Critical Genre Analysis

Genre theory has focused primarily on the analysis of genres, with some attention to the contexts in which they are produced, interpreted, and used to achieve specific objectives, often giving the impression as if producing genres is an end in itself, rather than a means to an end. The result of this focus is that there has been very little attention paid to the ultimate outcomes of these genre-based discursive activities, which are more appropriately viewed as academic, institutional and professional actions and practices, which are invariably non-discursive, though often achieved through discursive means. Critical Genre Analysis as a theory of interdiscursive performance develops analysis of textualisation more centrally towards a theory of contextualisation to propose an approach to a more critical and deeper understanding of interdiscursive professional actions. It is an attempt to analyse discourse as professional practice as objectively and rigorously as possible using a multiperspective and multidimensional methodological framework, taking into account interdiscursive aspects of genre construction to make it increasingly explanatory to demystify interdiscursive performance in a range of professional communication contexts.

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Critical Genre Analysis
Investigating interdiscursive performance in professional practice

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Preface

Critical Genre Analysis: Investigating Interdiscursive Performance in Professional Practice reflects my engagement with, and understanding of, genre theory with particular emphasis on the analysis of professional discourse and its application to English for professional communication.

My view of genre, as presented in my earlier work Analysing Genre: Language Use in Professional Settings (1993), had its primary focus on linguistic and rhetorical analysis, which is still considered one of the most popular and effective frameworks to analyse academic and professional genres for application to English for specific purposes, and more appropriately, English for professional communication.

In my later work, Worlds of Written Discourse: A Genre-Based View (2004), I decided to move away from pedagogic applications, first to focus on the world of professions, and second, to be able to see as much of the elephant as possible, as the saying goes, rather than only a part of it. I believe that all frameworks of discourse and genre analysis offer useful insights about specific aspects of language use in typical contexts, but most of them, on their own, can offer only a partial view of complete genres, which are essentially multidimensional in nature. Therefore, it is only by combining various perspectives and methodological frameworks that one can have a more complete view of the elephant, as it were. Hence, there was a need to combine methodologies, which made me propose a multidimensional and multiperspective framework for genre analysis, which I called a three-space model for the analysis of written discourse.

Critical Genre Analysis (CGA), as proposed in the present volume, is an attempt to develop genre theory beyond the analyses of semiotic resources used in professional genres in order to understand and account for professional practices or actions, rather than just focusing on professional discourses used in typical academic and professional contexts. An important aspect of this analysis is that in order to understand professional actions of members of specialist communities, which include corporations, institutions and other professional organizations, it focuses as much on generic constructs as on professional practices; as much on what is explicitly or implicitly said in and through genres as on what is not said; and as much on socially recognized communicative purposes, as on ‘private intentions’ (Bhatia, 1995) that professional writers tend to incorporate.
in their typical and not-so typical responses. In CGA, therefore, no professional, institutional or organizational practices are assumed but negotiated interdiscursively, and they often seem to be in a constant struggle between competing interpretations and interests. CGA thus, with its focus on practice, considers individual members of professional organizations, though bound by their common goals and objectives, as reflecting considerable flexibility to incorporate 'private intentions' within the scope of professionally shared values, genre conventions and professional cultures.

Critical Genre Analysis thus combines several unique features. First, it traces the development of genre theory from a predominantly lexicogrammatical and rhetorical analysis of genres towards a more interdiscursive and critical analysis of genres encouraging a better understanding of, and accounting for, specific professional practices. Second, it tends to encourage a more comprehensive, and thus effective, procedure for the study of professional practices, which otherwise are often discussed and explained through organizational, management and other institutional theories (see, Grant et al., 1998, 2001, 2004; Philips et al., 2004). As a result, this book presents a complementary methodological alternative in the form of a genre-based critical analysis of professional, organizational and institutional practices. Third, it indicates a development of genre theory from a purely ESP- or EPC-oriented pedagogic application to a more critical engagement, leading to demystification of the realities of the professional world. Finally, it argues for a multidimensional and multiperspective methodological framework to understand, analyse and account for professional and academic genres, professional practices, and disciplinary and professional cultures as comprehensively as possible.

At a more theoretical level, Critical Genre Analysis creates a valuable research space for the development of a more comprehensive and delicate system of interdiscursivity within the framework of conventional genre theory, which has not been sufficiently explored in current literature. Moreover, it underpins the importance of a multidimensional and multiperspective view of genre analysis, which, in my view, offers significant potential for the future development of genre studies. However, I must reiterate that this reflective account represents a subjective and very much personal view of genre theory as interdiscursive performance.

The book thus develops further the currently popular genre analytical framework to investigate interdiscursively the world of professions, focusing in particular on a multiperspective view of professional discourse, in an attempt to seek more comprehensive and in-depth responses to some of the key questions that have been the focus of my work over the past several years, some of which include the following:

- Why do professionals write the way they do?
- What is the nature of their professional objectives?
- What is the role of language in the achievement of such objectives?
- What makes such communication possible, and pragmatically successful, in achieving their professional objectives?
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- Who contributes ‘what’, ‘when’ and ‘how’ in the process of such discursive constructions?
- What other discourses and genres are interdiscursively appropriated in the construction of such professional genres?

The book, therefore, has three key features:

A It is an attempt to account for the interdiscursive aspects of professional genres.
B It makes a crucial distinction between the discursive and professional practice of specialists engaged in the creation, dissemination and exploitation of disciplinary knowledge to achieve their professional objectives.
C It favours a multiperspective theoretical framework, arguing for the integration of various perspectives on, and methods available for, the study of discursive and professional practices in specific professional contexts.

Drawing on the notion of critical theory, CGA thus develops the capacity to demystify, understand, explain, and account for professional practices, in an attempt to investigate why and in what way members of professional communities create, disseminate and consume specialized knowledge and exploit available semiotic resources and modes of communication to achieve their specific objectives.

I hope the book will be a useful account of the development of genre theory from its earliest conception to the present-day critical analysis of academic, professional, media as well as other public genres. It will be of particular interest to those academics and researchers from a wide range of disciplinary affiliations, such as business, management, organisational, corporate and professional communication, who share an interest in the study of discourse and genre analysis. The book also attempts to redefine applied linguistics by extending its boundaries beyond language teaching (i.e., English for specific purposes), by incorporating English for professional communication, Translation Studies and Information Designing within its scope.

References


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Part I

Overview