Unit A6
Genre analysis and academic texts

While social constructivism encourages us to interpret academic texts in their social contexts, genre analysis provides one of the main tools for doing so. Essentially, *genre* is a term for grouping texts together, representing how writers typically use language to respond to recurring situations. They are resources for getting things done using language, reflecting the idea that members of a community usually have little difficulty in recognizing similarities in the spoken and written texts they use frequently and are able to draw on their repeated experiences with such texts to understand and produce them relatively easily. This is because writing and speaking are based on expectations: writers, for instance, make their meanings clear by taking the trouble to anticipate what readers may be expecting based on previous texts they have read of the same kind. This unit introduces some of the key ideas of genre in EAP teaching and research, beginning with a brief characterization of the term.

⭐ **Task A6.1**

➤ What genres are you familiar with from your workplace, studies and leisure? Now group them in various ways, such as whether they are spoken or written, their degree of formality, similarity of purposes, type of audience, etc.

CONCEPTIONS OF GENRE

While genres are seen as abstract, socially recognized ways of using language, theorists differ in the emphasis they give to either contexts or texts; to stability or change; and to the language used to create genres or the actions they are used to perform. Similarly, analysts have opted to examine either the actions of individuals as they create particular texts or the distribution of particular features across a range of texts to see genres as collections of rhetorical choices (Hyland, 2000).

One way of characterizing genres is in terms of the ways broad social purposes are systematically linked with context through lexical and grammatical features (Christie and Martin, 1997). Researchers working within Halliday's (1994) *Systemic Functional Linguists* (SFL) model define genres by internal linguistic criteria, grouping texts which have similar formal features. Spoken and written genres are

Table A6.1 Some university genre structures

Genre	Genre purpose	Stage	Stage purpose
Recount	To reconstruct past experiences by retelling events in original sequence	Orientation Record of events (Reorientation)	Provides information about a situation Presents events in temporal sequence Brings events into the present
Procedure	To show how something is done	Goal Materials Steps 1–n (Results)	Gives information about purpose: title or intro The equipment required Activities to achieve goal in sequence Final state or 'look' of the activity
Narrative	To entertain and instruct via reflection on experience	Orientation Complication (Evaluation) Resolution	Information about characters' situation Problems for characters to solve The major events for the characters Sorts out the problems for the characters
Report	To present information, usually by classifying and then describing characteristics	Problem Reason^n (Conclusion) Recommendations	Identification of a problem Possible reasons for or result of problem Suggestions for solving the problem Measures to be adopted from report
Explanation	To explain how and why things happen	Identification Explanation steps^n	States the topic of the text Sequence in how something occurred

Notes: Parentheses indicate an optional stage. n indicates that the stage may recur.

seen as *narratives, recounts, arguments* and *expositions*, and each genre is composed of a series of stages which contribute to the overall purpose of the genre. Table A6.1 on the previous page shows some examples.

Defining genres in this way shows how frequently recurring linguistic patterns, or *elemental genres* (Martin, 1992), combine to create more specific *macro-genres*. Thus a *research article* might comprise several elemental genres such as an *exposition*, a *discussion* and a *rebuttal*. Equally, students can use their knowledge of a single elemental genre, such as a *procedure*, to create different macro-genres, like *recipes, scientific lab reports* and *instruction manuals*. This allows teachers to gradually expose students to more complex ways of expressing a genre. Simple *procedures* such as a recipe, for example, may list the steps to be performed as a series of imperatives, but more technical examples, such as an instruction manual, may specify constraints that have to be met to carry out these instructions, perhaps expressed as conditional clauses ('If the pressure reaches 195 then open the release valve').

This classification also provides a means of understanding how genres differ in the demands they make on students. A *procedure*, for instance, consists of a series of steps which shows how to achieve a goal and may be based on simple imperative clauses using familiar action verbs and everyday objects. *Explanations*, on the other hand, are more demanding because they typically require students to use sequential, causal and conditional conjunctions. Each genre in Table 6.1 moves writers further from their own experience to more general events and objects. Not only are these kinds of meanings more highly valued in academic settings, but students need to draw on more complex resources to write them effectively.

A very different way of understanding genres is to see them as fluid and dynamic. This is the view of the *New Rhetoric* school, which represents genres as 'stabilized for now' forms of action which are open to change and subject to negotiation. Genre is seen as a form of social action which is 'centred not on the substance or the form of the discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish' (Miller, 1994: 24). As a result, research has focused on how 'expert' users exploit genres for social purposes and the ways genres are created and evolve. New Rhetoric thus widens the concept to include institutional, ideological and physical contexts, reminding us to consider the ways that genres position and influence individuals as well as the opportunities they offer for effective communication.

But because genres are seen as guiding frameworks rather than recurring linguistic structures, these theorists are sceptical about their pedagogic potential. They also see classrooms as distorting genres by transforming them into artefacts for study rather than resources for communication (Freedman and Adam, 2000). All teachers can hope to do in these circumstances is expose students to relevant genres and limit their teaching to 'overall features of format or organisation . . . and a limited set of rules regarding usage and punctuation' (Freedman, 1994: 200). New Rhetoric therefore cautions teachers against regarding genres as materially objective 'things' and against teaching methods that reduce text to fixed templates. But while we can

recognize that genres evolve to meet the changing needs of communities, technologies and situations, and that individuals take liberties with text conventions, it is not usually the novice, and certainly not the L2 learner, who is best served by genre flexibility or who is able to make use of it.

Genre therefore remains an elusive term and even Swales, whose work launched the massive interest in genre in EAP, has since admitted that his original emphasis on 'communicative purpose' (Swales, 1990: 58) as a defining feature may not include all cases. Instead he suggests that genre may better be seen as a 'metaphorical endeavour' (2004: 61), identifying the following metaphors as helpful in understanding genre:

- *Frames for action:* guiding principles for achieving purposes using language.
- *Language standards:* expected conventions of layout and language.
- *Biological species:* development of genres analogous to species change.
- *Prototypes:* instances of a genre are more or less similar to 'core' exemplars.
- *Institutions:* typified and interrelated processes and values of an institution.
- *Speech acts:* the conventional actions a genre is intended to perform.

Swales argues that these metaphors offer a rich and multifaceted view of genre which captures its complex and varied nature. As we shall see below, however, views which tend towards both formal and functional ends of the continuum continue to be influential in EAP.

Task A6.2

➤ Which of Swales's metaphors seems to offer the most insightful characterization of genre for you? Can you elaborate this metaphor and say why you have chosen it? How easy do you think it would be to operationalize the metaphor in your EAP practice?

GENRE IN EAP

Some EAP theorists see genre as communicative events used by specific discourse communities. Focusing on the communicative needs of particular academic groups involves examining what these groups do with language, starting with the names members themselves give to their practices, such as *essays, dissertations* and *lectures.* These are the social/rhetorical actions routinely used by community members to achieve a particular purpose, written for a particular audience, and employed in a particular context. In this way they combine some of the aspects of the approach to genre taken by SFG, by the New Rhetoricians and by Swales. Some of these genres are shown in Table A6.2.

Table A6.2 Some academic genres

Written genres		Spoken genres	
Research articles	Book reviews	Lectures	Student presentations
Conference abstracts	Ph.D. dissertations	Seminars	Office hour sessions
Grant proposals	Textbooks	Tutorial sessions	Practicum feedback
Undergraduate essays	Reprint requests	Peer feedback	Dissertation defences
Submission letters	Editor response letters	Colloquia	Admission interviews

Swales describes the close relations between communities and their genres like this:

> discourse communities evolve their own conventions and traditions for such diverse verbal activities as running meetings, producing reports, and publicizing their activities. These recurrent classes of communicative events are the genres that orchestrate verbal life. These genres link the past and the present, and so balance forces for tradition and innovation. They structure the roles of individuals within wider frameworks, and further assist those individuals with the actualisation of their communicative plans and purposes.
>
> (Swales, 1998: 20)

While Swales admits things may be more complex than this, the idea that people acquire, use and modify genres while acting in social groups helps explain the ways we learn to become members of disciplinary communities. It therefore offers teachers a powerful way of understanding and, hopefully, addressing the communicative needs of their students.

Some genre analysis in EAP operationalizes these ideas about genre by examining representative text samples to identify salient text features, such as recurring tenses, cohesion, modality, etc., and the ways those texts are structured as a sequence of rhetorical units or *moves*. Each move is a distinct communicative act designed to achieve a particular communicative function and can be subdivided into several 'steps'. Both moves and steps may be optional, embedded in others, repeated, and may have constraints on the sequence in which they occur. Table A6.3, based on 240 postgraduate dissertation acknowledgements, shows that even the most seemingly interpersonal academic genres have a genre structure. A simple example of this structure is shown in Table A6.4.

★ **Task A6.3**

➤ Consider the list of academic genres in Table A6.2. Which of them would be useful to your students? What would you like them to know about this genre?

Table A6.3 The structure of dissertation acknowledgements

Move	Communicative function
1 Reflecting	Introspection on the writer's research experience
2 Thanking	Mapping credit to individuals and institutions
2.1 Presenting participants	Introducing those to be thanked
2.2 Thanks for academic help	Thanks for intellectual support, ideas, feedback, etc.
2.3 Thanks for resources	Thanks for data access and clerical, technical and financial support
2.4 Thanks for moral support	Thanks for encouragement, friendship, sympathy, etc.
3 Announcing	Public statement of responsibility and inspiration
3.1 Accepting responsibility	Asserts personal responsibility for flaws or errors
3.2 Dedication	A formal dedication to an individual(s)

Source: Hyland (2004: 310).

Table A6.4 Example of a Ph.D. dissertation acknowledgement

1	The most rewarding achievement in my life, as I approach middle age, is the completion of my doctoral dissertation.
2:1	During the time of writing I received support and help from many people.
2:2	I am profoundly indebted to my supervisor, Dr Robert Chau, who assisted me in each step to complete the thesis.
2:3	I am grateful to the Epsom Foundation, whose research travel grant made the fieldwork possible, and to the library staff who tracked down elusive texts for me.
2:4	Finally, thanks go to my wife, who has been an important source of emotional support.
3	However, despite all this help, I am responsible for any errors in the thesis.

DISCIPLINARY DIFFERENCES

In addition to providing teachers with insights into target texts, approaches to teaching and ways of organizing their courses, genre analyses also allow us to identify the different kinds of argument and writing/speaking tasks valued by different disciplines. Previous units have noted that the writing tasks students have to do at university are specific to discipline and level and that even genres with common names, such as *laboratory reports, case studies* and *essays*, are often structured in different ways across disciplines. Coffin *et al.* (2003) (see also Unit C2), for instance, identify three genres as being pivotal to each of three main domains of knowledge: project proposals in the sciences, essays in the humanities, and reports and case studies in the social sciences. Table A6.5 summarizes the structure of two such genres.

Genres are also distinguished by the choice of features that writers in different fields use to persuade their readers. One example is the extent to which writers typically employ self-mention. While impersonality is frequently cited as a key feature of academic discourse, not all disciplines observe this convention. Science and

Table A6.5 Functional stages of two genres

Scientific project proposal		Applied social sciences case study	
Title	Concise and accurate indication of project topic	Background	Overview of the organizational or professional context of the study
Introduction	Aims and theoretical background, including literature review and rationale	Analytical framework	For academic reader, provides explanation and rationale of framework
			or
Materials and methods	List of materials and apparatus, detailed description of methods and how these will meet aims	Approach to study	For professional reader, provides explanation of the theoretical approach
Analytical methods	What data will be obtained and how they will be analysed	Findings	Main findings
		Implications	Interprets the findings and shows their relevance to the organization studied
References	List of sources the proposal refers to		
		Recommendations	Suggested action points based on the information collected

Source: Coffin *et al.* (2003: 50, 69).

engineering articles tend to suppress human agency but writers in the humanities and social sciences often make extensive use of first-person pronouns, suggesting that writers have clear promotional and interactional purposes (Hyland, 2001). Similarly, the ways research is presented orally can differ across disciplines, with different argument structures employed by engineers and biologists, for instance (Dudley-Evans, 1993). By exploring these conventions with students, teachers can help them see the options available to them when communicating in their disciplines.

MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE

While genre studies typically privilege language, many analysts claim that there is a 'visual literacy': a grammar inherent in images that we must attend to. Academic texts, particularly in the sciences, have always been multimodal, but textbooks and articles are now far more heavily influenced by graphic design than ever before and the growing challenge to the page by the screen as the dominant medium of communication means that images are ever more important in meaning making. This more integrated perspective, which deals with all the means we have of making meanings, is called multimodality. Researchers adopting this view consider the specific ways of configuring the world which different modes offer and draw attention to consequent shifts in authority, in forms of reading and in forms of human engagement with the social and natural world (Kress, 2003; Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996, 2002).

For Kress, different modes have different affordances, or potentials and limitations for meaning. Certain texts, such as novels, encourage the reader to engage in the semiotic work of imagination, following the given order of words on the line but filling the relatively 'empty' words with the reader's meaning. Contemporary electronic texts such as Web pages and the screens of CD-ROMs are more often like images in their organization and ask the reader to perform different semiotic work, offering different entry points to the 'page' and different reading paths from the order of words in a sentence, so providing opportunities to design the order of the text for themselves.

So developments in mode and media have produced changes which mean that EAP students have to be taught to 'read' visuals as much as texts. The fact that figures, tables and photographs can occupy up to a half a science research article testifies to the significance of visuals in academic genres. The examples in Figures A6.1–3 from journals in biology, maths and linguistics illustrate both the variety of visuals in academic genres and their importance in carrying key information.

Like verbal communication, visual representation is a semiotic system, or system of signs, which varies with language, culture and genre. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) note that:

> Simplicity is . . . always based on a particular cultural orientation and ideological stance, and the result of intensive training. It is only once this training is achieved that images (and the way of looking at the world expressed by their structure) can appear 'natural' and 'simple', and hence not in need of analysis.

Miller (1998), for example, shows that while visual elements in the popular press function largely to attract the reader to the article and to explain rather than prove, visuals in academic texts are mainly arguments, following formal conventions organized for maximum persuasion and access to new information. Many scientists write their articles to highlight the visuals, and expert readers often read the visuals first. This is because while arguments are based on plausible, and well constructed, interpretations of data, they ultimately rest on findings, and these are often presented in visual form. Visuals thus buttress arguments and signal the importance of the article itself.

Some analyses take an SFL approach and claim there is a grammar inherent in images, just as there is in writing, based on choices to communicate particular meanings. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), for instance, show how visuals communicate meaning through such forms as point of view (whose perspective is taken), given-new structures (understood versus new information), visual transitivity (who is doing what to whom), deixis (then and now), and modality (is it true or false?). These analytical tools allow EAP teachers to explain how visuals have been organized for maximum effect and how the organization of diagrams

and other visual materials may differ across cultures. In particular they encourage their students to consider:

- Which aspects of the argument are included in the visual and which omitted and why?
- What connections are drawn between the visual and the text?
- What is the relationship between the gloss of the visual and the visual itself?
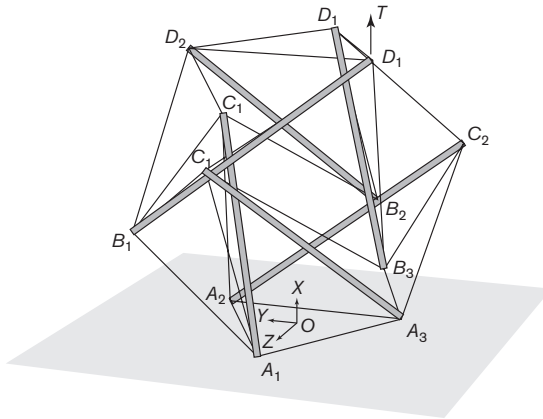- What are the connections between the visuals and their positioning on the page?

Figure A6.1 A first mathematical model of cellular tensegrity was based on this structure comprised of twenty-four linearly elastic cables (black lines) that represent actin filaments and six rigid struts (gray bars) that represent microtubules. The structure is anchored to a rigid substrate (grid) at three joints (A_1, A_2 and A_3). Force (F) is exerted at a joint (D_1) distal to the substrate [27] and [36]. A similar model in which elastic cables were replaced by linear Voigt viscoelastic elements was used by Cañadas *et al.* [43] and Sultan *et al.* [44] to simulate creep and oscillator behaviors of adherent cells, respectively (Stamenović, 2005: 258)
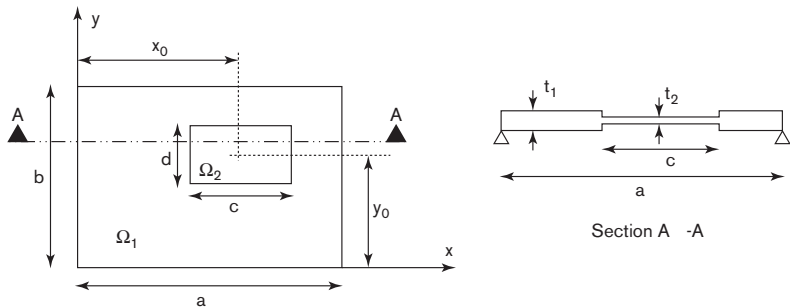

Figure A6.2 Rectangular plate with abruptly varying thickness (Azhari *et al.*, 2005: 642)
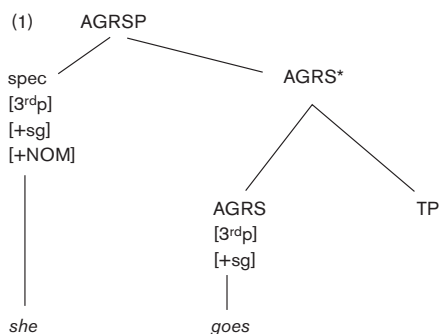
(1) AGRSP

```
        AGRSP
       /     \
  spec        AGRS*
 [3rdp]       /    \
 [+sg]    AGRS      TP
 [+NOM]  [3rdp]
         [+sg]
   |       |
  she     goes
```

Figure A6.3 An illustration of spec–head agreement between the subject (*she*) and the verb (*goes*) in AGRSP (Curtiss and Schaeffer, 2005)

CONSTELLATIONS OF GENRES

The genres of the academy represent an enormous range which Swales (2004) refers to as a 'constellation' and Bhatia (2004) a 'colony' of academic discourse. Some of these genres display significant overlap in terms of purpose and users, while others have little in common, but all help to create a hierarchy of texts which vary in their importance to different practitioners in different disciplines. Thus writing a review article or a textbook may have little career or academic value to many academics, while writing scholarly monographs can attract credit to academics in the humanities and research articles to those working in the sciences.

Genre sets

An important aspect of such constellations is that we almost never find genres in isolation. A useful concept here, introduced by Devitt (1991), is the concept of 'genre sets' to refer to the part of the entire genre constellation that a particular individual or group engages in, either productively or receptively. Textbooks, lab reports and lectures, for instance, may be key genres for many science students while a folder of readings, extended essays and online tutorials seems to dominate the genre lives of students following distance Master's courses in TESOL and applied linguistics. Similarly, the number of genres an academic participates in appears to increase with seniority, with a wider range of occluded administrative and evaluative genres, such as course or programme appraisals, professional references and referee reports, being taken on by individuals as they climb the academic ladder. Such sets, in other words, are temporary phenomena relating to individual positionings at a given time.

Some of these genres may depend on others, some may be alternatives to others, but together they represent the full array of texts a particular group must deal with

in a context. For teachers these sets and sequences are not only a useful way of contextualizing what is to be learnt by basing instruction on how genres are sequenced and used in real-world events, they also help to integrate reading, speaking and writing activities naturally in the classroom.

Genre chains

Another way of approaching genre constellations is through the idea of 'genre systems or chains', referring to how spoken and written texts cluster together in a given social context. For example, genres sometimes follow each other in a predictable chronological order, such as when applying for funding:

> Read funding announcement / information ➔
> Research funding body through Web site, etc. ➔
> Prepare research proposal ➔
> Write an application form ➔
> Read response letter ➔

Swales (2004) includes 'occluded' genres, which are unseen by outsiders, and are therefore invisible to applicants, such as the referee reports and meeting discussions which contribute to the outcome of such chains. In other circumstances one genre may be less dependent on the outcome of another, so that an activity unfolds with genres employed concurrently as a logical system. An example of this is the genres involved in writing an academic assignment (Figure A6.4).
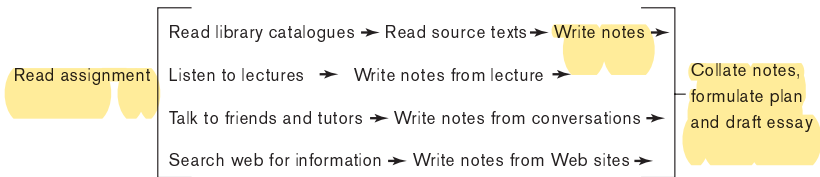
Read assignment | Read library catalogues ➔ Read source texts ➔ Write notes ➔ | Collate notes, formulate plan and draft essay
Listen to lectures ➔ Write notes from lecture ➔
Talk to friends and tutors ➔ Write notes from conversations ➔
Search web for information ➔ Write notes from Web sites ➔

Figure A6.4 The genres involved in writing an academic assignment

Genre networks

More generally, genres are often loosely arrayed in a *network* as each interacts with, draws on, and responds to another in a particular setting. This idea refers to the notion of *intertextuality* (Bakhtin, 1986) and the fact that every utterance reacts to other utterances in that domain. We now acknowledge that little that is said is original; every utterance transforms, addresses and accommodates earlier utterances in some way. Useful here is Fairclough's distinction between *manifest intertextuality*, or the traces of earlier texts through quotes, paraphrase or citation, and *constitutive intertextuality* (or *interdiscursivity*) which involves borrowing generic or rhetorical

conventions and forms to create a text, as in the use of biography in some qualitative research articles, thus merging what may be originally distinct orders of discourse to create new discourses. In other words, genre networks are the totality of genres employed in a particular domain at any one time. While this totality is constantly changing, it nevertheless links text users to a network of prior texts according to their group membership, and provides a system of coding options for making meanings.

Task A6.4

➤ Identify a genre set, chain or network in a context you are familiar with. Represent this constellation as a diagram to show the relationship of the different genres to each other, representing either their sequence or importance in that setting.