The place of genre analysis in international communication

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Writing is most probably the most difficult skill for ESL/EFL learners to master. It is difficult not only because it requires junior writers to generate and organize ideas in a language other than their mother tongue but also because it forces them to present their already generated and organized ideas in such a text form that is understandable to readers from a wide range of socio-cultural backgrounds as well as to the native speakers of English. Therefore, the question of how to teach writing in a second/foreign language has been at the center of attention for a good number of researchers and educators over the past decades. Attempts at determining how to teach writing, and what to teach in writing courses, have resulted in the development of teaching methods, materials, and procedures which are based on an analysis of different genres, and the quest is still going on. This paper provides a brief overview of genre analysis, discusses the notions of Genre Constellations, Genre hierarchies, Genre chains, Genre Sets, Genre Netwroks, and Subgenres, and elaborates on the relationship of genre analysis to international communication.

Keywords: Genre Constellations; Genre hierarchies; Genre chains; Genre Sets; Genre Netwroks; Subgenres; CMC; Intertextuality

1. Introduction

When Ferdinand De Saussure's students published his round of lectures on the nature of language and linguistic knowledge, most probably no one could ever imagine how detailed language study could get in the years to come. Yet, his role in motivating the 20th-century world in the study of language cannot be undermined. His famous lectures on the nature of language and linguistic knowledge resulted in an upsurge of interest in language schools in Europe and the USA. Several schools of linguistics ensued the most important of which are Bloomfieldian Structuralism, Chomskyan Generativism, and Hallidayan Functionalism. The products of these schools turned up in several separate but related domains of language study including Sociolinguistics, Psycholinguistics, Discourse Analysis, Applied Linguistics, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and so on. With the development of international

communication (i.e., intercommunication) through the advent of the Internet, these shools of linguistics have come into the focus of the attention of fields other than linguistics itself. An ever increasing number of fields started to use the theoretical and practical products of linguistic research.

One area of linguistic research which had an immediate effect on the nature of international communication was Genre Analysis (GA). Genre Analysis had to do with identifying the totality of the accepted linguistic conventions, practice, style, and restrictions in any given communicative event; it focused on the schematic structure of discourse in any given community of professionals or otherwise. This paper provides a brief overview of genre analysis, discusses the notions of Genre Constellations, Genre hierarchies, Genre chains, Genre Sets, Genre Netwroks, and Subgenres, and elaborates on the relationship of genre analysis to international communication.

2. Background

Nowadays international communication takes on many forms ranging from paper-and-pen written communication to e-communication. Business letters, academic lectures, control-tower spoken discourse, interviews through Skype, e-conferences, and so on are only a few examples. Needless to say, one point is quite clear: to be effective, any instance of communication should adopt a form which is known to and commonly practiced by parties on both sides of the communication line. Therefore, it is necessary to have a method for describing the appropriate structure of any instance of communication. This is the job of Genre Analysis (GA).

Although Genre Analysis has its origins in the ancient Greek rhetoric studies, a more recent scientific perspective on Genre Analysis was provided by English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The emergence of ESP in the second half of the twentieth century drew educators' attention to teaching writing for specific purposes. Corpus linguistics and discourse analysis joined in the quest and shared their insights with ESP to develop a comprehensive picture of the nature of ESP writing. English for Academic Purposes (EAP) followed and attention was directed to another important area of written performance—writing for academic purposes. The results of these research studies turned up in the emergence of Register Analysis, Genre Analysis, and Move Analysis.

This took place in the 1960s and early 1970s, and was related in particular with the work of Strevens, Ewer, and Swales on register analysis (Ewer & Latorre, 1969; Halliday, Mclntosh & Strevens, 1964; Swales, 1971). As Ewer and Latorre (1969) noticed, the goal of register analysis was the identification of grammatical and lexical features of different scientific registers; the principle behind this approach was that language needed in one scientific

field was composed of a specific register which was different from the language of other fields of science as well as the language spoken by lay people. Teaching materials then took the identified linguistic features as their syllabus. The main goal behind register analyses of the Ewer-Latorre type was that of making ESP courses more relevant to learners' needs (Ewer & Hughes-Davies, 1971). High priority was given to language forms that students would meet in their studies and, in turn, low priority to forms they would not meet.

Register analysis, as the first stage of ESP development, focused on language at sentence level; in its second development phase—which is known as the discourse phase—ESP gradually became closely involved with discourse or rhetorical analysis, and the focus was shifted to the level beyond sentence (Allen & Widdowson, 1974). ESP, in this phase, held that the difficulties which students face are related to their unfamiliarity with English use rather than from a knowledge of the linguistic system of English. Attention was, therefore, shifted to understanding how sentences were combined in discourse to produce meaning—that is, to organizational patterns in text (Swales, 1985). The assumption in this ESP phase was that the rhetorical patterns of text organization differed significantly between specialist areas of use; for example, the rhetorical structure of science texts was regarded as different from that of commercial texts (Widdowson, 1978).

This was followed by a third phase—TLU Situation Analysis—that aimed to develop procedures for enabling learners to function adequately in a target situation. The open assumption of this phase, according to Chambers (1980), was that, to afford good results, ESP course design should be careful about two important points:

- identifying the target situation, and
- carrying out a rigorous analysis of the linguistic features of that situation.

An alternative name for this phase was Needs Analysis (NA). The result of all these research studies was the development of interest in the analysis of academic genres. Genre analysis assumed that language was used differently within different cultures, and that second/foreign language learners' success in communicating with native speakers' of other languages was, approximately at least, a function of their mastery of the target language genre structures (Crossley, 2007).

Textbooks appeared that drew on a genre approach to the teaching of the target language skills (e.g., Swales & Feak, 1994). Genres were broken down into subgenres, subgenres into moves, and moves into steps. So teaching was based on these, and foreign/second language learners were expected to

masters move structures of each subgenre. Moves were defined as units of text that relate both to speakers'/writers' purpose and to the content that they wish to communicate (Crossley, 2007).

2.1. What is genre

In 1990, Swales, the accepted leader in genre and move analysis in the field of ESP, defined a genre as a class of communicative events commonly used by the members of a given community who share some set of communicative purposes. Based on Swales' definition, there are particular rules for communication, and these rules are settled based on communicative purpose. For example, the rules for writing social letters are different from rules which are essential for writing novels or theses.

Bloor and Bloor (1993) defined genre as a specific product of a social practice which can be described and taught because of its formal characteristics. Roseberry (1997) defined genre as a property of a text which defines it as a sequence of moves or segments where each move accomplishes some part of the overall communicative purpose of the text. In 1990, Swales (and in Martin, 1984) argued that all genres had essential rules, and that these rules control a set of communicative purposes in specific social situations (cited in Kay and Dudley-Evans, 1998). For Miller (1984), genre was a kind of social action which took place in a specific discourse community. Along the same lines, Hyland (2004) believed that the genre approach has an important effect on teaching writing.

Hyon (1996) suggested a way by means of which genre can be understood as a concept and its scope can be defined. According to Hyon (*Ibid*), the development of genre owed much to three research schools:

1. North American New Rhetoric (NANR) studies: Researchers were interested in the social and ideological significance of genres. The concentration on form was less than the focus on the social context. Most participants in these research studies were Native English Students at university.

2. Australian Systemic Functional Linguistics: Researchers investigated the broad genres of teaching and learning. In systemic functional linguistics, social context and function were as important as text and form. Most subjects for these studies were adult immigrants.

3. English for Specific Purposes (ESP): Researchers were interested in theoretical and pedagogical aspects of language which made genres. Both written and spoken discourses were important for ESP researchers. Learners who had been chosen for genre studies were non-native students of English in university settings.

Bruce (2008) classified genre in two groups: (a) social genre, and (b) cognitive genre. In social genre, texts were classified according their social purposes, but in cognitive genre, the criterion for the classification of texts was the internal organization of writing. Personal letters, novels, and academic articles were examples of social genre. Sequence of events and argue points of view were kinds of rhetorical purposes which were related to cognitive genres.

The differences between social genre and cognitive genre were made more clear in Bruce's own statements (p. 39):

> Scocial genre *refers to* socially recognized constructs according to which whole texts are classified in terms of their overall social purpose. Purpose here is taken to mean the intention to consciously communicate a body of knowledge related to a certain context to a certain target audience . . . . Cognitive genre *refers to* the overall cognitive orientation and internal organization of a segment of writing that realizes a single, more general rhetorical purpose to represent one type of information whitin discourse. Examples of types of general rhetorical purpose relating to cognitive genres are: to recount sequenced events, to explain a process, to argue a point of view, each of which will employ a different cognitive genre. [italics mine]

According Hyland (1999) genre studies had two significant motivations: (a) finding the relationship between language and the context where language was used, and (b) helping students to produce authentic text by introducing to them the accepted moves in writing. In other words, the second purpose was improving literacy education in societies.

As such, genre refers to the totality of the accepted linguistic conventions, practice, style, and restrictions in a given communicative event (i.e., the schematic structure of the discourse in a given community of professionals or otherwise). Therefore, any discussion of genre requires attention to several technical terms. These include genre constellations, genre sets, genre chains, genre networks, genre systems, and subgenres. Each term will be briefly described in the following sections.

2.2. Genre Constellations

In an attempt to clearly define what genre should be taken to mean, Swales (2004) used the term 'genre constellations' as a cover term to include a number of technical terms. As such, the term genre constellations works like a box that contains an enormous range of technical genre-related terms. The

most common terms that are found in this box are genre hierarchies, genre sets, genre chains, genre networks/systems, and subgenre.

2.2.1. Genre hierarchies

The first technical term within genre constellations that Swales (2004) defined is genre hierarchies. In each filed of science (e.g., chemistry, biology, . . .) there are many different forms of genre that junior and professional members of those fields commonly use. In applied linguistics, for instance, such genres as lectures, conference papers, poster presentations, journal articles, book chapters and so on are the most common kinds of genre. In biology, on the other hand, written genres often boil down into forms of writing that are called monograph, flora, or treatment (Swales, 2004).

It is important to note that different fields of science (or professional communities) do not give the same degree of importance to the same form of genre. For example, applied linguists may consider a journal paper as the most prestigeous form of genre while biologists may assume that monographs are the most important form of genre. These differences result in different classifications for genres in terms of importance. This is what swales (2004) refers to as genre hierarchies. Therefore the hierarchy (i.e., ordering of genres in terms of importance) of genres in biology is quite different from that of applied linguistics.

2.2.2. Genre chains

In any field there are different communicative events. For example, one communicative event in applied linguistics may be 'giving a lecture in a conference'. From the start of this communicative event until when it comes to an end, individuals involved in the event may have to use many different forms of genre. For instance, these genres may include:

- Call for papers
- Submission of abstracts
- Evaluation of abstracts
- Submission of the full paper
- Converting the paper into a power point presentation
- Presenting the slides
- Question-answering
- Publishing the paper in conference proceedings

Each step requires its own genre and these genres go together to accomplish the communicative event. Each one functions as a ring in a chain; hence, the

term 'genre chains' (Swales, 2004). The concept of genre chains, therefore, refers to how spoken and written texts cluster together in a given social/communicative context. Fairclough (2003) believed that genre chains are different genres which are regularly linked together and involve systematic transformations from genre to genre. Genre chains link together social events in different social practices, different countries, and different times.

2.2.3. Genre Sets

The totality of the different genres that one individual or members of a given community (of professionals) engages in is referred to as genre sets. Applied linguists, for example, may write books, publish paper, give lectures, present posters, chair conferences, supervise theses, and so forth. Each one of these activities is a genre in its own way, and may consist of its own genre chains. Collectively, however, these genres are called genre sets (Swales, 2004). Swales also argues that in set, genres never stand in isolation. A genre set is what a particular individual engages in, either or both receptively and productively, as part of his or her normal occupational or institutional practice.

2.2.4. Genre Netwroks

Genre networks is the technical term that describes the source(s) from which each genre originates. For example, a book is not the brain child of its author. Rather, the author uses many sources of information to compile his book. Pieces of information from other genres go together in the form of citations, quotations, plagiarism and so on to create a new genre (Swales, 2004). For example, a power point presentation, which is a genre consisting of several slides, does not come out of the blue sky. It comes from the content of another genre—paper, thesis, etc.

Such a practice is very often referred to as intertextuality (Bakhtin, 1986). Intertextuality refers to the kind of genre creation where "each utterance is filled with various kinds of responsive reactions to other utterances of the given sphere of speech communication" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 91). Fairclough (1992) distinguishes between two types of intertextuality:

a) manifest, where the source is overtly mentioned, and
b) constitutive, where the source is kept hidden.

The latter type is also called plagiarism or generic intertextuality (Devitt, 1991). According to Todorov (1990), genres often quite simply come "... from other genres. A new genre is always the transformation of an earlier one, or of

several: by inversion, by displacemt, by combination" (p. 15). Another term used interchangeably by some scholars to refer to genre networks is 'genre systems' (Berkenkotter, 2000).

2.2.5. Subgenres

Within the same genre, there may be different sections. Each section is called a subgenre. In a book, for example, there are three distinct section: the front matter, the body, and the back matter. The front matter itself consists of such pages as cataloguing, title page, preface, etc. The body, in turn, consists of chapters which contain sections in their own right. The back matter, too, consists of references, index, etc. Each of these sections is called a subgenre.

2.3. Bringing it all together

Although the term genre analysis is commonly associated with ESP, it is also a part and parcel of discourse analysis and text analysis. The seminal works by Swales (1981) and Swales (1990) had a great influence on ESP and resulted in genre analysis being associated with ESP. These works, as Dudley-Evans (1994) argued, have in particular "generated a more focused approach to the teaching of academic writing to non-native postgraduate students or young academics learning to write in their subject" (p. 219).

According to Douglas (2000), although Bazerman (1988) and Myers (1990) modified genre analysis by adding the findings of the sociology of science to it, Tarone, Dwyer, Gillette and Icke (1981) should be credited for their use of the term 'genre' for the first time in an ESP context in investigating the use of active/passive forms in papers published in an astrophysics journal. They concluded that in any piece of writing it is the writer's communicative purpose that governs and determines choice of forms at the grammatical and lexical levels (*cf.*, Coulthard, 1994; Douglas, 2000). These show that the approach to genre adopted in ESP or applied linguistics is somewhat different from that in literary criticism where such particular genres as tragedy, comedy or novel are studies (Dudley-Evans, 1994). Dudley-Evans also emphasized that a genre will change and evolve as a result of changes in the communicative goals and rhetorical needs of a community of specialists. This echoed a similar point made by Miller (1984) and Martin (1989). In ESP, therefore, genre emphasizes "established but not necessarily codified conventions" and embraces

1) "style of presentation of content,"
2) "the order of presentation of that content,"
3) "all the myriad rhetorical factors that affect the plausibility for readers of the argument presented," and

4) "the role of the genre within the discourse community that regularly uses it" (Dudley-Evans, 1994, pp. 219-220).

Dudley-Evans (1994, p. 220) further emphasized that although people in ESP are mainly concerned with written text, the fact that:

> . . . most genre studies have been concerned with written text should not, however, be taken to imply that genre analysis is exclusively concerned with written text. Spoken genres, such as the board meeting, the business negotiation, the slide presentation and the inaugural lecture, are just as much of interest. It is the availability and the 'portability' of written text . . . that have made it the main focus of genre analysis.

3. Discussion

A natural conclusion of the argumentation presented by Dudley-Evans (1994) is that an understanding of genres and genre analysis is a much-needed step in guaranteeing success of communication in any setting. Through genre analysis, it is possible to examine the performance of professional communicators and to identify the essential linguistic, cultural, social, and facial therein. Then, training consciousness-raising courses can be developed in which junior communicators can be trained to use these features in their future communication.

The first step in this direction was taken by Bhatia (1993). Bhatia believed that genre analysis is an examination of linguistic performance in academic and professional settings. According to Bhatia, in analysing a genre, there are seven steps to take:

1) putting the text in the situational context which is related to it;
2) Identification of the genre;
3) comprehending the discourse community precisely by clarifying and determing the goal of the genre;
4) collecting a corpus for analysis;
5) having information about the members of that discourse community; and
6) analyzing the linguistic aspects of the corpus by focusing on (a) lexico-grammatical features (or the study of tenses), (b) text patterns, and (c) structural interpretations (or move analysis).

The framework for genre analysis proposed by Bhatia (1993) can be extended to fields other than linguistics where communication is at the center of attention. This can help people to understand the organization of language in different discourse communities. By the use of genre analysis, providing form-function training and corrections for communicators to be used in a variety of communicative settings will be possible.

4. Conclusion

It was argued in this paper that the development of international communication at an ever-increasing rate brought about by a burst of new technologies motivates closer attention to communicative strategies that lead to communication success. It was also argued that one path to successful communication is through the implementation of genre analysis in communicative events. As Atai and Falah (2005) noted, there is enough evidence to suggest that people's knowledge of both linguistic competence and of the appropriate structure of genres and forms are an essential requirement for successful and effective communication not only in verbal form but also in written form. So language teaching programs and classes should not only focus on the teaching of micro-level linguistic components of any communicative event (e.g., words, phrases, sentences) but also on making trainees aware of the macro-level language components (e.g., discourse structure, rhetorical organization).

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