

WORLDS OF WRITTEN DISCOURSE

A GENRE-BASED VIEW

书面语篇的世界

体裁研究

VIJAY K. BHATIA 著

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语篇研究

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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

书面语篇的世界: 体裁研究 / (英) 巴蒂亚 (Bhatia, V. K.) 著.

—上海: 上海外语教育出版社, 2008

(外教社21世纪语言学新发展丛书)

ISBN 978-7-5446-0847-3

I. 书… II. 巴… III. 体裁—研究—英文

IV. H052

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字 (2008) 第059582号

图字: 09-2006-806号

Originally published by Continuum International Publishing Group in 2004.

This edition is licensed for distribution and sale in the People's Republic of China only, excluding Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao, and may not be distributed and sold elsewhere.

本书Continuum国际出版集团授权上海外语教育出版社出版,

仅限在中华人民共和国境内销售。

出版发行: 上海外语教育出版社

(上海外国语大学内) 邮编: 200083

电 话: 021-65425300 (总机)

电子邮箱: bookinfo@sflep.com.cn

网 址: <http://www.sflep.com.cn> <http://www.sflep.com>

责任编辑: 梁晓莉

印 刷: 上海外语教育出版社印刷厂
经 销: 新华书店上海发行所
开 本: 1000×1400 1/16 印张 15.25 字数 330 千字
版 次: 2008 年 6 月 第 1 版 2008 年 6 月 第 1 次印刷
印 数: 3 100 册

书 号: ISBN 978-7-5446-0847-3 / H · 0364
定 价: 39.00 元

本版图书如有印装质量问题,可向本社调换

Continuum

The Tower building, 11 York Road, London, SE1 7NX
15 East 26th Street, New York, NY 10010

First published in 2004 by Continuum

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 08264 5445 3 (hardback) 08264 5446 1 (paperback)

Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

出版说明

“外教社21世纪语言学新发展丛书”是上海外语教育出版社在新世纪为广大外语教师和研究者策划推出的又一套精品原版图书。

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Acknowledgements

A book of theory like this one essentially represents the work of a lifetime: a reflection of one's thinking and interaction with colleagues, fellow researchers, students and a number of other professionals one comes in contact with, either face-to-face in conferences, or indirectly through their published work. Considering the immense contribution that all such people have made to my thinking and work, I find it impossible to express my gratitude to these members of the precious discourse community that I have interacted with in the last several years. All of them in a number of ways have made a contribution to this book. It is impossible to name each one of them individually, but I would like to mention some of them.

I owe my greatest debt of gratitude to Chris Candlin, who has contributed to my thinking in a number of ways, as a colleague, friend, co-researcher, co-teacher and as one of the editors of the series. I distinctly remember numerous occasions before, during and after the MAESP classes discussing with him intricacies of genre analysis. During the period that we worked together at City University of Hong Kong, we collaborated in research, teaching and other professional activities, and it is difficult for me to specify explicitly his influence on my thinking and work. It certainly has been more than I can specify, and will be visible in several ways throughout this work. Equally important is the influence of John Swales on my thinking and work in a more general sense. I have benefited most from my interactions with them. My special thanks are also due to Srikant Sarangi, as the other editor of the series, whose detailed comments on the draft version were extremely helpful.

I also owe gratitude to Jan Engberg with whom I have had numerous discussions on my concept of 'genre colonies' during my several visits to Aarhus. He was always a willing and enthusiastic participant in discussions and contributor to my thinking in most aspects of genre analysis. In addition to these I would like to thank Anna Trosborg for offering me the Valeux visiting professorship, which made it possible for me to visit Aarhus several times and have interactions with colleagues, researchers and friends at Aarhus Business School. I am also thankful to my colleagues John Flowerdew and Bertha Do-Babcock for reading through the draft version and for giving comments on it.

I would also like to offer special thanks to my students on 'Discourse Variation in Professional Communities', who were the first guinea pigs for many of the ideas in the book when these were still in the process of development. Their portfolios of 'dirty analyses' of hundreds of texts were often interesting confirmations of a number of my ideas and beliefs. In particular, I would like to mention Jane Lung who never got tired of participating in my classes, giving reactions to my analyses, and reading through my drafts.

I am especially grateful to Aditi, the most recently initiated member of the professional discourse community, who not only read all the earlier drafts, but also proofread the subsequent version of the book with great enthusiasm and patience.

And last but not least, I am very grateful to Archana and Astha for being very supportive of my work and putting up with my tedious and annoying schedule for so many years. I would not have survived without their support.

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Introduction

Genre theory in the past few years has contributed immensely to our understanding of the way discourse is used in academic, professional and a variety of other institutional contexts; however, its development has been quite understandably constrained by the nature and design of its applications, which have invariably focused on language teaching and learning, or communication training and consultation. In such narrowly identified and restricted contexts, one often tends to use simplified and idealized genres. The real world of discourse, in contrast to this, is complex, dynamic, versatile and unpredictable, and often appears to be confusing and chaotic. These aspects of the real world have been underplayed in the existing literature on genre theory and practice. As a consequence, we often find a wide gap between genre analyses of texts in published literature, emphasizing the integrity and purity of individual genres, and the variety of rather complex and dynamic instances of hybridized genres that one tends to find in the real world. This tension between the real world of written discourse and its representation in applied genre-based literature, especially in the context of the present-day academic, professional and institutional world, is the main theme of this book.

The book addresses this theme from the perspectives of four rather different worlds: the *world of reality*, which is complex, ever changing and problematic; the *world of private intentions*, where established writers appropriate and exploit generic resources across genres and domains to create hybrid (mixed or embedded) forms, or to bend genres; the *world of analysis*, which proposes a multidimensional and multi-perspective framework to explore different aspects of genre construction, interpretation and exploitation; and finally the *world of applications*, where we focus on the implications of this view of genre theory, interpreting applied linguistics rather broadly in areas other than ESP and language teaching. Each of these worlds forms the basis of each of four sections of the book. In addition, there is the introductory section, which consists of the first chapter, which provides an overview of the field and proposes a four-space genre-based model of analysis of written discourse.

The overview in Chapter 1 claims that the present work in genre analysis has been the result of a systematic development of discourse

analysis, which has gone through three main stages of 'textualization of lexico-grammar', 'organization of discourse' and 'contextualization of discourse'. Based on this historical development of genre theory, the chapter then proposes a four-space model of genre analysis, which looks at language as text, language as genre, language as professional practice and language as social practice.

The following two chapters then look at the real world of written discourse. The main argument is that the complexity of the real world can be viewed in terms of two rather different but related views of the world; one looks at genres within specific disciplinary domains, highlighting disciplinary differences within specific genres, whereas the other considers genre relationships across disciplinary domains, highlighting similarities across disciplines. The first one thus focuses on individual genres within disciplines, whereas the second one considers constellations of genres, which can be seen as 'genre colonies' across disciplinary boundaries. Both these views of the real world of discourse are useful for a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of the real world of written discourse.

Section three incorporates Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 explores a further dimension of written discourse which distinguishes genre construction, interpretation and use based on 'socially recognized' conventions from a careful 'exploitation' or 'manipulation' of shared genre conventions. Taking this view, on the one hand we find a range of genres in a variety of interacting relationships with one another, unfolding rich and often complex patterns of interdiscursivity, whereas on the other hand we find expert members of professional cultures exploiting this richness to create new forms of discourse, often to serve their 'private intentions' within the constructs of socially recognized communicative purposes as realized through specific genres. The chapter also takes a closer look at two of the many interesting examples of generic appropriation and conflicts, the first from the context of fundraising, where generic resources are appropriated from the discourse of marketing, creating conflicts between the corporate and the philanthropic cultures, and the second from legislative writing from two rather distinct legal systems, where two different socio-legal contexts coming in contact with each other create potential conflicts in the interpretation of similar genres. The chapter thus introduces greater complexity within the tactical space, leading to the appropriation of linguistic resources across genres, often encouraging expert writers to exploit conventions to 'bend' genres to their own advantage, sometimes giving rise to conflicts in generic interpretation. This also results in the creation of hybrid genres (both mixed and embedded).

These manipulations of established conventions raise legitimate questions about the integrity of genres and the extent of freedom that professional writers have when they choose to bend generic norms and conventions in order to create new forms. This brings into focus the underlying tension between 'generic integrity', 'generic appropriation' and 'generic creativity', which lies at the very centre of applied genre theory. Chapter 5 highlights the fact that 'generic integrity' is not something which is static or 'given', but something which is often contestable, negotiable and developing, depending upon the communicative objectives, nature of participation, and expected or anticipated outcome of the generic event. The chapter also focuses on two other related aspects of genre theory, the relationship between professional genres and expertise in particular professional fields, and how expert professionals acquire such expertise in their specialist fields and what role genre knowledge plays in this acquisition.

The emerging picture thus looks very much more complex and dynamic than what we had been familiar with in typical genre-based analyses of professional discourse. To investigate such a world, we need to have an equally complex, multidimensional and multi-perspective model of genre analysis. The next section, incorporating Chapter 6, is an attempt to provide a possible answer to the issues raised and proposes a multi-perspective and multidimensional framework for extending the theory and scope of genre analysis in an attempt to see 'the whole of the elephant', as they say, rather than approaching it from any specific point of view for a partial view. The chapter also illustrates the use of such a framework by undertaking analysis of a real text, highlighting some of the advances that the proposed framework claims.

The final section of the book takes up some of the implications of genre theory and identifies specific areas of application. In the context of applications, there is an attempt to give applied linguistics a much broader interpretation than language teaching and learning. In a similar manner, ESP is interpreted to cover language learning at work, either as part of what Lave and Wenger (1991) called *Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, or as communication training in the context of specific workplace practices.

With the rapid pace of economic development in recent years, the world has become a much smaller place; socio-political boundaries are being consistently undermined in an attempt to create global markets, which have created opportunities for interaction across linguistic boundaries. This development has created contexts where translation and new forms of information and document design have assumed a much greater importance than at any time in the history of our

civilization. Genre theory, as part of its objective to understand language use, has a valid contribution to make in this area as well. Thus teaching of language is no longer seen as an end in itself; it is increasingly seen as a means of acquiring professional expertise associated and integrated with the discursive practices of the workplace and professional cultures, whether they relate to the construction and interpretation of professional documents, designing of information through the new media, or translation across languages and cultures. In this sense, genre theory has become increasingly popular and powerful in the last few years.

In order to cope with these demands in broadly interpreted applied linguistics, the tools for analysing language are also becoming much more comprehensive and hence powerful in two ways at least. On the one hand, advancement in the field of computational linguistics has made it possible to process large corpora of language use and draw more reliable conclusions. On the other hand, interdisciplinary interests in the use of language have encouraged analysts to look for more meaningful relationships between language descriptions and institutional, professional and socio-cultural processes that shape the use of language in society, giving immense power to expert professionals and writers. If genre brings power, can we afford to ignore the politics of genre? Genre theory has significant implications for the politics of language use, and therefore the final chapter pays some attention to the exploitation of genres in the maintenance of power and the politics of language use in professional contexts.

In this book I have made an attempt to take my understanding of genre beyond my earlier concept of genre, which was restricted by my pedagogic concerns of the classroom. I have deliberately and consciously tried to turn my back on the classroom to face the world of discourse as it really is: complex, dynamic, changing, unpredictable and sometimes chaotic. I have tried to develop a model of genre analysis which adds to my earlier work and also to that of a number of other researchers. I see this as an attempt to integrate various frameworks and views of genre theory, rather than as an entirely new development.

Vijay K. Bhatia

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