Voices and dialogic engagement in written specialised genres

Conclusion

The broadening horizon of LSP/EAP

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This volume reflects the current interests of LSP both in its quite narrow focus on rhetoric and in particular on the voices in texts, and in its broad scope of text and media types.

Over the last forty years, as they have moved away from register analysis and from the registers of particular disciplines, EAP studies have become much more valuable to their end-users in the globalized academic and business environments, those who have to communicate actively in English without sufficient training or exposure. But at the same time, as we have looked more at the effects of social function or purpose, audience, medium, genre, and other characteristics of texts, we have come to look at fewer features of the register of the texts itself. Even though recent work (Hyland and Tse 2007, Kuteeva 2013) has drawn attention to the discipline specificity of vocabulary and thought processes in academic writing, we pay little attention to the potential disciplinarity or even genre-specificity of paragraphing, thematisation, lexical cohesion, relativization patterns, or lexical relations. Consider the implications in our own field of applied linguistics of putting native speaker or correct in scare quotes or using them as unproblematic terms. Consider the affective content of terms such as psychometric, armchair linguistics, always and only dialogic. But it is impossible to discuss these linguistic markers of stance and engagement (or at least ethos) in a discipline one has
not become socialized into; EAP teachers cannot recognize the signals sent by particular terms of biology or engineering. Thus the range of linguistic features examined has become narrower while the functional and social range considered has become much deeper.

The political, technical and social changes that required this development have also meant that the boundaries of national cultures have become permeable as never before and the range of genres (Swales 1990, Bhatia 2004) and media that can and should be examined in LSP studies has expanded vastly. It is this development that is the most exciting aspect of the chapters in this volume, both because it reflects the psychosocial reality of writers (or text producers) acting in a variety of domains, and because the advent of Web 2.0 has transformed the nature of genre authorship.

**All texts in a particular domain such as the academic exist in a universe of many different text types and genres.** Their writers can therefore draw on a very wide range of generic and discoursal resources. Just as we know that multilingual speakers draw on their multilingual competence in each language they use, so we can assume that writers’ competence in any one genre is complemented and influenced by their competence in other genres and discourses. In fact many writers can draw on generic and discoursal competence in several languages. Thus in a traditional structuralist sense understanding any genre fully requires understanding the other genres in the system, or in a psychological sense each text is formed by drawing on the totality of genre knowledge available to the producer, nowadays across languages and cultures. People learning to write in one social context, such as the academic, need to learn which of the generic and discoursal resources they have from another context, such as the journalistic, (or from
another language) can be used in the new circumstances and which are inappropriate or ineffective.

The new Web means that published authorship is no longer restricted to trained professional mediated by trained professional editors. Book and travel reviews are not just the preserve of a few dozen metropolitan sophisticates – anyone can publish their reactions. EAP has long discussed the differences between student or ‘apprentice’ writing and professional academic texts, but in the last decade there has been a new dimension to the professional/non-professional distinction, since on-line publishers are not typically progressing towards professional status, but simply writers of a different sort (with a different sort of ethos). Furthermore, as the neologisms cited in Suau’s chapter – prosumer, wreader – indicate, the readers are all potential writers and the writers have all been readers.

By the content and authorship of its introductory chapter, this volume fixes its starting point in the central genre of the academic research domain. This genre – the English-language research article --- is the focus of contemporary studies of academic writing, because of its status and influence on other genres and also because it is important for writers to produce texts that will be acceptable to disciplinary gatekeepers of various sorts. Contemporary EAP research studies typically carry out analyses in terms of categories developed by Swales (e.g. 1990) and Hyland (e.g. 2005) focusing on conventional academic research articles in English, of the sort that are still printed on paper, even if most reading is on-line. The well-described features of these central genres need to be examined more closely for internal (disciplinary) variation which has not yet been specified, but there is also a need for insight into the generic context that gives these features their value. The chapters that follow Hyland’s in this volume
therefore use a variety of analytic models (Hyland’s own ‘stance and engagement’, Politeness theory, Martin’s Appraisal) and move out from this well-researched centre, in different and interesting directions.

These directions draw our attention to seven dimensions of difference among texts (Table 1), which I develop further below. Several of these dimensions have been radically changed by the rise of the internet and the ease of publication that it generates, but all are long-standing issues much discussed in the literature.

The most obvious dimension is language, often assumed to carry with it some kind of cultural difference (cf for example Mur-Dueñas 2012).

Then there is genre class or colony (cf Bhatia 2002, 2004). In the so-called EAP tradition (Hyon 1996) related genres (primarily written text genres in this tradition) can be grouped into colonies, which are “constellation[s] of closely related and overlapping genres, sometimes within but often across discourse communities, some of which may include: Promotional genres; Reporting genres…”(Bhatia 2002:10) Similarly the systemic-functional school groups school genres into functional types from ‘reporting’ to ‘explaining’ to ‘arguing’ (Coffin 2006). For present purposes, looking at the genres in this volume, we can perhaps identify three functional groups (colonies?) within a general category of exposition: informative, like a text-book, reporting (analytical exposition), like a journal article, or evaluative like a review.

Third, there is the interested-disinterested dimension, which refers to the reader’s expectations of the text-producer (Shaw 2006). We know that on-line the frequency of code-switching can blur the boundaries of language, that unskilled net users can mistake the function of a text they find, and that sites that seem to be disinterested evaluation...
may actually be interested promotion. But the chapters in this volume do not problematize these particular boundaries.

The remaining four dimensions seem to have been radically altered by the ease of access to publication provided by the net and the consequent changes in reader-writer relations. (It is striking that the Hyland stance-and-engagement model proves able to describe these new types of texts.) First of them is the medium: ‘paper’ (even if read via electronic media) vs. native electronic; the affordances of the latter are shaking up a variety of established hierarchies. Second, there is the familiar dimension of genre difference (Swales 1990), along which several writers here identify hitherto undescribed genres and find that if the affordances of the medium are fully exploited new genres develop which challenge our categories. Third, LSP scholars typically work with a notion of domain, contrasting the academic with the journalistic, for example Miller (1998). But here the electronic medium creates new possibilities: on the internet there is plenty of ‘amateur’ writing – reviews, travel reports etc. – in domains one would have called journalistic, but perhaps no longer can. The last dimension for comparison is the text-producer’s skill and degree of professionalism. This contrasts dissertation writers with established scholars, and, thanks to the net, ‘amateur’ with professional reviewers and travel writers.

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Table 1: Dimensions of difference raised by this volume.

**Language**

Language as the main difference between texts belonging to comparable genres is considered in three chapters here. Both Soler-Monreal & Gil-Salom and Diani say the difference between manifestations of a genre in Spanish and in English is one of “culture” (in the somewhat non-technical sense of, for example, Hofstede 2001), while Carretero does not appeal to this notion. The differences between texts in comparable genres but different languages can be accounted for in at least four ways (following Okamura 1999): national culture, national domain culture, audience and language affordances. National culture is the familiar expectation that members of different cultures have learned different ways of expressing themselves generally and that these affect how genres are realized. National domain culture is the effect of the local disciplinary culture or community – the conditions of production of the texts in question. Audience is associated with language because a text in English (or Spanish) presupposes a wider and less well-defined audience than one in, for example, Swedish, and in some topic or genre areas this type of difference may distinguish English-language from Spanish-language texts as well. Language affordances refers simply to the fact that some languages make it easy to structure utterances in ways that may be less convenient for others. Thus English, unlike the Romance languages, has two possessive constructions: *Chomsky’s work* and *the work of Chomsky* which allow somewhat different thematization to be made.

Soler-Monreal & Gil-Salom examine PhD theses in computer science, a discipline that is often considered to be highly anglicised, while Diani looks at book review articles in history, a discipline that is often regarded as a paradigm of local-language publishing.
The topics of these two chapters are thus within the academic context or domain, while Carretero’s chapter, using Martin’s Appraisal model in an exemplary way, looks at two types of film reviews that differ on the linked dimensions of medium, domain and professionalism.

Given the difference of the genres and the parent disciplines, and the evidence that reviews in Spanish at least can be rather different from their English equivalents (Salager-Meyer et al 2003, Moreno and Suarez 2008), it is quite startling that none of the investigations find major rhetorical differences between the languages in terms of the features (broadly evaluation, reporting verbs, personal pronouns) examined. The main difference they note in the English-language academic texts is greater personal visibility than in their Italian or Spanish counterparts. Since this seems to be a consistent finding (cf recently Karahan 2013 for Turkish); one may speculate that English-language academic texts are genuinely somehow different from others (though not as much as they were when Vassileva (2000) did her study). Carretero does not seem to find a corresponding difference in her non-academic disinterested sample, although Suau cites evidence of more prominent personalization in English-language non-academic interested texts (tourism promotion). It is thus not clear whether these language differences reflect something about Anglo-American culture in general or about Anglo-American academic style. It would be possible to invoke the idea of multiple genre competence and suggest that one’s genre knowledge in one context is quite likely to affect other contexts. This is perhaps a more realistic metaphor than the ‘colonization’ of one genre by another invoked by, for example, Bhatia (2004).

Soler-Monreal & Gil-Salom also draw attention to a number of structures available in one language and not in the other: in English delexicalized verbs like make that create a
space for an evaluative adjective (*extremely interesting* or *significant*), before a speech-act noun (*make a significant suggestion*); in Spanish the *se pasivo-reflejo* construction which perhaps creates a more elegant passive than its English translation. Carretero finds greater frequencies of evidential adverbs in English and of opinion adverbials in Spanish, and this also seems likely to reflect linguistic rather than rhetorical norms. Nevertheless all three chapters contain exemplification of nearly all the linguistic categories they examine, often with similar frequencies, from both Spanish/Italian and English sources. The three chapters that include comparisons of genres across languages thus suggest that the Spanish or Italian and English versions of several genres are very similar rhetorically and structurally. Such alignment is an interesting symptom of the globalized nature in the twenty-first century of the rhetoric not only of computer science theses and on-line reviews, but also of journalistic reviews and even academic history. ‘Language’ and ‘culture’ are no longer closely linked, and writers in other languages than English have often been exposed to many English-language as well as L1 exemplars of ‘their’ genres.

*Genre colony*

The second dimension I suggested was that of genre colony or class. What is most interesting here is that several chapters examine genres whose purpose is broadly evaluative: reviews of movies (professional and what I would call ‘online-independent’ rather than amateur) and of fiction, and academic book review articles. These genres clearly have features in common with one another, and there are also significant differences. Gea-Valor notes the rich array of attribution markers and engagement markers in fiction reviews and many of these reappear in Carretero’s analysis of a wider
range of features in movie reviews: *I* + reporting verb as marker of evaluation, questions, imperatives, etc. Some also recur in Diani’s academic book review articles, but it is striking that Hyland’s engagement (not to be confused with Martin’s Engagement!) is almost absent there. The academic context clearly restricts the stylistic resources available for evaluation.

Two further relevant colonies are the reporting genres and the informative ones. Textbooks, for example, are mostly informative, with general established content, like encyclopedias, lectures, and nature field guides. On the other hand, most sections of experimental research articles and dissertations are reporting, giving specific accounts of particular investigations, as are accident reports, insurance reports, and hard news items. By this definition travellers’ forums might belong to the reporting category (although they also include a good deal of general advice) and tourist information sites, as discussed by Dolón, to the informative one. Adopting a critical-discourse-analysis methodology, and thus enabled to look at some of the logos of her texts, Dolón investigates the construction of the notion ‘kid’ by the texts, and thus the syntactic functions assigned to the word *kid* in the two genres. Some of the differences she finds seem to be relatable to the genre’s colony membership. We expect past tense and specific noun phrases in a report, and present tense and generic noun phrases in an informative text. In fact in the forum Dolón’s kids have a tendency to be definite (*your kids, my kids*) and the verbs of which they are subjects are sometimes past-tense (in episodes of reporting rather than advice) whereas they are often generic (“homogenized, generalized child identity”) and generally govern present-tense verbs in the information websites.
Interest
Most of the genres discussed here are disinterested, which is almost a pre-requisite for valid membership of the academic domain or the evaluative (as opposed to promotional) colony. Disinterestedness does not mean objectivity or impersonality, it just means that the reader ascribes to the writers the duty of setting out both sides of any question as they see them (Shaw 2006). (In the interactive web genres good faith of this sort is a constant issue: a troll is one who posts in bad faith.) An interested text is one whose readers perceive it as aiming to persuade them to a particular course of action beneficial to the text producer. A job application, and in particular the curriculum vitae attached to it, will be read as telling the story which will most benefit the writer, consistent with the truth, and thus as interested. By contrast, although an academic article aims to persuade its reader of the value of its particular position, readers presuppose that any problem that the writer is aware of as a problem will be mentioned, and will regard omission of such data as dishonest.

Suau mentions this dimension when she explains that travellers’ forums are disinterested. They aim to “exchange personal opinions, judgements and evaluations from a non-business viewpoint” and have “personal and non-commercial interest”, unlike “other tourism web genres”. As we noted Dolón contrasts travellers’ forums with tourist information web sites, and the difference is clearly on the interested-disinterested dimension as well as on the colony-membership one mentioned above. Several of the differences she finds in the clauses headed by kids in the two genres are interpretable as characteristic of interested and disinterested texts. For example hedging modals (may, might, would) are more common in the forum and will unhedged by I think is more common on the official website. Dolón draws attention to the presence of the structure (often more or less evaluative) Kids are… on the forum and its absence from the official
web site. As she says, the interested text avoids imposing any kind of assessment on its readers; an interested text avoids ascribing anything to its intended readers that might exclude some of them.

**Medium**

While it seems possible to discuss language, colony and interestedness without reference to medium, the other dimensions seem to implicate one another. Yus makes it clear that paper-electronic distinction is not to do with the medium actually used for reading but with the extent to which the genre draws on the affordances of the electronic environment. He provides a very illuminating classification of electronic texts into reproduced, adapted and web-native. For him, traditional journal articles are reproduced, an on-line journal which includes links is adapted, and native discourse is exemplified both by a series of texts with links, videos, photos, dynamic graphs, etc. but single-authored and expecting a specific expert audience, and by a multiple-authored blog with a wider audience. Dissertations, newspaper book or film reviews, or academic articles read on-line are reproduced or at best adapted – they might as well be on paper. The other genres seem to be native, though they draw on the interactive affordances to different degrees. The tourist information site and the non-professional movie reviews are one-way communication even though the visuals and links in one case and the possibility of non-professional publication in the other are unique to the web. The travellers’ forums examined by Dolón and Suau, like Yus’ technology blog, have multiple authorship and real rather than constructed dialogicity, and consequently are completely new genres with no print analogues. In earlier studies of genre in the LSP tradition (as opposed to aesthetic genres, for example), medium has not figured largely, but it is clear that the web has changed this.
**Genre**

What we learn about specific genres from this volume is thoroughly intertwined with the medium dimension. Professional movie and fiction reviews, dissertations, and academic book review articles have much to tell us about representation of writer voice in genres which retain the writer-reader distinction and are thus essentially ‘print’. Diani shows that the academic book review article is a clearly distinct genre from the book review, with an intricately dialogic character, and thus describes a new ‘print’ genre. Gea-Valor shows that the journalistic fiction book review employs the writer’s voice in a way that is reminiscent of academic book reviews but with a much wider range of devices and in particular with much more direct engagement with the reader. Nevertheless, it is this genre which makes use of the old elitist pronoun *one* – ‘people like me’ and it seems that these reviews position reader and writer as quite distinct and unequal. The professional movie reviews seem to have some of the same style characteristics (Carretero). In the same way, Soler-Monreal & Gil-Salom show that thesis writers have to negotiate an intricate relation with readers whom as writers they must direct but who are more powerful than they are, and with sources that they must both challenge and show respect for. The politeness framework they use for analysis seems particularly appropriate for this dance on eggshells, though many of their quotations show that the writers have a quite immature style and may not be equal to these demands.

Suau gives a challenging description of the interaction patterns on travellers’ forums, and actually makes it clear that the tools used to define traditional written genres (*purpose, moves, community*) may not be appropriate for web genres. She cites the argument that these new genres are defined by ‘content, form, and functionality’ (rather than the traditional emphasis on purpose and community) and emphasizes the identity
of readers and writers. Those who write the entries want to read the responses, and those who read are potential writers. Yus gives a slightly different slant on this showing how ‘native online’ texts lack the sharp power differential between reader and writer; the reader manages the reading process and so the writer no longer has responsibility for directing it. Although he calls the four objects of his investigation ‘specialized genres’, it is notable that the medium shift he describes entails changes in text organization, reading patterns, and audience, so that the native web genres are different from print precursors in every way (Tiainen 2012). Yus’ paper is particularly interesting in that he states and tests hypotheses, so that his findings have significance in relation to his (and our) preconceptions. One hypothesis that is confirmed is that you will appear in the native texts more than in the academic print ones. This is also a characteristic of the journalistic fiction reviews and the movie reviews (Carretero: if you are a recovering alcoholic you might want to sit this one out as well) in contrast to the academic book review articles. This suggests that journalism and native web texts use some similar devices to evoke the actual presence of the unseen reader, even though in the one case readers cannot respond and in the other they can and do. Perhaps in fact the indirectness of reference to the reader characteristic of academic writing is an artificial reduction of the dialogicity natural to communication.

**Domain and professionalism**

Our notion of domain, particularly the domain of journalism, is also challenged by the affordances of the web electronic domain. LSP studies have often focused on the academic or business or journalistic domain, but if we accept a model in which a text-producer’s various active and passive genre competences interact with one another, features of all domains are potential influences on all others. This is confirmed by Carretero who does not find radical differences between professional and non-
professional reviews and indeed describes them as subtypes of the same genre. The non-professional writers can draw on their passive knowledge of the genre and register as provided by professionals, and so although the status relations and conditions for publication are very different, the results are fairly similar. This somewhat contradicts what was said about medium above, in that access to publication for non-professionals is an affordance of Web 2.0, and in that sense the non-professional reviews are native web texts which would not exist without it. But web writers who are not consciously exploiting the boundaries of their genre have to draw on the generic resources they have, so their reviews of films are quite like professional reviews, and their travel advice is quite like the travel advice they would put in a personal letter (a mixture of reporting and recommendation, addressed to individuals in good faith). In this way they are not so different from the writers of dissertations who are drawing on generic knowledge of academic articles and textbooks to deal with the communicative challenges of a rather different environment.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have used what my fellow-contributors have said about voice, evaluation, and identity construction to consider some conditions of writing in general in our time. The picture that has formed itself in my mind is of a writer with access to a wide range of passive knowledge of genres in different domains and languages drawing on this knowledge to exploit the affordances of the genre currently being attempted. Texts produced in different languages draw partially but increasingly on a common stock of examplars, so that differences at the level of language affordances are gradually coming to be more significant than those at the level of national or discourse-community rhetoric.
The lively stance and engagement markers in, on the one hand, journalistic reviews and, on the other, casual conversation perform functions which are necessary in academic writing, as Hyland has shown, but they must make use of a much reduced range of linguistic resources. Perhaps what we teach in academic writing is ways to suppress the natural transfer of stance and engagement markers from one genre to another and perhaps increased publication via web-native genres will make it less necessary.

**References**


