Selecting Genres for Transfer: The Role of Uptake in Students' Antecedent Genre Knowledge

SHARE [http://www.addthis.com/bookmark.php?v=250&username=compforum]

Angela Rounsaville

Abstract: Within composition studies, transfer and rhetorical genre studies have found an especially productive partnership for exploring together whether and in what ways students transfer writing-related knowledge from one context to another. This article continues this synthesis by turning to Anne Freadman's notion of uptake to suggest a more robust understanding of transfer *for writing*. As I will show, uptake foregrounds the role that heterogeneity, selection, and problem-solving play in how literate learners encounter and make sense of new writing tasks at the convergence of prior genre knowledge and current, local genred events. This micro discursive space of uptake is an important site for thinking about transfer in that it is partially through this process that prior genres meet, are transformed, rejected, or imported whole cloth into new rhetorical situations. Ultimately, this article argues that, through uptake, high road transfer is reconceived as a dynamic, problem-solving endeavor where writers can be encouraged to proactively sort through and make selections in and amongst prior genre knowledge.

Across fields that have taken up the challenge of teaching effectiveness that travels beyond a single classroom, transfer has, in many instances, become the go-to term to define the successful application or transformation of knowledge from one domain to another highly distinct and dissimilar one. Composition studies has sought to incorporate this rich array of literature into its own mission of helping students take the knowledges, skills, and strategies that they learn in first-year writing to other college courses, workplaces, and civic and community life. The impetus for this interest in transfer is three-fold. First, "teaching for transfer" shifts first-year writing from a gate-keeping to a gate-opening function. Second, transfer addresses three critical turns within composition studies that challenge the notion of writing as a generalizable skill: theories of situated learning and communities of practice, rhetorical genre theory, and activity theory. Third, it captures our field's interest in writing development and how students develop as writers in that it provides an analytic and a conceptual vocabulary for tracking learning across literacy domains. Coming together as the linchpin in these overlapping drives is how "high road" transfer (Perkins and Salomon) occurs, how we can better teach for it, and what kinds of infrastructure programs can develop to encourage this type of learning.

Seeking to find pedagogical methods and curricula that can teach to the high road transfer of writing-related knowledge, scholars within composition studies are researching possible answers to questions such as: What helps or hinders the transfer of writing-related knowledge? How do we teach for transfer in first-year writing? How do we, as a field, define and operationalize what we mean by "transfer," so that it aligns with what we know about writing and about how students develop as writers? While each of these questions is crucial for furthering studies and discussions of transfer in composition studies, this article suggests that without fully contextualizing writing-related transfer within terms, theories, and intellectual traditions intrinsic to composition studies we struggle to see what is uniquely exciting and uniquely difficult about writing-related transfer. For instance, an under-acknowledged consequence of importing whole-cloth extra-disciplinary theories of transfer to

composition studies has been the ubiquity of the "application" metaphor for organizing research. As I will discuss in later sections, there have been voices in recent years calling for an end to or an extension of this metaphor (Wardle; Nowacek), but efforts to move past such metaphors remain under -theorized. In particular, there remains a dearth of efforts to rethink application models that can be said to grow specifically out of intra-field understandings of writing and writing development, such as those developed within rhetorical genre theory. This is not to say that interdisciplinary efforts are not crucial for sustaining and refreshing transfer-related research—only that the special nature of writing necessitates writing theories.

Within composition studies, transfer and rhetorical genre studies have found an especially productive partnership for exploring together whether and in what ways students transfer writing-related knowledge from one context to another. This article continues this synthesis between transfer studies and writing studies, particularly through rhetorical genre theory, by turning to Anne Freadman's notion of "uptake," developed from speech act theory, to suggest a more robust understanding of transfer *for writing.* As I will show, uptake foregrounds the role that heterogeneity, selection, and problem-solving play in how literate learners encounter and make sense of new writing tasks at the convergence of prior genre knowledge and current, local genred events. This micro-discursive space of uptake is an important site for thinking about transfer in that it is partially through this process that prior genres meet, are transformed, rejected, or imported whole cloth into new rhetorical situations. But more importantly, close scrutiny of this space teaches us about the values, histories, identities, and self-defined rhetorical purposes that surround these genred convergences, which, as suggested in recent studies on prior genre knowledge and transfer, may have more power in guiding and structuring how and what prior writing-related knowledge transfers than the actual repertoire of text types that a student may be traveling with. Ultimately, I argue that, through this added layer of uptake, high-road transfer is reconceived as a dynamic, problem-solving endeavor where writers can be encouraged to proactively sort through and make selections in and amongst a "long, ramified, intertextual memory" (Freadman 48) of prior genre knowledge.

Transfer, Composition Studies, and Rhetorical Genre Studies

Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS) provides a set of terms for thinking about writing-related transfer that not only foreground the role of writing for transfer, but come with an already established theoretical framework for linking current and past genre knowledge with both local and distributed writing activity. To understand the affinity that RGS has with questions of transfer, I first discuss how David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon, perhaps two of the most recognizable names for work on transfer within composition studies, have conceived of key mechanisms and methods for transfer: "high road" and "low road" transfer and "bridging" and "hugging."

"High road" transfer involves the deliberate, mindful abstraction of knowledge, skills, or strategies from one context to be re-localized and successfully leveraged in another, distinct context, and is distinguished by the learner's role in actively seeking connections between prior knowledge and new learning encounters. Unlike "low road" transfer, where knowledge and skills move relatively effortlessly between similar contexts (with the classic example being how driving a car can prepare you for driving a truck), "high road" transfer is not automatic. Words that typically collocate around the term "high road" transfer reveal this: application, effortful, search, active, mindful (Perkins and Salomon). Not only do these terms imply the active nature of "high road" transfer, but they also suggest the difficulty of teaching for and successfully achieving transfer—difficulties that have been recorded often in transfer studies of all types: math and science related, writing related, including transfer between various school and workplace contexts, and so on.

In discussions of teaching for transfer, Perkins and Salomon suggest "bridging" and "hugging" as methods that can help facilitate each of these types of transfer and that often work best synergistically. As expected from these terms, "bridging" refers to methods that aid in "high road" transfer, while "hugging" helps to further exploit reflexive connections made through "low road" transfer. Therefore, for purposes of helping students to make the more dramatic leaps between dissimilar or "far" contexts, bridging methods are vital and include "instruction [that] encourages the making of abstractions, searches for possible connections, mindfulness, and metacognition," as necessary preconditions for the successful application of knowledge in future contexts (Perkins and Salomon). Classroom practices to encourage abstractions, mindfulness, and metacognition have deep histories with composition studies and are at the core of many commonplace practices such as reflective writing, portfolio keeping, and, more recently, teaching declarative writing-related concepts such as discourse community and rhetorical situation in first-year writing. In particular, bridging practices that teach for high road transfer have found special affinity within rhetorical genre theory and genre pedagogy.

Beyond sharing pedagogical goals and methods with theories of transfer developed in educational psychology, RGS also provides useful theoretical language for making transfer theory especially meaningful for writing and how students develop as writers. As I will now discuss, core terms such as typification and recurrence, prior genre knowledge, and genre repertoires all inform questions about how writing and writers moves across different domains, how writing changes, and how writers develop. Furthermore, RGS provides both a theoretical resource and conceptual frame for transfer because genres are frames and "keys to understanding how to participate in the actions of a community" (Miller 39), while also giving traceable empirical evidence for both longitudinal and synchronous study of writing-related transfer.

In "The Life of Genre, the Life of the Classroom," Charles Bazerman provides perhaps the most powerful rationale for how genres can help us to understand the relationship between transfer and how students develop as writers. As Bazerman asserts, "when we travel to new communicative domains, we construct our perception of them beginning with the forms we know" (19). In other words, genres, and in particular "genres [writers] carry," help knit together genre knowledge over time as writers are never without these generic frames as they traverse literacy domains. In fact, as typified responses to recurring rhetorical situations (Miller), genres hold the power to create the illusion of recurrence despite subtle or even major differences between writing tasks. For those of us interested in helping make "high road" transfer part of writing development, it is critical to understand how genre knowledge not only travels with writers, but accrues and shifts over time as new genres are encountered, prior knowledge is transformed, and genre repertoires are both diversified and deepened. Amy Devitt speaks to this dynamic: "The writer moving among locations carries along a set of writing experiences, including the genres acquired in those locations. That set of acquired genres, that genre repertoire, serves as a resource for the writer when encountering an unfamiliar genre" (220). From this perspective, looking to genre, and in particular to prior genre knowledge, allows us to consider what kind of knowledge is being transferred.

Importantly, RGS provides a view of genre and genre knowledge that goes beyond conventions such as format, word choice, and various stylistic cues. While these conventions may trigger genre recognition for novice writers, the genre repertoire that students travel with includes much more than a list of formal features. For instance, Bawarshi, building on Bazerman's notion of genre as the "social organization of cognition" explains how genres compel us to act and write and draw on memory in some ways over others. "Since genres locate all writers within such situated language practices, ideologies, and activities, they enable us to examine more fully . . . the conditions and assumptions that shape the choices writer make when they begin to write" (19). In other words, as writers travel across literacy domains and encounter new rhetorical situations, they not only carry

generic conventions but also the attendant field of practices, ideologies and activities that they have come to associate with that genre over time.

In addition to these core concepts, a series of critical frameworks often accompany discussions of rhetorical genre studies, and I consider these just as integral to productively framing and filling out what we want and believe transfer to mean within composition studies. While I will not provide a detailed review of these complementary constellation of theories, as this article specifically advocates for an even more robust synthesis of intellectual traditions between rhetorical genre theory and writing-related transfer, I would be remiss not to mention these highly valuable theories—activity system and situated learning. Natasha Artevema, who provides a "unified framework" of rhetorical genre theory, activity theory, and situated learning for educators to better understand genre learning, argues that these three theories work together to illuminate genre learning and thus transfer. In discussing this relationship, she notes that "activity theory expands RGS by supplying a higher level of theorization that allows researchers to address and account for issues of conflict, resistance, and change whereas situated learning complements RGS because both consider that the role of context is central" (165). Situated learning, the role of context, and how writers are encultured into new writing systems through practice and activity all inform and complement how rhetorical genre theory understands writing development. For instance, when Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas Huckin discuss the role that genre plays in disciplinary and professional enculturation, situatedness and situated cognition foreground how genres are learned and used in and through the community participation of everyday life. Or, when David Russell connects genres to activity systems to stress the "operationalized ways with words that students and teachers bring to the classroom as their legacy of involvement with other activity systems and other object/motives" (545). Additionally, more focused work to bring this kind of unified theory to studies of writing-related transfer has precedence, as Elizabeth Wardle's overview of three dominant approaches to transfer—the "task," the "individual," and the "context" approach—ultimately promotes a context approach to transfer that brings together activity theory with situated learning. Overall, genre learning and discourse community enculturation (which are linked activities) cannot be understood outside of context-based or situated models of learning.

As evidenced in the previous literature review, RGS provides an avenue to re-contextualizing transfer firmly within the arena of writing studies. In fact, a handful of influential and informative studies on writing and transfer have strongly advocated this union (Reiff et al.; Artevema and Fox; Nowacek). Yet without an overt commitment to and continued elaboration on the special nature of writing-related transfer, we run the risk of organizing research activity around tangentially or even unrelated approaches to transfer.

Challenging the Application Metaphor of Transfer

As part of a general turn in transfer studies broadly and in discipline-specific iterations of transfer research in composition studies more specifically, scholars have begun to actively revise the application metaphors suggested by Perkins and Salomon's early work. For instance, within the broader area of transfer studies, scholars have begun to suggest that a more productive starting place for discussing transfer comes from such perspectives as "reconstruction" and "becoming" (Hager and Hodkinson), which provide new metaphoric implications for learning and teaching. While still seeking to develop methods of teaching for "high road" transfer, a sea change in how we perceive of this process stresses application of prior knowledge as moments of negotiation between new learning environments and individual learners. Tracking this trend within transfer literature, Doug Brent explains that "[i]n reaction to highly limited understandings of transfer, especially laboratory-induced attempts at transfer, much of the more recent transfer literature insists on changing the concept of what transfer is and the contexts in which it is sought." Brent goes on to note how Giyoo Hatano and

James Greeno characterize "the problem not as a failure of transfer but as a failure of metaphor. . . . [R]ather than looking for more or less exact replication of old skills in new surroundings, we should measure transfer by looking at the *productivity of the old skills*, that is, *their ability to facilitate new learning in the new situation*" (409, emphasis added). Introduction to questions of transfer from these points of view invites inquiry into the spaces, processes, and mechanisms that make up moments of negotiation and foreground the interplay of context and the individual learner as a dynamic site of knowledge construction rather than a one-sided attempt at knowledge application.

Paralleling this more general trend in educational psychology to rethink transfer as more than the "mechanical transporting of knowledge" (Brent 404), the field of composition studies has likewise suggested that the transfer of writing-related knowledge is both more layered and more dynamic than what might be implied in the so-called "task" or "individual conception" model (Wardle). Building on recent conversations in educational psychology that reject cognitivist notions of transfer in favor of context notions, which include the situated view, the sociocultural view, and activity theory, and emphasizing that "the basis of transfer is not in the transition of knowledge but in patterns of participatory processes as a part of the social and material context" (Tuomi-Grohn and Engestrom 33-34), Wardle notes that "we would be remiss to focus solely on task- or individual-based conceptions of transfer with little regard for situation and activity" (67). Neglecting context approaches is especially problematic given our field's long-standing commitment to challenging deficit models of writing development and viewing writing within terms set by activity theory and situated learning. In this way, similar shifts in the study of transfer are emerging within composition studies as scholars seek to align how we understand and research for transfer with relevant research and theory on how writing works to mediate social action as a rhetorical, laminated, and situated activity.

While David Smit made his often-cited call for composition studies to engage in more and better research on transfer in 2004, it was not until Wardle's challenge to explicitly name the kinds of transfer theory the field should embrace that the idea of transfer began to coalesce around knowledge attuned to what the field knows about literate activity. Admonishing that "we should attempt to account for the ways in which knowledge and skills are *transformed* across contexts" (69) through the lenses of activity systems theory and communities of practice theory highlights how, when individuals enter into new writing situations, it is the interrelation between the writer and the context (both replete with dynamic trails of history, institution, culture, and systems of activity) that patterns any transition between contexts. I would suggest that Wardle's introduction of King Beach's theories in particular should be seen as a profound moment for how composition scholarship can shape its future understanding of transfer because it seeks to correlate transfer studies with writing. Specifically, through Beach's notions of generalization we start to align transfer theory with consensus understandings of writing as a complex literate activity that develops over time through on-going encounters with new writing and learning situations, although further integration of transfer theory and writing studies could extend and enhance our knowledge-base.

Wardle, referencing Beach, suggests that we consider these moments of transition and use of prior knowledge in new settings as "generalizations." This concept of generalization, "the continuity and transformation of knowledge across various forms of social organization" (Beach 40), as elaborated in Beach's own work, provides five interrelated points about transfer. First, generalization "involves multiple interrelated processes rather than a single procedure." Second, generalization "is never separated or decontextualized from social organization, though [sic] it may become distanced from particular organizations over time." Third, generalization "involves change in both individuals and social organization." Fourth, generalization "is best understood as a set of processes that relate changing social organizations and individuals." And lastly, generalization "consists of the construction of associations among social organizations" (40-41). With regards to the specific transfer or writing-related knowledge, Beach's explication, as Wardle notes, not only correlates with "[a]

more expansive study [into] the nature of writing activities, including other contexts in which students subsequently become involved," but also serves "as a lens to account for the crucial relationships between persons and situations over time" (Wardle, "Understanding" 69-70).

Not only is Beach's notion of generalization helpful in bringing theories of transfer together with those in composition studies, his work on transitions resonates with the field's recent work on transfer and antecedent genre knowledge. In studying transfer (or generalization) Beach suggests that we foreground moments of transition between disparate contexts as a means to better understand "the propagation of knowledge across social space and time through the construction of associations embodied in artifacts, and constituted by continuities, discontinuities, and contradictions" (42). Within composition studies, genre knowledge has become the primary site for not only understanding this propagation of writing-related knowledge but also for naming writing-related transitions as an interface between prior and current genre knowledge. For instance, Rebecca Nowacek's recent emphasis on the ways in which antecedent genre knowledge positions writers to seek similarities across contexts is due in part to the ways in which new genres act as exigencies to evoke "multiple avenues of connection among contexts" (20) when encountering prior genre knowledge. Research by Angela Rounsaville, Rachel Goldberg, and Anis Bawarshi, as well as by Mary Jo Reiff and Anis Bawarshi, demonstrates that as writers travel through school, work, and community life with their prior genre knowledge, the domains with which those genres are most closely associated for the writer travel with her and can inhibit that writer from seeing and acting on the kinds of genred exigencies that Nowacek discusses. Reiff and Bawarshi go on to discuss a specific phenomenon related to this space of transition—"not" genre talk. In these study findings, when trying to make sense of genre change between two writing tasks in a first-year writing course, some students spoke of "not" genres, which Reiff and Bawarshi suggest may be a way of students naming that transitory space between familiar and unfamiliar writing tasks, which may in turn be indicative of important learning moments for writers.

Each of these studies alludes to the ways in which transfer as "recontextualization" implies that "transfer is not only mere application; it is also an act of reconstruction" (Nowacek 25). This claim not only echoes Beach's emphasis on transitions but also his notion of "consequential transitions," where "[k]nowledge is constructed and reconstructed during transitions" (42). For theories of writing related transfer, these transition moments, as we have just seen, have been discussed as the recontextualization or transformation of antecedent genre knowledge as called forth by new genres in new contexts. According to Nowacek, in particular, these moments contain the possibility of students "connecting two previously distinct contexts" (30) via the intertextual nature of genre, as "genres associated with one context—because they are experienced as a constellation of tacit and conscious associations—can cue an individual to make connections with another, previously unrelated context" (28). Therefore elaborating Beach's claim that knowledge is formed and reformed at these interstices, Nowacek cites moments of reconstruction as vital to writing-related transfer, while Reiff and Bawarshi cite "not" genre talk as an in-between space in need of further inquiry. As contributions to Wardle's call for composition studies to operationalize its theory of writing-related transfer, these recent studies add a crucial dimension to the context approaches that she advocates; namely, how important the transition moments that connect prior and current genred spaces are for understanding "high road" transfer of writing-related knowledge.

As Nowacek explains, understanding transfer at the boundary of familiar and unfamiliar genred spaces provides studies of writing-related transfer, and in particular inquiry in the "high road" transfer of writing-related knowledge, with new avenues for understanding "how exactly individuals recognize similarities and differences between contexts" given the "routinized epistemic spaces that genres provide" (17-18). Approaching transfer from this perspective "recognize[s] [how the] multiple avenues of connection among contexts, including knowledge, ways of knowing, identities, and

goals" (20) animate this much sought after activity. Understanding these influences, in turn, provides teachers and learners with fruitful avenues for building curriculum, enhancing existing pedagogies, and pursuing future research. While Nowacek looks at the roles that "ways of knowing," identity, and goals play in moments of transfer, students' "not" genre talk is a similarly crucial intermediary space at the boundary of antecedent genre knowledge and novel writing tasks. Taken together, these findings suggest a need for increased attention to how we conceive of the "mediation between generic boundaries" (Freadman 43) in the transfer of writing-related knowledge.

While there have been clear shifts in how we talk about transfer and important discussions of the metaphoric implications of "transfer" over "reconstruction" or "generalization," there has not been a full theoretical elaboration from terms, theories, or research intrinsic to composition studies. In response, I suggest that we strengthen ties with the rich history of rhetorical genre theory as a way to build theories of transfer from scholarship already within the field. In other words, to rethink metaphors from within rhetorical genre studies not only builds on an intellectual tradition of transfer for writing, but it also provides theoretical insights endemic to explanations and research orientations that are already being deployed to study transfer. Specifically, uptake, as developed by Anne Freadman within rhetorical genre theory, helps us understand how genre knowledge is constructed and reconstructed during moments of transition and transfer. Building this type of intellectual lineage has several benefits. First, it builds sustained connections with discipline-specific ways of knowing that have already begun to theorize transfer for writing. Moreover, working with a field-specific tradition foregrounds the unique dimensions of writing in transfer. As I have discussed, transfer is a phenomenon of interest for all educators, and yet not all educational settings are interested in the same phenomenon of learning. The difficulty with turning and returning to other fields to build theoretical and methodological frameworks for understanding writing-related transfer is that those disciplinary ways of knowing have developed in response to alternate questions and sites of inquiry. This is not to say that we do not want to work interdisciplinarily, but that writing studies itself, and rhetorical genre theory in particular, aligns transfer with what we know about writing. In other words, writing, as a highly complex and diversified activity, requires theories of transfer to be re-contextualized within and through the long history of writing studies to adequately address transfer as it relates to literate activity and how students develop as writers.

Transfer and Uptake

In this section, I discuss what uptake can offer to the recent turn in theories of writing-related transfer. As discussed, this turn challenges application-oriented models of transfer in favor of models that foreground transfer as more complex "boundary-crossing" activities (Wardle; Reiff et al.; Nowacek). In addition, this section illustrates how Anne Freadman's theory of "uptake," as developed in her synthesis of speech act and rhetorical genre theory, gives a theoretical lens and language to build on this current strand of scholarship and conceive of moments of transfer as an ongoing problem-solving practice that involves the selection, translation, and negotiation of both burgeoning and prior genre knowledge at the intersection of memory and current task.

In "Uptake," Freadman responds to J.L Austin's use of the term uptake through the lens of rhetorical genre theory. Austin, working within speech act theory, uses uptake to describe the relationship between an illocutionary and perlocutionary act. For instance, uptake occurs when, under felicitous conditions, an illocutionary statement—an indirect statement that intends to induce action in an interlocutor—results in a perlocutionary effect or consequence. In other words, a statement gets taken up as an action—uptake has occurred and we see that language does things in the world. In "Uptake," Freadman argues that Austin's understanding of uptake minimizes the range of possible prior utterances that are available for selection when turning an illocutionary act into a perlocutionary effect, thereby suggesting that Austin's version of uptake gives the false impression that, under right

conditions, there is one correct and causal uptake of a prior utterance or genre. Rather, "the important thing to note is that uptake depends on a step that is not specified in speech act theory. This is the step in which our uptake selects, defines, or represents its object" (48). For Freadman, the notion that uptake can seamlessly and naturally occur is an ideological sleight of hand. Instead, selection is always at work (albeit not necessarily a conscious selection), which is structured in powerful ways by the space of uptake.

To make this point, Freadman shows how uptake relies heavily on what she calls memory and translation. First, uptake has memory, which indexes an arena of possible choices and must make a series of selections that will delimit it and make it meaningful for the user and for the rhetorical situation. The "long, ramified, intertextual, and intergeneric memories" (40) of uptake fills this space with a more expansive and heterogeneous character than that provided by Austin. Once establishing memory as a critical term for uptake, Freadman goes on to discuss the process of how "our uptake selects, defines, or represents its object." Through an analysis of an Australian court case in which a sentence becomes an execution, Freadman names translation as the principle mechanism as speech acts (genres) move across and are taken up in new locations despite an array of choices and across a range of jurisdictions. Crucially, this is where the process of translation selects from prior experience, as structured and retrieved in memory, and "translates the previous sign into a different language, a different conceptual framework, a different set of assumptions, or . . . a different genre" (43). In addition to the insights that uptake gives regarding the role of memory in genre use, translation provides a specificity and descriptive language to talk about types of inter- and intra-generic moves that occur between prior genre knowledge and current genred events. Ultimately, Freadman's contribution to the role of uptake between utterances or genres is her emphasis on the long memory, sequences, and arrangements of texts that are available for use when crossing generic boundaries. To be specific, uptake "mediates between genres" (44), as a deeply intertextual space that not only translates new genres from memories and repertoires of genre knowledge, but also folds that translation into what is meaningful within that current repertoire through active knowledge construction.

Freadman's work on uptake, genre, and memory as a space of conflicting and discursively informed memory that involves a complex process of selecting and translating prior knowledge has been an important theoretical resource for rhetorical genre scholars interested in understanding more fully what "mediates between genres" and the mechanisms that structure those mediations. For instance, Bawarshi, who has written extensively about uptake, stresses the critical role of memory when defining uptake as "the ideological interstices that configure, normalize, and activate relations and meanings within and between systems of genres, [and which are] *learned recognitions of significance* that over time and in particular contexts become habitual" (653, emphasis added). In other words, prior experience and prior habit come to inform, as complex memories compelled by current exigence, the "knowledge of what to take up, how, and when" (653). Melanie Kill likewise stresses the role of uptake's memory, when speaking of student-teacher interactions, by arguing that "students respond not only to us but also to what their "long, ramified, and intergeneric' memories allow them to anticipate of us" (220). In this way, what Bawarshi calls the "learned recognitions of significance" are relevant for all genre performances—embodied, textual, and so on. This is an important point because it suggests that transfer means more than just the ability to apply one textual convention or strategy to another, dissimilar text-type. Rather, it implies, as Nowacek demonstrates, that identities, ways of knowing, goals, and emotions all play a role in how writers move between genres. More importantly, it shows how these extra-textual aspects of uptake are not additions to genre knowledge, but rather deeply intertwined with how and why writers make sense of and act as they do at genre convergences.

The notion that uptake deals with both text and subjectivity is further developed by Kimberly Emmons in her work "Uptake and the Biomedical Subject," which builds on uptake theory by presenting two interrelated processes of translation: generic and discursive. Generic uptake involves "the selection and translation of typified forms (e.g., testimony) and social roles (e.g., prosecutor and witness) into new discursive situations" (192) and "draw forward previous forms and social organizations that work to secure future roles and responses available to interlocutors" (193). Discursive uptake, on the other hand, involves the translation of "key phrases, rather than patterns of social organization of discursive form" (192). The primary distinction between these two processes is the level of social organization that genres forward. On the one hand, genres carry with them the roles and expectations embedded in large-scale social institutions and are translated and played out as such. On the other hand, genres also have consequences where "dispositional effects [are] more individual than collective [and affects] the internal positioning of the subject" (192). Both of these processes attempt to account for the role of subjectivity in uptake and show how a range of dispositions travel with writers through the intertexual and intergeneric configurations of genres—core themes that have informed, although not explicitly developed in terms of uptake, the transfer research of Driscoll, Wardle, and Bergmann and Zepernick.

Certainly, uptake has become a viable and productive theory for furthering an understanding of genre-in-use as "forms of life" (Bazerman) that accrue and are enacted over time in ways that deal dialogically with the context and the individual. While uptake is becoming an increasingly influential concept in rhetorical genre studies generally, it also facilitates, as I will discuss throughout the remainder of this essay, how composition studies can continue to gain an understanding into the relationship between antecedent genre knowledge and transfer as a dynamic, problem-solving endeavor where writers can be encouraged to proactively sort through and make selections in and amongst a "long, ramified, intertextual memory" of prior genre knowledge. In fact, a number of current studies, additions to those mentioned in the previous paragraph, while not drawing specifically on uptake, nonetheless present claims closely linked to elements of uptake theory. For instance, when Nowacek argues that genres are exigencies that can call forth a range of prior experiences, some helpful and some a hindrance in new writing tasks, she is talking about memory. Clearly, it is important to understand the kind of exigencies and the discursive ecologies that are conjured when students encounter new genres and negotiate how to successfully write in that environment. In addition, as discussed earlier in this article, Reiff and Bawarshi's findings of "not" genre talk are spaces of uptake where writers break down and repurpose genres in ways that either remain whole genres or are reconfigured into a range of usable strategies (329). In fact, Reiff and Bawarshi call for more research into the space of "not" genres as a way to ultimately help students "interrupt the habitual uptakes long enough . . . to critically examine their sources and motivations as well as for students to consider what is permitted and what excluded by these uptakes" (331-32). Articles within this special issue also speak to the importance of uptake as a vital theoretical construct for understanding transfer. For instance, Liane Robertson, Kara Taczak, and Kathleen Blake Yancey's three types of transfer—"assemblage," "remix," and "critical incident"—all seek to understand the relationship between prior genre knowledge and current task through a more in-depth exploration of prototypical uptakes in transfer. In all of these instances, memory, selection, and translation are at the core of how researchers conceive of writing-related transfer, even if there hasn't been sustained and explicit use of this as a theoretical and research framework. This article argues for the explicit and sustained use of uptake for transfer research, and the following section demonstrates one (of many) ways in which uptake can inform this area of inquiry.

Implications of Uptake for Moments of Transition in Transfer

To explore how the language and conceptual frame of uptake might reveal important mechanisms for moments of transition in transfer, this section analyzes how John, a first-year student, discusses his

encounters with a major paper assignment at a large West Coast Research University. In using John's assessment of his first major assignment, I hope to show how the specific analytics of memory, selection, and translation not only link these boundary moments to writing studies, but also how this kind of precise language provides additional clues for how prior genre knowledge and current context meet and interact in transfer.

The following interview exchange between John and a research-team member comes from data collected in a cross-institutional study into how students' antecedent genre knowledge helped or hindered the understanding and successful completion of new writing tasks as they negotiated their first-year writing course.{1} [#note1] The exchange presented here is excerpted from a longer transcript in which John, a first-year student trained at a college preparatory school in an urban setting, discusses his familiarity with, expectations of, and strategies used to make sense of and write a series of composition assignments. The specific assignment referenced here asked John to take a scholarly text, Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet's "Constructing Meaning, Constructing Selves: Snapshots of Language, Gender, and Class from Belten High," and then use this text to identify, discuss, and develop a claim about a community that he was a part of. In the excerpt cited below, the interviewer is asking John about what he expected from this assignment and why he found it difficult.

> Interviewer: What did you think the expectations for that assignment were?
>
> John: I guess there was the introduction to intertextual writing which is a difficult thing if you are not experienced with it, you have to deal with multiple writings from multiple angles and it gets sort of tautological, so you have to formulate a claim then use your in-class readings. What was difficult about that is we were able to draw on real world experience like our own personal views about whatever our topic was, and it was really hard to integrate real world experience in with academic writing. [It was difficult] because it is not even done in academic writing. I ended up kind of separating the two too much. I think my teacher was little bit concerned that there wasn't enough intermingling of the textual arguments and the real world experience, which I think is validated, I just am not sure how to do it really. There is no precedent for that.
>
> Interviewer: Have you ever been asked to synthesize those two kinds of experiences?
>
> John: Like first hand, ethnographic stuff, and integrate English academics, taking about really abstract things? You wouldn't relate them. I don't know what academic group would relate those two things, so there is no framework for it really. Although I guess it is good to have a freshman engaged in their own lives . . . because it gives them something to latch on to. But in terms of what you would write in graduate school, it's probably not relevant. No one in graduate school is writing like that.
>
> Interviewer: Can you go into a little more detail about what was difficult about that?
>
> John: Well, when you have personal experience there is no way to evaluate what is important and what isn't. I mean academia provides this system of evaluating what is important and what should be discarded and your own life probably isn't [important]. [With that] you are working in a vacuum. And what I would read, like we would do peer review, I would be bored with other people's stuff because it was about their lives, and I am sure they were bored with mine. The academic stuff just didn't seem to apply to peoples' individual lives. It was a problem of scale mostly, a problem of magnitude.

If transfer is the successful application of prior knowledge to a new learning situation, John's exchange here seems like a failed account of the transfer of writing-related knowledge. John is clear about his lack of prior experience with this first major paper assignment—which involved using personal evidence to support and illustrate claims made from a scholarly text. This assignment—likely quite typical for FYC—stumps John for several reasons. First, according to John, there is no precedent for what he is being asked to write and, as a result, he has difficulty figuring out how to organize his paper and how to integrate the textual arguments from class readings with his real world experience. John is adamant about this lack of precedent and draws on his prior knowledge of what "counts" as academic writing to explain the strangeness of this assignment and perhaps to provide a rationale for his difficulty with accomplishing what his teacher expected. For instance, John has a relatively extended explanation of why this type of genre, from his perspective and experience, is a "mutt genre" (Wardle). Graduate students would never write like this. Academic writing requires higher caliber and more generalizable evidence (although it's not clear what exactly this looks like from John's explanation). Content should appeal to a broad audience and have the scale and scope to "interest" a larger swath of readers. In other words, the expectations of this assignment—to develop a claim by integrating personal experience with a scholarly article—doesn't appear to John to be a genre at all, at least not in the ways that he has conceived of academic writing.

From the perspective of high-road transfer as application, John's prior knowledge seems to hinder his entrance into this new writing situation. Regardless of the possible "mutt genre" status of this writing assignment, John's prior genre knowledge is a constraint, although he does note that allowing students to write about themselves can give them something to latch onto. Importantly, though, John is making connections between this current task and his prior knowledge, and he has certainly abstracted a notion of what writing is from his genre repertoire to make sense out of this situation. While his prior knowledge inhibits him from adequately accomplishing this assignment (negative transfer), a closer look at this micro-discursive space of transfer through the lens of uptake suggests an alternate role for John's prior genre knowledge.

Freadman's theory of uptake provides two perspectives on transfer that application models overlook: transfer involves selections from heterogeneous and even contradictory memories; this space between genres involves translation. As previously discussed, uptake is a space of intergeneric and intertextual memory. In John's interview recollection of his first major writing assignment in FYC, we can identify several strands of memory that were evoked and made available for selection when trying to "draw on real world experience like our own personal views about whatever our topic was, and . . . to integrate real world experience in with academic writing." Part of what makes uptake a helpful concept for understanding the transfer of writing-related knowledge is that it stresses the interstices between genres and tells us that uptake mediates this process. Being able to locate what about a new genre or new writing task connects with prior experience provides a starting point for understanding how prior knowledge is being used in a new situation. Uptake gives that lens and language. In John's case, his prior knowledge about evidence becomes a critical arena to understand this shift in genre expectations because of the nature of the current writing situation. Specifically, the most novel and unusual aspect of this new writing task seems to be use of evidence, which John is quick to note differs dramatically from how he conceives of the role and purpose of evidence in academic writing. In this way, John is trying to reconcile his teacher's request that he use personal evidence with his previous experiences with academic evidence. In this example, "what counts as evidence" and "how evidence should be used" is the distinguishing perspective that links the current writing task with prior memories and is the "place," the uptake, where the contexts between prior genre knowledge and current task mingle and are translated.

Given that uptake "mediates between genres" (Freadman 44), identifying sticking points to transfer—such as the use of evidence—is a powerful way to hone in on the strands and repository of memory

that a writer uses to makes meaning out of a new genre or writing task. For instance, drawing from John's discussion of why his FYC assignment proved difficult to complete, he presents a range of rationales—from his "long, ramified, intertextual, and intergeneric memories" (Freadman 40)—which could be traced to other, prior or synchronous contexts and locations that populate his writing life. When talking about "evidence," John presents the following trails that he, researchers, and teachers could follow when trying to track where his norms about writing stem from. The following list comes directly from John's interview and indicates a series of memories that were brought to the fore in his current struggle with evidence in academic writing.

- distinctions between "ethnographic stuff" and "English academics;"
- how graduate students write;
- the types of evidence typically used in academic writing and the role that that evidence should play in creating arguments;
- the role of scholarly texts to "provide this system or evaluating what is important and what should be discarded" when choosing evidence;
- how the criteria of "magnitude" or "scale" of evidence determines writing quality and relevance.

Nowacek argues that genres are exigencies that spur writers to recall a variety of memories that connect to a writer's identity, goals, and ways of knowing. The list cited above certainly exemplifies how past experiences serve as platforms and interpretive frames for solving the problem of new and unfamiliar genres and are recalled precisely because of the task at hand. As a theory, uptake not only gives language to this phenomenon, but also asks us to trace and track those memories within textual and generic systems that are grounded in the students' own writing logic. Moreover, uptake characterizes these moments of remembering, translation, and selection as problem- solving endeavors that work specifically with the stuff of writing and the stuff of literate activity—both local and distributed. In other words, uptake specifies boundary crossing in writing-related transfer of an active, meaning-making site where writers work through and select amongst a range of experiences and knowledges that have been called forth as a result of the unique convergence between prior genre knowledge and current, local genred events.

Having the critical language of uptake to talk about the processes of transfer in these boundary moments has several implications for the research and teaching of writing-related transfer. First, in taking up Wardle's admonition that composition studies has neglected to develop and operationalize its own theory of transfer, this article, through synthesizing uptake, antecedent genre knowledge, and transfer, further specifies the field's growing theories of transfer by aligning them more closely with what we already presume about literate activity and how students develop as writers. Second, uptake can be used for research purposes in studies of transfer to fully capture what is occurring in students' literate lives, enhancing a combination of longitudinal and synchronous studies with micro-studies of uptake both over and across time and adding to our field's repertoire of types of research most helpful for understanding transfer. Lastly, uptake offers alternative methods for how to incorporate prior genre knowledge into first-year writing.

With regards to teaching, uptake suggests new directions for the uses of prior genre knowledge. To date, the most comprehensive response to how to use students' prior genre knowledge as an aid to transfer has been Amy Devitt's in *Genres of Writing.* According to Devitt, antecedent genres can work as primers for future genre use. As she argues, "if we ask students to write analytic essays in first-year composition, that genre will be available for them to draw from when they need to write a causal analysis in their history class, a report at work, or a letter to the editor." Devitt continues, "selecting genres with the most potential as antecedent genres for a particular student population while teaching how to learn genres . . . may be the most responsible reaction" (204-05). In this

approach, transfer occurs as a consequence of the student having both the "right" antecedent genres that approximate future ones and a theoretical understanding of genre as social action. However, while attention to genres that most closely align between diverse writing situations does take into account the need for learners to see similarities across contexts, this theory of transfer underestimates how the selection of prior genre knowledge occurs for novice writers in the face of these new situations. In other words, it assumes that if novices are given the "right" genre, they will both naturally select it when they encounter a new situation and abstract from it the necessary rhetorical strategies. Thus, what is missing in this account is how novice writers select for themselves the relevant genre for a new writing situation. Uptake helps us in this regard.

Notes

1. During the 2006-2007 academic year, research teams at the University of Tennessee and University of Washington conducted a cross-institutional study of FYW students' use of prior genre knowledge. The interview reported on here came from part of the study that focused on students enrolled in sections of English 131 (a required first-year writing course) at the University of Washington that sought to determine what types of discursive resources, especially prior genre knowledge, student writers bring to college and how students draw on these resources in the process of negotiating between and participating in new academic writing contexts. In surveys, we asked students about the types of writing and writing experiences encountered before coming to the University of Washington. In addition, in face-to-face discourse-based interviews we asked students about their first writing experiences in 131 and what, if any, prior writing these experiences reminded them and what they drew on to complete these tasks. At the University of Washington, the co-investigators are Anis Bawarshi, Cathryn Cabral, Sergio Casillas, Rachel Goldberg, Jennifer Halpin, Megan Kelly, Melanie Kill, Shannon Mondor, and Angela Rounsaville. At the University of Tennessee, co-investigators are Mary Jo Reiff, who initiated the study, and Bill Doyle. (Return to text.) [#note1-ref]

Works Cited

Austin, J.L. *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1962. Print.

Artemeva, Natasha. "Toward a Unified Social Theory of Genre Learning." *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 22.2 (2008): 160-185. Print.

Artemeva, Natasha, and J. Fox. "Awareness Versus Production: Probing Students' Antecedent Genre Knowledge." *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 24.4 (2010): 476-515. Print.

Bawarshi, Anis. *Genre and the Invention of the Writer: Reconsidering the Place of Invention in Composition*. Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 2003. Print.

---. "Taking up Language Differences in Composition." *College English* 68.6 (2006): 652-56. Print.

Bawarshi, Anis S., and Mary Jo Reiff. *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy*. Parlor P, 2010. Print.

Bazerman, Charles. "The Life of Genre, The Life of the Classroom." *Genre and Writing: Issues, Arguments, Alternatives.* Ed. Wendy Bishop and Hans Ostrom. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1997. 19-26. Print.

Beach, King. "Consequential Transitions: A Developmental View of Knowledge Propagation Through Social Organization." *Between School and Work: New Perspectives on Transfer and Boundary-crossing.* Ed. Terrtu Tuomi-Grohn and Yrjo Engestrom. Amsterdam: Emerald Group Publishing, 2003: 39-61. Print.

Beaufort, Anne. *College Writing and Beyond : A New Framework for University Writing Instruction.* Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 2007. Print.

Berkenkotter, Carol, and Thomas Huckin. "Rethinking Genre from a Sociocognitive Perspective." *Written Communication* 10.4 (1993): 475-509. Print.

Bergmann, Linda, and Janet Zepernick. "Disciplinarity and Transference: Students' Perceptions of Learning to Write." *WPA Writing Program Administration: Journal of the Council of Writing Program Administrators* 31.1-2 (2007): 124-49. Print.

Brent, Doug. "Transfer, Transformation, and Rhetorical Knowledge: Insights from Transfer Theory." *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 25.4 (2011): 396-420. Print.

Carroll, Lee Ann. *Rehearsing New Roles : How College Students Develop as Writers.* Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2002. Print.

Devitt, Amy J. *Writing Genres.* Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2008. Print.

Devitt, Amy J. "Transferability and Genres." *Locations of Composition.* Ed. C. Keller and C. Weisser. New York: State U of New York P, 2007: 215-227. Print.

Driscoll, Dana Lynn. "Connected, Disconnected, or Uncertain: Student Attitudes about Future Writing Contexts and Perceptions of Transfer from First Year Writing to the Disciplines." *Across the Disciplines* 8.2 (2011). Web. 10 May 2012 <http://wac.colostate.edu/atd/articles/driscoll2011/index.cfm [http://wac.colostate.edu/atd/articles/driscoll2011/index.cfm]>

Emmons, Kimberly. "'All on the List': Uptake in Talk about Depression." *Rhetoric of Health Care: A New Disciplinary Inquiry.* Ed. Barbara Heifferon and Stuart Brown. Hampton P, 2008. 159-80.

---. "Uptake and the Biomedical Subject." *Genre in the Changing World.* Ed. Charles Bazerman, Adair Bonini, and Debora Figueiredo. West Lafayette, IN: Parlor P, 2009. 134-57.

Freadman, Anne. "Anyone for Tennis?" *Genre and the New Rhetoric.* Ed. Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway. London: Taylor and Francis, 1994. 43-66

---. "Uptake." *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre: Strategies for Stability and Change.* Ed. Richard M. Coe, Lorelei Lingard, and Tatiana Teslenko. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton P, 2002. 39-53. Print.

Hager, Paul. "Moving Beyond the Metaphor of Transfer of Learning." *British Educational Research Journal* 35.4 (2009): 619-638. Print.

Hatano, Giyoo, and James K. Greeno. "Commentary: Alternative Perspectives on Transfer and Transfer Studies." *International Journal of Educational Research* 31.7 (1999): 645-54. Print.

Jamieson, Kathleen. "Antecedent Genre as Rhetorical Constraint." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 61.4 (1975): 406-415. Print.

Kill, Melanie. "Acknowledging in the Rough Edges of Resistance: Negotiation of Identities for First-Year Composition." *College Composition and Communication* 58.2 (2006): 213-35. Print.

Miller, Carolyn. "Genre as Social Action." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70.2 (2009): 151-67. Print.

Nowacek, Rebecca. *Agents of Integration :Understanding Transfer as a Rhetorical Act.* Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2011. Print.

Perkins, David. "Teaching for Transfer." *Educational Leadership* 46.1 (1988): 22. Print.

Perkins, David, and Gavriel Salomon. "Transfer of Learning." *International Encyclopedia of Education.* 2nd ed. Oxford: Pergamon P, 1992. Web. <http://learn-Web.harvard.edu/alps/thinking/docs/traencyn.htm [http://learn-Web.harvard.edu/alps/thinking/docs/traencyn.html]>

Prior, Paul. *Writing/Disciplinarity: A Sociohistoric Account of Literate Activity in the Academy*. New York: Routledge, 1998. Print.

Reiff, Mary Jo, and Anis Bawarshi. "Tracing Discursive Resources: How Students Use Prior Genre Knowledge to Negotiate New Writing Contexts in First-Year Composition." *Written Communication* 28.3 (2011): 312-37. Print.

Robertson, Liane, Kara Taczak, and Kathleen Blake Yancey. "A Theory of Prior Knowledge and Its Role in College Composers' Transfer of Knowledge and Practice." *Composition Forum* 26 (2012). Web.

Rounsaville, Angela, Rachel Goldberg, and Anis Bawarshi. "From Incomes to Outcomes: FYW Students' Prior Genre Knowledge, Meta-Cognition, and the Question of Transfer." *WPA Writing Program Administration: Journal of the Council of Writing Program Administrators* 32.1 (2008): 97-112. Print.

Russell, David. "Rethinking Genre in School and Society: An Activity Theory Analysis." *Written Communication* 14.4 (1997): 504-54. Print.

Salomon, Gavriel. "Rocky Roads to Transfer: Rethinking Mechanism of a Neglected Phenomenon." *Educational Psychologist* 24.2 (1989): 113-42. Print.

Smit, David. *The End of Composition Studies*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2004. Print.

Tardy, Christine M. *Building Genre Knowledge*. West Lafayette, IN: Parlor P, 2009. Print.

Tuomi-Grohn, Terttu, and Yrjo Engestrom, eds. *Between School and Work: New Perspectives on Transfer and Boundary Crossing (Advances in Learning and Instruction).* Amsterdam: Emerald Group Publishing, 2003. Print.

Wardle, Elizabeth. "'Mutt Genres' and the Goal of FYC: Can We Help Students Write the Genres of the University?" *College Composition and Communication* 60.4 (2009): 765-89. Print.

---. "Understanding 'Transfer' from FYC: Preliminary Results of a Longitudinal Study." *WPA Writing Program Administration: Journal of the Council of Writing Program Administrators* 31.1-2 (2007): 65-85. Print.

SHARE [http://www.addthis.com/bookmark.php?v=250&username=compforum]