

## Crossing the boundaries of genre studies: Commentaries by experts

Ann M. Johns<sup>a,\*</sup>, Anis Bawarshi<sup>b</sup>, Richard M. Coe<sup>c</sup>, Ken Hyland<sup>d</sup>,  
Brian Paltridge<sup>e</sup>, Mary Jo Reiff<sup>f</sup>, Christine Tardy<sup>g</sup>

<sup>a</sup> San Diego State University, USA

<sup>b</sup> University of Washington, USA

<sup>c</sup> Simon Fraser University, Canada

<sup>d</sup> University of London, UK

<sup>e</sup> University of Sydney, Australia

<sup>f</sup> University of Tennessee, USA

<sup>g</sup> DePaul University, USA

---

*Keywords:* Genre; Genre analysis; Ethnography; Context; Second language writing pedagogies

---

The term *genre* has been interpreted in a variety of ways by experts from a number of traditions. Hyon, in her 1996 *TESOL Quarterly* article, separated genre theorists and practitioners into three camps: the Sydney School, based on the Systemic Functional Linguistics work of Halliday (1985), which has developed research and well-established pedagogies at a number of academic levels (see e.g., Christie, 1991; Feez, 2002); the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) camp, whose most famous exponent, John Swales, is internationally-recognized for *Genre Analysis* (1990) and “moves” in research article introductions; and The New Rhetoric (NR) group, principally North Americans, for whom genre knowledge has been considered to be primarily social, embedded in the community and context of writer and audience (See e.g., Freedman & Medway, 1994).

In a simpler taxonomy, Flowerdew (2002) dichotomized genre theorists into *linguistic* and *non-linguistic* camps, claiming that

the ESP and Australian school... apply theories of functional grammar and discourse, concentrating on the lexico-grammatical and rhetorical realization of communicative purposes embodied in a genre, whereas the New Rhetoric group... is more focused on situational context—the purposes and functions of genres and the attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviors of the members of the discourse community in which the genres are situated (p. 91).

---

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [ajohns@cox.net](mailto:ajohns@cox.net) (A.M. Johns).

Coe (2002), arguing against this dichotomy from a New Rhetoric (NR) perspective, pointed out that NR theorists view genre as

a motivated, functional relationship *between* text type and rhetorical situation. That is to say, a genre is neither a text type nor a situation, but rather the functional relationship between a type of text and a type of situation. Genres survive because they work, because they respond effectively to recurring situations (p. 197).

Coe's comments point to a fluid relationship between text and context, writer's purposes, voice, and occasion, and they seem to describe more fully the complexity and inclusiveness of genre theory and practice discussed by the experts who contributed to this article. The theorists and practitioners represented here, whatever their theoretical backgrounds, are well aware of the many factors that influence the processing and production of genres as they suggest ways in which this elusive term can become more accessible in second language writing pedagogy.

At the 2005 AILA (International Association of Applied Linguistics) Conference in Madison, Wisconsin, I chaired a symposium in which the experts whose commentaries are found here presented their work. Their conference presentations indicated considerable cross-over, as well as a number of distinct differences, between and among genre traditions. The purpose of the paper is to briefly summarize the symposium presentations and then to present the symposium presenters' responses to post-symposium questions, where they talked about their genre theories and their research—and about how their “take” on this concept and its applications applies to research and teaching in second language writing.

### **Presentation and commentary**

The first presenter, *Brian Paltridge* (University of Sydney, Australia), set the stage for the colloquium by speaking about the breadth of contexts for genres. He noted that they appear in academic, professional, popular, and indigenous cultures, each of which honors and owns visual, musical, and oral as well as written genres. In particular, he spoke of the role of social, cultural, and political assumptions in the production and interpretation of genres, concluding with a comment about the importance of ethnography in the genre research conducted by both students and professionals.

The follow-up questions posed to Brian Paltridge were:

- How do you define *genre*, especially for a second language writing audience?
- How can ethnographic principles assist teachers, researchers, and L2 learners to discover how genres are embedded in situations and communities?

*Defining genre:* Genres are ways in which people “get things done” through their use of language in particular contexts. An academic essay is an example of a genre. It is a socially-approved way in which students show what they know, what they can do, and what they have learned in a course of study. In drafting their essays, writers use language in particular ways according to the aim and purpose of the genre and the relationship between the writer and the audience. The way writers use language in a genre also depends on the expectations of the context in which the genre is being produced. Writers also draw on their previous experiences with the genre to produce a new text.

This does not mean, however, that every instance of a genre is, or needs to be, the same. In fact, genres vary in terms of their typicality. That is, a text may be a typical example of a genre or a less

typical one, but still be an example of the particular genre. Samraj (2004), for example, found that academic research papers written in different disciplines can vary in a number of ways but still continue to be examples of the same genre.

Thus, as writers, we vary our texts in a genre for a number of reasons. One cause for variation is a sensitivity to the values of those who are judging the effectiveness of the genre in a particular context. A new professor may start teaching a course with new ideas about how an essay should be written, what issues it should address, the extent to which students should show what they know, and how they should show what they know in the texts they produce. Genres also vary in response to the task that has been set by the students' professor (Samraj, 2004). Further changes may be made by the writer who is affected by both choice and constraints, for writing a text in a genre is neither a "free for all" nor "anything goes." As Devitt (2004) argues, there are often consequences for violating genre expectations (i.e. "the constraints") and these consequences cannot always be predicted. Both constraint and writer choice, she argues, are necessary and positive components of written genres.

*Using ethnographies:* I have found in ethnographies a useful way of examining the context of first and second language students' writing. In one study, I conducted what Swales (1998) calls a "textography" of the masters' theses that art and design students write (Paltridge, 2004). I combined a study of the student texts with the texts that surround these texts (Paltridge, 2000; Bhatia, 2004), as well as with interviews with students, advisors, and examiners. The purpose was to explore the theses' particular nature and character, the values that underlay the texts, and the role the texts played in the particular academic setting (Johns, 1997). I found that while art and design theses are much more fluid than the theses that students write in other areas of study, the expectations at the level of language and presentation were very much the same. Moreover, the constraints experienced by art and design students were not as great; they were more able to resist some of the expectations for thesis writing and examinations than students in other areas of study.

We also use ethnographies in a writing course for second language graduate students at the University of Sydney. There, we combine the notion of an ethnography of writing with Johns' (1997) work on students as researchers as a way of getting students to investigate the academic setting in which they are writing and the values and expectations which underlie the texts they are being asked to produce. Students interview their professors and ask them questions not just about what they want students to write, but also why they want them to write in these genres, thus preparing students to "navigate disciplinary contexts rhetorically" (Bawarshi, 2003, p. 154) as well as to negotiate the boundaries, values, and expectations of the disciplines in which they are writing. In the process, students uncover the genre knowledge that is required of them to succeed in their particular academic settings. We have found that it is only when they are aware of these factors that they are really able to understand what they are being asked to do and the extent to which they can make appropriate choices.

Ethnographies are also useful in English for Specific Purposes (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998) teacher education programs. I was recently in Shanghai where we also teach our master's degree, working with a group of Chinese College English teachers who were enrolled in our ESP course.<sup>1</sup> We were looking at the writing section of Chinese College English tests and considering how an ethnography of writing could add to an understanding of the assessment process, expectations, and the requirements of the test. We examined sample tests,

---

<sup>1</sup> In China, College English refers to compulsory English classes that non-English majors are required to undertake as part of their degree. At the end of their studies, students need to pass a nationally administered College English Test in order to graduate from their degree.

College English teaching materials, model texts provided in College English textbooks, and the curriculum requirements for College English courses. I held focus group discussions with College English teachers and interviewed examiners for the test. Through this research, we gained insights into the assessment of students' texts that we would not have gained by looking at the test or at examples of students' texts alone. The information that we gathered "beyond the text" (Freedman, 1999) is as important for students sitting these tests as information about the texts themselves. All of this knowledge contributes to the genre expertise that students need to develop as they learn to write texts which help them achieve their particular goals.

The next speaker, *Ken Hyland* (University of London), discussed his analytical scheme that enables the interpretation of intersubjective positioning, or the ways writers take a position on the content of their texts and towards their readers' positions on this content. Drawing from research on 240 research papers from eight disciplines, augmented by insider informant interviews from the disciplines selected, Hyland presented an integrated framework for examining textual interactions, a comprehensive scheme that considers both stance and engagement.

His follow-up questions were:

- How do you define *genre*?
- Why is the framework you have devised particularly revealing or central to our understanding of the author and his/her audience? How will this research framework assist second language writing researchers and practitioners?

*Defining genre:* For me *genre* simply refers to socially recognized ways of using language. It is a term we all use for grouping texts together and representing how writers typically use language to respond to and construct texts for recurring situations. More specifically, genre is based on the idea that members of a community usually have little difficulty in recognizing similarities in the texts they use frequently and are able to draw on their repeated experiences of particular contexts to read, understand, and perhaps write the text that occurs in them relatively easily. It is through this recurrent use of conventionalized forms and communicative practices that individuals develop relationships, establish communities, and get things done: Genres therefore not only embed social realities but also construct them. This puts social relationships at the heart of language use, as every successful text will display the writer's awareness of its context and the readers who form an audience in that context (Hyland, 2003). Novice writers, because they are outside a particular genre-using community, lack this familiarity and therefore often struggle to create appropriate texts.

One reason that second language writers find academic genres so daunting is that they are frequently told, by textbooks, style guides, and sometimes by teachers, to abandon their personality and write in an "objective," neutral way. All writing, however, is an act of identity in which people take positions, engage their readers, and represent themselves in different ways.

*The framework:* My scheme of stance and engagement consolidates previous work to offer a principled, integrated, and comprehensive way of understanding these personal, identity-forging aspects of writing. By categorizing the range of linguistic features which contribute to the writer's projection of a stance to the material in the text and the strategies employed to presuppose the active role of his or her addressee, we are able to see more clearly how writers offer a credible representation of themselves and their work by claiming solidarity with readers, evaluating their material, and acknowledging alternative views. This control of writer personality in a text is central to building a convincing argument.

The model, more fully elaborated and discussed in Hyland (2005), shows how interaction is achieved by writers acting as members of different communities and how the rhetorical preferences of these communities provide writers with different sets of options for constructing both themselves and their readers. *Stance* is the ways that writers intrude into texts to stamp their personal authority onto their arguments or, alternatively, to step back from their discourse. This writer's disciplinary "voice" or personality includes the ways they present themselves to convey their judgments, opinions, and commitments to what they say. Essentially, stance is constructed through hedges (e.g., *might, possibly, perhaps*), boosters (*undoubtedly, certainly*) self mention (*I, we*) and attitude markers (*interesting, clear, sophisticated*). *Engagement* is the other side of the coin, where writers recognize the presence of their readers. Writers achieve engagement by using questions, reader pronouns (*you, inclusive we, our*) and directives (*consider, must*). These features have a dialogic purpose in that they refer to, anticipate, or otherwise take up the anticipated voices and positions of potential readers. These elements allow writers to actively pull readers along with the argument, to focus their attention, recognize their uncertainties, include them as discourse participants, and guide them to interpretations.

To be persuasive, then, writers need to connect with the value systems of their disciplinary audiences or—in English for Academic Purposes courses—at least with the expectations of their subject teachers, by making rhetorical choices which evaluate both their arguments and their audiences. It also suggests, however, that while rhetorical choices index writers' memberships in social groups, individuals manipulate the options available to them for creative and rhetorical purposes of their own. To effectively manipulate these options, however, they need to know what choices are available to them and be able to use them confidently. For this reason, it is important that L2 writing teachers bring these interpersonal features into the center of their teaching rather than waiting until students have mastered other aspects of communication, such as "grammar." In other words, we have to reject the argument that low proficiency students need to control core forms of language before getting on to more esoteric, interpersonal aspects of writing, as if these were just the dressing on the cake.

Quite simply, interpersonal features found in stance and engagement are integral to all successful writing and should be taught to even novice writers in undergraduate classes. Students need to know how far and for what purposes they might effectively intrude into their writing using *I*, how to mitigate their statements to convey appropriate levels of commitment and respect for readers' opinions, and whether to instruct readers how to interpret arguments by using imperatives. This requires a "visible pedagogy," which makes what is to be learned and assessed clear to students, and methods which make such features explicit, such as investigating the texts and contexts of target situations in consciousness-raising tasks and "scaffolding" learners towards their potential level of performance through effective modeling and joint negotiation.

Christine Tardy, from DePaul University (USA), then presented her research on how an ESL graduate student progressed through experiences with textual borrowing, faculty mentoring, and engagement in disciplinary practices, finally enabling him to "sell" his writing to the larger research community.

Her questions were:

- How do you define *genre*, particularly considering the case study research you conducted with a graduate student?
- How can we reduce what we know about genre, without losing the nuance and complexity, to a level at which second language learners can understand and use the concept?

*Genre definition:* All genre scholars agree that genres are complex. Whether we choose to analyze genres in terms of their textual features, social actions, communities of practice, power structures, or the networks and modalities in which they operate (and individual researchers nearly always need to limit themselves to only some of these), we know that we are only seeing a partial view of all that is “going on.” This complexity is perhaps what many writing scholars are drawn to, for a genre is a kind of nexuses among the textual, social, and political dimensions of writing.

Like genres themselves, genre knowledge is also necessarily multidimensional, including domains like formal, rhetorical, process, and subject-matter knowledge (See Fig. 1). For experts, these domains interact and overlap, giving rise to the sophisticated knowledge that allows them to manipulate genres for very particular purposes. At novice stages, however, second language learners often compartmentalize these knowledge domains (Tardy, 2004). In their first encounters, learners may focus on one or two dimensions (such as generic moves or lexicogrammatical features) to the relative exclusion of others, or they may have difficulty seeing the interactions among the domains (for example, identifying how disciplinary values influence a text’s form). As they become more familiar with some knowledge domains (formal, rhetorical, subject-matter, and/or procedural), that knowledge becomes increasingly automatic and the learners concentrate on other generic elements. Over time, learners integrate these domains, building automaticity as well as the kind of tacit and rich knowledge characteristic of expert genre users.

*Teaching genre:* Ethnography (e.g., Johns, 1997) and multidimensional genre analysis (e.g., Devitt, Reiff, & Bawarshi, 2004) both help L2 students examine how different genre dimensions interact. These activities can help learners build a complex view of genre but may also be overwhelming as learners must attend to multiple dimensions simultaneously, for through such activities teachers might prematurely situate novices in the “expert” domain of Fig. 1. Some of the advanced ESL writers in a classroom that I observed, for example, had difficulty analyzing genres from a linguistic *and* rhetorical perspective and then drawing links between these features and the rhetorical scene. They found little relevance in such analysis and at times saw the complexities of genre as too abstract to be of use. Perhaps at some stages and for some learners, more filtered or compartmentalized views of genres are also necessary. For example, for some

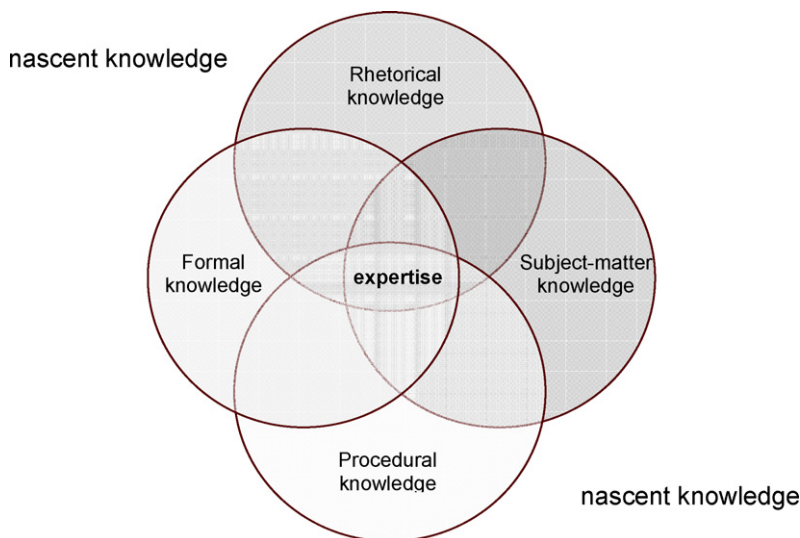


Fig. 1. A model of genre knowledge.

learners and genres, a focus on moves might be an appropriate starting point; in other contexts, an analysis of the rhetorical setting may provide a more useful foundation.

A model like that in Fig. 1 might provide a useful construct for introducing students to genre, first illustrating the complexities involved, then helping them investigate different dimensions separately, and gradually exploring the interactions of these dimensions. I am not arguing that L2 composition teachers should abandon pedagogical approaches that foster a rich view of genre; such approaches are necessary if genre is to be of use for learners outside of the classroom. Yet, filtering out some genre dimensions at early stages—especially for learners who face greater cultural or linguistic challenges—can help students make initial observations about a genre without feeling overwhelmed. Through classroom ethnography and “real world” practice, these observations can then be enhanced, destabilized, and re-formed (see Johns, 2002), as learners become more familiar with the genre and integrate its complexities into social action.

Mary Jo Reiff (University of Tennessee) and Anis Bawarshi (University of Washington) explored the implications for writing instruction of the intersection of New Rhetorical and ethnographic approaches (see also Paltridge and Tardy, in this article), arguing that ethnographic research assists students in tying communicative actions to their contexts and in inventing themselves (see Hyland, in this article) within these contexts. Because the presenters addressed different topics, each was asked to respond to questions.

The questions for Mary Jo Reiff were:

- How do you define *genre*? (Or how can *genre* be defined in a second language writing class?)
- How can the ethnographic principles you describe assist second language learners to understand how genres are embedded in situations and communities?

*Defining and teaching genres:* In our first year writing textbook, *Scenes of writing: Strategies for composition with genres* (2004), my co-authors (Amy Devitt and Anis Bawarshi) and I developed strategies for genre analysis that can assist in teaching both L1 and L2 writing. Referring to Christine Tardy’s previous genre knowledge model, our heuristic for genre analysis begins with the “procedural knowledge” of collecting samples of genres, an activity which allows students to select and explore unfamiliar or new genres or to gain access to the powerful institutional genres that they will be asked to read and write. Students then move through a series of steps that begin with “rhetorical knowledge” followed by questions about “subject matter” and “formal” knowledge (see Fig. 2, below). Rather than teaching genres as static forms, we teach students how to recognize genres as rhetorical responses to and reflections of the cultures and immediate situations in which they are used so that they are able to access, understand, and write within these cultures and situations, many of which are quite unfamiliar to them.

In his *JSLW* article on genre-based pedagogies, Ken Hyland notes that the goal of genre pedagogies is to guide students “toward a conscious understanding of target genres and the ways language creates meanings in context” (2003, p. 21). Yet genre-based pedagogical approaches have been criticized for removing genres from the complex, dynamic sociocultural contexts that give rise to them (Freedman, 1993), for locating the study of genres outside of the “living situations” of their use (Bleich, 2001), and for limiting the understanding of genres to discursive features that writers already recognize (Bazerman, 2004a). Hyland also raises a very real concern: that teaching L2 students genre analysis may help perpetuate the powerful social relations that genres construct and reinforce. This is where ethnographic

### 1. Collect Samples of the Genre

If you are unsure where to find samples, use our strategies for observing scenes in Chapter 1 to ask a user of that genre for assistance. Try to gather samples from more than one place so that you get a more accurate picture of the complexity of the genre. The more samples of the genre you collect, the more you will be able to notice patterns within the genre.

### 2. Identify the Scene and Describe the Situation in which the Genre is Used

Try to identify the larger scene in which the genre is used. Seek answers to questions about the genre's situation such as the ones below:

- *Setting*: Where does the genre appear? How and when is it transmitted and used? With what other genres does this genre interact?
- *Subject*: What topics, issues, ideas, questions, etc. does the genre address? When people use this genre, what is it that they are they interacting about?
- *Participants*: Who uses the genre?
  - Writers*: Who writes the texts in this genre? Are multiple writers possible? What roles do they perform? What characteristics must writers of this genre possess? Under what circumstances do writers write the genre (e.g., in teams, on a computer, in a rush)?
  - Readers*: Who reads the texts in this genre? Is there more than one type of reader for this genre? What roles do they perform? What characteristics must readers of this genre possess? Under what circumstances do readers read the genre (e.g., at their leisure, on the run, in waiting rooms)?
- *Purposes*: Why do writers write this genre and why do readers read it? What purposes does the genre fulfill for the people who use it?

### 3. Identify and Describe Patterns in the Genre's Features

What recurrent features do the samples share? For example:

- What content is typically included? What excluded? How is the content treated? What sorts of examples are used? What counts as evidence (personal testimony, facts, etc.)?
- What rhetorical appeals are used? What appeals to logos, pathos, and ethos appear?
- How are texts in the genres structured? What are their parts, and how are they organized?
- In what format are texts of this genre presented? What layout or appearance is common? How long is a typical text in this genre?
- What types of sentences do texts in the genre typically use? How long are they? Are they simple or complex, passive or active? Are the sentences varied? Do they share a certain style?
- What diction (types of words) is most common? Is a type of jargon used? Is slang used? How would you describe the writer's voice?

### 4. Analyze what these Patterns Reveal about the Situation and Scene

What do these rhetorical patterns reveal about the genre, its situation, and the scene in which it is used? Why are these patterns significant? What can you learn about the actions being performed through the genre by observing its language patterns? What arguments can you make about these patterns? As you consider these questions, focus on the following:

- What do participants have to know or believe to understand or appreciate the genre?
- Who is invited into the genre, and who is excluded?
- What roles for writers and readers does it encourage or discourage?
- What values, beliefs, goals, and assumptions are revealed through the genre's patterns?
- How is the subject of the genre treated? What content is considered most important? What content (topics or details) is ignored?
- What actions does the genre help make possible? What actions does the genre make difficult?
- What attitude toward readers is implied in the genre? What attitude toward the world is implied in it?

Fig. 2. Guidelines for analyzing genres.<sup>2</sup>

principles—observations of a group's linguistic interactions, participation in the group, interviews with individuals who read or write in a genre—can situate genre analysis and give second language students access to authentic contexts for language use, thus critically engaging them with cultural and textual practices.

<sup>2</sup> These activities, taken from Devitt, A., Reiff, M. J. & Bawarshi, A. (2004), are reprinted by permission from Pearson Longman Publishing Company, New York.



Previous research into situated academic discourse, such as John Swales' "textography" (1998) and Ann Johns' "students as researchers" work (1997), indicates how ethnographic methods—such as observation of physical sites of genre activity and interviews with genre users—can provide access to these communities and their genre use. In the writing classes I teach, students link their ethnographic study of cultures with analysis of genres, an approach noted by Paltridge, among others, in this article. For students who have difficulty understanding how to link texts with meaningful contexts, genre analysis can help mediate between a culture and its communicative interactions, between what Swales calls "lifeways" and "textways" (1998). Keeping in mind Tardy's advice that teachers should gradually introduce L2 writers to the multiple dimensions of genre (linguistic, rhetorical, cultural), I have devised a sequence of assignments that build on one another and focus on different dimensions of genre analysis (Reiff, 2005). As a first assignment, I have students research a fieldsite (a class they are taking, an academic or professional organization, a workplace). Our "Guidelines for Observing and Describing Scenes" in *Scenes of Writing* instruct students to (1) select and gain access to a site; (2) observe and describe the activities, participants, types of interactions, subjects discussed, and settings; and (3) examine the patterns of language use and genres. What follows is an excerpt from these guided questions:

*Identify the genres in the scene*

To identify the genres of a scene, look for patterns or habits in the interaction within a situation. Ask yourself:

- What *patterns* of speaking do you notice in those situations?
- What *written documents* typically appear in and are used repeatedly in those situations?

Because you might not be able to observe all of the genres in action, interview participants in the situation about their genres, and, if possible, collect samples. Try to get responses to the following questions:

- What "*kinds of texts*" do the participants typically write in that situation? What other kinds of texts do they write?
- What are these texts *called*?
- What do these texts *look* like?
- Who uses these texts, *when*, *where*, and *why*?

Transitioning from the above questions, the next assignment asks students to examine the patterns of language or genres embedded in a group or culture. Students are asked to consider studying a group that they would like to know more about or a community that they plan to enter in the future. For instance, they can study a workplace and examine one of their genres (manual, employee's handbook, annual report) to analyze what the conventions of that genre (content, language, style, format, organization, tone, visuals, etc.) tell us about that community. Or, perhaps more useful for L2 learners (as suggested by Brian Paltridge in this article), they study a disciplinary community, focusing on a form of communication or genres used in that discipline (scientific research articles, engineering reports, case studies in psychology) to see what they can learn about the community's knowledge and practices. To carry out their study, students collect and examine samples of a community's genre, observe the use of the genre in its setting, and

interview a few expert users of this genre. Students are instructed to focus on the specific features of the language practices of the group and to use dialogue or quotations from written material or spoken language to give a clear sense of the language use. As part of their critical analysis, students are asked to explain the possible causes and effects of unusual language practices within the group, and between the group and others not part of it, considering how language affects relationships among people within the group and how language acts as a boundary between insiders and outsiders. Making genre analysis the focal point of ethnographic inquiry—having students examine an organization’s newsletter or the employee manual at a business—ties communicative actions to their contexts and can illustrate to students how patterns of linguistic and rhetorical behavior (e.g., style and structures of texts) are inextricably linked to patterns of social behavior.

The third assignment is based on students’ interviews with an informant at their fieldsite, culminating in a fourth and final “field” project that synthesizes the previous research, an excerpt of which appears below.

*Assignment:* Project 4 will integrate all previous writing and rhetorical skills of observation and description, analysis of texts and language, and research on people or informants by bringing all of these research skills and data together in a culminating field study or mini-ethnography (written project about a culture). This final project should be approximately 2500–3000 words in length and should include the following:

- (1) observations and fieldnotes about the setting and the participants;
- (2) interviews with informants, including anecdotes, quotes, accounts, and oral histories;
- (3) written and material artifacts (texts, genres, and objects that have cultural significance);
- (4) visual artifacts, such as photos of the place/participants;
- (5) background source material (at least two sources, one of which may be print and the other nonprint).

Students are also given the option of writing within a genre of the community they have studied or producing a variation of the genre. For L2 students working with academic genres, this allows them to participate in institutional discourse while also challenging and perhaps even changing these powerful discourses.

In his article on genre pedagogy, Hyland acknowledges that New Rhetoric projects a complicated relationship between text and context and notes that “its contributions to L2 writing instruction has been minimal” (2003, p. 22). A genre-based pedagogy that incorporates ethnographic analysis provides a situated approach that crosses L1 and L2 and text and context boundaries, enabling writers—particularly those unfamiliar with a culture or community—to orient to and interpret particular communicative actions, thus providing learners with access to a community and, simultaneously, a frame for critiquing the powerful forms of language use within that community.

Anis Bawarshi, whose conference presentation dealt principally with the rhetorical term, *invention* (see Bawarshi, 2003), was asked this question:

- What is *invention*, and how does it relate to the teaching of genres in L2 composition?

Within L1 and L2 composition instruction, process-based pedagogies have tended to understand invention as pre-writing, as the recursive stage in writing processes in which writers explore, discover, and generate what they want to write and how they want to go about writing it.

Invention for typical process writing instruction may involve freewriting, clustering, brainstorming, journaling, and other strategies meant to help writers orient themselves in relation to a subject before they begin to write. While such process-based invention strategies encourage a view of writing as a dynamic process of working through thought and shift the focus of attention from texts to writers, they have also tended to overlook “the forces outside the individual which help guide purposes, establish relationships, and ultimately shape writing” (Hyland, 2003, p. 18). Indeed, if we understand writing as a social activity, then the very concept of “pre-writing” suggests a pre-social mode of being, in which writers search *inwardly* for ideas and meanings before they begin to write. Such a view of invention perpetuates what Hyland calls an “ideology of the individual” (2003, p. 20).

For L2 writers, this ideology can be especially challenging because it presumes as “natural” and “individual” those forms of pre-writing that, in fact, reflect and privilege cultural ways of knowing. By the same token, “its pedagogy of immersion ‘naturally’ favors students whose voice is closest to the literate culture of power in industrial society” (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993, p. 6). In short, by keeping ways of understanding the social nature of texts invisible and individual, process-based invention strategies exclude even further those students whose cultural and linguistic backgrounds leave them on the margins of the dominant culture and its genres. In response, genre-based approaches to composition situate discovery not so much within self-contained individuals but rather within genres, which then become the starting point for invention.

A genre-based approach to L2 composition allows us to expand process-based notions of invention by shifting the locus of invention from an interior cognitive process located *within individuals* to a situated cognitive process located *within genres*. How writers discover what they want to say, what content they decide to include, why they should include it and how they should structure it, and what effects what they include will likely have within particular rhetorical situations and on particular audiences—these all depend on writers’ knowledge of the genre in which they are writing. As such, I propose that we think of genres not as the culmination of, but as the *starting point* for, the teaching of invention. In this approach, invention becomes the stage in the writing process in which writers situate themselves within the genre they are writing and begin to ask the kinds of questions Mary Jo Reiff described in her response earlier (see her “Genre Analysis Guidelines”). Genre analysis helps orient writers within the social, rhetorical, and linguistic contexts they will need to inhabit before they can participate effectively and critically within these contexts.

When explaining the concept to novice writers, I sometimes describe genres as social worlds they are being asked to inhabit in order to do certain things. When they enter an unfamiliar setting, for example, students discover how they should act by looking around and figuring out what people are saying and doing there, how they are saying and doing it, and so on. In short, they analyze the social, rhetorical, and linguistic conventions at work in this setting before they can begin to participate. If genres are symbolic worlds we textually inhabit in order to participate in consequential actions, then part of invention must involve explicitly examining the conventions that shape these worlds. Genre analysis enables such examination by helping writers identify and describe a genre’s conventions (from its lexical and syntactic patterns to its structural, rhetorical, and thematic patterns) as well as its typical rhetorical situation (where and why it is used, who uses it, under what conditions, and when). In this way, genre analysis becomes an important part of invention, a way for writers to *discover* what can and cannot be said and done within the genre; what linguistic features (semantic, lexico-grammatical, phonological/morphological) and rhetorical features (relation to reader, stance [for example, “who am I as a writer in this text given

the situation in which I am writing and the text or experiences to which I am responding?” For more on stance, see Hyland in this article], use of evidence, tone, organization, etc.) are available to them; what goals, assumptions, and values are presupposed by users of the genre; what actions the genre makes possible; and how to deploy this genre knowledge in order to participate in the world. This kind of genre knowledge is integral to invention, since it enables writers to recognize when and why to use a genre, how to select an appropriate genre in relation to another, how much, explicitly and implicitly, to cite a text or experience in one’s response (for example, which life experiences one can refer to on a resume and how information presented in the resume can be cited in the cover letter), when to effectively resist expected genre conventions, and so on.

Thus, to expand traditional process-based understandings of invention, we need to go beyond individualized notions in which invention is understood as “pre-writing” or private introspection and locate invention instead in the genres writers seek to inhabit. Shifting the locus of invention in this way requires we move toward a more complex, textographic (see Swales, 1998) view of invention that situates writers and their writing processes in the genres and situations they are shaped by and shape. In this way, invention can make visible to writers the choices and constraints available within various genres, so that writers can locate themselves and begin to participate within these genres more meaningfully, critically, and dexterously.

The final speaker, *Richard M. Coe*, from Simon Fraser University (Canada) defined genre as a “culturally typical structure that embodies a socially-appropriate strategy for responding to varied situations,” and then addressed the pedagogical implications of the previous papers. His question was:

- Which genres should we teach—and why?

Students vary, language learning situations vary, associated learning objectives beyond learning particular genres vary, social contexts vary, even teachers vary. So I can’t answer this question with a list of academic levels, work situations, and genres. But I can suggest some principles for deciding which genres to teach which students in which courses.

For every genre, there is a genre-evoking situation. If there is a résumé genre, then there is a type of situation (applying for most jobs in many cultures) in which submitting a résumé is an effective strategy. Traditionally, we think of genres as forms, but to understand how they work, we must think of those *forms* as embodying *strategies* that have evolved for responding effectively to particular types of *situations* (Coe and Freedman, 1994). Indeed, the various new conceptions of genre—whether based in Systemic Functional Linguistics (Sydney School, see, e.g., Halliday & Martin, 1993, and Martin, 2002), speech act theory (Freedman, 1987 and in Coe, Lingard, & Teslenko, 2002), linguistic pragmatics (Giltrow, 1988 and in Coe et al., 2002), the New Rhetoric (Campbell & Jamieson, 1978) and Miller (1984), Russian activity theory (e.g., Bazerman, 2004b; Paré, 2002), or elsewhere—share an understanding of genre as the functional relationship between form and situation.

This is why it makes sense for Brian Paltridge and Mary Jo Reiff to advocate ethnography—because ethnography is an effective method for researching genre situations and thus for making functional sense of “foreign” genres. This is why it makes sense for Ken Hyland to emphasize disciplinary “voice” and stance (a.k.a., persona, subject position)—because using a genre effectively includes adopting an appropriate stance, achieving a “voice” that experienced readers of the genre will consider appropriate. This is why it makes sense for Anis Bawarshi to discuss genre in relation to invention—because the very structure of a genre serves as a heuristic guide to the content that the genre situation requires. This is why it makes sense for Johns to close this

article by advocating student exploration of a *variety* of genres written in response to a *variety* of situations.

To decide what genres to teach our students, we should consider what sorts of academic and other situations they are likely to encounter and what sorts of genres they will need to achieve their purposes in those situations.

- We should teach students genres they will be strongly motivated to learn, which usually means genres they will need or want to use soon (either in other courses or, for students approaching graduation, in work situations they will soon encounter).
- We should teach genres that embody the kinds of thinking the students will need or want or ought to be able to do (e.g., the traditional student essay which, like most academic genres, requires evidence-based inductive reasoning).
- The genres we teach students in any course of learning should differ significantly, in large part because this is a key to helping students develop genre awareness. Students might, for example, investigate specifically what instructors in their intended major discipline want when they ask for an essay or term paper.
- Genres should not be memorized as formats, but learned as functional strategies for achieving one's purposes in particular types of situations. A genre-based approach is thus also a reader-centred approach—because readers expect particular genres in particular situations and the genres they expect embody effective strategies for writing successfully to those readers.
- Students should learn at least one genre in each course actively, by investigating it themselves (See Paltridge and Tardy, above.).

At Simon Fraser University, we have been using a genre-based approach to writing instruction for nearly two decades now. Our first course is called “University Writing,” and it teaches academic genres and generic structures with a strong focus on the types of writing undergraduates need to use. Essentially, this course uses a reader-centred approach—with the added recognition that effective strategies for writing to particular types of readers are embodied in the generic structures those readers expect. The first assignment in this course is usually to write summaries of short readings, in part because this is an important generic structure, i.e., many, if not most, academic genres include summaries of one sort or another. The ability to articulate, accurately and succinctly, the gist of something one has read is, moreover, a crucial cognitive ability in both academic and professional contexts. We may also assign each student to investigate how summaries are written and used in expert academic writing from their own field of study. Or more likely that assignment is left for later in the course—but it is crucial for students, at some point in the course, to understand experientially that appropriate, effective writing varies from discipline to discipline (even between, say, English and history, let alone between sociology and biology). Some instructors, whom I admire, also assign in this course one piece of non-academic writing, e.g., a personal essay *a la* Joan Didion, Annie Dillard, *et al.*, to help students get some sense of how academic writing is distinct.

By contrast, in the upper division advanced writing course I taught recently, students wrote personal essays; brochures, which had to fit readably on a single sheet of paper (8.5 in. × 11 in.); and political briefs (see Giltrow, 1988), either on paper or as scripted slide presentations. Because the course is designed to help students who are already good academic writers learn how to write outside the university, it emphasizes reader-centred, audience-specific writing—e.g., a political brief written to convince the local parks board to redesign a

small mixed-use, neighborhood park—which one student actually wrote for this course some years ago (and which won the day at what began as a very contentious parks board meeting). Among other things, this assignment helps students develop their abilities to understand things from other people’s perspectives and to persuade toward consensus, which is, of course, very different from arguing to win (see [Coe on Rogerian persuasion, 1992](#), and on political briefs in [Johns, 2002](#)).

This sort of genre approach can be used at almost any level. I know a middle school teacher who used it very successfully in a grade six class which created didactic storybooks (i.e., the kind that embody a lesson) for kindergarten kids. She provided a dozen successful storybooks, which they analyzed for everything from sentence length to narrative structure. And to develop a sense of the genre’s readership, she encouraged them to imagine reading their stories to their younger siblings. They produced some lovely storybooks—such as “Stinky, the Pig,” in which a lonely pig acquires playmates after taking a bath—which they read to their school’s kindergarten and grade one pupils, and they developed considerable genre awareness in the process. Developing an awareness that different situations call for writing in different genres is far more important than learning any particular genre.

## Conclusion

In the introduction to this paper, it was suggested that following [Hyon \(1996\)](#), genre theory and pedagogies might be divided into a few different camps and/or approaches; however, the situation is much more complex than that, as can be seen from the expert comments in this article. There are differences among the genre definitions and realizations among the contributions here, particularly in where the experts start (with the text or context) and what they emphasize in theories and pedagogies. Some experts who have contributed to this paper, especially those with a linguistics background, derive their theories and data first from the texts themselves; whereas others, specifically the New Rhetoricians, begin with context or ideology. The contributors also speak in different disciplinary vernaculars, drawing from different traditions (linguistics, rhetoric, English, education). However, there is also considerable overlap in the commentaries, indicating continued efforts to encompass in theory and practice the complexities of texts, contexts, writers and their purposes, and all that is beyond a text that influences writers and audiences.

What does this mean for second language writing? Can we use these insights from genre experts for our work? A call for papers in *California English* (CATENet: Call for Manuscripts, October, 2005) asked for manuscripts that “focus on exploring ways in which an understanding of genres, both school-based and others, can raise student achievement.” Are we ready to accept the proposition that students’ scores on high stakes tests will be affected by genre pedagogies? If so, how do we answer the questions in the call, including:

- What is the relationship between spoken and written genres, between written and visual genres?
- How has work with *text* genres enriched teaching and learning?

As a long-time student of *genre* who has attempted to write a literacy textbook for college freshmen that embodies genre theories (and failed), I find the call from *California English* to be too simplistic and text-based, and the contributors to this paper would undoubtedly agree. For, as Chris Tardy notes above:

If genre scholars across disciplines share one point of agreement it is the complexity of genres. Whether we choose to analyze genres in terms of their textual features, social actions, communities of practice, power structures, or the networks and modalities in which they operate (and individual researchers nearly always need to limit themselves to only some of these), we know that we are only seeing a partial view of all that is actually going on.

So what do second language writing teachers and researchers do? The experts represented here, and others, argue that we are obliged to expand our teaching and research (if not, perhaps, our high stakes assessment) horizons to encompass genre theories if we are to enhance student success in all rhetorical situations. In our classrooms, we should promote student exploration of *a variety of genres written in and for a variety of audiences and contexts*, thus enabling students to develop as readers and writers who can examine, initiate, and respond to the many rhetorical situations they will confront in school, in work, and in their social and cultural lives.

## References

- Bawarshi, A. (2003). *Genre and the invention of the writer: Reconsidering the place of invention in composition*. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press.
- Bazerman, C. (2004a). Intertextualities: Volosinov, Bakhtin, literary theory, and literacy studies. In A. Ball, & S. W. Freedman (Eds.), *Bakhtinian perspectives on languages, literacy, and learning* (pp. 53–65). Cambridge University Press.
- Bazerman, C. (2004b). Speech acts, genres, and activity systems: How texts organize activity and people. In C. Bazerman, & P. Prior (Eds.), *What writing does and how it does it* (pp. 309–339). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Bhatia, V. K. (2004). *Worlds of written discourse: A genre-based view*. London: Continuum.
- Bleich, D. (2001). The materiality of language and the pedagogy of exchange. *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture, 1*, 117–141.
- Campbell, K. K., & Jamieson, K. H. (1978). Form and genre in rhetorical criticism: An introduction. In K. K. Campbell, & K. H. Jamieson (Eds.), *Form and genre: Shaping rhetorical action* (pp. 9–32). Falls Church, VA: Speech Communication Association.
- Christie, F. (1991). Literacy in Australia. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 12*, 142–155.
- Coe, R. M. (1992). Classical and rogerian persuasion: An archeological/ecological explication. In N. Teich (Ed.), *Rogierian rhetoric* (pp. 83–108). Amsterdam: Ablex/Elsevier.
- Coe, R. M. (2002). The new rhetoric of genre: Writing political briefs. In A. M. Johns (Ed.), *Genre in the classroom: Multiple perspectives* (pp. 197–210). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Coe, R. M., & Freedman, A. (1994). Genre theory: Australian and North American approaches. In M. Kenney (Ed.), *Theorizing composition* (pp. 136–147). Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Co.
- Coe, R. M., Lingard, L., & Teslenko, T. (2002). *The rhetoric and ideology of genre: Strategies for stability and change*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (1993). *The powers of literacy: A genre approach to teaching writing*. Pittsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Devitt, A. (2004). *Writing genres*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Devitt, A., Reiff, M. J., & Bawarshi, A. (2004). *Scenes of writing: Strategies for composing genres*. New York: Longman/Pearson.
- Dudley-Evans, T., & St John, M. J. (1998). *Developments in English for Specific Purposes: A multi-disciplinary approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Feez, S. (2002). Heritage and innovation in second language education. In A. M. Johns (Ed.), *Genre in the classroom: Multiple perspectives* (pp. 43–72). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Flowerdew, J. (2002). Genre in the classroom: A linguistic approach. In A. M. Johns (Ed.), *Genre in the classroom: Multiple perspectives* (pp. 91–104). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Freadman, A. (1987). “Anyone for tennis?” The place of genre in learning: current debates. In I. Reid, (Ed.), *CSLE paper* (pp. 91–124). Geelong, Australia: Deakin University. [Condensed and reproduced in Freedman A. & Medway, P. (1994). *Genre and the new rhetoric* (pp. 43–66). London: Taylor & Francis.]

- Freedman, A. (1993). Show and tell? The role of explicit teaching in the learning of new genres. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 27, 222–251.
- Freedman, A. (1999). Beyond the text: Towards understanding the teaching and learning of genres. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33, 764–768.
- Freedman, A. (2002). Uptake. In R. M. Coe, L. Lingard, & T. Teslenko (Eds.), *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre* (pp. 39–53). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Freedman, A., & Medway, P. (Eds.). (1994). *Genre and the new rhetoric*. London: Taylor & Frances.
- Giltrow, J. (1988). Canadian contexts for public advocacy: Briefs as a genre. *Technostyle*, 7, 17–25.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1978). *Language as social semiotic*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1985). *An introduction to functional grammar*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Martin, J. R. (1993). *Writing science*. London: Falmer.
- Hyland, K. (2003). Genre-based pedagogies: A social response to process. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 12, 17–29.
- Hyland, K. (2005). Stance and engagement: A model of interaction in academic discourse. *Discourse Studies*, 7, 173–192.
- Hyon, S. (1996). Genres in three traditions: Implications for second language teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 30, 693–722.
- Johns, A. M. (1997). *Text, role, and context: Developing academic literacies*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Johns, A. M. (2002). Destabilizing and enriching novice students' genre theories. In A. M. Johns (Ed.), *Genre in the classroom: Multiple perspectives* (pp. 237–248). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Martin, J. R. (2002). Meaning beyond the clause: SFL perspectives. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 22, 52–74.
- Miller, C. (1984). Genre as social action. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 70, 151–167.
- Paltridge, B. (2000). Systems of genres and the EAP classroom. *TESOL Matters*, 10, 12.
- Paltridge, B. (2004). The exegesis as a genre: An ethnographic examination. In L. Ravelli, & R. Ellis (Eds.), *Analyzing academic writing: Contextualized frameworks* (pp. 84–103). London: Continuum.
- Paré, A. (2002). Genre and identity: Individuals, institutions, and ideology. In R. M. Coe, L. Lingard, & T. Teslenko (Eds.), *The rhetoric and ideology of genre: Strategies for stability and change* (pp. 57–71). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Reiff, M. J. (2005 November) *Project 4: Fieldwiring/Ethnography. Assignment for English 355*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee.
- Samraj, B. (2004). Discourse features of the student-produced academic research paper: Variations across disciplinary courses. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 3, 5–22.
- Swales, J. M. (1990). *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Swales, J. M. (1998). *Other floors, other voices: A textography of a small university building*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Tardy, C. M. (2004). *Exploring the interactions between writing instruction and disciplinary practice: Pathways of four multilingual writers*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Purdue University.