GENRE ANALYSIS: LIFE MADE EASIER FOR ESP TEACHERS

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This article looks at Vijay K. Bhatia's book, *Analysing Genre: Language Use in Professional Settings*, which had a powerful effect on genre research in the period following its publication, for significant researchers in the field, and which has retained its full relevance to ESP practitioners owing to the innovative ideas put forward by the author. It is therefore an attempt to prove how the concept or rather the instrument of genre, as defined and demonstrated by Bhatia, can be used with rewarding results in the teaching / learning of Business or Legal or Academic English.

Bhatia intends to answer the question: *Why do members of a specialist community write the way they do?* To do this, he looks at developments in linguistics relevant to the analysis of professional and academic genres for applied linguistics purposes, and thus attempts to clarify the concept of *genre analysis.* He focuses on discussing applications of genre analysis in two domains of language use: language teaching, especially ESP, and language reform in public documents, proposing *easification* as a less damaging tool to the authenticity of genres in professional and academic discourses.

The book gives an outline of the theory of genre analysis drawing on a variety of diverse disciplines that help the system define its key features, boundaries and methodology, analyses of texts from a variety of genres and linguistic insights. The

author points out the conventional aspects of genre construction, and looks at the use of genre analysis in language teaching (ESP).

The categories of readers Bhatia addresses are mainly applied linguistics researchers, non-native English speaking teachers, writers of instructional materials, as well as reflective teachers and test designers. I find the book particularly relevant for teachers of English for legal purposes, as, to put in the words of Professor Christopher Candlin, the general editor of the book, when quoting John Swales' mention in *Episodes in ESP*, Dr. Bhatia "has enjoyed a long and well-recognized involvement with the particular genre of legal texts".
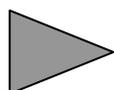
Main concepts

Bhatia uses four concepts that deal with linguistic description: **register, grammatical-rhetorical analysis, discourse analysis** and **genre.** According to him, **register analysis** is a surface-level linguistic description. "It focuses mainly on the identification of statistically significant lexico-grammatical features of a linguistic variety" (Bhatia: 5) He quotes Halliday, McIntosh and Stevens' definition of register (1964:87): *"The name given to a variety of language distinguished according to its use is register." Field, mode* and *tenor* are situational and contextual dimensions of registers.

The **grammatical-rhetorical analysis**, a functional language description**,** *aims to investigate the relationship between grammatical choice and rhetorical function in written English for Science and Technology* in the opinion of Selinker, Lackstrom and Trimble (1973:1, quoted by Bhatia). They attempt to discover how specific linguistic features take on restricted values in the structuring of scientific communication. The main shortcoming is that the analysis is carried out from outside the process, the theoretician lacking important information as to the reasons of a specific structuring, which leads to misleading generalizations such as the importance of definitions in scientific writing.

Language description as **discourse** has been qualified as an interactional analysis. Discourse is known to be interactive, being created as a result of the reader's interpretation of the text. Relying on Grice's co-operation principle (1975), it assumes equal standing of the participants in communication. It does not pay

adequate attention to the socio-cultural, institutional and organizational constraints and expectations of the written genre in a particular setting.

Bhatia considers **genre analysis** *language description as explanation* (10). According to him, applied discourse analysis is inadequate in two respects – it lacks adequate information about the rationale underlying various discourse types; i.e. insufficient explanation of socio-cultural, institutional and organizational constraints and expectations that influence a particular discourse - genre and it pays little attention to the conventionalized regularities of various communicative events.

This calls for the need of a *thick description of language in use* (11) including socio-cultural and psycho-linguistic aspects of text construction and linguistic insights. Applying genre analysis, significant form - function correlations are obtained. Specialist informants need to be used in the description, analysis and clarification of genres. Also cross-cultural factors influence the realization and understanding of specific genres.

Bhatia is in favour of *easification* (145-146) – as an alternative to simplification that tampers with genre integrity and results in working against the purpose of teaching. Depending on the nature of the respective genre and on the purpose of reading, Bhatia proposes a range of easification devices that guide the reader through the text, without making drastic changes to the text. Teaching and testing ESP, as well as language reform in designing public documents can benefit from such a process. Ways of easifying legislative documents for specialist use can be clarification of cognitive structuring, reducing information load at a particular point, indicating legislative intentions, and illustrating legislative issues.
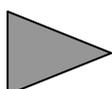
Structure of the book

The book is divided into three parts. It begins with some theoretical preliminaries of genre analysis, followed by genre analysis in action and then applications.

The theoretical preliminaries in Chapter 1 start with a discussion about the way covered by discourse analysis from description to explanation. The author

discusses the kind of analysis provided by the four concepts mentioned above, claiming that there is a movement from superficial to in-depth analysis, from description to explanation among them.

Chapter 2 presents approaches to genre analysis. Swales' definition of genre is commented upon and refined (Swales: 1981, 1990). Bhatia emphasizes the main role of the communicative purpose in identifying genre. A change in purpose will yield another genre; a change in any other features will give sub-genres.

Mismatches in the use of generic resources can be the use of some specific lexico-grammatical resources, kinds of meanings associated with specific genres, positioning of certain rhetorical elements or specific meanings typically associated with a restricted number of genres. Bhatia discusses three kinds of orientation in the analysis of the functional variation in language: *linguistic* – lacking the ability to distinguish between register and genre, *sociologic* – how a particular genre defines, organizes and communicates social reality- and *psychological* – tactical aspects of genre construction.

In Part 2, *Genre analysis in action*, aiming to point out again the importance of communicative purpose in establishing genre, the author analyzes two apparently different communicative events from the business world, sales promotion letters and job applications, demonstrating that they belong to the same genre due to their similar sets of communicative purposes. Then he proposes two apparently similar communicative events in the academic world which he proves to belong to different genres.This exercise sustains the importance of communicative purpose in establishing genre.

The chapter on *Legal discourse in professional settings* focuses on two of the written media of legal discourse: legislation and cases. Legislative provisions attempt to guard against the human capacity to wriggle out of obligations and stretch rights by being precise, clear and unambiguous. At the same time they have to refer to every conceivable contingency – a task accomplished by being all-inclusive (Bhatia: 102). The author classifies rules into *action, stipulation and definition rules* and discusses the syntactic properties of and cognitive structuring of legislative provisions (104 -105).

Legal cases have four communicative purposes: to record all the elements of a trial, to serve as precedents to subsequent cases, as reminders to be used in class or in a court of law and as illustrations of a certain point of law in law course books. The author discusses the structural interpretation of legal cases and cross-cultural variation in legal discourse.

The applications discussed in Part 3 are second language teaching, especially ESP and language reform in public documents. After presenting *easification*, as opposed to *simplification,* as a better means to preserve genre integrity in discourse, genre-based grammatical explanation in ESP is dealt with, i.e. the case of nominal expressions, followed by considerations on a genre-based language curriculum. Bhatia claims that a genre-based flexible language curriculum can facilitate learning beyond the confines of the curriculum itself allowing more freedom to both teachers and learners. He discusses the case of an English newspaper that includes a wide variety of genres (157).

In teaching English for Legal Purposes guided by pedagogical convenience rather than effectiveness, cases are mostly used rather than legislative texts and focus is put on their narrative feature. This is not how cases are used in practising law, so there is a contradiction between learning and real life tasks, resulting in a lack of an appropriate text-task relationship. Also the essential intertextual relationship between genres and the purpose they serve in various legal settings cannot be appreciated.

Bhatia's conclusion is that specialist learners should be trained to handle both legislative provisions and legal cases. The ESP teacher should create an awareness of the various genres used in different legal settings and bring them together in a meaningful relationship.

The last chapter of the book is about generic integrity and language reform. The author is against the simplification intended for the sake of reader accessibility, claiming that it could end in the total loss of generic identity of the text.
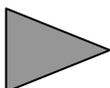
Final remarks

To summarise, according to Bhatia, genre analysis presents several points of interest for applied linguistics researchers, legal drafters and ESP teachers. First of all, it enables structural interpretation of types of texts and identifying cross-cultural variation in professional discourses. Secondly, by including socio-cultural and psycho-linguistic aspects of text construction and linguistic insights, it obtains significant form - function correlations. Further, it makes it possible for the ESP teacher to create an awareness of the various genres used in different settings of the same discourse and to bring them together in a meaningful relationship. Finally, a genre-based flexible language curriculum can facilitate learning, allowing more freedom to teachers and learners.

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