

Genre in a Changing World

Editors' Introduction

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It has been a decade since the Vancouver conference on genre, which resulted in the volume *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre* (appearing in 2002). Since then the world of genre studies and genre approaches to literacy instruction have continued to grow rapidly, gaining variety and complexity as the concept of genre has been examined through a widening variety of intellectual traditions, has been researched in the social histories of many countries, and has been creatively applied in many different educational settings internationally. Although there have been many conferences and publications on genre in the intervening years, this is the first volume since the one arising out of the Vancouver conference to represent the current range of work on genre. As you will see that range is now truly remarkable and puts us on the verge of another dynamic period of theoretical reformulation, research, and application.

The twenty-four papers in this volume were selected from the over 400 presentations at SIGET IV (the Fourth International Symposium on Genre Studies) held on the campus of UNISUL in Tubarão, Santa Catarina, Brazil in August 2007. Two special issues of journals have also been drawn from this conference: issue 3.1 of *Linguistics and Human Sciences* and a forthcoming issue of *L1: Educational Studies in Language and Literature*. At this conference two series of conferences were brought together. The first SIGET conference was in 2003 at Londrina, Paraná as a predominantly Brazilian event, meeting again in 2004 in Vitória, Paraná and in 2005 in Santa Maria, Rio Grande do Sul. In 2007 the organizing committee of SIGET in order to expand the international scope of the conference reached out to include the participants in a series of informally organized genre conferences in North America and Europe convening in Ottawa in 1992, in Vancouver in 1998, and in Oslo in 2001. Participants in SIGET IV came from all over the globe, and authors in this volume represent Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Finland, France, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Both the wide range of participation and Brazil as the venue of this remarkable conjunction were no accident. All regions of the world are increasingly

aware that they are caught up in a global information economy. People of all nations need to be able to communicate in specialized professional realms to prosper and reap the benefits of new levels of knowledge-based professional and organizational practice. The pervasiveness, immediacy and interactivity of the new communicative media, including the World Wide Web, have further heightened awareness of the need to read and write in many rapidly evolving forms. The need to prepare the citizens to communicate in specialized ways (whether in a first language or a second international language) typically becomes evident in higher education, even at the post-graduate level. Genre is a useful concept to begin to understand the specialized communicative needs that go beyond the traditional bounds of literacy education.

Furthermore, higher education has been growing in most countries out of the same desire to prepare citizens to be part of knowledge-based economies. Students given new access to higher education need advanced literacy skills to succeed at university. Participation at higher levels of education puts greater demands on writing and production, as students need to go beyond reproducing received knowledge to gathering new information and data, developing critical judgment, engaging in discussions and decision making, and applying knowledge to new situations and problems. Students also need to grapple with the specialized languages of disciplines. Again, genre provides a useful way to understand the higher-level literacy demands of different academic disciplines and arenas of professional training.

The increasing recognition of the demands of writing for participating in higher education and beyond, along with the aspirations for more people in each nation to gain access to the benefits of advanced levels of education, has in turn led to a recognition of expanding writing education in primary and secondary schooling. This writing education is seen in more practical and worldly terms than the traditional view of letters as a purely humanities subject. Writing is seen more as a tool to participate in both professional and disciplinary worlds and in the worlds of everyday life. Again genre helps elaborate writing as a focused, purposeful, highly differentiated task. Thus genre has become a more salient aspect of educational policies for primary and secondary schooling in many countries.

Brazil provides a striking case of educational interest in genre, as the National Curricular Parameters explicitly specify:

Every text is organized within a specific genre according to its communicative purposes, as part of the conditions of discourse production, which generate social uses that determine any and every text. Genres are, therefore, historically determined, and constitute relatively stable forms of utterances available in a culture

(Brasil, 1988, p. 21).

Further, in the work with the contents that compose the practices of listening to oral text, reading written texts, producing oral and written texts and doing linguistic analysis, the school must organize a set of activities that allow the students to master oral and written forms of expression in situations of public usage of their language, keeping in mind the social and material situational conditions of text production (the social place occupied by the producer in relation to his/her addressee(s); the addressee(s) and their social place; the author's intention or purpose; the time and material location of the text production and its mode of circulation) and selecting, from this standpoint, genres appropriate for text production, involving its pragmatic, semantic and grammatical dimensions. (Brasil, 1988, p. 49)

In addition to its genre based curriculum and its rapidly expanding higher educational system, Brazil is an exciting locale for genre studies because it is a meeting place of many intellectual traditions that are not in such close dialogue in other parts of the world. Brazilian scholars draw on rich French and Swiss traditions of genre and language education and European philosophic traditions as well as on the Anglophone traditions of Systemic Functional Linguistics, English for Specific Purposes, and rhetorical and activity based genre theory (sometimes called North American genre theory). Within an open, dialogic intellectual climate, combined with its own Freirian concern for the empowerment of individuals within real world practices, Brazil has developed creative approaches to exploring the many dimensions of genre and bringing those understandings to the classroom, making the implementation of the National Curricular Parameters a laboratory for developing genre-based language education.

The many intellectual and theoretical resources you will find in the essays in this volume include rhetoric, Systemic Functional Linguistics, media and critical cultural studies, sociology, phenomenology, enunciation theory, the Geneva school of educational sequences, cognitive psychology, relevance theory, sociocultural psychology, activity theory, Gestalt psychology, and schema theory. Some of these approaches are raised in the opening theoretical section, but others appear throughout, as all articles are theoretically, empirically, and practically grounded.

The first section "Advances in Genre Theories" consists of four essays that raise fundamental issues of how different kinds of genre theory may be seen in relation to each other or can be supplemented by new perspectives. John Swales

in the opening chapter explores the complexity of genre by comparing how different metaphors guiding different theories illuminate different aspects of genre. Paul Prior directs our attention to the multimodality of genred interactions, not only in the textual content but in the very situations of text production, use, and attributing meaning. Antonia Coutinho raises the problematics of attributing genre by looking at the case of genres that are invoked within a fictionalizing frame of another genre, changing the interpretation and stance towards the original genre while necessarily still maintaining important aspects of its generic identity. In the final chapter of the opening section Fábio José Rauen draws on relevance theory to examine how genre is shaped by relevance considerations within situations and how genre then focuses relevance expectations of users, thereby leading to a more efficient alignment of writer and reader.

The second section on “Genre and the Professions” considers how the work of professions has been carried out through genres and how genres have become crucial in how we understand ourselves and our roles in a knowledge and profession based world. The first two chapters look at genre in the law. Cristiane Fuzer and Nina Célia Barros examine closing arguments in closing trials to show how the defendant is kept at the narrative center, while the legal practitioners who are the primary actors in the trial are backgrounded. Leonardo Pinheiro Mozdzenski traces the origins of lay legal primers in Brazil making the law accessible to all citizens back to religious instructions and historically transformed by political movements and changing socioeconomic arrangements. Kimberly Emmons turns our attention to the impact of mental health professions as she studies how people take up professional discourses of mental health to shape their subjectivities as depressed. The formation of professional communicative practice through students’ learning of engineering genres is the subject of Natasha Artemeva’s chapter. Finally, Anthony Paré, Doreen Starke-Meyerring, and Lynn McAlpine find how the process of writing dissertations inserts students into complex educational and professional sets of communicative relations, in which they must find their way.

The third section on “Genre and Media” considers how journalistic genres in the public sphere shape our view of the world. The first three essays in this section explore the complexity and novelty of newspaper genres, and the last considers how journalistic stories influence public subjectivities. Adair Bonini looking at Brazilian newspapers finds that news stories fall into a spectrum between report and reportage. Rui Ramos examines press dossiers, the thematic collection of stories in Portuguese newspapers. Helen Caple finds in an Australian newspaper a new genre of print news story responsive to the graphic culture fostered by internet culture. To close this section Débora de Carvalho Figueiredo analyzes how identities are formed through stories of plastic surgery experiences in women’s magazines.

Since the great contemporary interest in genre has been motivated by the needs of language education, it is appropriate that the final two sections consider educational implications and applications of genre theory and research—the earlier devoted to an array of approaches and the latter specifically to programmatic applications, all of which could be considered *Writing Across the Curriculum*. The section on “Genre and Teaching/Learning” begins with Charles Bazerman’s inquiry into how the writing of specific genres might be instrumental in cognitive development. Roxane Helena Rodrigues Rojo then considers how genre theory can be turned toward understanding classroom discourse. Desirée Motta-Roth describes the sophisticated design of a course in academic writing for masters and doctoral students, mixing theory and practice as students learn to participate in their professional world. Amy Devitt similarly describes and provides the theoretical rationale of a pedagogy aimed at increasing students’ critical awareness of genre. Maria Marta Furlanetto describes the difficult process of initiating teachers into an understanding of genre so that they are better able to implement a state-wide genre-based curriculum. In the final study of this section Salla Lähdesmäki uses theories of genre and intertextuality to analyze how second-language textbooks incorporate other genres as part of learning activities.

The last section considers how genre theory has been used to help students learn to communicate within specialized disciplines and professions, in the kinds of programs that have been called *Writing Across the Curriculum*. This section provides comparisons of the way genre is being used in different educational settings, organized differently in different countries. The first chapter, collaboratively written by David Russell, Mary Lea, Jan Parker, Brian Street and Tiane Donahue presents and compares the British Academic Literacies approach with the US *Writing Across the Curriculum* movement. Next Tiane Donahue presents the French didactics approach to academic writing. Estela Inés Moyano presents a linguistically based initiative at an Argentinian University to increase faculty’s genre awareness of student assignments so as to improve support for first language writing assignments in subject matter courses. Solange Aranha describes a second language genre-based disciplinary-focused writing courses for graduate students. The volume ends with Giovanni Parodi presenting a Spanish language corpus research project into genres used in disciplinary courses in a Chilean university.

A world tied together by communication and knowledge, enacting increasingly complex cooperations on many levels, puts an increasing demand on the genres that share our meanings and knowledge, that coordinate our actions, and that hold our institutions together. A world being transformed by new technologies and media as well as new social and economic arrangements creates the need

for rapid and deep transformation of genres. In a world where pressing problems require increasing levels of coordination and mutual understanding, forging effective genres is a matter of global well-being. In a world where increasingly high degrees of literate participation are needed by citizens of all nations, advancing the communicative competence of all, making available the genres of power and cooperation, is a matter of social capacity and social justice. As committed educators and researchers, the contributors to this volume and the participants in SIGET draw strength from the importance of this work.

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