3 Genre in Linguistic Traditions: Systemic Functional and Corpus Linguistics

While current approaches to genre in Rhetoric and Composition studies draw in part from work in literary theory, they draw more so from linguistic, rhetorical, and sociological traditions. In this and the following chapter, we will examine genre studies within linguistic traditions, namely Systemic Functional Linguistics, Corpus Linguistics, and English for Specific Purposes. Then in Chapters 5 and 6, we will focus on genre studies within rhetorical and sociological traditions, since Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS) has been most closely linked with and has most directly informed the study and teaching of genre in Rhetoric and Composition studies.

Genre and Systemic Functional Linguistics

Systemic Functional approaches to genre have contributed richly to how genre is understood and applied in textual analysis and language teaching over the last twenty-five years. Influenced in large part by the work of Michael Halliday (Halliday; Halliday and Hasan) at the University of Sydney, and applied to genre particularly in the work of J. R. Martin, Frances Christie, Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis, Gunther Kress, Brian Paltridge, Joan Rothery, Eija Ventola, and others, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) operates from the premise that language structure is integrally related to social function and context. Language is organized the way it is within a culture because such an organization serves a social purpose within that culture. "Functional" thus refers to the work that language does within particular contexts. "Systemic" refers to the structure or organization of language so that it can be used to get things done within those contexts. "Systemic" then refers to the

"systems of choices" available to language users for the *realization* of meaning (Christie, "Genre Theory" 759; emphasis added). The concept of "realization" is especially important within SFL, for it describes the dynamic way that language *realizes* social purposes and contexts as specific linguistic interactions, at the same time as social purposes and contexts *realize* language as specific social actions and meanings.

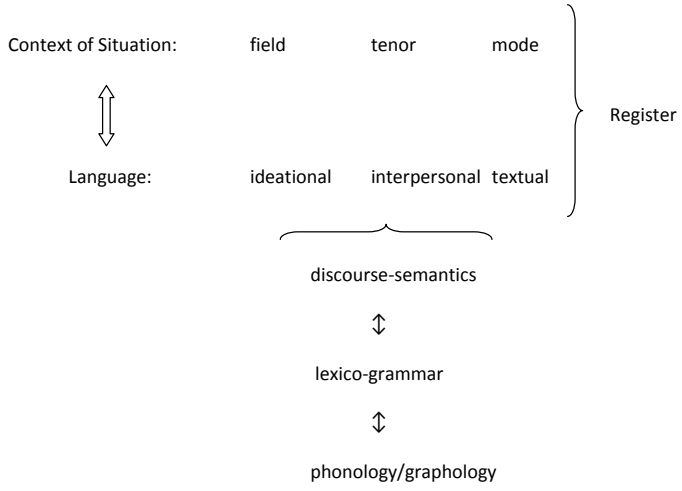
A great deal of the work in SFL can be traced to Halliday's *Language as Social Semiotic*, in which Halliday describes how "the network of meanings" that constitute any culture, what he calls the "social semiotic," is to a large extent encoded in and maintained by its discourse-semantic system, which represents a culture's "meaning potential" (100, 13). This is why, as Halliday argues, language is a form of socialization, playing a role in how individuals become socialized and perform meaningful actions within what he calls "contexts of situation."

Halliday explains that contexts of situation are not isolated and unique, but often reoccur as "situation types," a set of typified semiotic and semantic relations that make up "a scenario . . . of persons and actions and events from which the things which are said derive their meaning" (28-30). Examples of situation types include "players instructing novice in a game," "mother reading bedtime story to a child," "customers ordering goods over the phone" (29). Because contexts of situation reoccur as situation types, those who participate in these situation types develop typified ways of linguistically interacting within them. As these situation types become conventionalized over time, they begin to "specify the semantic configurations that the speaker will typically fashion" (110).

Halliday refers to this "clustering of semantic features according to situation types" as *register* (68). By linking a situation type with particular semantic and lexico-grammatic patterns, register describes what actually takes place (the "field"), how participants relate to one another (the "tenor"), and what role language is playing (the "mode"). For example, the "field" of discourse represents the system of activity within a particular setting, including the participants, practices, and circumstances involved. The "tenor" of discourse represents the social relations between the participants—their interactions—within the discourse. And the "mode" of discourse represents the channel or wavelength of communication (face-to-face, via e-mail, telephone, and so on) used by the participants to perform their actions and relations

(Halliday 33). When linguists identify a "scientific register," then, they not only describe a style of language but also the practices, interactional patterns, and means of communication associated with scientific contexts.

What happens at the level of context of situation in terms of field, tenor, and mode corresponds to what happens at the linguistic level in terms of what Halliday refers to as the three language "metafunctions": ideational, interpersonal, and textual. "Ideational" refers to the linguistic representation of action (who is doing what, to whom, when, and where). As such, the ideational metafunction corresponds with *field.* "Interpersonal" describes interactions between participants (such as asking questions, making statements, or giving commands) at the linguistic level. The interpersonal corresponds with *tenor.* "Textual" describes the flow of information within and between texts, including how texts are organized, what is made explicit and what is assumed as background knowledge, how the known and the new are related, and how coherence and cohesion are achieved. The textual metafunction thus corresponds to *mode.* At the level of register, then, context of situation and language realize one another as follows (informed by Martin, "Analysing" 34-40):



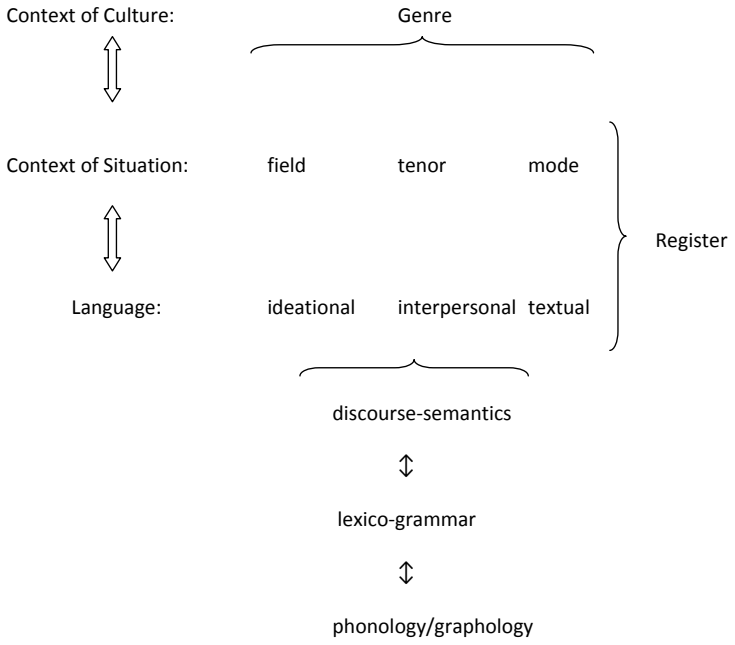
In connecting situation types and semantic/lexico-grammatic patterns, Halliday's work has served as a foundation for Systemic Functional (what is commonly known as "Sydney School") approaches to

genre and their focus on helping students "learn to exercise the appropriate linguistic choices relevant to the needs, functions or meanings at any time" (Christie, "Genres as Choice" 24).[5] Led by the work of J.R. Martin and supported by scholarship in the field of education linguistics in Australia, Systemic Functional approaches to genre arose in part in response to concerns over the efficacy of student-centered, process-based literacy teaching, with its emphasis on "learning through doing." Such an approach, its critics argued, ignores the contexts in which texts are acquired and function, in ways that naturalize and privatize what is actually a social process of literacy acquisition. As such, process approaches deprive students of access to the systemic, patterned textual choices that function within different contexts of situation. Far from empowering students via a student-centered approach that encourages student expression and discovery, process approaches instead reproduce social inequality by denying traditionally marginalized students access to academic and cultural texts. As Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis explain, process-based approaches are actually "culture bound;" with their focus on student agency and ownership, the power of voice and expression, student control and motivation, such approaches reflect and privilege the "cultural aspirations of middle-class children from child-centered households" (6). By the same token, "its pedagogy of immersion 'naturally' favours students whose voice is closest to the literate culture of power in industrial society" (6). In short, by keeping textual structures and their social functions hidden, process approaches exclude even further those students whose cultural and linguistic backgrounds leave them on the margins of the dominant culture. An explicit focus on genre in literacy teaching, its proponents argue, helps counter such imbalance by revealing the relationship between text structures and social purposes in ways that enable all students to produce texts more effectively and critically.

Beginning in the early 1980s with research that examined children's writing in Australian elementary and secondary school classrooms, and extended in the early 1990s through research related to the New South Wales Department of Education's Disadvantaged Schools Program, SFL approaches to genre have been influenced most widely by the work of J.R. Martin, who has helped define genres as "staged, goal-oriented social processes through which social subjects in a given culture live their lives" ("Analysing" 43). As further explained in Martin, Christie, and Rothery, genres function as *social processes* "because

members of a culture interact with each other to achieve them; as *goal-oriented* because they have evolved to get things done; and as *staged* because it usually takes more than one step for participants to achieve their goals" (59).

Martin builds on Halliday's work by locating genre in relation to register so that genre and register relate to and realize one another in important ways. According to Martin, while register functions on the level of *context of situation,* genre functions on the level of *context of culture.* The relationship can be diagrammed as follows:



In such a model, genre connects culture to situation, and register connects situation to language, or, as Martin puts it, "register (encompassing field, tenor and mode) contextualizes language and is in turn contextualized by genre" ("Analysing" 37).

Martin's formulation enriches our understanding of genre by showing how social purposes/motives are linked to text structures, and how these are realized as situated social and linguistic actions within register. Indeed, this has been the most common trajectory in SFL genre analysis: Moving from the identification of social purpose as represented in generic structural elements (involving the analysis of what

Hasan calls "generic structure potential"—the range of staging possibilities within a particular genre) (Eggins and Martin 240);[6] to the analysis of a text's register as represented in field, tenor, and mode; to language metafunctions; to more micro analyses of semantic, lexicogrammatic, and phonological/graphological features.

Within Australian genre pedagogy, Martin's view of genre has been used as part of the influential LERN (Literacy and Education Research Network) project. The project set out to identify what genres were the most important within school literacy (and has since been expanded to include adult migrant ESL settings and workplace settings), and to develop pedagogy to teach those genres most critically and effectively (Cope and Kalantzis 9). That pedagogy has come to be known as the "teaching-learning cycle," represented in the shape of a wheel. The teaching-learning cycle has been adapted by various researchers (for example, see Macken et al; Hammond et al; Rothery; Feez and Joyce), but its basic components include three stages: modeling, joint negotiation of text, and independent construction of text. In the first stage, students are exposed to a number of texts representing a given genre. During this stage, students and teacher identify the cultural and situational context in which texts in the genre function, what social purposes they serve, how their structural elements reflect their functions, and how their language features carry out their functions. As such, the first stage moves from discussion of context and social purpose to a description/analysis of register and language. In the second stage, students and teacher engage in the joint negotiation and then construction of a text within the genre, first conducting research, developing content knowledge, note-taking, observing, diagramming, and then working to collaboratively produce a version of the genre. In the final stage, students independently construct a version of the genre by conducting research to develop content knowledge, drafting the text, conferencing with teacher and peers, editing, evaluating, and publishing their text (Cope and Kalantzis 10-11). The cyclical shape of the model is meant to reflect its flexibility, so that teachers can enter into the model at the stage most appropriate to students' level of preparedness (Paltridge, *Genre and the Language Learning Classroom* 30-31). At the same time, it is meant to reflect how students and teacher can keep rotating through the cycle as more and more complex genres are added. The teaching-learning cycle, thus, makes visible to students

the structural and linguistic features of genres, and how these features are connected to social function.

The teaching-learning cycle and the SFL view of genre upon which it is based have not been immune from critique, on either the pedagogical or theoretical fronts. On the pedagogical front, scholars such as Gunther Kress, Bill Cope, and Mary Kalantzis have raised concerns about the degree of formalism exhibited by such an approach, in which generic models and structural analysis are used to teach students how to write texts "correctly" (Cope and Kalantzis 12). Kress also raises concern about the classifying impulse behind Martin et al's approach to genre, in which genres are classified and then modeled to students as though they were givens. By starting with model texts and examining the social purposes embodied within them, such an approach ignores the material/social relations and contexts that may not be visible in the text's structure and features, but that play an important role in how and why the text functions the way it does (Cope and Kalantzis 14). Pedagogically, critics worry that such an approach to genre teaching promotes a "linear transmission pedagogy" in which "textual form is largely presented in an uncritical way at the modeling stage" for students to emulate (Cope and Kalantzis 15). As Cope and Kalantzis explain, "The cycle imagery . . . belies the fact that the underlying pedagogical process is linear. Not only is this a reincarnation of the transmission pedagogy but it also takes genres at their word and posits their powerfulness uncritically, solely on the grounds that they should be taught to groups of students historically marginalized by the school literacy" (15). This approach, they fear, can easily lead to a "cultural assimilationist model of education" (16).

In an updated version of the Teaching Learning Cycle that attempts to address some of these concerns, Feez and Joyce add a separate category called "Building the Context" which precedes text modeling. The context building stage of the cycle employs ethnographic strategies for "learners to experience and explore the cultural and situational aspects of the social context of the target text" (Feez 66). Such strategies include research, interviews, field trips, role-playing, and cross-cultural comparisons.

On the theoretical front, critics have raised concerns about SFL's view of genre and its trajectory, moving as it does from social purpose/text structure to register analysis to linguistic analysis. While Martin is careful to note that genre realizes ideology, which he defines as the

"system of coding orientations engendering subjectivity—at a higher level of abstraction than genre" ("Analysing" 40), and while Christie and Martin have acknowledged the role of genre "in the social construction of experience" (*Genres and Institutions* 32), the SFL model, critics note, does not examine the ways in which genres not only realize but also help reproduce ideology and social purpose. That is, by taking "genres at their word," such a view of genre also takes social purposes at their word, thereby ignoring why certain social purposes exist in the first place as well as what institutional interests are most served through these purposes and their enactments. According to Terry Threadgold, genre theory is significant because of the relations it reveals between genres and institutions, power, the construction of subjectivity, as well as "the relations it permits/enables/constrains and refuses between readers and writers, textual producers, and receivers" (102). Threadgold's critique hinges on SFL genre theory's use of genres as a starting point for textual analysis while overlooking the "web of social, political, and historical realities" in which genres are enmeshed (106). As Threadgold elaborates:

> What we need to know is how institutions and institutionalized power relationships and knowledges are both constructed by and impose constraints on (and restrict access to) possible situation types *and* genres. We need to know why certain genres are highly valued, and others marginalized. We need to understand the changing history of such valorizations. We need to know why some genres are possible, others impossible, ways of meaning at given points in history. We need to know how and why these factors construct identities for social agents . . . and how and why some social agents are able to/willing to resist and others to comply with existing situational and generic constraints. (106)

At the same time, Threadgold, following Derrida, also argues that because texts are always performances of genres, genres are less stable than SFL approaches imagine: "Genres and system cannot therefore have static, fixed values, and the extent to which they are predictive of choices in lexico-grammar is constantly subject to slippage and change . . ." (116). Indeed, as Brian Paltridge has demonstrated in his anal-

ysis of Environmental Studies research articles, genre identification depends more on contextual cues and interactional and conceptual frames than on structural and linguistic patterns (*Genre, Frames and Writing* 84-85).

While such findings raise questions about SFL approaches to genre pedagogy, the research and debates within SFL genre approaches have been crucial in establishing how genres systemically link social motives/purposes to social and linguistic actions. By arguing for genre as a centerpiece of literacy teaching, SFL genre scholars have debated the ways genres can be used to help students gain access to and select more effectively from the systems of choices available to language users for the realization of meaning in specific contexts. In the next section, we will discuss how scholarship in historical and corpus linguistics has also informed work in genre study.

Genre and Historical/Corpus Linguistics

Although work in genre within historical and corpus linguistics has not yet had a great impact on rhetorical genre theory and Rhetoric and Composition studies (with the notable exception of Amy Devitt's work), it has much to contribute to research and teaching of genre by accounting for the nature of typology and for language change. In this section, we will examine debates over genre categorization within historical and corpus linguistics, and how such debates might help clarify confusion between genres and modes within Rhetoric and Composition studies. Then we will examine how corpus based studies of genres provide insight into how and why genres change.

According to Hans-Jürgen Diller, the field of historical linguistics became interested in text classification when it expanded its scope of study from sentences to texts (11). Within text linguistics, Diller describes two trajectories of classification: Deductive and Inductive text typologies, which parallel in some ways the difference between what Todorov describes as analytical (or theoretical) versus historical (or empirical) approaches to genre classification, described in Chapter 2. *Deductive* text typologies, which Diller represents through the work of Robert Longacre (*The Grammar of Discourse*), seek to create overarching categories for genre and text classification in a way similar to how Northrop Frye sought to identify universal archetypes in order to classify and describe relations between literary texts. Longacre, for in-

stance, "bases his typology of 'Notional' or 'Deep Structure' text types . . . on the 'notional categories' which in his view underlie human language" (Diller 12). The four "notional text types" (or modes) for Longacre are Narrative, Expository, Behavioral, and Procedural, and together they overarch and help categorize surface text types which Longacre calls genres (Diller 12-13). For example, the Narrative mode overarches genres such as fairy tales, novels, short stories, newspaper reporting; the Procedural mode includes such genres as food recipes, how-to books, etc.; the Behavioral mode includes essays and scientific articles; and the Expository mode includes sermons, pep-talks, speeches, etc. (Diller 13).

Rather than starting with apriori categories, *inductive* text typologies classify text types based on perceived textual patterns. Douglas Biber's work in corpus linguistics has most influenced such an approach to genre classification. Corpus linguistics, using large scale electronic text databases or corpora, allow researchers to conduct systematic searches for linguistic features, patterns, and variations in spoken and written texts. In *Variation Across Speech and Writing,* for instance, Biber begins by identifying groups of linguistic features (what Biber calls "dimensions" such as "narrative versus non-narrative," "non-impersonal versus impersonal style," "situation dependent versus elaborated reference") that co-occur with high frequency in texts. Then, applying these dimensions to a statistical analysis of a corpora of twenty-three genres, Biber examined the degree to which these dimensions appear within various texts in each genre. Based on such studies, Biber has been able to identify a great deal of linguistic variation within genres, suggesting that genres can be defined in terms of more or less complexity.[7] (For more on Biber's analysis of textual clusters on the basis of shared multi-dimensional, linguistic characteristics as well as his historical work mapping the rise and fall of genres, see *Dimensions of Register Variation: A Cross-Linguistic Comparison; Discourse on the Move: Using Corpus Analysis to Describe Discourse Structure;* and *Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Register.*)

This notion of "more or less" has played an important role in historical and corpus linguistic approaches to genre categorization. Based on Eleanor Rosch's theory of prototypes, which takes a psychological (as opposed to a classical) view of human categorization, such a typology identifies membership within genre on the basis not of "either-or" but on the basis of "more-or-less, better and poorer" (Diller 21).

As Brian Paltridge explains, prototype theory describes how people categorize objects according to a prototypical image they have conditioned in their minds by socio-cultural factors, while classical theories describe categorization based on shared, essential properties within objects that result in objective assessment of category membership (*Genre, Frames and Writing* 53). The famous example in this case is the way some birds, such as sparrows, are "birdier" birds than others, such as ostriches. The notion of prototypes, related to Wittgenstein's idea of family resemblances, allows genre researches to define text membership within genres on the basis of how closely their structural and linguistic patterns relate to the genre prototype. Some texts, thus, are closer to their genre prototype while others function more on the periphery of prototypicality, or, more accurately, on the boundaries of different prototypicalities, as in the case of mixed genres. The important point here is that the relation between texts and genres is not simply based on features internal to both, but more powerfully is based on learned, conceptual relations between "memory, context and frames," thus rendering "the notion of prototype as a principle of selection, organization and interpretation of genre frames" (Paltridge, *Genre, Frames and Writing* 62).

Prototype theory has important implications for genre study and teaching. Within SFL genre theory, J.R. Martin has used it to distinguish between typological and topological genre classifications: "For purposes of typological classification, we have to define just what percentage of causal relations is required for a text to qualify [as a member of the genre]. The topological perspective on the other hand allows us to position texts on a cline, as more or less prototypical . . ." ("Analysing" 15). The topological approach thus allows SFL approaches to genre teaching to use the teaching-learning cycle to move students towards more and more prototypical genres through sequenced assignments. At the same time, corpus linguistic-based analyses of genres have allowed researchers and teachers working in English for Specific Purposes (as we will describe in the next chapter) to identify the most and least salient features of different academic and workplace genres so that these can be taught more realistically.

We will conclude this section with a brief discussion of how historical and corpus linguistic approaches to genre have informed the way we understand language change by positing genres as the locus of such change (Diller 31). For example, in his study of the adverbial first par-

ticiple construction in English, Thomas Kohnen describes how that construction first appeared in and then spread through English via its use in different genres. The adverbial first participle first appeared in the English religious treatise and then soon afterward spread to the sermon (Kohnen 116). What is telling is that the adverbial first participle achieved a certain status by virtue of first appearing in prestigious and powerful religious genres, which then acted as catalysts for linguistic change (Kohnen 111). As Diller explains, "the presence of a form in a prestigious genre may prompt its reception in other genres and thus speed up its diffusion throughout the (written) language" (33). Amy Devitt has likewise demonstrated how genre is a significant variable in language change (*Writing Genres* 124). In her study of how Anglo-English became diffused through Scots-English, Devitt found that Anglicization did not occur evenly throughout Scottish English, but rather occurred "at quite different rates in different genres" (126). Anglicization occurred most rapidly, for example, within religious treatises, and the least rapidly within public records. This suggests that genres can be understood as sites of contestation within histories of language change. While religious treatises anglicized more quickly because of the power of the Church of England, public records, Devitt explains, were more resistant because they "represent the remnants of the political power that Scotland until recently had retained within its own political bodies. The Privy Council may not have much legislative power anymore, but its records can still reflect that older Scots identity through using its older Scots language" (131). Such studies reveal the extent to which genres mediate relations of power historically and linguistically, in ways that enrich the study and teaching of genre. In the next chapter, we will examine the ways that English for Specific Purposes has added to the study and teaching of genre by emphasizing the interaction between discourse community, communicative purpose, and genre.