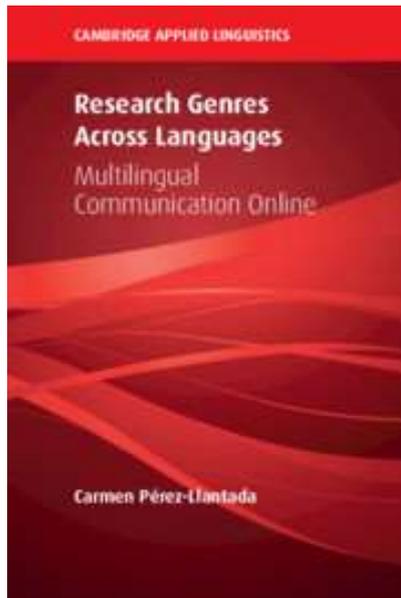


BOOK REVIEW



EXPLORING RESEARCH GENRES AND LANGUAGE-USE IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Carmen Pérez-Llantada. RESEARCH GENRES ACROSS LANGUAGES. MULTILINGUAL COMMUNICATION ONLINE (2021), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 300 pp., ISBN-978-1-108-79259-2 (PBK); ISBN-978-1-108-87052-8 (EBK). <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108870528>

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In similar ways as the printing press paved the way for new means of communication and new ways for people to imagine each other and the world in the early modern period (Anderson, 1983), the internet has fundamentally changed our communication practices and our imaginaries. This book joins a rapidly growing body of scholarship that attempts to analyze these changes as they pertain to the world of research and science (see e.g. Gross & Buehl, 2016; Kupper, Moreno-Castro, & Fornetti, 2021; Luzón & Pérez-Llantada, 2019). Carmen Pérez-Llantada, an established authority on genre and multilingualism, brings together key ideas in her work over the last several years into a comprehensive and discerning synthesis, showing the value of using genre as an analytical lens.

She claims that the book is “a contribution to the existing literature on genres and English for Academic and Research Purposes” (p. 1). And while it might be particularly relevant for EAP and related fields, the book has a much broader reach, with valuable insights also for those working in the fields of applied linguistics more broadly, writing studies, rhetoric and composition, and communication studies. While these fields are often concerned with similar empirical phenomena, they sometimes do not engage with each other because of different theoretical or methodological traditions. This book’s broad theoretical approach and conceptual ambitions, however, make it accessible and relevant across multiple fields.

Chapter 1: Research Genres in Context

Pérez-Llantada starts out by explicitly situating her work as an extension of John Swales's work on genre (Swales, 1990, 2004). She notes that Swales's 2004 publication of *Research Genres* coincided with the conception of Web 2.0, a term often used to denote a shift towards a more dynamic, interactive, and participatory use of the internet. To Pérez-Llantada, the internet has been a main driver in both producing new communicative needs and possibilities for researchers, changing existing genres and creating new ones, and in so doing also creating new conditions for language use. Thus, taking Swales's approach to genre as a framework, her interest is in analyzing what has happened since 2004, explaining that "the main aim of the book is to provide an empirically informed view of the existing ecology of research genres that supports multilingual science communication online" (p. 16).

To reach this aim, she focuses on developments within STEMM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, Medicine) adopting an "explanatory sequential mixed-methods design" (p. 16). Concretely, Pérez-Llantada brings together a synthesis of existing literature from a broad range of fields including social theory, applied linguistics, education, rhetoric and composition, and communication studies with an eclectic set of empirical material: data from Eurostat, OECD, small-scale specialized corpora consisting of different digital genres from a selection of STEMM journals (e.g. *Cell*, *Nature*, *PLoS*), and various crowdfunding platforms and qualitative surveys of authors of these genres. In other words, Pérez-Llantada's goal is not to understand a specific genre, but to outline a more conceptual understanding of a whole communicative system.

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Chapter 2: Theories and Metaphors

The author next presents concepts used to describe and explain key features of this communicative system. The chapter starts out with a review of literature on research genres explicitly citing Swales over the last decade, showing that little attention has been paid to digital genres in this work thus far. She moves from this review to an overview of some of the key recent concepts used to understand how the internet and digitalization have made it necessary to reexamine our assumptions about "context," "texts" and "readers/audiences". Specifically, Pérez-Llantada points to growing complexity as a key feature of the digital era. While the journal article remains the core genre, a host of *add-on genres* surrounding this core has emerged, such as the graphical abstract or author videos. These trends have been explained through such concepts as "genre remediation" and "genre webification" (e.g. Miller & Kelly, 2017). Similarly, she points to concepts such as "collapsing of contexts" (e.g. Davis & Jurgenson, 2014) and "polycontextuality" to grasp how a digital text might be situated in several contexts at once, and as such, prompting a rethinking of how we understand *context*.

Based on these conceptualizations of increasing complexity, Pérez-Llantada argues that she wants to "dissociate genres from the traditional views of 'context of

social interaction' and, instead, associate them within a complex layering of contextual and situational frames for research genres" (p. 40). Furthermore, this "complex layering" is a rationale for her conceptualization of an "ecological view" of genres. In this view, the research world is understood as a sort of "ecosystem" that contains both "ecologies of genres" and "ecologies of languages" that interact in complex ways.

Chapter 3: Science, Genres and Social Action

Here, features of the ecologies outlined in chapter two are examined. Using the growth of online platforms such as *PLoS*, *eLife*, and *IEEE Spectrum* that offer a much broader range of communicative possibilities than traditional print journals, she shows how these digital arenas both respond to and generate new communicative needs. Specifically, Pérez-Llantada highlights the emergence of "rhetorical hybrids" such as "short summaries" or "video methods articles" primarily intended for expert-to-expert communication, and blog posts and summaries aimed at non-expert audiences. She also shows how digital technology enables new semiotic resources such as visuals and video that enable the creation of "semiotic hybrids," such as for example graphical abstracts and author videos. The examples are geared towards showing how these hybrids do not completely depart from existing genres but reshape them to serve new communicative needs.

Chapter 4: Language Diversity in Genred Activity

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The fourth chapter examines how the layered and complex digital genre ecology outlined in the third chapter is also accompanied by "complex multilingual practices" (p. 99). Where some see the internet and digitalization as trends that have further bolstered a monolingual English research world, Pérez-Llantada wants us to think differently. Specifically, she takes issue with what she describes as "an excessive focus in the literature on the dominance of English for communicating globally and the pressure to publish in English in highly competitive journals" (p. 108). Drawing on Canagarajah and Said (2011), she argues that this focus misrepresents the role English plays in contemporary digital research communication and that English is becoming "deterritorialized" (p. 24). That is, English no longer belongs to a privileged group of "inner circle" "native speaker" researchers, but to a global scientific community who uses English for instrumental, practical purposes.

In this global scientific community, the monolingual English researcher is an anomaly, and the vast majority of researchers use English for some purposes (predominantly peer-to-peer communication) and other languages for other purposes (communicating with non-experts in blogs, crowd-funding platforms, and so on). She makes this argument by drawing on analyses of language use and perceptions of language use in threads on ResearchGate and the crowdfunding platform Experiment.com, a survey of project launchers using Experiment.com, data from the SciELF corpus, and short summaries and abstracts in *Nature*. "Paying attention to dynamic multilingualism and to polylinguaging in the research world

would make linguistic diversity an effective way of resisting and redressing monoglossic (English-only) language ideologies”, she concludes (p. 128).

Chapter 5: Genres and Multiliteracies

Pérez-Llantada next identifies the kind of literacies that novice researchers will need to develop to navigate the complexities of the language and genre ecologies outlined so far: rhetorical literacy, multimodal literacy, intercultural literacy, digital literacy, academic bi/multiliteracy, and not least, the ways that these intersect. To illustrate some of the strategies researchers have already adopted, she investigates a sample of articles in the journal called *Data-in-Brief*, which focuses on describing and making available a particular set of data for further use by other researchers. Pérez-Llantada also reports on a survey of authors with recent publications in *Cell*, *Nature*, *eLife*, and *PLoS* about their practices and perceptions of the expanded genre repertoire. A key finding from this survey is that researchers still consider the research article the most important genre, but that they also see the value of the *add-on genres* that have emerged.

Chapter 6: Innovation and Change in Genre-Based Pedagogies

To follow up the need for developing the kind of “multiliteracies” outlined in the previous chapter, Pérez-Llantada offers a set of concrete teaching modules, complete with tasks and prompts that may be adapted to specific teaching contexts. The prompts are designed to help researchers “become ethnographers” of the communicative practices in their respective fields (p. 189), and they thus offer ways to analyze and discuss some of the emerging genres discussed in the book.

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Chapter 7: The Way Ahead

The final chapter outlines next steps in terms of research areas (spoken genres, other disciplines than STEMM, the use of visuals, bi/multiliteracy transfer) and methodologies (rhetorical and critical genre analysis, register analysis, ethnographic analysis and reader-response analysis). Pérez-Llantada stresses the value of genre analysis and genre theory to help us understand not only the genres themselves, but what kind of knowledge production they enable, and what kind of knowledge needs they respond to, as new technology continuously shapes our communicative possibilities. Overall, this is a timely and rich book that succeeds in its aim to offer an empirically informed broad conceptual discussion of research genres in the digital era. Its strength is in its conceptual ambitions – drawing on a wide range of social theory (Giddens, Bauman), literary theory (Bakhtin) and an extensive range of conceptual work from education, media studies, communication studies, applied linguistics, and more. This conceptual richness can make the book a demanding read as the chapters teem with concepts and references, at times making it challenging to discern Pérez-Llantada’s own voice in the mix. Yet, at the same time, the conceptual breadth is refreshing in an EAP landscape that sometimes appears

rather theoretically narrow. Pérez-Llantada's more ambitious conceptual mapping of this landscape is thus well worth the challenge.

The wide range of empirical material is well-suited to illustrate Pérez-Llantada's key points. However, the trade off in taking such a broad approach is that there is not always room for the kind of analytical depth that a narrower conceptual and empirical scope would afford. For example, in chapter 4, Pérez-Llantada uses a discussion thread on ResearchGate to support the claim that multilingual researchers perceive English "merely an instrumental vehicle for knowledge sharing and exchange" (p. 109). While the discussion thread certainly suggests that this is true for some researchers, using a discussion thread seems a bit thin to support the more general, and contentious, claim that Pérez-Llantada puts forth. This is particularly true, since the book's bibliography contains many studies that provide more in-depth empirical material that suggests that to many multilingual researchers English is not just instrumental and *neutral* but much more political. However, this is a minor point, in an overall convincing argument that English needs to be decentered and that digital genres have paved the way for multilingual practices that deserve much more attention. Overall, Pérez-Llantada's project of favoring breadth over depth makes for an important contribution and points to many interesting and important areas for further investigation. Another major strength is how Pérez-Llantada seamlessly brings together theory, empirical research, and pedagogy. While "pedagogical implications" is often provided in a brief or general paragraph or two (if included at all), this book provides a substantive chapter, clearly informed by the preceding empirical and conceptual discussions to spell out concrete pedagogical interventions that many will no doubt find extremely helpful. Hence, Pérez-Llantada not only provides us with examples of interesting pedagogical strategies, but also with a model for how to move from research to research-informed pedagogies.

In sum, I very much recommend this book to researchers and practitioners interested in research writing, research literacies and research communication working in EAP, communication studies, writing studies, or rhetoric and composition. Pérez-Llantada has offered us a comprehensive analysis that will be useful in shaping our research agendas and pedagogical practices in years to come.

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