

BOOK REVIEW



METHODOLOGICAL POWER OF GENRE CONCEPT

Matt Kessler and Charlene Polio (Eds.).
CONDUCTING GENRE-BASED RESEARCH IN
APPLIED LINGUISTICS (2024), Routledge.
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Since 1980s, a surge of interest in understanding how language functions in different social contexts, particularly for the purposes of language teaching and learning, has led to the development of a genre-based research approach. Nowadays, it is a multifaceted and dynamic methodological paradigm which plays an important role in applied linguistics by bridging a gap between theoretical conceptualizations of social aspects of communication and their practical application in real-world situations. However, the wealth of insights gained by genre-oriented applied linguistic studies requires some systematic scrutiny as they have already become rather diverse. In view of this, the volume *Conducting genre-based research in applied linguistics: A methodological guide*, edited by Matt Kessler and Charlene Polio, appears to be a timely and comprehensive resource for those interested in genre perspectives on language functioning and learning. Furthermore, the contributions to the book unveil and show rich methodological horizons of the genre-based approach in language studies.

The book consists of three sections preceded by the Introduction. As the editors explain, their intended readership includes graduate students, both master's and doctoral ones, and early-career researchers. This orientation influenced the organization of the volume: it begins with a comprehensive overview of the genre concept (provided by the editors) in three fields – English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL) and New Rhetoric – followed by ten chapters, each having one and the same layout: 1)

introduction to the approach and definition of genre, 2) goals, 3) common research methods, 4) example studies, 5) issues and challenges, 6) study-in-focus (a typical, well-designed paper highlighted by the authors of the chapters), and 7) future research directions. Such a structure of the book appears to be quite helpful as it organizes and guides readers' perception in the way which ensures the formation of a systematic understanding and vision of the applications of genre concept in applied linguistic research.

The initial book section, "Research Methods," includes two chapters. The first one (Chapter 2) by Raffaella Negretti and Baraa Khuder concentrates on case studies which aim to reveal and understand, by means of interviews, text histories, questionnaires, and observations, how learners develop their genre knowledge and what factors influence this process. The authors emphasize the importance of a careful research design and the value of critical reflexivity in the interpretation of findings in genre-based case studies. They also identify such possible future trends as the use of published case studies in genre pedagogy, focus on the dialogic interaction (between teachers and students or co-authors) which develops genre awareness, and investigation of complex relationship between genre knowledge and learning experiences across languages. Chapter 3 (authored by Christine Tardy) considers genre-based approaches in ethnographic research which has some similarities with case studies in terms of their qualitative perspectives and the focus on understanding social phenomena and contexts. Tardy explains that many ethnographic studies explore broader literacy practices using the concept of genre as an important tool. Those studies which focus on genre *per se* either explore texts within a genre with close attention to the context of its use or mostly concentrate on its contextual issues. Since ethnographic research into genres is rather limited due to its complexity, Tardy suggests increasing the number of genre-oriented ethnographic studies which can reveal various levels of genre knowledge connected to social environments.

The second section of the volume, "Analyses, Tools, and Topics," includes six chapters. In Chapter 4, Ken Hyland discusses metadiscourse research (to which he himself essentially contributed by offering appropriate theoretical frameworks). As known, metadiscourse embraces words and phrases which writers or speakers use to organize their texts, express attitudes, and connect with their audiences. Metadiscourse research is primarily corpus-based although there are occasional papers which methodologically rely on insider informants' use and perception of various metadiscourse markers. Hyland emphasizes that the notion of genre is key to metadiscourse studies, as it informs the language choices which writers make to guide their readers. Despite a number of analytical challenges, metadiscourse research, in Hyland's opinion, can further be applied not only to the analysis of written academic texts but also to the study of appropriate patterns in different genres, domains, and languages. Furthermore, metadiscourse research results can be explored from a pedagogical perspective to reveal their learning impact in English for Specific and Academic Purposes (ESP and EAP) courses.

Chapter 5, written by J. Elliott Casal and Matt Kessler, discusses genre analysis, mostly associated with the work of John M. Swales. The authors describe main stages of this procedure (which they call a rhetorical move-step analysis) and explain that it has such limitations as insufficient transparency and reproducibility since the boundaries of moves and steps are semantically and functionally delineated. The authors of the chapter suggest deeper exploration of the actual implementation of Swalesian genre analysis by evaluating changes in learner production and perception of related activities by students and instructors. They also remark that rhetorical genre analysis has been predominantly applied to English academic texts and therefore there is a need to expand it to the texts of other professional genres. It should be noted in this respect that the body of research utilizing move-step analysis seems to be growing in the fields other than EAP and has already been applied to quite different, often multimodal genres, for example, such as the press release (Yakhontova & Ivantsiv, 2021) or webchat (Xu & Lockwood, 2021). Also, the rhetorical move-step analysis has been often used as part of contrastive genre analysis which focuses either on genres in different languages or those from different social spheres (see, for example, Deng & Wannaruk, 2021; Yu, 2022). The overview of both of the mentioned above research directions could have expanded the methodological range of the move-step model application discussed in this chapter.

Further in this section, Viviana Cortes shows the relevance of genre concept to the analysis of the relationship between moves/steps and such formulaic expressions in texts as lexical bundles and phrase frames (p-frames). Cortes explains the methodological principles and a corpus-driven procedure of the analysis of these two types of lexicogrammatical constructs. She emphasizes that the majority of investigations go beyond the surface features of lexical bundles or p-frames and use a formulaic language perspective to describe a particular genre, or to compare the texts of one genre across languages and contexts, or to discuss language production of novice or L2 learners. Although identification of lexical bundles and p-frames and boundaries between them may be at times problematic, formulaic language corpus-driven studies are important, according to Cortes, as they can be applied to the analysis of numerous genres, both academic and non-academic, and possess a pedagogical potential.

The following chapter on multidimensional analysis by Larissa Goulart and Shelley Staples also describes an approach which is grounded in the idea of linguistic variation. Multidimensional analysis (or MDA), initiated by Douglas Biber, uses statistical procedures to reveal groups of co-occurring linguistic features which are associated with communicative functions and can therefore be used for genre and register categorization. Goulart and Staples, however, warn that MDA has not been sufficiently grounded in genre theory and, therefore, future research directions should include more attention to genre frameworks as well as the development of a promising interest in expanding MDA to spoken genres.

The penultimate chapter of this section, written by Charlene Polio and Hyung-Jo Yoon, considers the application of a genre-based approach to the research related to complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CALF) measures which usually occurs in the assessment context. As Polio and Yoon explain, such research is either experimental or corpus-based and mainly focuses on language development across genres from the perspectives of complexity, accuracy, and fluency. A problematic aspect of this area is that many CALF measures-oriented studies treat genre in broad terms and do not take into account the role of social factors. Therefore, possible future research, as the authors of the chapter suggest, can include consideration of a wider range of genres produced under real-life conditions and in various languages as well as more pedagogically-oriented studies and those integrating CALF measures with other methods.

The section closes with the chapter by Larissa D'Angelo and Francesca Marino on multimodal analysis which provides an overview of the recent methodology flourishing in genre studies. Multimodal analysis addresses complexity and interplay of semiotic resources in various genres, many of them resulting from the rapid development of digital technologies. The authors highlight main approaches within this methodology and discuss various tools (e.g., software) they utilize. D'Angelo and Marino mention, among the limitations of this analysis, the challenge it provides for linguists who consider language a primary focus of their research. The authors advocate the development of software and hardware able to store large amounts of multimodal data and point out that social media platforms still remain a relatively unexplored territory for multimodal studies.

The third and final section of the book under the title "Focus on the Learner and Learning" consists of two chapters marked by a predominant pedagogical focus. In Chapter 10, Bruna Sommer-Farias overviews genre-based studies on multilingual writing, which help to reveal, by combining text-based and ethnographic procedures, how writers learn and use genres in several languages. Sommer-Farias elucidates the metacognitive, potentially non-language-dependent character of genre awareness available for multilingual users. She outlines such future research directions in this area as writing by multicompetent users in more than two or three languages and development of effective tools which can better disclose how genre-specific knowledge works across languages.

The last chapter in the volume, authored by Kathryn Accurso and Jennifer Walsh Marr, shows in detail the SFL framework for revealing and analyzing "patterns in purpose, form, and situated social action across texts" (p. 225). As Accurso and Walsh Marr explain, the SFL methodology focuses on the study of texts at the level of genre and register with strong pedagogical implications, which can help students better understand the social functions of texts as well as linguistic and multimodal choices underlying them. Although SFL faces a constant challenge of research complexity due to the involvement of various levels of textual analysis, it remains an influential and important direction of genre-based research due to its connection between descriptive analysis and pedagogical practice.

Further research, as the authors of the chapter suggest, should focus on multimodal and multilingual aspects of text production and reconsider genre concept as a tool for social change.

Thus, the reviewed book showcases a wide panorama of genre-based approaches across various applied linguistic domains. Furthermore, the book expands and deepens the understanding of genre itself as each chapter opens with the explanation of how genre concept is understood in a particular area of applied linguistics. Another quite useful and therefore valuable feature of the volume is the set of research questions which each chapter offers. Such questions, typically posed by the researchers utilizing a genre-based approach in a specific area of applied linguistics, provide an effective guidance and support to all those wishing to elaborate genre-oriented studies.

What, perhaps, is somewhat unexpected in this volume, is the arrangement of contents. Given the popularity and influence of Swalesian genre analysis (as well as the time of its emergence), wouldn't it be more logical to begin the volume with chapter 5? In such a case, it could be followed by chapter 9 on multimodal analysis (which also uses the notion of move) and chapters 4 (on metadiscourse), 6 (on lexical bundles and p-phrases) and 7 (on multidimensional analysis). The first section would then become the second one, while the last section would remain in its place, perhaps, with an added chapter on CALF measures which seems to better fit section 3 due to its pedagogical orientation.

Despite this small reservation (or reviewer's subjective opinion!), the book *Conducting genre-based research in applied linguistics: A methodological guide* is a theoretically important and practically helpful publication not only for novice applied linguists but also for experienced ones. Undoubtedly, it will find its interested, attentive, and grateful readers in various academic contexts. And last, but not least, this volume vividly demonstrates the methodological power of genre concept, which is so dear to the heart of genre researchers throughout the globe.

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