

Genre, text type, and the language learning classroom

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Recent years have seen increased emphasis being placed on the notion of genre in the language learning classroom. Less attention, however, has been given to the notion of 'text type'. This article argues that the distinction between 'genre' and 'text type' is an important and useful one. To illustrate this distinction, an analysis is presented of a number of texts from two genre-based coursebooks, one which focuses on adult second language literacy development, and another which focuses on writing in an academic context. The article also suggests ways in which the relationship between genres and text types may be exploited in the language learning classroom.

Introduction Recent years have seen increased attention being given to the notion of genre in ELT. This has been especially true in the case of English for Specific Purpose (ESP), but is increasingly so for other areas of language teaching. In Australia, for example, genre-based approaches have been applied in academic writing, English in the workplace, adult second language literacy development, and language development in schools. Less attention, however, has been given to the notion of 'text type'. One effect of this is that, in a number of instances, the terms 'genre' and 'text type' seem to have been conflated, with the term 'genre' being used to include both of these notions.

In a large scale corpus-based study of twenty-three genres and just under one million words, Biber (1988) draws a distinction between genre and text type which has important implications for the language learning classroom. For Biber, the term 'genre' categorizes texts on the basis of external criteria, while 'text types' represent groupings of texts which are similar in linguistic form, irrespective of genre. Thus, the term 'genre' describes types of activities such as, for example, prayers, sermons, songs, and poems, 'which regularly occur in society' (Dudley-Evans 1989: 77), and 'are considered by the speech community as being of the same type' (Richards *et al.* 1992: 156). Text types, on the other hand, represent groupings of texts which are similar in terms of co-occurrence of linguistic patterns. Biber found that the same genre can differ greatly in its linguistic characteristics. He also observed that different genres can be quite similar linguistically. The terms 'genre' and 'text type' thus represent different, yet complementary, perspectives on texts. This article argues that the distinction between genre and text type is an important and useful one for language learning classrooms.

Notions of genre and text type

A number of definitions of genre have been influential in the area of genre analysis, notably those of Martin (1984) and Swales (1990). Martin's definition has been particularly influential in the work of the Australian genre-based approach to teaching writing. Martin (*ibid.*: 25) describes genre as 'a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture'. Further examination of Martin's work, in which he gives examples of genres such as poems, narratives, expositions, lectures, seminars, recipes, manuals, appointment-making, service encounters, and news broadcasts, clearly shows that his definition takes largely the same perspective on genre as that of Biber (1988). Swales' (1990: 58) definition of genre as 'a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes which are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community' shows that he, too, views the notion of genre from a similar perspective to that expressed by Biber.

Various examples have been presented of the rhetorical structuring of different text types. For instance, Meyer (1975), in an analysis of the rhetorical organization of 'expositions', presents four main types of text structure: time order, collections of descriptions, comparisons, and cause and effect. Other discussions of rhetorical patterning in texts can be found in the work of Hoey (1983), who discusses problem-solution, general-particular, matching contrast, and hypothetical-real texts, and Crombie (1985), who presents examples of the problem-solution and the topic-restriction-illustration type of text. Hedge (1988) presents text type categories such as static descriptions, process descriptions, narratives, cause and effect, discussions, compare and contrast, classifications, definitions, and reviews. McCarthy (1991) and McCarthy and Carter (1994) discuss rhetorical variation in texts, and present a number of examples of commonly occurring text types. Each of these descriptions of rhetorical patternings is extremely useful for the language learning classroom.

This discussion may give the impression that the notions of genre and text type are clearly defined in the area of genre analysis. Whilst this is true in some cases, it is much less so in others, and, in particular, in certain pedagogic applications of the results of genre analysis. In fact, some pedagogic applications of genre analyses seem to be based on the notion of 'text type' rather than 'genre'. Derewianka (1991), for example, in her discussion of writing in schools, presents as genre categories texts which she labels as recounts, narratives, information reports, explanations, and arguments. Categories such as these can also be found in Martin's more recent work on genre (see, for example, Martin 1989). This is also the case in the work of Hammond *et al.* (1992) who, in a work focusing on adult second language literacy development, list as genre categories anecdotes, descriptions, expositions, news items, procedures, recounts, reports, and reviews. An examination of the written texts presented in Hammond *et al.*, however, reveals that these texts may be viewed from another perspective as well; that is, one which identifies the genre and text type category membership of the genres in

the terms described above. This alternative perspective is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Examples of genres and text types (based on Hammond et al. 1992)

Genre	Text type
Recipe	Procedure
Personal letter	Anecdote
Advertisement	Description
Police report	Description
Student essay	Exposition
Formal letter	Exposition
Formal letter	Problem-Solution
News item	Recount
Health brochure	Procedure
Student assignment	Recount
Biology textbook	Report
Film review	Review

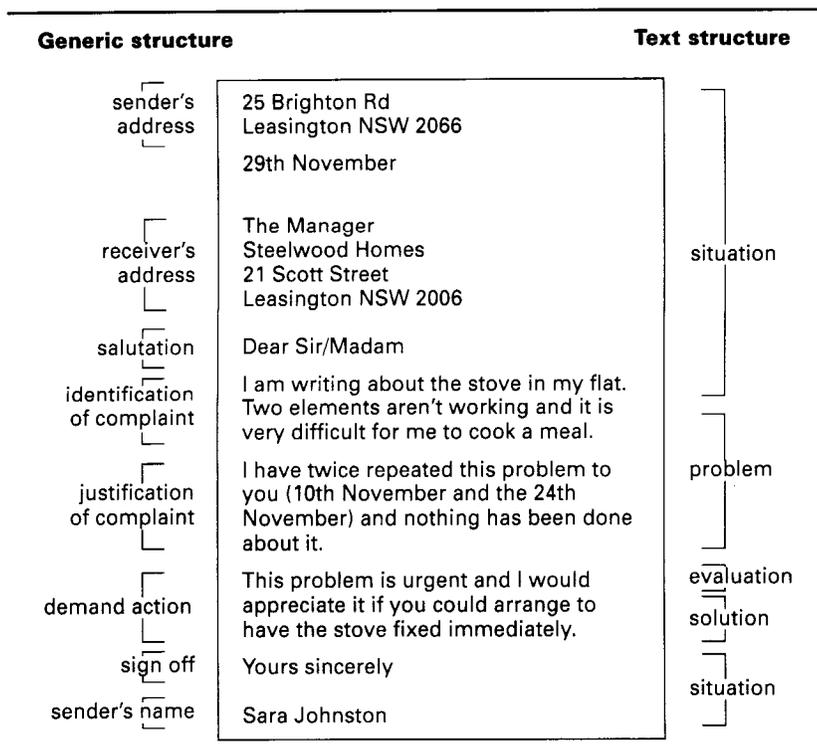
It is clear from this analysis that more than one genre may share the same type. That is, the genres of advertisements and police reports may both share the text type of description. Equally, a single genre, such as formal letters, may be associated with more than one text type; in this case, exposition and problem-solution.

Other examples of text types being associated with more than one genre can be found in the work of Hoey (1983): problem-solution texts are described within the context of advertisements, scientific discourse, short stories, and novels; general-particular texts are described within the context of poems, novels, and scientific texts; matching contrast texts are described within the context of poems and letters to the editor. Equally, Crombie's (1985) work on discourse structures provides examples of problem-solution texts within the context of scientific reports and advertisements, and topic-illustration texts within the context of advertisements and news reports.

Examples of genre and text type

Two different perspectives can be offered on the structure of these texts: one that identifies the text's generic structure based on its genre category membership (in Biber's (1988) terms), and another that describes its text structure based on its internal patternings of rhetorical organization. These two perspectives are illustrated in Figure 1, where an analysis is presented of one of the formal letters included in Hammond *et al.* (1992). This analysis presents structural components of the text which may easily be disguised if just one of these structural patternings is presented to students. For example, the generic structure analysis of this particular text omits the evaluative comment of 'This problem is urgent . . .', an essential component of the text in which the writer expresses her personal viewpoint on the situation. Equally, the text structure analysis does not account for conventions such as where the sender's and receiver's address should be placed, and the fact that there should be a formal sign off. This analysis also reveals that the text structure component 'evaluation' does not necessarily need to occur in final position, as it does in many other problem-solution texts.

Figure 1: A formal letter: problem-solution (based on Hammond et al. 1992: 57)



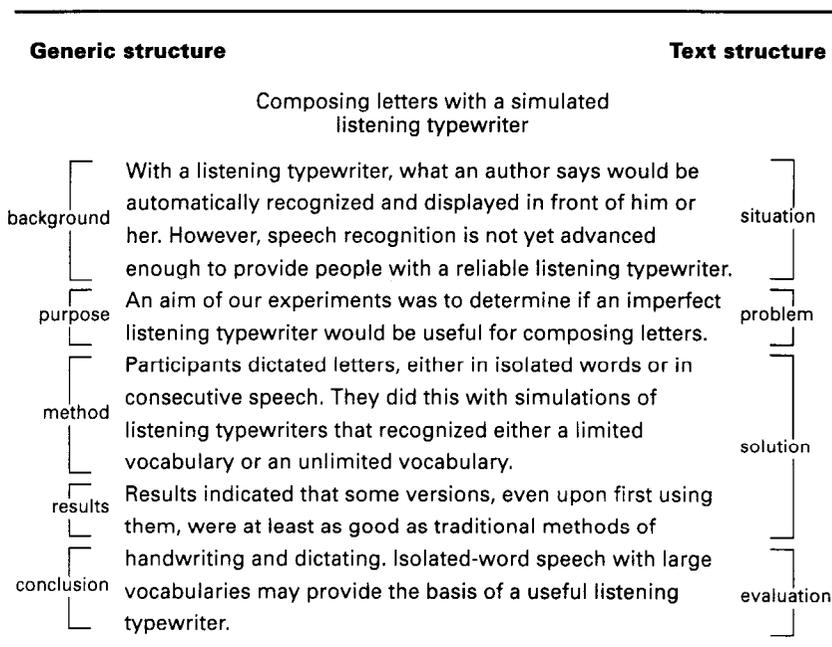
The analysis presented in Figure 1 may seem, in some ways, to be rather obvious. However, when this text is contrasted with, say, a personal letter, where generic structure components such as the receiver's address is omitted, and the sender's address and sign off may also be omitted, one sees the value of including the generic structure of the text in this presentation. When one considers the lesser effect of such a letter written without any evaluative comment, the value of including text structure in the analysis is also made clear. The analysis also highlights the fact that different sections of the text may be part of the same text structure component; in this case, the sign off and sender's name join sender's address, receiver's address, salutation, and the first sentence of the body of the text, as part of the overall situation component of the problem-solution framework.

The analysis presented in Figure 1 thus incorporates generic and textual components which are essential to the particular genre and text type categories. Presentations of genre analysis which conflate the notions of genre and text type, or only present one or the other of these analyses, may easily conceal some of these components and, thereby, not always provide students with a complete view of the discourse components of texts.

The analysis of the abstract of an experimental research report presented in Figure 2 demonstrates, further, how the perspective described above may be usefully presented in the language learning classroom. From this analysis it can be seen that the evaluation

component of the text may also occur in final position. The analysis also highlights the location of the research problem in the text, presented in the generic structure as purpose. It illustrates, as well, how the solution to the problem component of the text is found in both the method and results sections of the text, and not just in one or the other.

Figure 2: Abstract of an experimental research report: problem-solution (based on Weissberg and Buker 1990: 185)



This analysis, when compared to the analysis presented in Figure 1, illustrates once more how different genres may be extremely similar in terms of text type. From a student's point of view, analyses such as these provide extremely useful textual information, in that they demonstrate how the rhetorical patterns associated with one particular text type may be usefully drawn on for the production of significantly different genres.

Genre, text type, and the language learning classroom

There are many ways in which the relationship between genres and text types may be exploited in the language learning classroom. Many of the suggestions made in the literature on genre analysis for dealing with the generic structure of texts may equally be applied to the teaching of textual structures. Swales (1990), Hammond *et al.* (1992), Flowerdew (1993), and Bhatia (1993), for example, provide examples of many such activities.

In addition, generic structures and text structures may be compared and contrasted in the language learning classroom. Students, for example, may be presented with a number of genre and text type categories and asked to select the appropriate category for a particular text. They may then be given a list of generic and text structure components and asked to locate them within the text. Conversely, students may be presented with the generic and text structure components of a text, and asked to

reconstruct the text from these and a list of key content words and concepts. Other tasks may involve students arranging sections of a text on the basis of generic and text structure information provided.

Students may, equally, be given a number of examples of a particular genre and asked to identify the generic structure and associated text type/s on the basis of their examination of the texts. In this way students can explore the characteristic features of particular genres, and the sorts of variation that occur within them.

In English for academic purposes (EAP), students may be asked, for example, to analyse essays, lectures, and debates for similarities and differences in terms of generic structures and accompanying text types. They can then be directed to create texts of their own, drawing on the language and discourse patterns identified in the texts they have already examined.

Students may also be asked to analyse assignment and examination questions in order to identify the appropriate text type for the particular question. Students may then draw up a 'text frame' (McCarthy and Carter 1994: 58–62) for the particular assignment or examination question; that is, a diagrammatic representation of the structural organization of their answer to the question, which students can then use to write their own individual texts.

Conclusion This article has discussed the notions of genre and text type within the context of the language learning classroom. It has also described some ways in which these notions may be exploited in the classroom. It has been suggested that the distinction between genre and text type is an important and useful one for language teaching and learning. The specific aim of the article, however, has been to suggest ways in which these different, yet complementary, views on discourse structure may be included in the analysis of genres and, by application, language learning programmes.

There are many ways of looking at discourse structures other than those presented here and each of them provides important views on the nature of genres. There are, too, already many examples, especially in ESP and the work of the Australian 'genre school' (McCarthy and Carter 1994: 29), where genre-based views of language have been successfully applied in language teaching and learning. This article provides suggestions for one further way in which a genre-based view of language may be incorporated into the language learning classroom.

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