



REVIEWS

Carol Berkenkotter, Vijay K. Bhatia and Maurizio Gotti (eds.): *Insights into Academic Genres*.
Bern: Peter Lang, 2012. ISBN 978-3-0343-1211-0, 468 pp.

Over the eleven years since its establishment in 2001, the series “Linguistic Insights” has won very positive recognition among scholars in various disciplines of linguistics. The series, issued by the publishing house Peter Lang and under the editorial supervision of Professor Maurizio Gotti, has been promoting studies in theoretical and applied linguistics, focusing on the interface between language and communication in diverse contexts. The conception of language as a purpose-oriented activity, rather than as a formal system of signs, has motivated a cross-disciplinary approach primarily oriented toward genres, specialized texts, and professional discourses.

The latest addition to the series – No. 160 – is a collection of papers that all approach the topic of academic discourse from the same methodological perspective, namely that of genre studies. This formidable, 460-page book, with its 20 contributions written by 25 contributors from eight different countries, attests to the wealth of topics that modern genre analysts have found to explore in the area of academic discourse. The volume is divided into four sections: one provides a general theoretical background for the book and the other three consist of analytical papers that tackle a broad range of issues.

The section “Theoretical Insights” opens with Carol Berkenkotter’s consideration of genre change with respect to scholarly online blogs. She suggests that the generic status of this new form of academic interaction, typically consisting of multi-modal hypertexts, can be described with the help of four criteria: affordances, uptake, dynamism, and stance. Noting the rapid variability and development of blogs, she raises the general question about heterogeneity and the gradual dissipation of genre integrity, on the one hand, and the unclear criteria on the basis of which new genres could be unequivocally identified, on the other. In the second theoretical paper in the section, Vijay K. Bhatia deals with the management of interdiscursive socio-pragmatic space (cf. Bhatia 2004) in the two related genres of the doctoral dissertation and the journal article. Interdiscursivity, defined as the text-external appropriation of semiotic resources across genres (and opposed to text-internal intertextuality; cf. Fairclough 1995), is understood as contributing to creative tension and explaining some of the communicative processes in academic research writing. The interdiscursive space is characterized by the “appropriation” of generic resources, research content and findings, methodology, and conventions of academic practice, leading to the recontextualization (reframing) of a doctoral dissertation into a journal article, which, as Bhatia demonstrates, operates according to different text-external factors (i.e., expectations of the discourse community, audience, shared knowledge, strategic management of gatekeepers, and the management of other voices in research articles).

The second section, titled “Presenting Research Results”, covers seven contributions on topics ranging from research articles to conference presentation introductions. Davide S. Giannoni extends the existing approaches to the language of evaluation (cf. Hunston and Thompson 2000) by exploring the values underlying this phenomenon, focusing on the way authors from various

disciplines signal “goodness” in their research articles. The presence of relevant linguistic markers – classified on a semantic basis into the five sets of goodness/badness, positivity/negativity, rightness/wrongness, (non-)problematicity, and erroneousness – contributes to a discursive construction of consensus, i.e., a reproduction of normative values that are difficult to challenge because the consensus is “prompted by reticence rather than argumentation” (75).

The research article is also the genre analyzed by Davide Mazzi, who integrates argumentation studies and corpus linguistics. Drawing on Van Eemeren et al’s (2007) list of indicators of analogy, he observes that argument by analogy tends to cluster in Results and Discussion sections of medical articles. The data reveal that authors tend to use same-domain analogies in order to draw attention to patterns in the data, and different-domain analogies “to provide sophisticated descriptions of empirical findings with a stronger visual impact” (94). Thus, argument by analogy underlies the expression of empirical regularities, the presentation of findings with authorial evaluation, and emphasis on the validity of one’s findings with respect to relevant literature.

Another scholar who studies research articles is Pilar Mur-Dueñas, who deals with generic integrity and intrageneric and intradisciplinary variation. The data analyzed consist of texts published in two journals of applied economics – a prestigious international journal and its sister publication – that differ in the lengths of their texts and their reviewing processes, which impacts the scholars’ writing practices, since they have “to adjust their writing conventions to participate in the international dialogue within the discipline in different publication sites”. By comparing the microstructural steps that make up each of the four macro-sections of the relevant articles (namely Introduction, Methods, Results, Conclusions), Mur-Dueñas identifies several steps that are central to both types of journals. It is those steps that are interpreted as constituting the generic integrity of international research articles in the field of economics.

In his article on generic integrity in jurisprudence and the philosophy of law, William Bromwich develops Hyland’s (2000) observation that writers of philosophy tend to manifest a very high incidence of criticism in their texts. However, as Bromwich argues, the members of this community of practice manage to position themselves with respect to their colleagues’ research, yet maintain positive relations. This comes as the result of the specific nature of the discipline as well as certain salient linguistic features and rhetorical devices. Thus, knowledge in jurisprudence is constructed through the one-author-and-many-presentations approach, which results in the frequent presence of extensive acknowledgements that reveal the interpersonal and collegiate nature of the texts. The rhetorical figures include prefacing criticism with praise, the use of self-deprecation and the hedging of critical remarks, which all provide a safe distance between the critical comment and the writer. This combines with authorial self-effacement (through nominalizations and passives). The author also makes the relevant observation that senior writers tend to write with a higher degree of personalization.

Moving to a spoken genre of academic discourse, Francisco Javier Fernández Polo studies what constitutes the oral counterpart of written research articles, namely conference presentations. Limiting his attention to presentation set-ups, he focuses on the move of topic announcement. The set-up stage is understood both interpersonally (as a chance for the researcher to present his/her credentials and establish a positive relationship with the audience) and ideationally (as a way of reorienting the audience to the content and structure of the presentation). Although the title announcement has little true information value for the audience – who already know it from the abstract or the chairperson’s introduction – it has a crucial rhetorical function, “appropriating the topic and marking the boundaries with previous talk, or foregrounding its novelty and relevance for the audience” (158). On the linguistic level, the “semiotic spanning” (Ventola 2002) between the verbal and visual modes is rarely achieved through verbatim repetition; instead, the presenters opt for a reformulation or paraphrase of the topic (by means of amplification/explicitation, reduction, updating, or simplification/popularization). Significantly, the two modes are found to be complementary: “the written title conveys the voice of the expert whereas the spoken presentation talks to the colleague” (166).

The section concludes with two papers on doctoral dissertations. Sue Starfield, Brian Paltridge and Louise Ravelli describe the so-called “practice-based doctorates” that have been increasing in popularity in Australian study programmes in the fields of visual and performing arts. The new phenomenon is placed in the context of the historical development of the genre of dissertation writ-

ing (by noting, in particular, the 17th-century practice of public demonstration and witnessing of scientific experiments that gave way to the written mode of documenting one's research findings a century later). The authors also consider the challenge which practice-based doctorates present for the modern notion of what research on the doctoral level should be. The authors' ethnographic approach reveals the current standing of this type of doctorate in Australia as well as the weight that different institutions assign to the written as opposed to the creative component. In the second paper on doctoral dissertations, Masumi Ono provides a move-analysis of introductory chapters in literature dissertations written in English and Japanese. The findings indicate that English dissertations tend to contain more steps in the introductory chapters, which are analyzed as divided into the moves of 'establishing a territory', 'establishing a niche', and 'presenting the writer's research'. Cross-cultural differences are also present in the individual steps within the moves: while the English group tended to use the steps of 'making topic generalizations', 'review of previous research' and 'presentation of fictional work/author' more frequently, the Japanese group emphasized 'gap in research', 'question-raising', 'description of thesis structure', 'description of relations between chapters' and 'writer-centred statements'. Ono distinguishes between move-specific steps and move-independent steps, and argues that the step 'presentation of fictional work/author' is a discipline-specific step in literary dissertation writing.

The third section of the book on "Reviewing and Popularizing Research Insights" comprises six papers, although the last two papers on novice academic writing in students' Master's theses are, rather, related to the two papers on doctoral dissertations contained in the previous section. In the first paper in the section, academic theatre reviews are discussed by Anna Stermieri, once again as regards their move structure. She identifies the following moves: the introductory move, the contextualizing move, the narrative move, and the evaluative move – each characterized by a number of sub-functions (rhetorical moves). Since her data set includes material spanning two decades, she also briefly outlines some aspects of diachronic variation: there seems to be a gradual shift of evaluative stance, with the critics developing a more involved position.

Susan Kermas considers the interface between research article abstracts and the genre of popular science reports that are derived from research articles. Using data from plant biology texts, she notes how the difference between the two genres is reflected in the scientific nomenclature. It is not only that academic abstracts tend to use Latin names and science news reports common names, but that the lexical choices also reflect the topic and the readership, as appears to be the case also with health and nutrition texts that are addressed to a mixed readership.

The popularization of science is also the subject of Isabel Herrando-Rodrigo's paper on the dissemination of medical knowledge through medical research articles and what she calls "medical electronic popularizations". It appears that such popularizations, while mostly addressed to lay audiences, mirror the corresponding medical articles, because their writers wish "to promote their research and raise credibility towards their writing" (260). The medical popularizations are specific in that the research conclusions and the source of publication tend to be placed at the beginning, thus enhancing the quality and reliability of the research. A major difference from research articles lies in the fact that, while the latter project objectivity through nominalizations and passives, medical popularizations strive for a similar effect through their frequent use of reported speech, i.e., by giving voice to the researchers themselves.

Another popularizing genre is studied by María José Luzón, namely researchers' comments in academic blogs. In this analysis of several categories of social presence (affective indicators, cohesive indicators, and interactive indicators), academic blogs are interpreted as a hybrid genre that draws on other forms of computer-mediated communication, informal genres of academic oral discourse, more formal interactive academic genres, and academic evaluative genres. Importantly, the study also considers discursive phenomena related to the expression of rude/antisocial behaviour, including personal attacks, disassociation, argument criticism and disagreeing. Confrontational behaviour and criticism is related to the construction of conflict as well as consensus between the critic and other readers of blog comments.

The section concludes with two related papers on student academic writing. Adopting a cross-cultural perspective, Olga Dontcheva-Navratilova explores authorial voice in the written Master's

theses of two groups of non-native students of English (Czech and German). The focus is on pronominal self-reference and impersonal it-constructions used for the presentation of the students' research findings. The data indicate that there is clear cross-cultural variation, with the differences arising from the interference of the academic writing standards in students' first languages on the one hand and the instructions received from style manuals and courses in academic writing on the other. The most interesting finding concerns the preference of Czech novice writers for indicating writer visibility through personal pronouns. However, they use them for discourse organization rather than for putting forward their claims, which contrasts with the more powerful and persuasive use of pronouns by the German students.

Adopting a pragmatic perspective, Renata Povolná analyses a custom-made corpus of Master's theses in order to establish cross-cultural differences in the use of discourse markers by Czech and German students of English. Although the local traditions of academic writing bear some similarities – on account of shared Central European intellectual traditions – the data indicate some common features that arise from the experience of non-native English speakers (learners): a strong tendency for individual writers to use a limited set of the same discourse markers; a general trend to overuse discourse markers, particularly at the beginnings of discourse segments; and an occasional practice of misusing certain discourse markers, thus rendering the texts stylistically inappropriate.

The final section of the book, titled "Insights into Pedagogic Genres", groups together five relatively diverse but nonetheless interesting papers. Carmen Sancho-Guinda's approach is innovative, in that it analyzes verbal descriptions of graphs used by ELT engineering students. Graph interpretations – perceived as "low-stance" and "high-engagement" with respect to the students' expectations about their audience – are interpreted as "visual information *transfers* ... rather than *commentaries* and as instances of a *transcribing skill* rather than a *genre* (for not being staged enough and recognizable)" (362). The student-based data reveal a great deal of redundancy – superfluous metadiscourse ("metadiscursive clutter"), paraphrases of the graph title/legend, tautological premodifiers, etc. – which partly illustrates the students' lack of experience in efficiently commenting on the visuals. It appears that students mistake informativeness for verbosity, and apparently fear silence in the classroom (Sancho-Guinda calls it "horror vacui"), which is most likely motivated by the pedagogical purpose of the discourse.

Michela Giordano sets out to explore law students' case briefs – short, one-page accounts that summarize the facts, the legal issue, the decision and the judicial reasoning in contract law disputes. Case briefs are considered – in harmony with Bhatia (1993) – as a specific genre of a distinctly pedagogical type. Although the analyzed sample is too small to allow for making generalizations, Giordano notes the formulaic nature of the texts and provides overviews of several formats provided for the genre by various legal practitioners. She identifies the relevant moves and offers a stylistic account of the textual features as well as the rules and conventions of the genre.

Christoph A. Hafner, Lindsay Miller and Connie NgKwai-Fun report on a tertiary level EAP course in which students are asked to produce scientific documentaries as digital video. The paper sums up the content of interviews conducted with the course participants, who reflected on the efficiency, problems, and possible improvements of the video tasks. As regards the discourse and genre perspective, the article indicates some directions for potentially fruitful, future research, particularly with respect to recontextualizing the video documentaries into written lab reports, and the rhetorical structures and norms of the two genres. Video projects themselves can also be researched in regard to the ways in which argumentation is constructed multi-modally.

Patrizia Anesa and Daniela Iovino deal with interactive whiteboards in academic settings, concentrating on how this technical innovation can contribute to genre hybridization. The paper reviews, somewhat extensively, the various lecturing styles, and its analytical part documents how interactive whiteboards increase interactivity in the classroom. As a consequence, classroom work – one can hardly talk about "lecturing" any longer – merges elements of such genres as lectures, seminars, presentations and workshops.

In the final contribution to the volume, Sara Gesuato analyses academic course descriptions, arguing that they constitute a specific genre since they display a common communicative goal, structure, content, and audience. The focus of the study is on the lexico-grammatical representation of the

participants involved in this genre, i.e., students, teachers and courses, mainly as far as the semantic roles that they are assigned in the relevant syntactic structures. The data show that teachers and students tend to be backgrounded. The texts convey the impression that they are produced by academic institutions and are addressed to an impersonal public audience, with the courses metonymically standing for the teachers and mediating between the teachers and the students. The backgrounding of the participants, combined with such grammatical features as the frequent present tense and *will* future, enhances the official character of the texts and contributes to their authoritative nature.

To conclude, the book is very relevant for genre analysis of communication in the highly diverse academic contexts in which scholars increasingly operate in the modern world. As can be expected from any similarly extensive collection, the papers are sometimes thematically diverse and, necessarily, operate with different methodologies and perspectives on the data. However, that can be seen as an asset of the book, since the papers illustrate that the earlier, predominantly textual focus of genre analysis has shifted to embrace other forms of communication and that much promising work is to be found, for instance, at the interface of existing academic genres and new technologies. In short, the book attests to the complexity of the discourses that constitute current academia.

Some of the papers deal with relatively well-established topics and genres (such as the research article) and some with applying tested methodology (such as move analysis), thus contributing to an already extensive body of expert literature in the relevant areas. Several papers in the collection exhibit a less mainstream orientation, and consider, for instance, multi-modal aspects of academic communication and the affordances of new media. Some of the papers present preliminary findings, indicating directions for future research; others form parts of ongoing research carried out on existing corpora as well as purpose-made data sets compiled in order to correspond, as best as possible, to the scholars' research aims. Alternative groupings for some of the articles could have been found – e.g., the studies on research articles could be presented separately from genres such as Master's theses and doctoral dissertations (while the latter two could be either placed together or subsumed within the section on pedagogy) – but the overall organization of the volume is logical and functional.

All in all, the book convincingly shows that academic genres, as much as others, find themselves constantly defining and redefining their boundaries, being affected by often contrary forces striving towards generic integrity, generic variability and generic hybridity.

References

- Bhatia, Vijay K. (1993) *Analysing Genre. Language Use in Professional Settings*. London: Longman.
- Bhatia, Vijay K. (2004) *Worlds of Written Discourse: A Genre-Based View*. London: Continuum.
- Fairclough, Norman (1995) *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. London: Longman.
- Hunston, Susan and Geoff Thompson (eds.) (2000) *Evaluation in Text. Authorial Stance and the Construction of Discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hyland, Ken (2000) *Disciplinary Discourses: Social Interactions in Academic Writing*. Pearson: Harlow.
- Van Emmeren, Frans, H., Peter Houtlosser and Francisca Snoeck Henkemans (2007) *Argumentative Indicators in Discourse. A Pragma-Dialectical Approach*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Ventola, Eija (2002) "Why and What Kind of Focus on Conference Presentations?" In: Ventola, Eija, Celia Shalom and Susan Thompson (eds.) *The Language of Conferencing*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 15–50.

Jan Chovanec

Address: Jan Chovanec, Department of English and American Studies, Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University, Arna Nováka 1, Brno 60200, Czech Republic. [email: chovanec@phil.muni.cz]