

The futures of genre studies

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- Restricted to EAP/ESP. I cannot speak for literary theorists, folklorists, musicologists, information scientists, librarians...
- I start with an old issue: how big (or small) should genres be?
- Academic writing → research writing → empirical papers → quantitative empirical research papers → quantitative empirical research papers in sociology → quantitative empirical research papers in the sociology of medicine → quantitative empirical research papers published in The Sociology of Medicine.

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- Should we be “lumpers” or “splitters”?
 - Not, I think, an answerable question (at least like that)
 - Long intrigued by Adena Rosmarin’s powerful, if egocentric, position
(*The Power of Genre* (U of Minnesota Press, 1985))



“That once genre is defined as pragmatic rather than natural, as defined rather than found, and as used rather than described, then there are precisely as many genres as we need, genres whose conceptual shape is precisely determined by that need. They are designed to serve the explanatory purpose of critical thought, not the other way round”. (p.25)

In effect, genre is the analyst’s heuristic tool, his or her chosen way of organizing textual data.



Consider this very speech event: Is it one genre, or two
(presentation followed by discussion)

In the first case, we point to a single main speaker, the same participants in the same room at the same time. All focus their attention on the main topic (or so the presenter hopes).

In the second case, part one is monologue; part two is multi-
logue. Part 1 is prepared; Part 2 is unscripted. Finally, the
language in the two parts will likely be somewhat different.



But then consider our roles and purposes.

If I am being a discourse analyst, I will opt for a single genre.

But if I am being an EAP practitioner, preparing my students for this particular speech event, I will (obviously?) opt for two genres because the pedagogical outcomes are obviously very different.

So, back in 1992, Yates & Orlikowski

Wrote:

“The business letter and the meeting might at one point be genres, whereas at another point, these types of communication might be considered too general and the recommendation letter or the personnel committee meeting might better capture the social sense of recurrent situation.”

Prescient perhaps?

So, in pragmatic terms

If I am teaching a class about the lexicosyntax of formal academic style, then research writing could well be the container genre.

If I am helping a student prepare a paper for publication, then I need to know the target journal.

Very recently, (2007) Martín & Leon Perez:

In immunity and allergy studies, journals that require IRDM format are more promotional than IMRD ones.

What we need less of

- a) Studies that only investigate ESL/applied linguistics texts
- b) Move-step analyses that reveal nothing new
- c) Merely textual studies of stance and engagement
- d) Studies of lexical bundles
- e) Studies that have no clear pedagogical message

What we need more of for a brighter future for EAP genre studies

A. Revisiting old hypotheses that have been left unexamined

- 1) Tarone et al.(1981) Passive and active voice in *Astrophysics* journal papers.

Writers of methods sections in this field tend to use we+active when they have made a unique procedural choice: the passive seems to be used when authors are simply following established or standard procedures.



An intriguing form-function linkage:

ACTIVE → NEW STUFF

PASSIVE → OLD STUFF

The length, depth and height of the box *were measured*.
We then devised a way to measure the fourth dimension.



Giannoni's 2008 study of methods in biological and medical Ras

We-actives were used 10% of the time:

Most common we-actives:

used/computed/obtained/observed/tried (??)

not the verbs we might expect to signal innovation:

Developed/created/introduced/modified/devised/extended

Carmen's "Article of the future"—Methodology

I compiled/I provide/I randomly retrieved/were also compiled/

was carried out/was identified/I followed/were normalised/

I took a conservative approach/I categorised/was used/I designed/was emailed

13 procedural statements, 6 active and 7 passive

Other factors at play?

2) Graetz (1985) on abstracts

“The abstract is characterized by the use of the past tense, third person, passive, and the non-use of negatives.” (p.125)

10 abstracts from *The Geological Society of America Journal*

10 abstracts from *The Journal of Information Science*

10 abstracts from *The Journal of Nutrition*

Geology negative/quasi-negative candidates

...little consensus exists...

the ... transition did not occur until the middle Cambrian

... not only showed but it also exhibited ...

unnamed ...conglomeratic unit.....

Information Science potential negatives

... which sources middle school students would turn to, which they would not, and...

Little attention has been given to....

Unlike traditionally, ...

...consumers usually do not know...

Nutrition negatives (structured abstracts)

...it remains unknown...

Infant microbiota did not cluster...

Fortification did not affect NEC incidence...

...the effects ...are unknown...

...showed no effect on postprandial FMD...

...no direct evidence in vivo to support...

This unprecedented animal model...

3. The rhetoric of parentheticals

For Hyland (e.g. 2005) material in brackets are part of metadiscoursal “code glosses”. In his 2007 study, parentheticals were the most common way of reformulating what has just been written.

He concludes “code gloss signals are therefore a crucial element of a text’s meaning as they work to relate a text to its context by taking readers’ needs, understandings, existing knowledge, intertextual experiences, and relative status into account” (p.284)



So, small acts of reformulation, exemplification and specification.

But let's have another look –and here I am not concerned with dates, references to non-verbal material (see fig. 3) or cross-references (see Chapter 3).



Hyland's explanations work very well with Carmen's empirical "article of the future".

Things not quite so simple with Chris Tardy's *Beyond Convention* book ;

In chapter One, 15 parentheticals, of which three may not be quite so helpful to the reader

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- 1) ... our perceptions of genres as relatively stable (at least for the moment) actions...
 - 2) ...it needs to share enough features (or ‘family resemblances’) with the prototypes...
 - 3) ...as Devitt argues, standards (and conventions) rely on ...

In the Humanities, however...

Michael Fried (2002) *Menzel's realism: Art and embodiment in nineteenth-century Berlin*.

Chapter 3. About nine pages of large-format text. Excluding dates, etc, 44 parentheticals.

A quarter are full sentences, including two that span two sentences.



..., the viewer occupies an elevated position with respect to the scene as a whole. (According to Menzel, the initial painting was made from the balcony of the apartment he lived in at that time.) And what gives that implied position special force is the sense we have of looking plungingly down onto the portion of the garden ...

... In fact, according to Menzel, ... (??)



Another quarter seem to function as hedged speculations

...comprising four upright trees (poplars?) together with...

... assuming (as seems plausible) that the drawing was made...

... the nearly blank façade (a fire-wall awaiting further construction?) that we glimpse toward ...

the man is accompanied by a younger woman whose relation to him is unclear (perhaps she is his daughter), his own gaze is ...



Some of the others are asides; others seem to serve as reiterating and strengthening a point just made; few seem to be code-glosses in the established sense of aiding readers in their understanding of the text.

A final point:

Consider the following:

anaphora (repetition)

repetition (anaphora)

Finally, context and text/transcript

- Theresa Lillis: “EAP is too textual”
- Okay, we can’t be true ethnographers
- But we are not archaeologists sifting through the remains of distant cultures
- We can be sociolinguists of knowledge production, consumption and reception

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- We can interview people
 - We cannot fully grasp specialized content, do experiments, or make technical calculations.
 - We can gain insight into the conventions of conduct in a field
 - We can become apprized of the value system at work
 - We can aim for an insider “emic” approach

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- In my old writing-for-publication classes, I welcomed wide disciplinary differences in the participants
 - I used to tell them “You are my lab; You are my data source”
 - One simple example.

Which is better? Simple or complex experiments?

And the answer ?

Life sciences → simple

Social sciences → complex

Engineering → depends on the field

environmental → simple

mechanical → complex

To wrap up

Research articles on EAP genres have become:

- a) too textual
- b) too thin (in Geertz's terms)
- c) too concerned with overall structure
- d) too interested in the interpersonal and promotional

Instead, let's not forget the basics

- a) more work on syntactic and phraseological patterns
- b) more work on local cohesion
- c) more enlightenment from contextual insights
- d) more attention to newer interdisciplinary fields
- e) more reception studies