

Issues in Genre Analysis and Genre Evolution Within the Discursive and Social Practices

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Abstract

The paper explains various ways by which discourse can be understood through genre analysis approach. It also sheds light on genre evolution while focusing on the diachronic study of language to show some gradual and continuous development in language studies over time. Some of the existing works on genre analysis are considered to further explicate the notion of genre analysis, genre evolution, hybrid genre and how genre and register are related linguistic properties. Genre analysis examines how texts are structured to fulfil communicative purposes and how members of a discourse community use genre to claim and attribute community memberships. Genre analysis examines the structure and communicative purpose of different types of texts (e.g business letters, newspaper editorials, weblogs) and the way these texts function among the groups of people who use them. Martins (1984) and Eggins (1994) link genre to context of culture and explain that genre are realised through language. This means we only know we have a particular genre by looking at the way language gets used. The study of this nature will serve as resourceful material for linguistic scholars.

Key words – genre analysis, discourse analysis, genre evolution, hybrid genre, language studies, communicative purpose, pedagogical.

Introduction

Eggins (2004) defines genre by simply saying: ‘when we describe the staged, structured way in which people go about achieving goals using language, we are describing genre’ (Eggins, 2004: 10). To convince the reader of the necessity of having genres in language, she mentions the significance of habitualisation in our lives underlining that we quickly routinise the way we perform repeated activities because it saves us time and energy. To Martin (1992:505), genre is a staged, goal-oriented, social process realised through register. Swales (1990) defines genres as linguistic and rhetorical actions, involving the use of language to communicate something to someone at some time in some context for some purposes. These purposes are recognised by the expert member of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. A genre therefore is a relatively stable class of linguistic and rhetorical ‘events’ which members of a discourse community has typified in order to respond to and achieve shared communicative goals (Swales, 1990:58).

Genre Evolution

The notion of genre evolution is from the diachronic perspective on language. This refers to the study of language over a period of time. Genre evolution study has its root in historical linguistics. Historical linguistics has to do with language development through time. It is about historical analysis which refers to diachronic studies of the development of disciplinary and professional genres. It involves the study of historical change occurring within text, discursive and social practices. Basically, genre evolution is genre development over time which has to do with gradual and continuous change in some feature or convention over time.- or relatively abrupt change in lexico-grammar... Gross et al (.2012).There are different facets of evolution as far as human activities is concern. The world is evolving and so does human language and other activities. The recent changes in science, technology, arts, religion, among others, are factors that account for genre evolution. What we use language to do in texts, discursive and social practices are not stagnant. Some of the studies on diachronic

approach to the study of language include Halliday (1988) who examines the historical development of physics articles and Bazerman (1988) who traces development of the scientific experimental article in English. Sichen (2020) surveys a wide range of studies available in the genre literature and identifies three development in genre analysis namely, digital genre analysis, multimodal genre analysis, and genre innovation. The study reports the major changes in rapidly developing digital media and some of the challenges of genre analysis and it can be resolved by genre scholars in the technology-driven era. She views the development in genre studies as interconnected and explores how the development facilitates each other. The study concludes that digitality and multimodality contribute to the innovation of genres.

Alharbi (2021) investigates the move-step structure of two sets of English-medium research article introductions (RAIs) in the field of applied linguistics using Swale's (1990, 2004) approach. Thirty research articles written for international readership were selected from *Journal of English for Specific Purposes* while local research articles were selected from *Arab World English Journal*. The study compares the publications in terms of the employment of the three moves proposed in Swale's (1990, 2004) move-step model. The study concludes that RAIs present variability in their length (international RAIs are longer while the local RAIs are shorter). In term of similarity, both international RAIs and the local RAIs exhibit the three moves in Swale's model but with different frequencies. The variation in frequencies was attributed to the length of the RAIs.

Hybrid Genre

Language change over time with different genre giving birth to hybrid genres. Some media texts are hybrid genres which means they share the conventions of more than one genre. A hybrid genre is a genre that blends themes and elements from two or more different genres. For instance, a novel or drama that combine romance, horror, science fiction, historical fiction, crime, fantasy, comedy, mystery, thriller. Instead of focusing on one genre, it blends two or more recognisable genres together. Musical genre and romance genre may be combined sometimes etc. We have main genre and sub -genre. Hybrid genre is different

from sub -genre. A sub-genre is a category within a particular genre. It is a part of a larger genre. Football is a sub-genre of sports (Olagunju 2016) while slasher films are a sub-genre of thriller.

Approaches to Genre Analysis

There are three main approaches to genre analysis: Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Genre as Social Interaction (Rhetoric Genre Studies). The linguists that are associated with the first which is SFL follow the framework proposed by Halliday (1994), Halliday and Hasan (1989), Martin (1992) and Ansary and Babaii (2004).

The second approach to genre studies is proposed by Swales (1990). Eggins and Slade (1997:268) state that 'there are as many specialised languages as there are many professions'. This is what is being referred to as language for specific purposes, or when it is applied to English, it is English for specific purposes (ESP), that is, special discourse used in specific settings by people sharing common purposes. ESP is a move-analytic approach. It is an applied linguistic perspective of genre. Swales' work anchors on the 'communicative purposes' of the 'discourse communities' (Swales 1990:58). This is reiterated in the work of Bawarshi and Reiff as stated below.

Bawarshi and Reiff (2010: 41) states that:

English for Specific Purposes focuses on studying and teaching specialised varieties of English. Most often to non-native speakers of English, in advanced academic and professional settings. ESP is often used as an umbrella term to include more specialised areas of study such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), and English for Medical Purposes (EMP).

Although ESP as an area of study started in 1960 and researchers in ESP started using genre analysis as research and pedagogical tools in 1960, it is John Swales' book titled *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings* that really explained the theory and development of the methodology required for bringing genre analysis into ESP research and teaching. Bawarshi and Reiff (2010: 44) note further that it is largely due to Swales' work and the research it has inspired over the last twenty years that ESP and genre

analysis have become in many ways synonymous. Swales begins Genre Analysis by identifying two key characteristics of ESP genre approaches, namely their focus on academic and research English (which was expanded to include occupational English), and their use of genre analysis for applied ends. The applied nature of ESP has been a defining feature of the field from its inception. As Swales explains, ESP approaches can be traced to 'quantitative studies of the linguistic properties of registers of a language' for the purpose of identifying the frequency of occurrence of certain linguistic features in a particular register and then making these features the focus of language instruction. The research works in this area include Bhatia (1993) on job applications, sales promotion letters, and legislative documents; Graetz (1983) on abstracts, the introduction and discussion sections of dissertations (Dudley-Evans 1986, 1987).

The third approach to genre analysis which focuses on written communication (in composition studies and professional communication) in which the genre is considered to be a social action is called 'Genre as Social Interaction'. Bazerman (1988) and Bizzell (1992) are prominent researchers in this area of the interaction between the writer and social groups. The scholars in composition studies insist that the textual forms that are usually called genres are only traces of a recurring social action. Shokouhi and Amin (2010:1) state that genre analysis has become a popular framework for investigating the form and functions of both oral and written discourse. They state further that genre-based approach is multi-dimensional and works on different aspects of a genre-form, function, content, and context. Shokouhi and Amin (2010) use a genre-based approach in the analysis of Persian and English Newspaper Editorials with consideration for EFL learners' reading comprehension. The study notes that the generic structure, content and context, that is, considerable level of genre play a significant role in reading comprehension of texts and that the socio-political context in which a text is produced has a great influence on the content of that text.

Bhatia (2008a:166) states that recent work in genre theory indicates a strong shift of emphasis

from text to context, which has encouraged three interrelated developments. First, the analysis is becoming increasingly multi-disciplinary, in that specific disciplinary concerns and methodologies are getting, reflected in analytical frameworks. This integration of discursive and professional practices has made genre analytical insights more relevant and acceptable to the disciplinary and professional communities which is also a useful development for the applications of the theory, especially in English for Specific Purpose (ESP) and professional communication.

Bhatia (2008b) investigates the use and abuse of linguistic resources in corporate periodic disclosure document (which included annual and periodical performance reports, press releases and other communications, announcements, shareholder circular, and company newsletters) using a critical genre-based approach. The study attempts to demystify the appropriation of linguistic resources to obscure corporate performance, in particular, the negative aspects of corporate results, and to highlight the positive aspects of performance in order to enhance the company's image before the shareholders, and the business community as a whole. The study identifies and addresses a number of issues concerning the interaction between language use and corporate behaviour and also creates awareness of stakeholders to a better understanding of the discursive practices of corporation in meeting the statutory demands as well as the social expectations of corporate disclosure practice. It also highlights the relationship between 'generic integrity' and 'genre bending' in professional discourse.

Unuabonah (2012:20) states that there are two theories of genre that are frequently used in the analysis of academic and professional texts. These include the Systemic Functional Linguistic Model (Halliday and Hasan, 1989; Henry, A. and Roseberry, R. 1998 and Ansary and Babaii, 2004 and 2009), and for the Specific Purpose Approach, (Swales, 1990, Bhatia, 1997). Both approaches deal with the identification of recurring patterns used to organise the content of a genre and relating these patterns to specific linguistic features. Some other scholars who have worked on genre are: Hyland (2002); Martin and Rose (2003); Eggin

(1994); Swales (1990; Hart (1986); Nwogu (2004), etc. The present study is partly located in genre studies. The next section therefore discusses approaches to genre analysis and issues in genre studies.

Discourse Community, Communicative Purpose, and Genre

Swales's approach to genre studies notes three key and inter-related concepts which are discourse community, communicative purpose, and genre. Swales defines discourse communities as 'socio-rhetorical networks that form in order to work towards sets of common goals' (Swales 1990:9). These common goals become the basis for shared communicative purposes, with genre enabling discourse community members to achieve these communicative purposes. Swales states further that communicative purpose is the thread that binds the three key elements together. It is communicative purpose that drives language activities of the discourse community and it is also the prototypical criterion for genre identity. Communicative purpose is both a privileged criterion and one that operates to keep the scope of a genre. In addition to purpose, exemplars of a genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience.

Swales proposes six defining characteristics of discourse communities. First, 'a discourse community has a broadly agreed set of common public goals; which can either be explicitly stated or tacitly understood. Second, in order to achieve and further its goals, a discourse community must have 'mechanisms of intercommunication among its members' such as meeting rooms or telecommunications technologies or newsletters, etc. Third, membership within a discourse community depends on individuals using these mechanisms to participate in the life of the discourse community. Fourth, 'a discourse community utilises and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims'. These genres must be recognisable to and defined by members of a discourse community. Five, 'in addition to owning genres, a discourse community has acquired some specific lexis' which can take the form of 'increasingly shared and specialised terminology' such as abbreviations and acronyms.

Finally, 'a discourse community has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discursual expertise who can pass on knowledge of shared goals and communicative purpose to new members. As such, genres not only help members of a discourse community to achieve and further their goals; genres also help new members acquire and become initiated into a discourse community's shared goals, hence the value of genre as teaching tool within ESP (Swales 1990:24-27).

Relationship Between Register and Genre

Ansary and Babaii (2004) explain that both register and genre theories seek to explain variation in texts by reference to variation in context. That is, explicit links are often made between features of the discourse and variables of the social and cultural context in which the discourse is enacted. We can infer from Ansary and Babaii's explanation that the two concepts are interwoven in nature, all centered around context. Martin (1985:250) says that the genres are realised through registers and registers in turn are realised through language. Based on the explanations and descriptions of genre and registers, genre, can then be simply defined as the functional label for groups of texts while register is seen as the formal features of groups of texts.

Hasan (1997:230) states that register and genre are synonymous 'for most material purposes'. She associates any genre with, on the one hand, a configuration of elements of structure of text (later termed the Generic Structure Potential, or GSP) and, on the other, a 'contextual configuration' (particular values of field, tenor and mode). A given GSP is the structural output of a context of situation, which is conceptualised as one of the networks which makes up the context of culture. Each structural element of the GSP is realised by patterns of language. While Hasan relates text to social activity, this is accounted for in terms of contextual configuration (cc), 'a specific set of values that realises field, tenor, and mode'. Hasan (1989:56) distinguishes between obligatory and optional elements of structure, with field appearing to be responsible for obligatory elements, while variations originate in tenor and mode (Martin, 1992:495), and the order of elements being criteria for membership of a genre.

Goodlier (2008:27), explaining the differences and similarities between register and genre, states that registers impose explicitness constraints at the level of vocabulary and syntax, while genre impose additional explicitness constraints at the discourse level. Following Couture's (1986:82) explanations of register and genre, Goodlier (ibid) states further that genres define conventional patterns of linguistic structure for a complete discourse, and they are intertextual. Unlike register, genre can only be realised in completed texts or texts that can be projected as complete, for a genre does more than specify kinds of codes extant in a group of related texts; it specifies conditions for beginning, continuing and ending a text.

Martins (1984), Hasan (1985a), Ventola (1987) and Eggins (1994:25-36) link genre to context of culture and register to context of situation. Eggins notes that 'both register and genre are realised through language. This means that we only know that we have a particular genre or register by looking at the way language gets used. It is through the patterns of meanings, words and structures, and of course sounds and language, that these contextual dimensions are expressed'.

Textuality and Genre Analysis

The discussion of textuality is very crucial to the study of genre. In his discussion of textuality, Adegbite (1991:35) refers to a text as 'a unit larger than the sentence. It is a functional unit; thus it incorporates language form with situation in language use'. He goes further to say that in recent developments, a text also refers to spoken and written utterances found in road signs, warnings, poems, conversations and others. A text, according to de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) is a communicative occurrence and venture beyond the domain of linguistic proper, while textuality accounts for how a text functions in human interaction.

In their definition of a text, Halliday and Hasan (1989:10) have the following to say:

...we can define text, in the simple way perhaps, by saying that it is functional. By functional, we simply mean language that is doing some job in some context, as opposed to isolated words or sentence...So any instance of living

language that is playing some part in a context of situation, we shall call a text. It may be either spoken or written, or indeed in any other medium of expression that we like to think of.

The submission of Adegbite (ibid) complements that of Halliday and Hasan (1989) in their description of a text. To Brown and Yule (1983), a text is a pre-theoretical term for any stretch of language collected or recorded for the purpose of analysis and description referring to the verbal record of a communicative event. In their explanation of what a text is, Grabe and Kaplan (1996: 202 – 203) consider 'a text as written within certain context, aimed at specific 'readers' and the writer's purpose is realised with the structure and lexis used. The genre is created through an overall textual pattern, specific lexical signals, inter-clause relations, and lexical and grammatical cohesive links (Cook, 1989, quoted in Cunningham, 2004: 4).

In their discussion of textuality, de Beaugrande and Dressler (ibid) outline seven standards of textuality (viz cohesion, coherence, informativity, intentionality, acceptability, situationality and intertextuality) which need be satisfied in order for a text to be communicative. They stressed the need for acceptability of the seven standards by the receivers.

Olateju (2004:3), quoting Halliday and Hasan (1985: 8) on the key points that need to be understood in the classification and understanding of text, states the following:

The form and content of the message, the setting, the participants, the context and effect of communication, the key, the medium, the genre and the norms of interaction.

She notes further that the key points give insight into proper understanding and interpretation of texts.

Conclusion

This study has been able to explicate the notion of genre, genre evolution, genre analysis and its relationship with register. It considers the relationship of genre to texts and some studies on genre analysis within discursive and social practices are explicated for a better understanding of what we use language to do in different settings. It explains the concept of genre development with

gradual and continuous change in some feature or convention over time. The study will further illuminate the notion of genre analysis and genre

evolution in language studies and also serve as a useful material for linguistic scholars in the area of discourse studies.

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