

# GENRE AND DISCOURSE COMMUNITY

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Over the last decade, increasing attention has been given to the notion of genre in scientific/academic discourse and its applications in language teaching and learning. This interest has been mainly driven by the desire to understand how individuals use language to interpret and respond to communicative situations and the ways these uses change over time. However, the concept of genre and its relationship to discourse community has been viewed in distinct ways by researchers in different scholarly traditions. The aim of this paper is to provide a review of the current genre-based approaches and pedagogical applications in the main research traditions where genre studies have been developed, i.e. Systemic Functional Linguistics, North American New Rhetoric studies, and the English for Specific Purposes tradition.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Within the last two decades, genre has become a popular framework for analysing the form and function of scientific discourse, as well as a helpful tool for developing educational practices in fields such as rhetoric, professional writing and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Genre-based approaches, by developing a theory of language and a pedagogy based on research into the linguistic structures of texts and the social contexts in which they occur, have therefore had considerable impact.

Although there is general agreement among genre theorists that genres are socially recognised ways of using language (Hyon, 1996; Yunick, 1997; Hyland, 2002), genre analysts differ in the emphasis they give to either the social contexts or the texts, whether they focus on the functions of texts in discourse communities, or the ways that texts are rhetorically organised to reflect and construct these communities.

This paper reviews the concept of genre and its relation to discourse community, and attempts to clarify how both genre and genre-based pedagogy have been conceived by researchers in the different scholarly traditions.

## 2. THE CONCEPT OF ‘DISCOURSE COMMUNITY’

In his definition of genre, Swales (1990: 58) conceptualises the discourse community as “the parent of genre”. He attributes the notion of ‘discourse community’ to the work of various social constructionist theorists, quoting Herzberg (1986):

Use of the term “discourse community” testifies to the increasingly common assumption that discourse operates within conventions defined by communities, be they academic disciplines or social groups. The pedagogies associated with writing across the curriculum and academic English now use the notion of “discourse community” to signify a cluster of ideas: that language use in a group is a form of social behaviour, that discourse is a means of maintaining and extending the group’s knowledge and of initiating new members into the group, and that discourse is epistemic or constitutive of the group’s knowledge (Herzberg, 1986: 1, as cited in Swales, 1990:21).

Swales (1990: 24) develops the idea of ‘discourse community’ by comparison with ‘speech community’<sup>1</sup>. He mentions several reasons for separating the two concepts: The first is that a discourse community requires a network of communication and common goals while there may be considerable distance between the members both ethnically and geographically. In contrast a speech community requires physical proximity. A second reason that Swales mentions is that a discourse community is a sociorhetorical unit that consists of a group of people who link up in order to pursue objectives that are established prior to those of socialization and solidarity, both of which are characteristic of a speech community (i.e. a sociolinguistic unit). A final point is that discourse communities are centrifugal (they tend to separate people into occupational or speciality-interest groups), whereas speech communities are centripetal (they tend to absorb people into the general fabric of society).

Swales (1990: 24-32) proposes six defining criteria that any discourse community should meet:

1. A discourse community has a broadly agreed set of common public goals.
2. A discourse community has mechanisms of intercommunication among its members.
3. A discourse community uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback.
4. A discourse community utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims.

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<sup>1</sup> For an extended discussion on the concept of speech community, its developments and general problems with contemporary notions, see Patrick (2002).

5. In addition to owning genres, a discourse community has acquired some specific lexis.
6. A discourse community has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discourse expertise.

These criteria emphasise that, for Swales, a discourse community is a social group that uses language to accomplish work in the world and that discourse maintains and extends a group's knowledge. The implicit emphasis given to the international character, as Bloor (1988: 58) points out, is of particular importance for ESP (English for Specific Purposes) teaching, as it raises the status of non-English-speaking background students, and fosters the understanding of the relationships between the members of particular disciplines across political and geographical boundaries.

Notwithstanding, Swales' definition of discourse community has been criticised for being narrow and for the very restrictive role he gives to it. Mauranen (1993: 14), for example, argues that there are discourse communities of many different kinds that fit Swales' definition, that discourse communities are subject to change, and that the tension between tendencies towards change and stability can be perceived in the use that communities make of language. Furthermore, Mauranen argues that Swales' definition of discourse community excludes the academic or scientific community as a whole, since only individual disciplines might meet all or most of his criteria.

The concept of 'discourse community' has also been discussed by, among others, Bizzell (1992), who recognises that there is an absence of consensus about its definition. Bizzell (1992: 222) herself provides a definition of discourse community that basically differs from that of Swales in that a community's discourse and its discursive expectations are regulative of world view. Bizzell claims that 'discourse community' borrows not only from the sociolinguistic concept of 'speech community', but also from the literary-critical concept of 'interpretative community', thus relating the issue of linguistic and stylistic convention to those of interpreting experience and regulating the world views of group members. As regards Swales' definition of 'discourse community', Bizzell (1992: 227) points out that by treating the discourse community as essentially a stylistic phenomenon, Swales delimits the object of study "in such a way as to leave out larger socioeconomic and cultural elements - that is, those elements that most forcefully create world views in discourse". In contrast to Swales' position that it is possible to be a member of a discourse community without wholly accepting that community's world view, Bizzell (1992: 232) argues that if discourse communities involve regulating the world views of their members, then conflicts can arise when community membership overlaps. She further argues that for an individual who belongs to multiple discourse communities, the resolution of such conflicts requires the exercise of power.

## 2. 1. The relationship between Discourse Community and Genre

The close relation between discourse community and genre has been frequently acknowledged in the literature. Bhatia (2002), for instance, sees genres as conventionalised communicative events embedded within disciplinary or professional practices. The socially situated nature of genres is typically foregrounded by the notion of discourse community. As Hyland (2002: 121) points out, “by focusing on the distinctive rhetorical practices of different communities, we can more clearly see how language is used and how the social, cultural, and epistemological characteristics of different disciplines are made real”. Swales (1990) characterises the relationship between discourse community and the generic forms that they produce, suggesting that genres belong to discourse communities, not individuals. Similarly, Bazerman’s (1988) study of the development of the experimental article establishes an important connection between the formation of a scientific community and the development of discourse strategies for making claims about experiments.

Freedman and Medway (1994) have raised the question of the circularity of the relationship between genres and discourse communities. Mauranen (1993) considers that it is the genre which defines or selects its user groups rather than the other way around. According to Mauranen different social groups have access to different genres. It is the social purpose of the linguistically realised activity that determines who is allowed to use it. Paltridge (1997a), on the other hand, holds that it is the discourse community that determines the conditions for identification of genres. For Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995: 25) genres are also determined by their users. They further argue that a close examination of genres may reveal a great many of a discourse community’s social practices, ideology and epistemological norms. Similarly, recent research (e.g. Hyland, 1998, 2000, 2002) suggests that content, structure, and interactions are community defined, and that genres are often the means by which institutions are constructed and maintained.

The importance of giving consideration to how genre is viewed by a particular community can be seen in the work of Myers (1989, 1990). He explores interactions between writers and readers within discourse communities. This approach considers the role of audience both in terms of shared understanding and expectations of how a text should be written. Myers (1989: 3) makes a distinction between two types of audience: the wider scientific community (exoteric audience), to whom a research report is ostensibly addressed, and an immediate audience of individual researchers doing similar work (esoteric audience). As Myers argues, although the writer really addresses the esoteric audience, s/he has to use forms as if s/he were addressing a general scientific audience. In this way, although knowledge of some terms is assumed, well-known researchers and relevant studies have to be cited as if the reader did not know them. This for Myers is evidence of the way in which the relationship between writers and readers (the discourse community)

shapes the rhetorical features of academic texts. This approach to the study of reader-writer relations within discourse communities contributes to an understanding of why some linguistic features are used in the production of academic genres. The examination of textual features reveals how writers adapt their practices to their audience and how participants collectively construct genres.

### **3. THE CONCEPT OF ‘GENRE’**

The term ‘genre’ has long been used in literary studies to refer to different types of literary text, and has been widely used with a similar meaning in related fields such as film studies. Today, as Swales (1990: 33) points out, this term is used to refer to “a distinctive category of discourse of any type, spoken or written, with or without literary aspirations”. The notion of genre has been discussed in a range of different areas, including folklore studies, linguistic anthropology, the ethnography of communication, conversational analysis, rhetoric, literary theory, the sociology of language, and applied linguistics (see Paltridge, 1997a). Most interpretations of the concept of genre, in the widely different fields in which it is used, seem to agree at least implicitly on one point: genres are types or classes of cultural objects defined around criteria for class membership.

In linguistics, the first explorations of the concept of genre are to be found in the work of ethnographers of communication, who took genre to refer to “a type of communicative event” (Swales, 1990: 39). Some of the first linguistic descriptions were provided by researchers such as Biber (1988), who approached genre by making quantitative analyses of surface linguistic features of texts in the hope that statistical properties would reveal significant differences between them so that they could be grouped according to shared features. Similarly, Grabe (1987) made an extensive statistical survey of elements such as prepositions, tenses, passives, etc., in order to determine the distinguishing features of expository prose in English. Although this level of linguistic analysis tells us very little about what aspects of genres are textualised and to what ends, as Bhatia (1993) notes, linguistic analyses of frequency of lexico-grammatical features are useful in the sense that they provide empirical evidence to confirm or disprove some of the intuitive claims that are frequently made about the lexical and syntactic characteristics of spoken and written discourse. Yunick (1997: 326) too argues for the importance of these types of analyses, since quantitative work serves to identify not only phenomena general to many genres across cultures and languages, but also significant patterns of meaning which might not emerge from ethnographic analyses alone.

The current conception of genre involves not only the examination of conventionalised forms, but also considers that the features of a similar group of texts depend on the social context of their creation and use, and that those features can be described in a way that relates a text to others like it and to the choices and

constraints acting on text producers. Notwithstanding, as was stated earlier, genre theorists have differed in the emphasis they give to either context or text whether they focus on the roles of texts in social communities, or the ways that texts are organised to reflect and construct these communities. Three broad schools of genre theory can be identified, according to Hyon (1996), in terms of their different conceptions and pedagogical approaches to genre: Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), also known as the Sydney School (see, Freedman & Medway, 1994); North American New Rhetoric studies, and the ESP research tradition.

### 3. 1. The Systemic Functional Linguistics approach to genre

Broadly speaking, Systemic Functional Linguistics is concerned with the relationship between language and its functions in social settings. For systemicists, a text can be described in terms of two complementary variables: the immediate situational context in which the text was produced (*register* or *context of situation*) and the overall purpose or function of the interaction (*genre* or *context of culture*). Registers are reflected in the kinds of linguistic choices that typically realise three aspects of a text: *Field*, which refers to what the text is about; *mode*, which refers to the channel of communication, and *tenor*, which refers to the interpersonal relationships between participants and their social roles. In SFL, each of these situational variables has a predictable and systematic relationship with lexicogrammatical patterns, and functions to produce three types of meaning, i.e. the experiential, the textual, and the interpersonal (Eggins, 1994: 76).

Halliday himself, however, does not provide a full account of the relationship between “genre” and “register” (Swales, 1990; Hyon, 1996; Bloor, 1998). For Halliday, as Yunick (1997) argues, genre has no serious theoretical status. It is seen as a cultural and historical phenomenon which is involved in the realization of mode. Nevertheless, according to Martin (1985) and Ventola (1987), registers provide constraints on lexical and syntactic choices (e.g. the language of research papers or journalism), while genres constrain the choices of discourse structures in complete texts (e.g. a research article or a news story). Accordingly, the above mentioned typologies of Biber or Grabe would be regarded as describing register, not genre. While this distinction may be productive, Yunick (1997: 329) claims that it could also result in potentially confusing associations, since all language use is realized both in terms of lexico-grammar and discourse structure, and both discourse structure and lexico-grammatical patterns may be specified in varying degrees of prototypicality.

Ultimately, Martin (1985: 25) defines genres as a “staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture”. There are thus as many different genres as there are recognizable activity types in a culture (e.g. short-stories, recipes, lectures, etc.). Genres are instantiated in complete texts by means of the conventions associated with their overall form or global structure.

Eggs (1994) expresses the relation between genre, register and language in the following terms:

- Language is used with a function or purpose, and this use is related to a given situation and a specific culture.
- The context of culture (genre) is more abstract, more general, than the context of situation (register).
- Genres are realised through languages, and this process of realising genres in language is mediated through the realization of register (Eggs, 1994: 78).

The ways in which Systemicists view register as mediating the realization of a genre is through a functional constituent structure or “schematic structure” which has been established by social conventions. A text can be identified as belonging to a particular genre through the analysis of its schematic structure. There are elements of schematic structure that are defining of a genre (i.e. obligatory elements), and others that are optional. A genre is thus defined in terms of its obligatory elements of schematic structure and variants of a genre (i.e. subgenres) are those texts in which the obligatory schematic structure elements are realised together with optional elements.

Although genres seem to have preferred rhetorical structures, these obligatory elements of textual structure play an important role in the recognition of genres, but are not defining features. It is the social determinants of contextual situation that govern the structural generic choices available to writers in that situation. The linguistic structures of a genre are important in as much as they help identify specific instantiations as belonging to a specific genre or not, but the elements of structure are there because the text is to serve a particular function in the discourse community. Mauranen (1993: 16) illustrates this idea with the example of parodies of academic papers which use all typical structural and stylistic conventions of the genre so that people familiar with it find them funny. In these parodies it is content alone that provides the clue to the humorous intention of the writer. Therefore, a poorly-structured research article could be accepted as a member of the research genre, while even an extremely well-structured parody would be rejected on the basis that it does not represent the activity that the genre is supposed to represent.

For the majority of Systemic genre analysts a text can be identified as belonging to a particular genre through an analysis of ways in which genre is realised in language, that is, the general view among systemicists is that genre can be defined in terms of linguistic properties alone. Paltridge (1997a: 104), on the other hand, argues that the structure of a text is, at no point, genre defining, since in typical instances of a genre, it is not the presence of particular discourse structures alone which leads to the recognition of a text as an instance of a genre, but rather “the co-occurrence and interaction of each aspect of discourse structure with other components of interactional and conceptual frames in their entirety”. Paltridge thus sees genre assignment on the basis of both pragmatic and perceptual conditions.

The linguistic contributions of SFL to the study of genre lie in dissociating genres from registers and styles, in considering genres as types of goal-directed communicative events or social activities, and in acknowledging genres as having schematic structures. However, as noted above, the notion of register has traditionally been a much more central issue in Systemic linguistics than that of genre, and there is little said about rhetorical purpose except in the most general sense (Bloor, 1998). The studies in this research tradition, as Hyon (1996) notes, have mostly focused on describing textual features (both global text structures and sentence-level register features associated with field, tenor and mode) characteristic of various genres, rather than the specialised function of texts and their surrounding social contexts.

Genre-based applications in this tradition have been centered mainly in the context of primary and secondary schools, and more recently in adult migrant English education and workplace training programmes in Australia (Hyon, 1996; Hyland, 2002). The goal of Systemic Functional Linguistics and genre-based teaching has been to help students “participate effectively in the school curriculum and the broader community” (Callaghan, 1991: 72). In order to achieve this goal, systemicists acknowledge the importance of teaching the social functions and contexts of texts. However, their main focus of attention has been teaching students the formal, staged qualities of genre so that they can recognise these features (i.e. the functions, schematic structures and lexico-grammatical features) in the texts that they read and use them in the texts that they write.

### **3. 2. The “New Rhetoric” School approach to genre**

The members of the school known as “New Rhetoric” studies are North American scholars such as Miller (1984/1994), Bazerman (1988), Bizzell (1992), and Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995), who reflect a different approach to the conceptualization and analysis of genre. Rather than focusing on formal characteristics of the texts in isolation, they give attention to the sociocontextual aspects of genres and how these aspects change through time. They also place special emphasis on the social purposes, or actions, that these genres fulfill within these situations (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Hyons, 1996; Paltridge, 1997a).

Since the primary concern for the New Rhetoric researchers is investigating the functional and contextual aspects of genres, their methodological orientation tends to be ethnographic (e.g. participant observation, unstructured interviews, etc.), rather than text analytic, with the aim of uncovering something of the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the communities of text users that genres imply and construct (Hyland, 2002). New Rhetoric scholars have studied contexts of social action such as the writing of professional biologists (Myers, 1990), or the production of the experimental article (Bazerman, 1988). The studies in this line of research, as Freedman and Medway (1994: 2) point out, “unpack the complex social, cultural,



institutional and disciplinary factors at play in the production of specific kinds of writing”.

A most striking difference between the Systemic and New Rhetoric work is the prescriptivism and the implicit static vision of genre that many see as inherent in the Systemic Functional Linguistics approach (Freedman & Medway, 1994: 9). In contrast, the New Rhetoric school emphasises the dynamic quality of genres (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995). A corresponding focus of research has been to trace the evolution of specific genres in response to socio-cultural phenomena in their contexts. Bazerman’s (1988) study of the evolution of the research article is a case in point.

The New Rhetoric perspective also favours a critical approach to the analysis of genre. Freedman and Medway (1994: 11), for example, criticise the Systemic school position, for its “uncritical acceptance of the status quo” and for not “subverting the power of existing genres and/or legitimizing new ones”. Freedman and Medway (1994: 15) see genres as “inescapably implicated in political and economic processes, but at the same time as shifting, revisable, local, dynamic and subject to critical action”. The questions that these authors suggest that need to be brought into genre inquiry are those related to the gender and racial ideologies underpinning writing practices, or issues of power relations, status and resources.

The pedagogical motivation of New Rhetoric research has been L1 teaching, including rhetoric, composition studies, and professional writing (Hyon, 1996). Consistent with their theoretical focus on sociocontextual aspects of genre, they have been less concerned with teaching text form and more with its role in helping university students and novice professionals understand the social functions or actions of genres (Yunick, 1997).

Although some of these studies offer thorough descriptions of academic and professional contexts surrounding genres and the actions texts perform within these situations (see, for example, Bazerman, 1988), as Hyland (2002: 114) notes, this approach has not tended to address itself to the classroom, generally regarding it as an “inauthentic environment lacking the conditions for complex negotiation and multiple audiences”. In contrast to the applied focus of SFL and ESP work, New Rhetoric has generally lacked explicit instructional frameworks for teaching students about the language features and functions of academic professional genres. The main reason for this lack of explicit teaching can be explained by their dynamic vision of genres. As Freedman and Medway (1994) observe:

If genres are understood as typified responses to social contexts, and if such contexts are inevitably fluid and dynamic, what sense can it make to explicate features of historical genres (and all genres are historical) as a way of teaching and learning? (Freedman & Medway, 1994: 10)

These authors further argue that genre knowledge and its use in social contexts is acquired through a process of socialization with the members of particular

disciplinary communities, and that explicit teaching could even be an obstacle to this natural process.

### 3.3. The ESP approach to genre

Researchers in ESP, such as Swales (1981, 1990) and Bhatia (1993), have also approached the notion of genre as a social phenomenon, and with a primarily pedagogical motivation of using it as an analytical tool to inform the teaching of English to non-English-speaking background individuals of this language in academic and professional settings. Swales (1990) defines the term “genre” as follows:

A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style. Communicative purpose is both a privileged criterion and one that operates to keep the scope of a genre as here conceived narrowly focused on comparable rhetorical action. In addition to purpose, exemplars of a genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience. If all high probability expectations are realized, the exemplar will be viewed as prototypical by the parent discourse community. The genre names inherited and produced by discourse communities and imported by others constitute valuable ethnographic communication, but typically need further validation (Swales, 1990: 58).

According to this definition, a genre is primarily defined on the basis of its communicative purpose/s; this shared set of communicative purposes shapes the genre and gives it an internal structure. This internal structure is, in turn, constituted by conventionalised rhetorical elements which are shaped by the members of a discourse community as a result of their experience or training within a specific disciplinary community. Therefore, any digression in the use of lexico-grammatical or discursive features will be noticed as atypical by the discourse community and may have negative consequences, such as the rejection of a research paper (see, for example, Ventola & Mauranen, 1996).

The theory of prototypes is another important aspect in Swales’s definition of genre. Prototype theory<sup>2</sup> aims to explain why people and cultures categorise the world in the way they do. According to this theory, people categorise items and concepts in keeping with a prototypical image they build in their mind of what it is that represents the item or concept in question. Prototype theory can be especially

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<sup>2</sup> For further discussion on the concept of prototype see, for example, Rosch (1973).

useful for accounting for variability in genre, although, as Mauranen (1993) notes, a problem with the application of prototype theory to genre analysis lies in the fact that genres are not clear-cut conceptual categories, but kinds of social behaviour. The family resemblance analogy is therefore appropriate as long as we deal with observed similarities in the characteristic features of realizations of genres.

Swales' definition of genre differs from that of the systemic linguists in the importance attached to the communicative purposes within a communicative situation (Bloor, 1998). This conception of the notion of genre draws on multiple perspectives such as ethnography of communication, and the above-mentioned work in the field of New Rhetoric, particularly Miller's (1984) notion of "genre as social action", in which genre is defined on the basis of its overall communicative goal. Miller's influence is also seen in the ESP discussion of genre which argues that genres are not static (see, for example, Bhatia, 1993, 2002), but entities that evolve in response to changes in particular communicative needs.

Despite the tremendous influence of this notion on the analysis of academic discourse, Swales' conception of genre has received some critical responses. Bhatia (1993: 16), argues that, although Swales takes into account linguistic and sociological factors in his definition of genre, he underplays psychological factors, thus "undermining the importance of tactical aspects of genre construction, which play a significant role in the concept of genre as a dynamic social process, as against a static one". Similarly, Paltridge (1995, 1997a) addresses this lack of a cognitive dimension. He proposes a model for genre analysis which integrates both social and cognitive aspects for the classification of different genres, and adopts a pragmatic perspective based on the concepts of *prototype*, *intertextuality* and *inheritance*. The notion of prototypicality is central to Paltridge's framework for genre analysis. He holds that the closer the representation of a genre is to the prototypical image of the genre, the clearer an example will be as an instance of that particular genre. Conversely, the further away a genre is from the prototypical image, the less clear-cut an example of the particular genre the representation will be. He further argues for the importance of *intertextuality* and *inheritance*<sup>3</sup> to the framework he proposes in that these notions account for the relationship between instances of genres in the production and interpretation of texts.

In contrast to the New Rhetoric perspective that opposes the idea of explicitly teaching genre conventions, ESP researchers, like the systemicists, place their main focus on teaching formal features of texts, that is, rhetorical structures and grammatical features, so that non-English-speaking background students can learn to control the rhetorical organization and stylistic features of the academic genres of English-speaking discourse communities. Hyland (2002), among others, has

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<sup>3</sup> de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981: 10) describe *intertextuality* as "the factors which make the utilization of one text dependent upon knowledge of one or more previously encountered texts". They define the notion of *inheritance* as follows: "the translation of knowledge among items of the same or similar type of sub-type" (de Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981: 91).

acknowledged the importance of genre analysis in as much as it provides useful information about the ways genres are constructed and the rhetorical contexts in which they are used. Bhatia (1997), in a recent publication has also noted:

Genre analysis has become one of the major influences on the current practices in the teaching and learning of languages in specialist disciplines like engineering, science, law, business and a number of others. By offering a dynamic explanation of the way expert users of language manipulate generic conventions to achieve a variety of complex goals associated with their specialist discipline, it focuses attention on the variation in language use by members of various disciplinary cultures (Bhatia, 1997: 313).

### **3. 4. Genre analysis across cultures**

Considering that genre is a social concept centred around communicative goals and ways of fulfilling goals (cf. Swales, 1990), science and other scholarly activities are typically viewed as similar enough to produce basically the same communicative actions (e.g. description of materials and methods, accounts of experiments, discussion of theories and explanations, etc.). But, as Mauranen (1993) points out, the way of actually doing this (i.e. the rhetorical strategies employed) may vary in such a way that certain patterns or preferences are distinguished when texts produced by writers from varying background are compared. Therefore, cross-cultural comparisons of genres must be conducted with caution. As Yunick (1997) claims, the presence or absence of a feature in one cultural context, even if very similar, may have a very different interpretation. Melander (1998) further argues that it is wrong to claim that scientific articles generally belong to the same genre, regardless of the language in which they are written, claiming the choice of language in many cases also brings about a choice of genre. In Swedish scientific articles, it appears, according to Melander, that authors may be regarded as addressing other audiences and having other communicative tasks to fulfill than do the authors of texts written in English. A case in point are RAs in bio-medical research which, Melander (1998) claims, differ in Swedish and English. He found that the articles in English are not scientific in a strict sense, but aimed at doctors working in a clinical setting, whereas the Swedish papers can be regarded as addressed to an audience of peer researchers.

In genre-analytic contrastive studies, it seems then reasonable to start by ensuring that researchers are comparing the same genre in both languages, that is, that both groups of texts accomplish the same communicative purpose or social function in the respective discourse communities.

By comparing definitions and analyses of genres within the three main research traditions and by examining their contexts and goals, this paper has attempted to contribute to offer some insight into the ways that genre theory and

pedagogy respond to the interests of different scholars and teaching contexts in academic settings.

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