Narratives in Academic and Professional Genres

Maurizio Gotti, Carmen Sancho Guinda (eds).
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Narratives in Academic and Professional Genres occupies a much needed space in which professionals have for long coveted. The area of academic genres has been dealt with extensively; however, the professional area, whether communication in the workplace or the study of minor genres in the professions, such as photographic narrative in annual reports, the narrative of patents, aviation catastrophes or the journalistic obituary, have been practically ignored. Recently, however, scholars have recognized the need to further investigate this area of scholarship. This dense volume contributes to show the possible interactivity that may exist between academic and professional genres.

The volume *Narratives in Academic and Professional Genres* offers an ample space for discussion addressed to narratology in two main areas of academic and professional communication. In the first part, entitled "Narratives in Academic Genres", ANNA MAURANEN's study investigates how research findings are reported in conference presentations through narrative elements. In her discussion, she analyzes the different narratives of "me", "us" and "them"; through the first pronoun, the listener is invited to identify "with the speaker's perspective" (page 62), while "us" and "we" draw "the hearers into the research group's perspective" (page 57). The position of authors in the narrative with regard to audiences is also approached by CARMEN DANIELA MAIER and JAN ENGBERG in their paper on "narrator's types and roles" in several academic generic forms in the field of visual communication; in their analysis they recognize the difficulty of approaching such a genre.

Linguistic features in historical narratives are described by MARINA BONDI in her corpus of 425 academic and popular papers in which specific meanings are drawn from "prototypical place deictics *here/there*" (page 139). In turn, ROSA LORÉS-SANZ approaches history book reviews written in English and Spanish as "the most prominent evaluative genre" (p. 195) by discussing their

rhetorical structure and discoursal features. PILAR MUR DUEÑAS also brings an intercultural view of English and Spanish research articles manifested through scholars' narrative of their own research. Among her main conclusions we find that both cultural groups share similar conventions when recounting their research, while at the same time she underscores the fact that English texts show a higher percentage of personal over impersonal narrative acts (70.3% and 29.7%, respectively); in Spanish texts, however, the results are practically reversed (27.9% and 72.1%, respectively) (page 225). CHRISTOPH A. HAFNER, LINDSAY MILLER and CONNIE NG KWAI-FUN et al. adopt a pedagogical approach and look at the structure of student narrative writing in English for science and technology. They look at the subject from different angles, namely through the use of digital media and how to create a digital story, science class projects, with special emphasis on the organization of a scientific documentary. This paper draws from digital storytelling advocates as being a powerful classroom tool, as we are reminded in today's teaching/learning literature (Jason Ohler, 2006).

Some studies refer to less formal academic narratives, such as BEGOÑA BELLÉS FORTUÑO's paper in which she examines classroom asides as a "recurrent pragmatic feature in academic lectures" (page 74) ; the analysis is based on a corpus extracted from MICASE (The Michigan Corpus of Academic and Spoken English). According to her results, asides are basically evaluative in nature. CHRISTINE FEAK's analysis, in turn, is on narrative styles in university public meetings, namely Board of Regents meetings, in which opportunities are provided to citizens to address governing boards although she contends that these "meetings appear to be more a ritual that serves to preserve an identity through the embedded narratives" (page 99). Again, using a storytelling strategy, YIANNIS GABRIEL provides a very personal reflection on researchers as storytellers and the stories' role in academic discourses. MARÍA JOSÉ LUZÓN analyzes what she calls "academic blogs" as having a widely diversified nature; through them "bloggers create their online identity [projecting] a persona made up both of professional and personal/social traits" (page 191). The final study of this first part, by LUISA CAIAZZO, is on the "About" page of British University websites and their evaluative vs. factual contextual environments. Among other conclusions, she underscores the role of "time, aspect and voice (…) in shaping the narrative" (page 271).

The second section of this collection of papers is entitled "Narratives in Professional Genres". Quoting Therese Riley and Penelope Hawe (2005),

BRIAN PALTRIDGE states in his "Afterword" that this type of research allows us "to see the world through the eyes of others" (page 497). In fact, some of the papers in this section are more on the side of research into academic than into professional genres, such as FRANÇOISE SALAGER-MEYER, MARÍA ÁNGELES ALCARAZ ARIZA and MARIANELA LUZARDO BRICEÑO's paper in which they analyze medical titling practices and authorship in case report narratives. However, they contend that case reports are often used as purely a professional communication device but that this trend has also led "towards a more scientific medicine" (page 314). MARCO DE MARTINO takes up the issue of illness narratives in which he foresees patients with a serious disease moving from passivity towards activity: "in witnessing their illness experience and sharing it with other people, they turn fate into experience and also show a sense of ethical responsibility" (page 338). Other papers in this second half of the volume underscore the importance of narratives about climate change, as in KJERSTI FLØTTUM's paper, which are often characterized by their use of "calibrated and rigorously defined expressions for uncertainties" (page 289), and for which she would advocate more research on the matter. Legal narratives also find their place in this volume with papers like RUTH BREEZE's and PATRIZIA ANESA's. While ANESA points out that people are by nature storytellers (page 363), legal narratives have little to do with storytelling because the narratives are interwoven with technical accounts and stories. As BREEZE remarks, "the development of the narrative is recursive, with repetition of key incidents through multiple accounts, and revisiting of specific aspects that hold the key to possible legal implications" (page 360). ISMAEL ARINAS PELLÓN's paper also hinges around patent technicalities from the world of commerce and legal principles in his discussion on intellectual property. In another paper, CARMEN SANCHO GUINDA introduces narratives related to aviation catastrophes, what she calls genre hybrids, for which she poses a series of questions concerning authorship and narrative adequacy. She parallels the rhetorical structure of this narrative scheme with the moves contained in the research article abstract. Transparency in such narratives seems to be one main issue, especially derived from the *Freedom of Information Act*, but also authorship, which are composed, as SANCHO GUINDA suggests, not only by "narratives of authority putting forward the opinions and decisions of a group of experts, but they are also crafted by witnesses and the families and professional relations of those involved in or affected by the disaster" (page 408). The final two papers deal with two issues not usually found in applied Linguistics studies. ELIZABETH DE GROOT, through a study of annual

reports, looks into the complexity of photographic narrative in business genres; then, ISABEL CORONA MARZOL analyses multimodality in British newspapers offering a narrative composite resulting from cross-fertilization of neighboring genres.

The contents of this volume are aimed at a wide readership, both professional and academic. They provide food for thought on important research areas which are not usually covered by other essay collections. From the pedagogical point of view, the different approaches to the interactivity between academic and professional genres offered in this volume also add additional material for teaching and learning practices. Even though we may disagree with some minor appreciations, we are sure it is a welcome addition to today's research and that it will also stimulate further research in these and other related areas. Thus, we fully recommend this collection of essays since it deepens into areas often ignored in today's research.

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References

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