Approaches to Specialized Genres

Kathy Ling Lin, Isaac N. Mwinlaaru & Dennis Tay (Eds.)
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Despite four decades of studies on genre, researchers sometimes still disagree on what genre is (Martin, 2015). To answer this question and clarify some theoretical and methodological issues, Routledge has published *Approaches to Specialized Genres*, with contributions by some leading and emerging scholars in genre. This volume begins with an introduction by the three editors, who present an outlook for genre research into the 21st century.

The volume is divided into five parts. The first part, titled "Theory and concepts", deals with some fundamental issues concerning genre. In one chapter "Towards a meta-theory of genre", one of the co-editors, Isaac N. Mwinlaaru, offers a comprehensive review on genre studies from three perspectives, namely genre as a social semiotic process, as a hierarchy of stratified layers of meaning and as a semiotic process interacting with other social, biological, and physical systems. The author also points out certain areas that need further research. For instance, little research has been done on the identification of phonological patterns in spoken professional encounters in business, legal, and media contexts.

Part II, "Rhetorical and generic structure", focuses on the generic structure of genres. Zhao and Groom in chapter 2 conducted a corpus-based comparative study of rhetorical moves and move sequences in English abstracts published in international and Chinese-language journals in accounting and finance. They find a range of salient differences in rhetorical move structures between these two kinds of journals as well as across the two areas. For instance, international abstracts tend to report research results, while Chinese abstracts are likely to report research methods.

Authored by Lin, another of the editors, chapter 3 provides a diachronic perspective on recent macro-structural developments in empirical research articles in two contrasting areas (viz. applied linguistics and civil engineering). The two areas exemplify the disciplines of Humanities and Science. This research illustrates both structural changes over time and related cross-

disciplinary variations. To supplement textual findings, the author conducted interviews with some expert writers from the two areas in a combination of methods that yields more convincing results.

Salmaso's research in chapter 4 develops story genres. Based on a taxonomy of five categories of Narrative Instances (NI), this study focuses on "recounts", which is concerned with how one event in a narrative leads to another. By analysing some cases of "recounts", Salmaso identifies their three general characteristics, namely, the coproduction of NIs, complex/inserted NIs and canonical order of generic constituents. With a combination of a qualitative analysis of three instances of "recounts" and a quantitative analysis of fifteen "recounts" to generalise findings, the framework turns out to be useful to the study of story genres.

Xu and Hu in chapter 5 examine the rhetorical characteristics of Retraction Notices (RNs) from academic journals. Based on a corpus of 255 RNs written by authors of retracted articles and journal authorities, their research identifies 18 move types and discovers considerable variation regarding frequency. The authors argue that RNs are a high-stakes academic genre. Though still evolving, they have not achieved a stable generic structure. The research also notes that RNs are located in particular social contexts and shaped for specific communicative purposes.

Afful's study in chapter 6 analyses the generic structure of Philanthropic Fundraising Letters (PFLs) written by some deans and academics in a Ghanaian university. It finds the PFLs used a seven-move pattern. The purpose of PFLs is to request readers to make donations. The academics showed different degrees of directness in their approach to writing these PFLs, in terms of how soon they made their requests. This chapter sheds light on the interactions between sectors, including academic institutions and philanthropy, as well as providing guidance about how to write successful PFLs.

Part III is concerned with lexicogrammatical aspects of genres. Chapter 7 by Chan and Chan focuses attention on the use of discourse markers (DMs) by students in Hong Kong, where schools use different languages as medium of instruction. The study finds students from English-medium secondary school tend to use more sophisticated DMs, especially at interpersonal and cognitive levels. By contrast, their counterparts from schools with Chinese or both English and Chinese as teaching medium use dominantly referential and textual/structural DMs.

Lyons and Moss's research in chapter 8 concentrates on applying systems of transitivity, projection and appraisal in Systemic Functional Linguistics to analysing the verbal clauses in academic registers of Colombian Spanish. They identify four types of grammatical strategies that the Sayers (subject in a sentence) or participants construed as saying something in verbal clauses. The four types are explicit Sayer, implicit Sayer, covert Sayer and absent Sayer. The authors notice the different Sayer realizations co-occur more frequently with direct, indirect or hybrid projections. Choices of realization of Sayers not only have an ideational importance, but also further the potential for epistemic and attitudinal framing of ideas and locutions of others.

Part IV deals with multisemiotic analyses of multimodal digital genres such as linguistics lecture slides and video ads. Chapters 9 and 10 endeavour to respond to Bondi's (2016, p. 325) call for more research into instructional genres. Based on empirical data, Feng's study surveys the generic structure and multimodal design of PowerPoint slides for linguistics courses in China. It finds most lessons focus on the teacher-centred transmission of knowledge. Feng further argues that learning objectives should be transformed from understanding concepts to training students to integrate linguistic theories in practice.

By paying attention to interactions in a new instructional genre, Querol-Julián's research draws on an integrated multimodal framework, which comprises four approaches to analyse the constraints and affordances of interaction in the digital environment of Synchronous Videoconferencing Lectures (SVLs). Quantitative analysis and visual representation of modal density and higher-level actions are combined with qualitative multimodal analysis in her discussion of teachers' and students' interaction in SVLs.

Pan and Tay's study in chapter 11 introduces a new six-step procedure to identify creative metaphors in video ads, called "Creative Metaphor Identification Procedure for Video Ads (CMIPVA)". Its reliability is supported by a study of 20 annotated ads from a corpus of 100 video ads. They note the relationship between filmic techniques and metaphors in video ads and the reason why metaphors can be detected through filmic techniques. The study argues that metaphor is of significance for advertising strategy, so learning how to construct a metaphor is important for ad designers, who can benefit from CMIPVA.

Part V observes genre in pedagogic and professional settings. Charles's research in Chapter 12 reports on a dual approach to teaching the "literature

review" in theses. This approach relies on both top-down (i.e., starting from move structure study and then continuing to move-specific language use in particular subjects) and bottom-up perspectives (i.e., beginning with corpus searches of some outstanding features and then reaching the recognition of genre moves). It helps students explore the ways in which genre moves are performed and connect the moves to the typical phraseology of their subjects.

Cheng's research in chapter 13 notices that a gap needs to be filled out between the office and the classroom. He focuses on one type of workplace genre, emails. Analysing emails in 18 business and workplace writing textbooks, he proposes seven themes. He believes that emails can perform a range of rhetorical purposes and discusses what teachers and researchers can do to improve their teaching and research.

Yu and Hafner in the last chapter focus on one hybrid genre, the training log book entry written by novice professional construction engineers in Hong Kong. This specialised discourse addresses multiple audiences with multiple purposes. They find the genre has some hybrid pedagogical-professional characteristics, as shown in its schematic structure, which reflect the communicative purposes and expectations of the discourse community.

Recent decades have seen a steady rise in interest in genre research, which has made great contributions to English language education. The widespread and demand for English has triggered teaching and studying English in different niches. This volume in question echoes this trend. All in all, the volume presents readers with rich methodologies and insights into genre research. Various established and emerging genres are covered and many issues worthy of further discussion are raised, such as genre change and metafunctional diversity. However, in spite of all of these useful aspects, the overall structure of the current chapters could have been better rearranged. For instance, as chapters are contributed by different authors, there is always some inconsistency in writing styles. A future volume could be restructured in a more consistent way.

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