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Introduction. Genre perspectives in text production research

While genre may appear to be a rather static, formal, product-oriented concept from which to consider the process orientation of production, contemporary understandings of genre have emphasized the dynamics of genre as something constantly being freshly produced and as guiding processes in each instance of production. Approaching genre from the perspective of process makes evident how dynamic new concepts of genre are and how they shape each writer's approach to writing text with their understandings of situations, motives, and actions.

Genre theory, however, is no single thing, and researchers from different traditions have approached genre in different ways, using different data-gathering and analytic tools as well as definitions, thereby making evident different aspects of genre. In this section we sketch some of the wide range of approaches from which the authors of the following chapters draw.

1 Major traditions

1.1 Applied linguistics

Applied linguistics, broadly conceived, has most commonly viewed genre from a functionalist perspective: genres are the ways language-users get things done. Though referring originally to register rather than genre, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) developed out of M. A. K. Halliday's (1978) work on the notion of varieties of language associated with contexts of situation. Scholars in applied linguistics examine existing texts for generic patterns that are contextually meaningful.

For the purposes of language instruction, scholars in second-language instruction and English for Specific Purposes have analyzed existing texts to describe the textual and rhetorical regularities within those language varieties. John Swales (1990), for example, defines the rhetorical moves typically made in research articles and instructs graduate students in the structures and purposes of academic genres. Ann Johns (1997) encourages students to perform ethnographic research into genres that matter for their academic lives, working with others in ESP to expand knowledge of textual regularities with more contextual and procedural knowledge. Australian linguists working within SFL, sometimes referred to as the Sydney school, have perhaps the most fully developed and rationalized instructional model. Using a cyclical teaching and learning process, instruction includes analyzing, modeling, and both collaborative and individual generating of texts to reproduce generic models (see

Cope and Kalantzis 1993 for a fuller introduction). This genre pedagogy seeks to give disadvantaged children access to school genres for purposes of social equity. Such pedagogical goals contribute to the emphasis in applied linguistics on the functions of genres, their forms and motives, and the effects of genres on writers' production processes, especially as writers learn to produce genres with which they were previously unfamiliar.

Less concerned with pedagogy, scholarship in corpus linguistics has different motives but similar emphases on textual forms. When applied to textual form rather than as indicative of a dynamic process, the term genre has been contested within text research, colliding with the terms "text type" and "register" on a regular basis. Such scholars as Vijay Bhatia (2004) and David Y. W. Lee (2001) work to distinguish genre from other categories of texts, but in fact the concept fluctuates in different approaches. Using well-developed quantitative methods, Douglas Biber (1988) and other corpus linguists who study genre analyze linguistic data as they vary by common generic labels, such as interviews, press reportage, or academic prose. Such scholarship has established the existence and details of linguistic variation by genre, whether morphemic, syntactic, or discursal, and historically as well as contemporaneously. The influence of genre on text production is implicit, as genre serves as another variable in studies of language change and variation, but the emphasis in corpus linguistics is on the range of variation and change as much as regularity.

1.2 Composition and rhetoric

Composition and rhetoric focus on the making of meaning and how genre enters into authorial processes within specific situations. Much work in rhetorical genre studies has developed from Carolyn Miller's theorizing of genres as "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations" (1984: 159). Scholars commonly examine existing texts in order to reveal the rhetorical situations and broader contexts that the linguistic and rhetorical features of the genres represent, or they examine the contexts in order to understand how the genres act and interact within those contexts.

From this perspective, genre organizes a full range of individual identities, actions, roles, and social situations. Research methods include qualitative social data as well as rhetorical analysis of texts, including ethnographies, interviews and individual process data. Data are often gathered from in situ activity, leading out from the classroom to larger social activities in which writing engages. Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff (2010), for example, investigate the genres used by first-year writing students in the United States and their willingness and ability to transfer knowledge from one genre arena to another. Anthony Paré (2002) examines the genres used by hospital social workers and how individuals adapt their identities to resist and conform to generic expectations.

Sharing an emphasis on pedagogy with applied linguistics, genre studies within composition and rhetoric seek to understand the academic and non-academic contexts in which students will be using genres once they leave the writing classroom. Some design and study curricula to teach genre awareness, rather than the expectations of particular genres, so as to reorient writing instruction to make it more useful in more contexts (see, for example, Devitt, Reiff, and Bawarshi [2004]).

Both applied linguistics and rhetoric and composition have strong pedagogic motives to teach tools of language (linguistic) and skills of meaning making and social action, using tools of rhetoric and writing processes. Since genres are associated with identities, roles, actions and modes of thought, learning of genres can also be associated with a variety of dimensions of development fostered in schooling, and thus genre provides important directions for academic writing, writing to learn, and writing across the curriculum. Swiss educational researchers such as Bronckart (1997) and Dolz and Schnuewly (1998) have particularly been interested in genre as an organizing principle of language arts curricula.

1.3 Communication studies

Communication studies, even more so than composition and rhetoric, primarily are interested in how broadly circulated representations influence and crystallize social, cultural and political activities and belief. The field is largely focused on data gathered from public media, especially journalism, and how information, roles, attitudes and ideologies are represented and made available for publics through the media. Genre for communication scholars provides a strong lens for understanding how media presentations are organized and how representations are made available for publics. Genre focuses the process by which information is identified, collected, made available, and interpreted by media professionals and also provides a means for publics to understand and interpret media representations. Changes in genre reveal to communication scholars changes in the production of social knowledge and public access to information.

1.4 Information science

Information science is interested in the organization of and access to texts. Having its origins in the bibliographic organization, storage, and retrieval of documents, the field has expanded to study the social organization and social processes of knowledge production, transmission, and accumulation. Genre is both a bibliographic characteristic of texts to be stored and accessed, and an indicator of social groups, networks and activities. Information scientists typically work with large sets of bibliographic data that can be manipulated electronically, but a subset such as archivists working with special collections work from limited collections of physical documents.

2 The organization of this section

Together these approaches give an expansive multidimensional view of genre and show how genre plays a role in all the individual and social processes activated by writing, from internal formation of goals and writing choices, through the largest unfolding of social and political action and the unfolding of large communal systems of knowledge formation.

The three chapters in this section organize these multiple dynamic aspects of genre, moving from the most concrete shaping of language choices that are typified and suggested every time one seeks to produce texts to the largest social patterns that are produced through the typified production of documents. Chapter 15 “Reproducing genres: Pattern-related writing” reviews the literature investigating how the regularities of genres influence the processes through which texts emerge and the formal characteristics of texts that are produced. This chapter, since it works most closely with the writing of individual texts and the form of texts, draws heavily on applied linguistics and rhetoric and composition approaches to genre. Chapter 16 “Producing genres: Pattern variation and genre development” reviews work on the motives and situational dynamics that lead to genre change through each instance of writing. This chapter, since it focuses on the dynamic between changing social forces and the production of new and changing meanings, draws most heavily on Communication Studies and Rhetoric and Composition, often adopting an historical perspective examining the changes over periods of time. Chapter 17 “Beyond single genres: Pattern mapping in global communication” reviews work that maps the largest activity networks and social formations that emerge from the production of many related texts over time. With its focus on larger activity and intertextual structures, this chapter draws most heavily on Information Sciences along with Rhetoric and Composition. It also adopts larger historical and social perspective to gain distance on local events to see the larger patterns of relations. Together, these three chapters, through their overlapping citations but different focuses, demonstrate the richness and potential of genre scholarship for understanding text production.

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