres* are activities that people engage in through the use of language. Academic lectures and casual conversations are examples of spoken genres. Newspaper reports and academic essays are examples of written genres. Instances of a genre often share a number of features. They may be spoken or written in typical, and sometimes conventional, ways. They also often have a common function and purpose (or set of functions and purposes). Genres may typically be performed by a particular person aimed at a particular audience, such as an academic lecture being delivered by a lecturer to a group of undergraduate students. There may be certain contexts in which a genre typically occurs, such as a lecture taking place in a university lecture theatre, and certain topics that are typically associated with the use of a genre, such as particular academic course content. Genres change through time. This may, for example, be in response to changes in technologies or it may be as a result of changes in values underlying the use of the particular genre. The office memo is an example of a genre that has changed in response to technological changes. An office meeting may change when a new person takes over chairing the meeting who has a different idea from their predecessor as to how the meeting should be run, what is important to discuss and how this should be discussed.

A genre is 'a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture' has been extremely influential in the work of the Sydney School of genre analysis. Genre, thus, is a kind of 'social agreement' about ways of doing things with language in particular social and cultural settings. Miller also discusses the notion of *typification* in relation to genre. That is, there are typical forms a genre might take as well as typical content and typical action that the genre performs, all of which we recognize and draw on as we engage with the use of genres.

Pre-genres, disembedded genres, and situated genres

One of the difficulties with the concept of genre is that genres can be defined on different levels of abstraction. For example, one might say that Narrative is a genre, but then so, too, is Report in the sense of a factual narrative about actual events, and so, too, is a Television News Report, i.e. the particular form of report characteristic of television news. If Narrative, Argument, Description, and Conversation are genres, they are genres on a high level of abstraction. They are categories which transcend particular networks of social practices, and there are for instance many different types of Narrative genres (e.g. conversational narratives, the endless 'stories' in the press and on television, the 'stories' that clients tell counsellors in therapy, etc.) which are more specifically situated in terms of social practices. If we say that a genre is tied to a particular social practice or network of social practices, then we should call Narrative, etc. something different. Swales (1990) suggest the term 'pre-genre'.

Analysing individual genres

The individual genres of a text or interaction (e.g. the main and sub-genres ethnographic interview, expository argument, conversational narrative) can be analysed in terms of: Activity, Social Relations, and Communication Technology — what are people doing, what are the social relations between them, and what communication technology (if any) does their activity depend on?

Activity

The question, 'what are people doing?', here means specifically, 'what are people doing discursively?' When we think of social events, we are concerned with activities overall, in their non-discursive as well as discursive aspect. Here the focus is on the discourse. But a distinction needs to be drawn between cases where the social activity is primarily discursive (a lecture, for example), and cases where discourse has an ancillary role (e.g. fixing the engine of a car, or playing football). In the case of a lecture, there is a specifically discursive activity with its own organizational properties, which can be analysed separately from relatively secondary non-discursive elements of the overall activity such as the use of an overhead projector or power-point. In the case of a game of football, it would be difficult to argue that there is a specifically discursive activity distinct from the overall activity. Whether discourse is primary or ancillary is a matter of degree. It is common for genre to be defined in terms of the purposes of the activity. For instance, according to Swales (1990) a genre 'comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes'. A particular genre may have a number of purposes.

Social relations

Genres as forms of interaction constitute particular sorts of social relations between interactants. Social relations are relations between social agents, which can be of different types: organizations (e.g. local government, a business organization), groups (e.g. a campaigning group such as Reclaim the Streets), or individuals. Communication can be between organizations or groups or individuals, or combine different types of social agents. An influential sociolinguistic study by Brown and Gilman (1960) suggests that social relations vary in two dimensions, 'power' and 'solidarity', or social hierarchy and social distance. An issue of particular contemporary interest is the relationship between what a social analysis of networks of practices, institutions etc. might suggest about social hierarchy and distance, and how social hierarchy and distance are construed in genres.

Communication technologies

Discourse can be differentiated with respect to communication technologies in terms of two distinctions: two-way versus one-way communication, and

mediated versus non-mediated communication. This gives us, schematically, four possibilities: Two-way non-mediated: face-to-face conversation Two-way mediated: telephone, email, video conferencing One-way non-mediated: lecture, etc.

One-way mediated: print, radio, television, Internet, film The increasing complexity of the networking of social practices in contemporary societies is linked to new communication technologies — telegraph, telephone, radio, television, and more recently electronic information technology (e.g. the Internet) — which have significantly enhanced both one-way and two-way mediated communication. One way in which genres differ from one another is in the communication technologies they are specialized for, and one factor in changing genres is developments in communication technologies: the development of new communication technologies goes along with the development of new genres.

The Sydney School of genre analysis

The notion of genre is important in the teaching of writing and reading (Martin and Rose 2012) in the work of the Sydney School of genre studies. Here, the term *schematic structure* is often used to describe the discourse structure of texts. For Martin, the notion of genre corresponds to Malinowski's (1923 , 1935) notion of *context of culture* and is responsible for the schematic structure of a text. The *register* (Halliday 1989) of the text, on the other hand, corresponds to Malinowski's *context of situation* and is responsible for the language features of a text. Genres, thus, are culture specific and have particular purposes, stages and linguistic features associated with them, the meanings of which need to be interpreted in relation to the cultural and social contexts in which they occur.

Relationships between genres

A recent development in genre theory has been the notions of *genre networks* , *genre chains* , *genre sets* and *repertoires of genres* (Tardy 2003 , Devitt 2004 , Swales 2004). A key issue here is the way the use of one genre may assume or depend on the use of a number of other interrelated genres. An example of this is the academic essay which may draw from and cite a number of other genres such as academic lectures, specialist academic texts and journal articles. Academic essays also interrelate closely with assignment guidelines, statements of assessment criteria, tutorial discussions and teacher–student consultations.

Gerhart (1989) discusses three views of genre in contemporary literary theory: the traditionalist view, the ideological view, and the deconstructionist view. On the traditionalist view, genre acts as a catalyst in the interpretation of individual texts: while genre knowledge does not determine a unique interpretation, it nevertheless facilitates understanding; in the absence of genre knowledge, a

particular text would be considerably harder to understand. On the ideological view, genre is one property of language which cannot but be used in relation to the ideologies which drive writers and readers. The deconstructionist view sees texts as inevitably related to others of a similar type in a complex textual network, a semiotic system. What these views have in common is the idea that the understanding of texts depends in important ways on genre knowledge, though the precise role and extent of this dependence is seen differently in different approaches.

Thus, there is general agreement in the field of literary theory that genre knowledge is crucial for understanding texts. The importance of genre knowledge has also been emphasised in translation theory. Reiss (1981) suggests that different text types require different standards of functional equivalence. Hatim and Mason (1997) observe that there might be something like a 'text-type deficit' between cultures or language communities: a certain text type may not be available in the language communities involved in cross-cultural communication. This may result in loss or shifts in certain aspects of pragmatic meaning: for example subtlety in argumentation may be lost and the translated text may seem blunt with potentially wide-ranging consequences. The question is whether the translator is permitted, or even required, to change the text type in order to preserve such pragmatic meanings.

The notion of genre

Texts can be sorted into generic categories in almost any imaginable way. A sample list of such categories is given in (1):

(1) Story, poem, tape-recorded story, written story, detective story, novel, science-fiction novel, fantasy novel, narrative, recipe, procedural text, non-narrative text, parable, allegory, hymn, fiction, dialogue, history text, linguistics text book, . . .

The individual genre labels in this list are obviously constructed on the basis of quite different criteria: thus the label detective story refers to aspects of what the story is about; narrative is connected not so much to the content of the text as to the way it is presented; fiction treats the logical status of a text in relation to the world as a basis for classification; dialogue relates to external properties of the talk exchange such as number of participants.

Such generic classifications have been given different names in the literature: genre, discourse type, text type. Before embarking on an investigation of the role of genre in utterance interpretation, some preliminary clarification of these notions is needed.

Different terms are used in different disciplines. Genre is mostly used in literary theory, whereas discourse type and text type are more often used in linguistic studies of discourse. The literary-theoretic notion of genre often emphasises criteria based on content, whereas other classification criteria are more important in discourse studies.

However, the correlation between notions of text classification and disciplines is not rigid; thus one finds literary critics such as Todorov (1990) trying to ground a literary notion of genre on linguistic foundations such as speech-act theory, and the generic distinction between narrative and non-narrative texts surfaces in both linguistic and literary studies (compare for example Longacre 1983; Todorov 1990 and Caenepeel 1995). This suggests that there is not necessarily a crucial distinction between genre on the one hand, and discourse type and text type on the other, at least not one which could be easily captured in pre-theoretical terms.

Discourse type and text type are distinguishable only to the extent that text and discourse are seen as distinguishable. While there is widespread agreement about the notion of discourse as encompassing spoken or written language productions in context.

The functions of genre

A common assumption in modern linguistic theory is that generic classification is only of theoretical importance if it can be shown to have a function in utterance comprehension. The critical re-evaluation of traditional classifications is a recurrent theme. As an example, one might point to the discussion of the notion of grammatical construction (such as relative clause) in generative grammar (Chomsky 1986; Haegemann 1993). In pragmatics, Sperber and Wilson (1995) have argued that various traditional classifications have no independent function in utterance interpretation: for example, foreground versus background information, or topic versus focus and various types of speech-act classifications.

Ramos (1998), for example, suggests a matrix of sixteen parameters which constitute different types of verbal-visual communication. The parameters are: whether the exchange is character-oriented (that is the communication takes place between characters, for example of a comic strip) or spectator-oriented (that is the communication takes place between the author of the discourse and the reader), whether the message is conveyed verbally or non-verbally, whether the information transmission was intentional or unintentional, and whether the communication was maximally efficient (that is the addressee understood correctly) or minimally deficient (that is the addressee did not understand correctly).

the kinds of functions which genre has been or could be claimed to perform fall into four major categories: the linguistic function, the hermeneutical function, the sociological function, and the historical function.

Discourse Modes and Genres Merger

Discourse organizes itself around modes or genres that can be functionally as well as formally marked. Terminology varies only superficially. Some mode demarcations are more detailed than others as some terms are used more inclusively than others. For instance, Smith (2003: 8) recognizes five modes, which are narrative, descriptive, report, information, and argument. As such, the list, Smith admits, is not exhaustive for it may be expanded to include classifications proposed by other analysts where 'referential, persuasive, expressive, and literary discourse' exist alongside (ibid.: 42). The description and information modes may be both subsumed within expository though the latter, i.e., information seems more at home for the expository text is basically informative and as such descriptions falls in with fitfully. These modes are ultimately delineated by a set of features in the form of 'certain types of situation – event, state, generalization, abstraction – into the universe of discourse' (ibid.). The five fold taxonomy is characterized, further, by such principles as 'progression, temporal and atemporal.' Further, Bhatia (2004: 60) talks in terms of Werlich's basic forms or values that include '*arguments, narratives, descriptions, explanations and instructions.*' Bhatia's term 'generic values' is devised to account for the situation that 'they can be and often are used in various combinations to give shape to different professional genres, as in promotional genres (descriptions and evaluations), reporting genres (narrations, arguments and descriptions) or introductions (descriptions, narrations, etc.).'

There is an overall awareness expressed by analysts that discourse analysis of genres 'is a complex multi-perspective and multidimensional phenomenon.' Genre delineation demands a complex and methodological framework 'to arrive at satisfactory and comprehensive discourse analyses' (Bhatia, Flowerdew, and Jones, 2008: 163). Obviously, 'expert genre writers' are capable of appropriating 'generic resources' so as to create 'hybrid' forms (ibid: 164). In concord with the above, Smith (2003: 8) declares that 'actual texts are usually not monolithic,' therefore; 'the notion of discourse modes' justifies and explains its variety in one single text. The overlap among diverse genres is inevitable since all texts seem to organize themselves according to certain relations, which are delineated by Meyer and Freedle (in Lewin, Fine, and Young, 2001:4) as description, collection, causation, comparison/contrast, and problem/solutions.

Bhatia (2004: 57) directs the attention to Hoey's concept of discourse colony where 'colonization as a process' is found to involve 'invasion of the integrity of one genre by another genre or genre convention, often leading to the creation of a hybrid form, which eventually shares some of its genre characteristics with the one that influenced it in the first place' (ibid: 58). Thereupon, the merger of two or more discourse genres is hardly far-fetched. A narrative text can display an array of genre varieties where

historical, expository, persuasive, argumentative, behavioural, and may be even some more types make appearances. Further, Bhatia (2004: 17) remarks that sometimes a specific genre is 'deliberately and consciously bent to achieve something more than just a socially accepted and shared professional objective.' For though genres are highly conventionalized, still they continually develop and change.

Expository Discourse

Since historical information can be cast in the form of expository synthesis (Berkhofer, 1995: 29) and since expository seems to subsume at least three of Smith's modes (2003: 42), and because of the presence of a descriptive aspect in history-writing along with the historical and analytical (Stanford, 1994: 5), expository is the term adopted henceforth to designate this type of discourse. Expository discourse, Longacre (1996: 8) proposes, is one basic facet of a four-fold division of discourse genres. Discourse can be classified on the notional, etic (deep) level into four major types including narrative, behavioural, procedural, and expository. Expository discourse appears in the form of scientific essays, business reports, memorandums, and descriptions as it intends to explain or describe a certain topic directly and clearly; it is the discourse specific to the communication of facts with neither bias nor personal involvement. It could fairly well dominate almost all non-fictional texts for it is the type in which articles, magazine reports, informative writings are couched. Herring (cited in Fahy, 2002:7) sums up the functions of expository discourse in that it informs, corrects, debates, or persuades.

Four types of parameters, which are the temporal linkage, agent-orientation, tension, and projection, trigger this four-fold classification of discourse. The first couple of parameters are basic and either fully present in or absent from a specific discourse type. The other two are subsidiary in that their presence or absence depends on the presence or absence of some other features of the discourse (Longacre, 1996: 9). Unlike narrative, expository discourse is minus the temporal linkage and thus discards the chronological organization since it is generally timeless or time neutral. The expository text is arranged logically rather than temporally and the pieces of information are time free unless time works independently as a theme in itself. If the time factor is decisive to, for instance, a certain scientific experiment that is carried out over a time span or if the account is historical in that the thesis discussed bears on historicity. In this case, time links the experimental procedure though not necessarily the textual replica of the procedure itself. Agent-orientation has to do with the involvement of some agents "with at least a partial identity of agent reference running through the text" (ibid: 9). Expository, again contrary to narrative, discards this parameter too. Instead of some agent identity, expositions revolve around a specific theme or topic adopting a thematic organization. The expository information can dispense of the participant that is usually dimmed off and backgrounded if present.

Alternatively, the theme or subject matter is focalized and the procedure followed is objectively delineated.

The two subsidiary parameters of projection and tension could be equally present in or absent from expository discourse depending on its varieties. Expository discourse could be plus projection, which has to do with conjuring up the future and investing prophetic speculations when it chooses to be futuristic telling of future designs for instance planning a budget or economical account (ibid.). Otherwise, it sticks to the present immediate facts and findings avoiding speculations and assumptions and the exposition is, then, minus projection. Tension has to do with whether the discourse reflects struggle or polarization of some sort. Its presence in or absence from the exposition is also determined by variety. A certain topic can be discussed rather enthusiastically and emphatically investing tension in this case. One can not imagine that controversial scientific theories, for instance cloning or plastic surgery or even Einstein's Relativity, could have been introduced and propounded without a good deal of tension. Alternatively, the discussion could proceed and progress smoothly and neutrally with no tension at all.

Surface Structure Features

Various discourse features like tense, mood/modality, clause structure, verb type, and discourse organization serve to define expository discourse. In addition, Bhatia (2004: 19) elaborates on surface-level properties, which subsume "formal as well as functional aspects of discourse, that is phonological, lexico-grammatical, semantic, organizational (including intersentential cohesion) and other aspects of text structure (such as 'given' and 'new', 'theme' and 'rheme') or information structures (such as 'general-particular', problem-solution, etc.)" It is possible for this type to share surface features with other discourse genres since they are found to coincide and overlap. However, each type is elicited from the grouping of its specific features or a large number of them in the text.

Hoey (in Longacre, 1996: 34n) traces the development of expository text along four steps: **a. Problem b. Supportive argument c. Evaluation of the solution.** Hoey's model pivoting on problem/solution format (1979; 1983) is further extended to subsume one more component of **situation**; the overall model can be applied to both narrative and expository prose (in Lewin, Fine, and Young, 2001: 4):

- 1. situation**
- 2. aspect of situation requiring a response (i.e. problem)**
- 3. response to aspect of situation requiring a response**
- 4. result of response to aspect of situation requiring a response**
- 5. evaluation of (4)**

Behavioural Discourse

Behavioural/hortatory discourse is one of the four genres of monologue discourse as opposed to dialogue. On the level of function, behavioural discourse aims to guide, teach, persuade, praise, encourage, and extort. Thus, it subsumes religious sermons, exhortations, eulogies, and political speeches of candidates (Longacre, 1996: 7). To identify its features, four kinds of parameters, which are agent-orientation, time linkage, projection, and tension, are set to work. In case of sermons in question, it is noteworthy that because preaching is a form of persuasion, Vines and Allen (1987: 331) assert, that "every sermon should have a hortatory purpose as its underlying base. The simple reason for this is that we do not preach for the sake of preaching or even just to communicate truths, but we preach for a verdict." Alternatively, sermons could be wholly didactic in that they contain excellent information.

In terms of the first two basic parameters, behavioural discourse is certainly agent-oriented in that it is addressed by a definite entity to another definite entity. It relies heavily on participants represented by the deliverer of the discourse and its receiver(s). But it is minus the temporal linkage as the discourse is not decided by any chronological organization. Time references may abound in the discourse, nevertheless, their presence has nothing to do with the progress of the main behavioural line of the discourse.

When it comes to the other two parameters, namely projection and tension, their presence or else absence is variety-oriented. Projection has to do, Longacre (1996: 7) proposes, with the situations that are contemplated, enjoined, or anticipated but not realized. Behavioural discourse can be plus/minus projection, which could be equally present or absent. If a sermon or a theological treatise chooses to conjure up the future, talk hypothetically of suppositions and anticipations, reconstruct the past in the light of the present changes, and in short present unrealized and or expected future behavioural information, projection is made use of. Alternatively, a sermon could dispense with projection altogether avoiding any hypothetical and unrealized information. Eulogies, for instance, are always minus projection. In the question of the other subsidiary parameter of tension, behavioural discourse can be also plus/minus tension, which has to do with the presence of some sort of struggle or polarization in the behavioral argument. A sermon or theological treatise can be either argumentative, enthusiastic in a way that reflects conflict, opposition, or tension. Or else it can adopt a matter-of-fact approach that guarantees the smooth uninterrupted flow of the discourse.

According to the four parameters above explicated, behavioural discourse is obviously participant-oriented. As a result, the first and second persons pronouns (I/you/we/me/us/your/our) are certainly dominant. The speaker's throbbing presence is felt and stamped in the discourse and the addressee(s) are felt too though not necessarily identified; the second person pronoun (you) is the hallmark. In relation to the tense feature, behavioural discourse is neutral since the sequential arrangement of the behavioural information is dispensed with. Thus, it could be constructed in almost any tense category. Neutrality, however, implies generality and even universality as to the tense feature, that is why, the gnomic present which is proverbial in thrust

(Longacre, 1996: 17) is at home with behavioural discourse. Gnomonic present is time/tense-neutral, i.e., timeless and it does not make demands of temporal nature. In terms of the parameter of projection, it is expected that the features of mood and modality are invested when the behavioural discourse makes use of this parameter. The verbs are to be selected in a way that reflects anticipated, non-realized, and enjoined behavioural information by the use of modal, interrogative and negative constructions in opposition to the affirmative and imperative. Finally, in the question of tension, behavioural discourse could manipulate tension quite intensively in the form of peak constructions since peaks, prepeaks and post peaks could occur in the climatic behavioural discourses equally as in climatic narrative discourse.

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