

where professor and student interacted together in a joint problem-solving environment.

The next issue to be addressed in this section is whether certain groupings, including academic classes, constitute *discourse* communities. Given the six criteria, it would seem clear that shareholders of General Motors, members of the Book of the Month Club, voters for a particular political party, clienteles of restaurants and bars (except perhaps in soap-operas), employees of a university, and inhabitants of an apartment block all fail to qualify. But what about academic classes? Except in exceptional cases of well-knit groups of advanced students already familiar with much of the material, an academic class is unlikely to be a discourse community at the outset. However, the hoped-for outcome is that it will form a discourse community (McKenna, 1987). Somewhere down the line, broad agreement on goals will be established, a full range of participatory mechanisms will be created, information exchange and feedback will flourish by peer-review and instructor commentary, understanding the rationale of and facility with appropriate genres will develop, control of the technical vocabulary in both oral and written contexts will emerge, and a level of expertise that permits critical thinking be made manifest. Thus it turns out that providing a relatively constrained operational set of criteria for defining discourse communities also provides a coign of vantage, if from the applied linguist's corner, for assessing educational processes and for reviewing what needs to be done to assist non-native speakers and others to engage fully in them.

Finally, it is necessary to concede that the account I have provided of discourse community, for all its attempts to offer a set of pragmatic and operational criteria, remains in at least one sense somewhat removed from reality. It is utopian and 'oddly free of many of the tensions, discontinuities and conflicts in the sorts of talk and writing that go on everyday in the classrooms and departments of an actual university' (Harris, 1989:14). Bizzell (1987) too has claimed that discourse communities can be healthy and yet contain contradictions; and Herrington (1989) continues to describe composition researchers as a 'community' while unveiling the tensions and divisions within the group. The precise status of conflictive discourse communities is doubtless a matter for future study, but here it can at least be accepted that discourse communities can, over a period of time, lose as well as gain consensus, and at some critical juncture, be so divided as to be on the point of splintering.

### 3 *The concept of genre*

Genre is a term which, as Preston says, one approaches with some trepidation (Preston, 1986). The word is highly attractive – even to the Parisian timbre of its normal pronunciation – but extremely slippery. As a first step in the arduous process of pinning it down, I shall discount all uses of the term to refer to non-verbal objects. These include the original meaning of the term (in English) to refer to a type of small picture representing a scene from everyday domestic life and its growing employment as a fancy way of referring to classes of real world entities. The latter is illustrated in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* by 'large floppy rag dolls, a *genre* favored by two-year olds'.

The use of *genre* relevant to this study is glossed by *Webster's Third* as 'a distinctive type or category of literary composition'; however, the dictionary's citation – from *The New Yorker* – usefully expands the context of literary to include 'such unpromising *genres* as Indian Treaties, colonial promotional tracts and theological works'. Indeed today, *genre* is quite easily used to refer to a distinctive category of discourse of any type, spoken or written, with or without literary aspirations. So when we now hear or read of 'the genre of the Presidential Press Conference', 'the new genre of the music video' or 'the survival of game-show genres', we do so, I believe, without feeling that a term proper to rhetorical or literary studies has been maladroitly usurped.

Even so, genre remains a fuzzy concept, a somewhat loose term of art. Worse, especially in the US, genre has in recent years become associated with a disreputably formulaic way of constructing (or aiding the construction of) particular texts – a kind of writing or speaking by numbers. This association characterizes genre as mere mechanism, and hence is inimical to the enlightened and enlightening concept that language is ultimately a matter of *choice*. The issue then is whether genre as a structuring device for language teaching is doomed to encourage the unthinking application of formulas, or whether such an outcome is rather an oversimplification brought about by pedagogical convenience. An initial way of tackling the issue is to examine what scholars have actually said about genres in a number of fields. For this purpose, the following four sections briefly consider uses of the term in folklore, literary

studies, linguistics and rhetoric. (Another possible area would have been film studies, e.g. Neale, 1980.)

### 3.1 Genre in folklore studies

The concept of genre has maintained a central position in folklore studies ever since the pioneering work in the early nineteenth century on German myths, legends and folktales by the Brothers Grimm. And yet as a major figure in folklore studies has remarked, 'thus far in the illustrious history of the discipline, not so much as one genre has been completely defined' (Dundes, 1980:21). Ben-Amos (1976), whose valuable survey I have relied on, comments that this failure is partly ascribable to high standards of rigor and clarity expected in scientific definitions, and partly to continuous changes in theoretical perspective. As he pertinently observes 'the adequacy of generic descriptions depends entirely on the theoretical view they are designed to satisfy' (1976:xiii).

Ben-Amos goes on to consider a number of these perspectives. One is to consider genre, following Linnaeus, as a classificatory category; for example, a story may be classified as a myth, legend or tale. The value of classification is seen to lie in its use as a research tool for categorizing and filing individual texts, that is, as an effective storage and retrieval system. This, in turn, can lead, as might be expected, to the devising of the genre maps that place particular genres along various kinds of planes such as the prosaic/poetic and the secular/religious. However, it is apparently common in this classificatory work to consider genres as 'ideal types' rather than as actual entities. Actual texts will deviate from the ideal in various kinds of ways.

Another major group of approaches sees genres as *forms*, one established tradition taking these forms as permanent. Thus, legends and proverbs have not changed their character over recorded history: 'they have an independent literary integrity, which withstands social variations and technological developments' (1976:xx). They thus have kinds of cognitive deep structure preserved by the relations among the discursal components of the texts themselves. What does change, of course, is the role of such texts in society: vicious political satires become innocuous nursery rhymes; incantations to prevent the soul from leaving the body reduce to formulaic 'God Bless You' responses to a sneeze; and proverbs no longer play as central a role in popular education as they once used to. A strong motive for the concept of an underlying permanent form apparently derives from the long-standing interest among folklorists in using the classic exemplars of myth and legend to trace beliefs back into *pre-history*. For that motive, the assumption of an enduring substrate is

clearly useful, perhaps even necessary, but closely tied to a field-specific research agenda.

The functionalists in folklore would rather stress sociocultural value. For Malinowski (1960), for example, folklore genres contribute to the maintenance and survival of social groups because they serve social and spiritual needs. Perhaps inevitably, to assign cultural value also requires the investigator to pay attention to how a community views and itself classifies genres. Thus, for many folklorists major narrative genres such as myth, legend and tale are not so labeled according to the *form* of the narrative itself but according to how the narrative is received by the community.

Do the people regard the narrative as sacred? If so, then it would seem a myth. Do they entertain the narrative as a potentially accurate recounting of actual events? Then it is a legend. Do they regard the narrative as a total fiction with a requisite suspension of belief? Then it is one form of tale. The central point is that the folklorist is primarily concerned with the folk narrative in some larger context of belief and behavior. The folklorist recognizes that folk narratives are the production of individuals, produced during social interactions and informed by surrounding cultural traditions. The entire sense of folktale is not sandwiched in between 'Once upon a time' and 'they lived happily ever after'. A tale is much larger than that. The folklorist must attempt to understand why people tell stories in the first place, why listeners appreciate them, and why they favor some stories over others. The problem is not only to understand how a text 'hangs together', but also to understand why a particular individual or group of people would find such a text meaningful, worthy of attention, and deserving of repetition.

(Oring, 1986:134-5)

A final observation in this brief survey is that not all folklorists accept the *permanence of form* concept. Some are more interested in the *evolution* of the genres themselves as a necessary response to a changing world. This is particularly true of those who study relatively recent genres in developed countries, such as 'The Blues' in the USA, or have watched the evolution (and atrophy) of folklorist genres in traditional communities affected by modernizing influences.

The lessons from the folklorists for a genre-based approach to academic English are, I believe, several. First, the classifying of genres is seen as having some limited use, but as an archival or typological convenience rather than as a discovery procedure (a point we have already seen Geertz make at the end of Part I). Second, a community, whether social or discursal, will often view genres as means to ends.

Third, a community's perceptions of how a text is generically interpreted is of considerable importance to the analyst.

### 3.2 Genre in literary studies

We have already seen that folklorists may have special historicist reasons for holding onto the permanence of form. In contrast, literary critics and theorists may have special reasons for de-emphasizing stability, since *their* scholarly activity is typically designed to show how the chosen author breaks the mould of convention and so establishes significance and originality. Moreover, actual literary practice in this century would seem, on the surface, to have so thrown away convention – in form, in content and in authorial role – as to render obsolete the very term *genre* itself. As Todorov remarks:

To persist in discussing genres today might seem like an idle if not obviously anachronistic pastime. Everybody knows that they existed in the good old days of the classics – ballads, odes, sonnets, tragedies, and comedies – but today?

(Todorov, 1976:159)

However, the above quotation comprises the opening sentences of Todorov's paper and our genre knowledge of such papers leads us to expect, in this case quite correctly, that the author is indeed about to persist. He argues that the fact that works 'disobey' their genres does not mean that those genres necessarily disappear. For one thing, transgression, in order to exist, requires regulations to be transgressed. For another, the norms only retain visibility and vitality by being transgressed. This is the process, according to Todorov, of genre generation. 'A new genre is always the transformation of one or several old genres: by inversion, by displacement, by combination' (1976:161). He then turns to the issue of what genres are, and rejects a widely-held view, especially common in literary circles, that genres are classes of texts. He prefers instead to argue:

In a society, the recurrence of certain discursive properties is institutionalized, and individual texts are produced and perceived in relation to the norm constituted by that codification. A genre, literary or otherwise, is nothing but this codification of discursive properties.

(Todorov, 1976:162)

Further, since ideological changes affect what a society chooses to codify, so change may come about from institutional sources as well as from individual experimentation with discursive (or discursal) properties.

These processes make it possible to claim that the whole issue of genre conventions and their realignment is central to the evolution of the creative arts – in film, in music, in art and in literature. On the last, Hepburn (1983) has this to say:

How a competent reader approaches a work of literature, his attitudes and expectations, depend importantly upon the genre he sees it as exemplifying. A work that rebels against genre-conventions equally relies on the reader's recognition of the conventions being rejected. Aesthetically relevant features of a work may stand out only if its reader has a background awareness of the historical development of the genre, or of the style, that the work is transforming in its distinctive way and perhaps without direct allusion within the text itself. The work may demand to be seen against the foil of the whole tradition from which it stems, and which it modifies by its very existence.

(Hepburn, 1983:496)

Thus a claim is advanced that an appreciation of genre is a necessary if not sufficient condition for an appreciation of literature. It is necessary because it not only provides an interpretative and evaluative frame for a work of art but, more to the point, that frame is as much *textual* as it is cultural, historical, socioeconomic or political.

Fowler (1982), in the most exhaustive contemporary study known to me of literary genres, additionally stresses the value of genre to the *writer*:

Far from inhibiting the author, genres are a positive support. They offer room, one might say, for him to write in – a habitation of mediated definiteness; a proportional neutral space; a literary matrix by which to order his experience during composition ... Instead of a daunting void, they extend a provocatively definite invitation. The writer is invited to match experience and form in a specific yet undetermined way. Accepting the invitation does not solve his problems of expression ... But it gives him access to formal ideas as to how a variety of constituents might suitably be combined. Genre also offers a challenge by provoking a free spirit to transcend the limitations of previous examples.

(Fowler, 1982:31)

Although Fowler discusses genre classification with great erudition, he concludes that all such constructions have relatively little value when seen against the inescapable evidence of continuous genre evolution. At the end of the day, genre analysis is valuable because it is clarificatory, not because it is classificatory. It provides 'a communication system, for the use of writers in writing, and readers and critics in reading and interpreting' (1982:286). In taking this stance Fowler is able to lay at rest a number of 'ancient misapprehensions':

1. Genre theory is of little relevance because it corresponds ill with actual works of literature.
2. Genre theory leads to heavy prescription and slavish imitation.
3. It sets up highly conservative value hierarchies ('no great novels since Joyce or Lawrence').
4. It is inevitably obsolescent in its attempts to characterize a present period by then gone.

This very brief excursion into literary views of genres has singled out a few authors who have given *genre* particular attention. In consequence they may be atypical, but in fact none represents a view as extreme as that of Hawkes, who contends that 'a world without a theory of *genre* is unthinkable, and untrue to experience' (1977:101). Those few authors appear to concur that in living civilizations genres change as a result of internal pressure, and, in consequence, classificatory schemes are at best a secondary outcome of analysis. As Schaubert and Spolsky (1986) observe, genres form an open-ended set. Neither Todorov nor Fowler accept that genres are simply assemblies of more-or-less similar textual objects but, instead, are coded and keyed events set within social communicative processes. Recognizing those codes and keys can be a powerful facilitator of both comprehension and composition.

### 3.3 Genre in linguistics

Linguists as a group have been more partial in the attention they have given to the term *genre*. This may be partly due to traditional tendencies to deal with aspects of language below the level of texts and partly due to a reluctance to employ a 'term of art' (Levinson, 1979) so closely associated with literary studies. In any event, the term is only found with any frequency among linguists of either ethnographic or systemic persuasions.

For the ethnographer Hymes:

Genres often coincide with speech events, but must be treated as analytically independent of them. They may occur in (or as) different events. The sermon as a genre is typically identified with a certain place in a church service, but its properties may be invoked, for serious or humorous effect, in other situations.

(Hymes, 1974:61)

As for *speech event* itself, it 'will be restricted to activities, or aspects of activities, that are directly governed by rules or norms for the use of speech' (1974:52). Leaving aside the restriction to only the oral mode,

there is, I suggest, something a little unsatisfactory about Hymes' reasons for separating *genre* and *speech event* analytically. Invoking the properties of a sermon for humorous effect is clearly not the same thing as delivering a sermon, if only because they have very different communicative purposes. If, on the other hand, some of the sermon's properties are invoked for serious effect, then this may (or may not) strengthen the rhetorical effectiveness of *another* genre such as a political speech. It is still not a sermon, however 'sermonizing' it may be. Whereas if all the characteristics are transposed, then we can recognize the fact that we are listening to a sermon occurring in an atypical location. As Preston (1989) notes, it is not that *speech events* and *genres* need to be kept apart, but rather that *situations* and *genres* need to be.

A position much closer to that adopted in this book is that of Saville-Troike (1982). Like most other ethnographers, she takes *genre* to refer to the *type* of communicative event and offers the following as examples: jokes, stories, lectures, greetings and conversations. Like some of the folklorists, there is interest in discovering in a community which communications are generically typed and what labels are used, as these will reveal elements of verbal behavior which the community considers sociolinguistically salient. In addition, the ethnographers give considerable attention to how best to interpret and utilize the elicited metalanguage. Saville-Troike is quite clear on the matter:

Since we cannot expect any language to have a perfect metalanguage, the elicitation of labels for categories of talk is clearly not adequate to assure a full inventory and must be supplemented by other discovery procedures, but it is basic to ethnography that the units used for segmenting, ordering and describing data should be those of the group, and not *a priori* categories of the investigator.

(Saville-Troike, 1982:34)

It is not, of course, difficult to recognize the danger of basing units on the '*a priori* categories of the investigator', and indeed text-linguistics and certain text-typologies are somewhat prone to this very danger. In that respect, the ethnographic position as represented by Saville-Troike is both salutary and admirable. However, what we might call 'folk' categorization and the investigator's *a priori* categorization are not necessarily in exclusive opposition. Indeed, it can be argued that the investigator's role in genre analysis is neither to follow slavishly the nomenclatures of groups, nor is it to provide his or her own deductive and introspective categorial system. Rather, the procedure should be to develop sets of *a posteriori* categories, ones based on empirical investigation and observation, within which eliciting the community's category-

labels plays a central role. Indeed, this seems to be what Saville-Troike is getting at when she observes that languages do not have 'perfect' metalanguages and so need supplementation and refinement.

The concept of *genre* has also in recent years been discussed by the systemic or 'Hallidayean' linguists (cf. Halliday, 1978). However, the relationship between *genre* and the longer established concept of *register* is not always very clear – see Ventola (1984) for a discussion of this uncertainty. Register, or functional language variation, is 'a contextual category correlating groupings of linguistic features with recurrent situational features' (Gregory and Carroll, 1978:4). This category has typically been analyzed in terms of three variables labeled *field*, *tenor* and *mode*. *Field* indicates the type of activity in which the discourse operates, its content, ideas and 'institutional focus' (Benson and Greaves, 1981). *Tenor* handles the status and role relationships of the participants, while *mode* is concerned with the channel of communication (prototypically speech or writing). 'The field, tenor and mode act collectively as determinants of the text through their specification of the register; at the same time they are systematically associated with the linguistic system through the functional components of the semantics' (Halliday, 1978: 122). Thus, field is associated with the management of the ideas, tenor with the management of personal relations, and mode with the management of discourse itself. The categories provide a conceptual framework for analysis; they are not themselves kinds of language use.

It is only comparatively recently in the systemic school that *genre* has become disentangled from *register*: Frow (1980:78), for instance, refers to 'discourse genre, or register'. On the other hand, Martin (1985) makes the following three-way distinction: genres are realized through registers, and registers in turn are realized through language. As for genres themselves:

Genres are how things get done, when language is used to accomplish them. They range from literary to far from literary forms: poems, narratives, expositions, lectures, seminars, recipes, manuals, appointment making, service encounters, news broadcasts and so on. The term genre is used here to embrace each of the linguistically realized activity types which comprise so much of our culture.

(Martin, 1985:250)

Martin gives two kinds of reasons for establishing genre as a system underlying register. One revolves around the fact that genres constrain the ways in which register variables of field, tenor and mode can be combined in a particular society. Some topics will be more or less suitable for lectures than others; others will be more or less suitable for informal conversation between unequals. Recognizing the gaps is not only valu-

able in itself, but can have important consequences for cross-cultural awareness and training.

The second reason for recognizing that genres comprise a system for accomplishing social purposes by verbal means is that this recognition leads to an analysis of discourse structure. Genres have beginnings, middles and ends of various kinds. Verbal strategies 'can be thought of in terms of states through which one moves in order to realize a genre' (Martin, 1985:251). Genre 'refers to the staged purposeful social processes through which a culture is realized in a language' (Martin and Rothery, 1986:243).

Couture (1986) provides unusual clarification of the use of *register* and *genre* within systemic linguistics. Registers impose constraints at the linguistic levels of vocabulary and syntax, whereas genre constraints operate at the level of discourse structure. Further, 'Unlike register, genre can only be realized in completed texts or texts that can be projected as complete, for a genre does more than specify kinds of codes extant in a group of related texts; it specifies conditions for beginning, continuing and ending a text' (1986:82). For Couture then the two concepts need to be kept apart: genres (research report, explanation, business report) are completable structured texts, while registers (language of scientific reporting, language of newspaper reporting, bureaucratic language) represent more generalizable stylistic choices. Genres have 'complementary' registers, and communicative success with texts may require 'an appropriate relationship to systems of genre and register' (1986:86).

In a detailed application of how genres and registers could relate differentially to a scale which runs from the highly explicit to the highly elliptical, Couture gives the following illustration:

Since the two sides of the scale are independent, a writer could select a genre that implies a high level of explicitness (like a business report) and at the same time select a register that demands less explicitness (such as bureaucratic language). In doing so, the writer must decide which criteria for explicitness he or she wishes to dictate linguistic choice (clear hierarchical development of message and support demanded by the *report* genre or implicit expression of the cultural values of impartiality, power and prestige associated with *bureaucratic* style).

(Couture, 1986:87)

Aside from scholars such as Martin, Rothery and Couture, linguistics as a whole has tended to find genre indigestible. The difficulty seems to derive from the fact that *register* is a well-established and central concept in linguistics, while *genre* is a recent appendage found to be necessary as a result of important studies of text structure. Although *genre* is now seen as valuably fundamental to the realization of goals, and thus acts as a

determinant of linguistic choices, there has been an understandable unwillingness to demote *register* to a secondary position, an unwillingness strengthened, on the one hand, by large-scale investment in analysis of language varieties (for lexicographic among other purposes) and underpinned, on the other, by relatively little interest in seeing how texts are perceived, categorized and used by members of a community.

Despite these equivocations, linguistic contributions to the evolving study of genre lie in the emphasis given to: (a) genres as types of goal-directed communicative events; (b) genres as having schematic structures; and most strikingly (c) genres as disassociated from registers or styles.

### 3.4 Genre in rhetoric

Ever since Aristotle, rhetorical inquiry and criticism has been interested in classifying discourse. One common approach has been to proceed deductively, in a top-down manner, and construct a closed system of categories. A prominent modern example – and one of many – is Kinneavy's *A Theory of Discourse: The Aims of Discourse* (1971). Kinneavy classifies discourse into four main types: expressive, persuasive, literary and referential. A discourse will be classified into a particular type according to which component in the communication process receives the primary focus. If the focus or aim is on the sender, the discourse will be expressive; if on the receiver, persuasive; if on the linguistic form or code, it will be literary; and if the aim is to represent the realities of the world, it will be referential. Although such classifications have impressive intellectual credentials and considerable organizing power, the propensity for *early* categorization can lead to a failure to understand particular discourses in their own terms. For example, the scientific paper appears, in Kinneavy's system, to be a classic instance of referential discourse but, as we shall see in Part III, there may be very good reasons for not coming to quick conclusions about its predominantly referential nature.

In contrast, rhetorical scholars who have taken a more inductive approach have tended to take context more into account and to give genre a more central place. This is perhaps particularly so among those who study the historical development of discourses in recurrent settings, as has been done by Jamieson (1975). She outlines her position as follows:

Three bodies of discourse may serve as evidence for the thesis that it is sometimes rhetorical genres and not rhetorical situations that are decisively formative. These bodies of discourse are the papal encyclical, the early state of the union addresses, and their

congressional replies. I will argue that these discourses bear the chromosomal imprint of ancestral genres. Specifically, I propose to track essential elements of the contemporary papal encyclical to Roman imperial documents and the apostolic epistles, essential elements of the early state of the union addresses to the 'King's Speech' from the throne, and essential elements of the early congressional replies to the parliamentary replies to the king.

(Jamieson, 1975:406)

Jamieson is able to show, in these cases anyway, how antecedent genres operate as powerful constraining models. As she observes, without such a concept, it would be difficult to reconcile the fact, on the one hand, that the first leaders of the United States incorporated monarchical forms into key early public statements and the fact, on the other, that one of their prime purposes was to reject the tyranny and trappings of a monarchical system.

Jamieson is careful not to assert that established rhetoric will necessarily be a prevailing influence on a particular rhetorical response. Whether it is situation, audience expectations or genre itself is, she advocates, a matter of inquiry. Even so, it will come as little surprise to find that many rhetorical scholars with an inductive and/or historical orientation stress the recurrence of similar forms in genre creation:

A genre is a group of acts unified by a constellation of forms that recurs in each of its members. These forms, *in isolation*, appear in other discourses. What is distinctive about the acts in a genre is a recurrence of the forms *together* in constellation.

(Campbell and Jamieson, 1978:20)

This kind of generic analysis, as in most others we have seen, aims to illuminate rather than classify. It offers, amongst other things, a way of studying discursive development over time that is detachable from an analysis of an individual event or an individual author; it also suggests, by way of comparing rhetorical similarities and differences, a potential method of establishing the genre-membership or otherwise of a particular text.

Miller (1984), in a seminal paper, shares Campbell and Jamieson's view that analysis of actual genres can clarify certain social and historical aspects of rhetoric that might otherwise be missed. She is also like them an anti-taxonomist, because genres are unstable entities: 'the number of genres in any society is indeterminate and depends upon the complexity and diversity of society' (1984:163).

However, Miller also advances the discussion in a number of important ways. First, she has principled reasons for extending the scope of genre analysis to types of discourse usually disregarded by rhetorical scholars:

To consider as potential genres such homely discourse as the letter of recommendation, the user manual, the progress report, the ransom note, the lecture, and the white paper, as well as the eulogy, the apologia, the inaugural, the public proceeding, and the sermon, is not to trivialize the study of genres: it is to take seriously the rhetoric in which we are immersed and the situations in which we find ourselves.

(Miller, 1984:155)

Secondly, she argues that 'a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centered not on the substance or form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish' (1984:151).

Thirdly, Miller gives serious attention to how genres fit into the wider scale of human affairs. She suggests that:

What we learn when we learn a genre is not just a pattern of forms or even a method of achieving our own ends. We learn, more importantly, what ends we may have . . .

(Miller, 1984:165)

As students and struggling scholars, we may learn that we may create a research space for ourselves, we may promote the interests of our discourse community, we may fight either for or against its expansion, we may uncouple the chronological order of research action from the spatial order of its description and justification, we may approach unexpected sources for funding, or we may negotiate academic or editorial decisions.

Genre analysts among the rhetoricians thus make a substantial contribution to an evolving concept of genre suitable for the applied purposes of this study. They provide a valuable historical context for the study of genre movements and they finally destroy the myth – or so I hope – that genre analysis *necessarily* has something to do with constructing a classification of genres. Miller's exceptional work reinforces the concept of genre as a means of social action, one situated in a wider sociorhetorical context and operating not only as a mechanism for reaching communicative goals but also of clarifying what those goals might be.

## Overview

The foregoing brief survey of how genres are perceived in four different disciplines indicates something of a common stance. Its components can be summarized as follows:

1. a *distrust* of classification and of facile or premature prescriptivism;
2. a *sense* that genres are important for integrating past and present;
3. a *recognition* that genres are situated within discourse communi-

ties, wherein the beliefs and naming practices of members have relevance;

4. an *emphasis* on communicative purpose and social action;
5. an *interest* in generic structure (and its rationale);
6. an *understanding* of the double generative capacity of genres – to establish rhetorical goals and to further their accomplishment.

This stance suggests that it is indeed possible to use genres for teaching purposes without reducing courses to narrow prescriptivism or formalism and without denying students opportunities for reflecting upon rhetorical or linguistic choices.

## 3.5 A working definition of genre

This section offers a characterization of genres that I believe to be appropriate for the applied purposes that I have in mind, although detailed consideration of links to language-teaching activity and language-learning theory will be held over to Chapters 4 and 5 respectively. I shall proceed by making a series of short criterial observations, which will be followed in each case by commentary. Sometimes the commentaries are short and directly to the point; at other times they are more extensive as they explore wider discursal or procedural issues. I hope in this way – as the section title indicates – to create a sufficiently adequate characterization for others to be able to use, modify or reject as they think fit.

1. *A genre is a class of communicative events.*

I will assume that a communicative event is one in which language (and/or paralanguage) plays both a significant and an indispensable role. Of course, there are a number of situations where it may be difficult to say whether verbal communication is an integral part of the activity or not. Levinson neatly illustrates the possibilities for speech contexts:

On the one hand we have activities constituted entirely by talk (a telephone conversation, a lecture for example), on the other activities where talk is non-occurring or if it does occur is incidental (a game of football for instance). Somewhere in between we have the placing of bets, or a Bingo session, or a visit to the grocer's. And there are sometimes rather special relations between what is said and what is done, as in a sports commentary, a slide show, a cookery demonstration, a conjurer's show, and the like.

(Levinson, 1979:368)

Activities in which talk is incidental, as in engaging in physical exercise, doing the household chores, or driving, will not be considered as

communicative events; nor will activities that involve the eyes and ears in non-verbal ways such as looking at pictures or listening to music.

Secondly, communicative events of a particular class will vary in their occurrence from the extremely common (service encounters, news items in newspapers) to the relatively rare (Papal Encyclicals, Presidential Press Conferences). By and large, classes with few instances need to have prominence within the relevant culture to exist as a genre class. If a communicative event of a particular kind only occurs once a year it needs to be noteworthy for class formation: a TV advert using a talking dog will not do. Finally, and to repeat an earlier claim, a communicative event is here conceived of as comprising not only the discourse itself and its participants, but also the role of that discourse and the environment of its production and reception, including its historical and cultural associations.

2. *The principal criterial feature that turns a collection of communicative events into a genre is some shared set of communicative purposes.*

Placing the primary determinant of genre-membership on shared purpose rather than on similarities of form or some other criterion is to take a position that accords with that of Miller (1984) or Martin (1985). The decision is based on the assumption that, except for a few interesting and exceptional cases, genres are communicative vehicles for the achievement of goals. At this juncture, it may be objected that *purpose* is a somewhat less overt and demonstrable feature than, say, form and therefore serves less well as a primary criterion. However, the fact that purposes of some genres may be hard to get at is itself of considerable heuristic value. Stressing the primacy of purpose may require the analyst to undertake a fair amount of independent and open-minded investigation, thus offering protection against a facile classification based on stylistic features and inherited beliefs, such as typifying research articles as simple reports of experiments.

In some cases, of course, identifying purpose may be relatively easy. *Recipes*, for example, would appear to be straightforward instructional texts designed to ensure that if a series of activities is carried out according to the prescriptions offered, a successful gastronomic outcome will be achieved. In others it may not be so easy. For instance, we might suppose that the examination and cross-examination of witnesses and parties carried out by lawyers under an adversarial system of justice are designed and structured to elicit 'the facts of the case'. However, independent investigation shows this not to be so (Atkinson and Drew, 1979; Danet et al., 1980). The elaborate sequences of closed 'yes-no' questions are designed to control how much the hostile or friendly witnesses will be allowed to reveal of what, in fact, they do know.

Or, to take another example, we might suppose that the purposes of

party political speeches are to present party policies in as convincing a way as possible, to ridicule the policies and personalities of opposition parties, and to rally the faithful. However, especially in these days of massive television coverage, party political speeches may now be being written, structured and delivered in order to generate the maximum amount of applause (Atkinson, 1984). And certainly there are signs in Britain that the 'applause factor' is becoming raised in consciousness, as it were, not only as a result of the interest in Atkinson's work, but also because of the recently established journalistic practice of measuring the length of ovations following major speeches at conventions.

The immediately preceding example suggests that it is not uncommon to find genres that have *sets* of communicative purposes. While news broadcasts are doubtless designed to keep their audiences up to date with events in the world (including verbal events), they may also have purposes of moulding public opinion, organizing public behavior (as in an emergency), or presenting the controllers and paymasters of the broadcasting organization in a favorable light. When purposive elements come into conflict with each other, as in the early Environmental Impact Statements studied by Miller (1984), the effectiveness of the genre as sociorhetorical action becomes questionable. In the academic context, a genre with high potential for conflicting purposes is that of the student written examination (Searle, 1969; Horowitz, 1986a).

There remain, of course, some genres for which purpose is unsuited as a primary criterion. Poetic genres are an obvious example. Although there may be overt political, religious or patriotic tracts put out in the form of verse, the poetry that is taught, remembered, known and loved is rarely of that kind and inevitably makes an appeal to the reader or listener so complex as to allow no easy or useful categorization of purpose. Poems, and other genres whose appeal may lie in the verbal pleasure they give, can thus be separately characterized by the fact that they defy ascription of communicative purpose.

The need, in all but exceptional cases, to ascribe privileged status to purpose derives not only from a general recognition of the power it has to shape our affairs, but also because it provides a way of separating 'the real thing' from parody. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines *parody* as 'A composition in which the characteristic turns of thought and phrase of an author are mimicked and made to appear ridiculous, especially by applying them to ludicrously inappropriate subjects'. However, MacDonald (1960:557) is surely right when he complains that the final clause does not sufficiently distinguish parody from its poor relations, *travesty* and *burlesque*. Good parody is often applied to subject matter that is only slightly or subtly inappropriate. As a result, *content* and *form* may not reveal the fact that parody is being attempted, as in Cyril Connolly's parody of Aldous Huxley in 'Told in Gath' or Henry Reed's celebrated

Eliot-esque 'Chard Whitlow'. Consider, for instance, the opening two paragraphs from a paper by Michael Swan and Catherine Walter published in the *English Language Teaching Journal* entitled 'The use of sensory deprivation in foreign language teaching':

The term 'sensory deprivation' is probably familiar to most of us from recent reports of interrogation procedures, but it may seem strange to find the expression used in a discussion of language teaching, especially since, at first sight, it is difficult to imagine how *deprivation* of sensory input could contribute to learning. However, recent experiments in this field (carried out principally by the Chilton Research Association at Didcot, near Oxford) have suggested that sensory deprivation (SD) could well become a powerful pedagogic tool in the not too distant future. The purpose of this article is simply to provide a résumé of current research in SD; readers who would like more complete information are referred to the very detailed account by Groboshenko and Rubashov (1980).

Interest in the use of SD in language teaching arose initially as a natural extension of the work of such researchers as Gattegno, Rand Morton, Lozanov and Watanabe. Gattegno's refusal (in the 'Silent Way') to allow learners more than minimum access to the second language (L2) model; Rand Morton's insistence on eliminating meaning entirely from the early 'phonetic programming' stages of language learning; Lozanov's concern to purge the student of his former identity and to build a new, autonomous L2 personality through 'Suggestopaedia'; and finally Watanabe's controversial but impressive use of 'hostile environment' as a conditioning factor – all these elements are clearly recognizable in current SD practice. But SD goes a great deal further.

(Swan and Walter, 1982:183)

Most of the regular readers of *ELTJ* with whom I have discussed this paper stated that they read it with increasing incredulity. However, they also admitted that they were by no means sure it was a 'spoof' until they reached the end and saw the words 'Received 1 April 1982'. After all, the content is conceivable (just), and certainly not 'ludicrously inappropriate'. Further, the Swan and Walter paper is of an appropriate length, uses standard style, has the expected information-structure and is appropriately referenced, some of the references being genuine. Although the publication of this fake paper may have been an exceptional event in the world of language teaching publications, other academic groups, particularly scientists, have an established tradition of parodying both their research methods and their publication formats. For instance, there exist 'specialized' periodicals like the *Journal of Irreproducible Results* and the *Journal of Insignificant Research* (see Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984, Chapter 8 for an excellent discussion). In the end, although we may well

find contextual clues that help us to separate the spurious from the genuine, we need to rely on the privileged property of identifiable communicative purpose to disentangle the clever parody from 'the real thing'.

### 3. *Exemplars or instances of genres vary in their prototypicality.*

So far I have argued that genre membership is based on communicative purpose. What else is it based on? What additional features will be required to establish such membership? There are, as far as I can see, two possible ways of trying to find answers to such questions: the *definitional* approach and the *family resemblance* approach.

The definitional view is much the better established and, indeed, underpins the creation and worth of dictionaries, glossaries and specialized technologies. It asserts that, in theory at least, it is possible to produce a small set of simple properties that are individually necessary and cumulatively sufficient to identify all the members and only the members of a particular category from everything else in the world. Thus, a *bird* can be defined in terms of being an animal, having wings and feathers, and laying eggs, or some such list of properties. As long as the object has the stipulated features, it is a member of the category; it matters not whether the bird is a 'normal' one like a sparrow or a 'far-out' member of the category such as an ostrich or a penguin – they are all equally birds. The definitional view has had some success in certain areas. Kinship terms have been extensively analyzed in this way; a bachelor is 'an adult unmarried male' (Katz and Fodor, 1963); and other areas where it seems to work with relatively little problem are numbers (ordinal, cardinal, real, rational etc.) and physical and chemical elements. However, in practice, great difficulty has been experienced in drawing up lists or defining characteristics of such everyday categories as *fruit*, *vegetables*, *furniture* and *vehicles*. And if that is so, then there would appear little hope of identifying the all-or-none defining features of *lectures*, *staff meetings*, *research papers*, *jokes* or *consultations*. A further difficulty is created by the easily-attested phenomenon that we still recognize category membership even when many of the suggested defining characteristics are missing; the roast chicken emerging from the cooker is still identified as a *bird*. As Armstrong, Gleitman and Gleitman observe, 'It's not at all hard to convince the man in the street that there are three-legged, tame, toothless albino tigers, that are tigers all the same' (1983:296).

It might therefore be the case that what holds shared membership together is not a shared list of defining features, but inter-relationships of a somewhat looser kind. This indeed would seem to be the view taken by Wittgenstein in a justly famous passage in the *Philosophical Investigations* that is worth quoting in full:

66. Consider for example the proceedings we call 'games'. I mean board games, card games, ball games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all? – Don't say: 'There *must* be something common, or they would not be called "games"' – but *look and see* whether there is anything common to all. – For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don't think, but look! – Look for example at board games, with their multifarious relationships. Now pass to card games; here you find many correspondences with the first group, but many common features drop out, and others appear. When we pass next to ball games, much that is common is retained, but much is lost. – Are they all 'amusing'? Compare chess with noughts and crosses. Or is there always winning and losing, or competition between players? Think of patience. In ball games there is winning and losing; but when a child throws his ball at the wall and catches it again, this feature has disappeared. Look at the parts played by skill and luck; and at the difference between skill in chess and skill in tennis. Think now of games like ring-a-ring-a-roses; here is the element of amusement, but how many other characteristic features have disappeared! And we can go through many, many other groups of games in the same way; can see how similarities crop up and disappear.

And the result of this examination is; we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.

67. I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than 'family resemblances'; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc., etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way. – And I shall say: 'games' form a family.

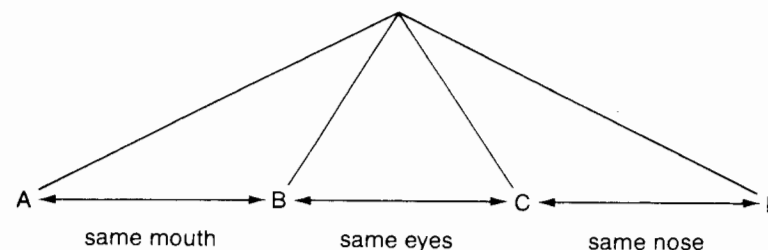
(Wittgenstein, 1958:31–2)

Thus, we could perhaps argue that in, say, the case of lectures 'we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail'. Thus some lectures may be like others in terms of some of the following: the arrangement of speaking roles, seating arrangements, the level of formality in language, the use of visual support, the number and positioning of examples, the employment of metadiscoursal features of recapitulation and advanced signaling, and so on. Others will be like others in equivalent but different ways.

However, 'family resemblance' has not been without its critics. To start with, we would do well to bear in mind Lodge's observation that 'no choice of a text for illustrative purposes is innocent' (Lodge, 1981:23). Just as kinship-terms suit Katz and Fodor, so games may particularly favor Wittgenstein's observations. In fact, we can note that nearly all

games offer a contest or a challenge. The *Oxford Dictionary* proposes this definition of a game: 'A diversion of the nature of a contest, played according to rules, and decided by superior strength, skill or good fortune' – and, of course, this contest can be against the game itself as in patience, solitaire, or in a jig-saw puzzle. Admittedly, we are left with an unaccounted-for residue as represented by such children's games as 'ring-a-ring-a-roses'.

Rather more seriously, it can be objected that a family resemblance theory can make anything resemble anything. Consider, for instance, a set-up like that shown below.



Thus whilst B and C share a common feature, A and D have nothing in common themselves except that they share a different feature with B and C. So a knife is like a spoon because they are both eating instruments, and a spoon is like a teapot because they are both used to contain liquids, and a teapot is like a suitcase because they both have handles, so a knife is like a suitcase. Indeed it was precisely this kind of undisciplined chaining that Vygotsky (1962) characterized as being typical of the young child, to be replaced in maturity by a more orderly system of categorization. However, as Bloor (1983) has argued, we need to remember that Wittgenstein was concerned with *family* resemblances and that families cohere by reason of other things beside physical characteristics such as blood-ties and shared experiences; therefore it would be inappropriate to leave the domain of eating activities (knives and spoons) for that of traveling activities (suitcases).

Wittgenstein's discussion of family resemblances and subsequent comment have given rise to a 'prototype' or cluster theory designed to account for our capacity to recognize instances of categories.

The *prototype* approach to categories is particularly associated with the work of Eleanor Rosch (Rosch, 1975; 1978; Mervis and Rosch, 1981; Armstrong, Gleitman and Gleitman, 1983; for a useful introduction see Clark and Clark, 1977: 464–8; for a full discussion of the issues see Smith and Media, 1981). Rosch and her co-workers begin with the observation that although by definition robins, eagles, swallows, ostriches and penguins are all birds, we somehow feel that they do not all

have the same status. Some are 'birdier' than others. Rosch then conducted a number of experiments to establish this; she was able to show, for example, that the time subjects took to verify the correctness of a statement depended on whether the subject was a 'typical' member of its class or not. Hence, in the United States, verification times for 'a robin is a bird' were faster than for 'an ostrich is a bird'. Further, Rosch (1975) was able to establish that when subjects were asked to rank examples in order from most typical to least typical they did so with a large degree of agreement. Thus, in US culture chairs and tables were the most typical members of items of furniture and lamps and ashtrays least typical; similarly, apples and plums were typical fruits and olives and coconuts atypical.

The most typical category members are *prototypes*; a *chair* is what is likely to come to mind when we think of an item of furniture and an *apple* similarly comes to mind in the case of fruit. A *robin* is a prototype bird within US culture because its body and legs are average size, and it flies, perches in trees and sings. According to Rosch (1975) a category has its own internal structure, which will assign features or properties a certain probability for being included in category membership. An ostrich is a marginal member because it fails to meet the high probability expectations of flight and relatively small size. Organisms like bats and whales are problematic because they carry properties that meet high probability expectations of categories to which they do not technically belong.

Armstrong et al. bring the definitional and cluster approaches together in the following generalized way:

There are privileged properties, manifest in most or even all examples of the category; these could even be necessary properties. Even so, these privileged properties are insufficient for picking out all and only the class members, and hence a family resemblance description is still required.

(Armstrong et al., 1983:270)

This integration has considerable appeal. It allows the genre analyst to find a course between trying to produce unassailable definitions of a particular genre and relaxing into the irresponsibility of family resemblances. As we have seen, communicative purpose has been nominated as the *privileged* property of a genre. Other properties, such as form, structure and audience expectations operate to identify the extent to which an exemplar is *prototypical* of a particular genre.

#### 4. *The rationale behind a genre establishes constraints on allowable contributions in terms of their content, positioning and form.*

Established members of discourse communities employ genres to realize communicatively the goals of their communities. The shared set of

purposes of a genre are thus recognized – at some level of consciousness – by the established members of the parent discourse community; they may be only partly recognized by apprentice members; and they may be either recognized or unrecognized by non-members. Recognition of purposes provides the rationale, while the rationale gives rise to constraining conventions. The conventions, of course, are constantly evolving and indeed can be directly challenged, but they nonetheless continue to exert influence.

I will illustrate these observations by taking two simple examples: one from administrative correspondence and one from professional interviews. Correspondence, not yet administrative correspondence, itself does not constitute a genre as it does not represent a coherent set of shared purposes. Rather it represents, as a convenient label, a supra-generic assembly of discourse. Within administrative correspondence there are, however, a number of establishable genres. Two closely related ones are the individually-directed 'good news' letter and 'bad news' letter (Murphy and Hildebrandt, 1984). These genres are formal responses to applications, or sometimes complaints. Classic instances are responses to applications for jobs, scholarships or grants. At one level, it might be argued that both kinds of letter constitute a single genre of *responses to applications*, but a little reflection will show that, while the textual environment and the register may be the same, the rationale is sufficiently different to require a separate genre for each.

The rationale for the 'good news' letter is based firstly on the assumption that the information transmitted is welcome. It therefore is conveyed early and enthusiastically, while the rest of the letter is set out in such a way as to remove any remaining obstacles and engender a rapid and positive response. Part of the rationale behind a 'good news' letter is that *communications will continue*. In contrast, the 'bad news' letter is based on the assumption that the information is unwelcome. It therefore is conveyed after a 'buffer' has prepared the recipient for its receipt and couched in language that is regretful and non-judgmental. Part of the rationale of the 'bad news' letter is that it minimizes personal resentment so that no long-term disaffiliation from the institution occurs; another part is to signal that *communications have ended*. For that reason, in 'bad news' letters the negative decision is usually represented as having been taken by some impersonal body, such as a committee, over which the writer gives the impression of having little influence, the purpose being to insinuate that complaint, petition or recrimination will be of no avail. The rationale thus determines what Martin (1985) refers to as the schematic structure of the discourse and also constrains lexical and syntactic choice.

The second illustration is taken from medical consultations and is designed to highlight differences in rationale perception between

established and non-established members of discourse communities. Apparently many medical doctors trained in Britain use the system called SOAP to structure their consultations (Jones, 1982):

1. S = Subjective (what the patient says is wrong; what the patient perceives as his or her symptoms)
2. O = Objective (results of tests; symptoms perceived by the doctor)
3. A = Analysis (of the symptoms so as to lead to a diagnosis)
4. P = Prescription (pharmaceutical and/or giving advice or treatment)

However, patients rarely have any conscious recognition that the doctor imposes order on the consultation by the use of a structuring system such as SOAP. Part of the reason may be that other things going on, such as greetings and leave takings and various types of utterance designed to settle and reassure patients and to effect transitions between stages (Candlin, Bruton and Leather, 1976; Frankel, 1984), could appear more salient to patients. Equally, there may be things apparently not going on: the doctor's carrying out of stages O and A may well be a largely silent and private matter.

Understanding of rationale is privileged knowledge, but is neither the whole story nor any guarantee of communicative success. Erickson and Schultz (1982) in their remarkable study of academic counseling sessions make the following observation:

There is a similar sequential order of discourse topics across interviews – an order which manifests an underlying logic of gatekeeping decision making. But it is not the underlying logic, the interactional *deep structure*, that is essential, for much more is manifested in performance – in communicational *surface structure* – than an underlying abstract logic of gatekeeping. Distinctive packages of social meanings and social identities are also manifested communicatively in each interview.

(Erickson and Schultz, 1982:12)

The point to note here is that even when we grant that surface features and local decisions are highly contributory to the performance outcome, it is still very much the case that for a participant to have a sense of the 'underlying logic' or rationale is facilitative in both reception and production.

5. *A discourse community's nomenclature for genres is an important source of insight.*

As we have seen, knowledge of the conventions of a genre (and their rationale) is likely to be much greater in those who routinely or professionally operate within that genre rather than in those who become involved in it only occasionally. In consequence, active discourse com-

munity members tend to have the greatest genre-specific expertise – as we often see in interactions between members of a profession and their client public. One consequence is that these active members give genre names to classes of communicative events that they recognize as providing recurring rhetorical action. These names may be increasingly adopted first by overlapping or close discourse communities and then by farther and broader communities. Particular attention therefore needs to be given to the genre nomenclatures created by those who are most familiar with and most professionally involved in those genres.

As far as academic genres are concerned, many, if not most, are terms that incorporate a pre-modifying nominal of purpose: introductory lecture, qualifying exam, survey article, review session, writing workshop. Others reverse the order by using a purposive head-noun: grant application, reprint request and course description. Still others indicate the occasion rather than communicative purpose, such as final examination, plenary lecture, festschrift, faculty meeting or graduation address. However, members of the discourse community typically recognize that particular occasional genres have particular roles to play within the academic environment and that, in consequence, the sets of purposes are, on the one hand, evident and, on the other, constrained.

In the previous section that dealt with linguistic contributions to genre analysis (2.3), it was argued that insider metalanguages should certainly be considered seriously, but also viewed with circumspection. Indeed, it was suggested that an appropriate approach for the analyst would be to establish genres based on investigations into actual communicative behavior, two aspects of which, among several, would be participants' naming procedures and elicited categorizations. There are a number of reasons for caution.

One reason is that the naming of communicative events that occur and recur in post-secondary educational settings – to restrict discussion to the main focus of this study – tend to be institutional labels rather than descriptive ones. I mean by this that the timetable or course handbook will identify group activity A in setting X as a *lecture*, and group activity B in setting Y as a *tutorial*. However, as every student in higher education knows one member of staff's 'tutorial' can be identical as a communicative event to another member of staff's 'lecture' and vice versa. Of course, instructors may modify their approach depending on whether they are *supposed* to be giving *lectures* or *tutorials*, but the fact that a communicative event is labeled by the institution as being an event of such-and-such a kind does not necessarily mean that it will be so.

Secondly, names tend to persevere against a background of substantial change in activity. *Lectures* may no longer be the monologic recitations they once were, but actively invite intercalated discussion and small-group tasks. *Tutorials* today may consist of student interaction with a

computer program or a tape recorder and no longer involve a 'tutor' in the traditional sense of the term. We inherit genre categories that get passed down from one generation to another.

In direct contrast, genre-naming can equally be generative. While the coining and deliberate usage of new labels for event categories can at times create substance and structure out of an amorphous background, at others the names may reflect empty categories with no claim to genre status. A pertinent instance of these processes can be seen in the advance information for the Nineteenth International IATEFL Conference (*IATEFL Newsletter* no. 84, August 1984:54). The section entitled 'Contributions' quotes at length from *The Working Party Report on Conferences*, April 1984.

The range of ways in which presentations and workshops could operate might be broadened considerably. If contributors were offered a range of possible formats to choose from, there would be scope for many members who are currently inhibited by the formality of presentation. At the same time many presentations would continue in the well-tried formats of the past.

The *advance-information* then lists and glosses eleven possible suggestions:

1. Basic presentations
2. Haiku sessions
3. Resource rooms
4. Traditional talks/lectures
5. Experimental workshops
6. Creative workshops
7. The buzz-group lecture
8. Curran-style lecture
9. Screening panel lecture
10. The traditional debate
11. Specific interest groups

I think it reasonable to suppose that 11 different formats is decidedly more than the average conference-goer is familiar with, and I would guess that there are very few people in the English-teaching world who could confidently explain what is expected to happen in all 11. Certainly, I had not heard of haiku sessions ('People who have one very good idea to present that can really be properly got across in 10 minutes or one minute') or screening panel lectures ('Before the lecture begins three to five people from the audience come to the front and spend five minutes discussing what they expect to and want to hear from the speaker and

what they expect others will want to hear. This allows the speaker to pitch his talk right'). However, I now know what a haiku session or screening panel lecture might be like, even though I have never experienced either of them; and I dare say having read about such possibilities, my interest is raised and so my participation is encouraged. Thus it is that the naming and description of new sub-genres can have pre-emptive force. Oscar Wilde had an inimitable ability to stand the world on its head, and when he observed that 'life imitates art' rather than the commonly-held converse that 'art imitates life', he may have been closer to the truth than his witticism is generally given credit for. Certainly here we seem to have been discussing potential cases where 'conference' life imitates format' rather than the converse. On the other hand, relatively few of these genre suggestions seem to have been realized. Documentation from subsequent conferences fails to make mention of the 'haiku' or the 'screening panel' formats, even if others such as 'resource rooms' and 'specific interest groups' have made some headway.

If there are genre names with no genres attached to them, so must there be genres without a name. I believe there is at least one of these that occurs quite commonly in my main professional discourse community and which I am sure many readers will recognize. This is a type of presentation given to colleagues and graduate students which is built around a number of episodes in which participants, often working in pairs or small groups, are asked to reach and then share conclusions on short texts distributed among them. The tasks might involve ranking texts in order of evolution or quality, re-assembling textual fragments into their original order, or using internal evidence to guess a text's provenance. While I have twice experienced the use of such informed guessing episodes in other disciplines (in geology and art history slide-supported presentations), interestingly in both these cases the presenter prefaced his remarks with the same phrase 'Now let's play a party game'. In my own discourse community, I believe that involving others in context-stripped and task-oriented text analysis is viewed as too central and too valuable an activity to be dismissed as 'playing a party game'. And as far as I am aware, presentations of this distinctive and relatively prevalent type have no name.

This section opened with the promise that it would produce an adequate characterization of genre. The working definition that follows may in fact not be fully adequate, but it has I believe benefited from the discussion of the term in allied fields and does represent some advance on my earlier formulations (e.g. Swales, 1981a). Although there remain several loose ends, some to be discussed in the next two sections, my present understanding is summarized below.

*Genre defined*

A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style. Communicative purpose is both a privileged criterion and one that operates to keep the scope of a genre as here conceived narrowly focused on comparable rhetorical action. In addition to purpose, exemplars of a genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience. If all high probability expectations are realized, the exemplar will be viewed as prototypical by the parent discourse community. The genre names inherited and produced by discourse communities and imported by others constitute valuable ethnographic communication, but typically need further validation.

**3.6 Pre-genres**

One of the basic assumptions underlying much of the preceding discussion is that human beings organize their communicative behavior *partly* through repertoires of genres. Thus, it is not the case that all communicative events are considered instances of genres. In fact, there are at least two areas of verbal activity that I believe are best considered to lie outside genres: casual conversation or 'chat' and 'ordinary' narrative.

The nature and role of conversation will be considered first, and Levinson's opening position will serve perfectly well:

Definition will emerge below, but for the present *conversation* may be taken to be that predominant kind of talk in which two or more participants freely alternate in speaking, which generally occurs *outside specific institutional settings like religious services, law courses, classroom and the like.*

(Levinson, 1983:284, my emphases)

This kind of talk has, of course, been massively studied and discussed, particularly since the advent of the tape recorder (e.g. Grice, 1975; Goffman, 1981; Levinson, 1983; Richards and Schmidt, 1983; Gardner, 1984); and Atkinson (1982) gives the ethnomethodological arguments for the centrality and significance of conversation. As he and many people have observed, 'ordinary' conversation is a fundamental kind of language use: for example Preston (1989:225-6) comments: 'Since conversation in some sense is basic to all face-to-face interaction, it may

seem to refer to such a ubiquitous level of speech performance that one would sense a difference between it and anything else one might wish to call a genre'.

Casual conversation presumably occurred early in the evolution of the human race, as it does in a child's acquisition of first language. It takes up, for most of us, a fair part of our days; indeed involvement in conversation can be quite hard to avoid. Further, our sense of the enveloping nature of conversation is brought home when we consider its absence. Therein, after all, lay many of the trials and tribulations of Robinson Crusoe. It is often said that the severity of placing a prisoner in 'solitary confinement' resides as much as anything in the denial of verbal interaction, and a 'vow of silence' is no light undertaking.

Additionally, there would appear to be attestable individual discrepancies between conversational and non-conversational skills. Probably all of us have known people who may be highly effective communicators in certain roles (as teachers, salespeople, joke-tellers, armchair critics and so on) yet who are adjudged to be lacking in the skills of ordinary conversation and thus are thought of as individuals who are 'difficult or uncomfortable to talk with'. Conversely, we probably know people who seem to have a remarkable facility to sustain casual conversation, but who are the first to announce, for instance, that they couldn't stand up and give a vote of thanks to save their lives. These observations all seem to point to the fact that general conversational ability and genre-specific verbal skills may be phenomena of a somewhat different kind.

If these observations have substance, it would seem that ordinary conversation is too persuasive and too fundamental to be usefully considered as a genre. Rather, it is a pre-generic 'form of life', a basis from which more specific types of interaction have presumably either evolved or broken away. The interesting question for the genre analyst is not so much whether conversation is a genre; instead, the interest lies in exploring the kind of relationship that might exist between general conversational patterns, procedures and 'rules' and those that can be discovered in (to give three examples) legal cross-examinations, medical consultations and classroom discourse. In those three cases, are the unfolding interactions best seen as mere extensions and modifications of common conversational practice and thus ultimately parasitic on such practice? Or, alternatively, would we gain a greater understanding of what is happening by considering them as existing independently in separate universes of discourse? Are *Unequal Encounters* (Candlin, 1981) such as normally occur between doctor and patient, lawyer and witness, and teacher and pupil, of a different *kind* to the more equal and less goal-directed encounters that take place in casual conversation?

Another interesting aspect of the putative relationships between the pre-genre and genres occurs in situations where 'ordinary' face-to-face

conversation is replaced by telecommunication. Schegloff (1979) has shown that telephone conversations actually open with the ringing of the telephone and that the person lifting the receiver and speaking is *responding* to a summons. He has also analyzed and described the limited range of procedures that Americans use to identify and recognize each other on the telephone (much less of a problem, of course, if you can see to whom you are about to talk). Owen (1981) has written interestingly on the use of 'well' and 'anyway' as signals given by British telephone speakers to indicate a wish to close a topic or a call. However, to establish that a particular kind of communicative event has specific, situation-bound opening and closing procedures is not, in fact, to establish very much, because specificity may well be concentrated at initiation and termination (Richards and Schmidt, 1983:132-3). For example, openings like 'Merry Christmas', 'Good morning, Sir', 'Oh, we are smart today', 'Come here often, do you?' reflect particular circumstances that are likely to be of rapidly diminishing importance as the conversation proceeds. Therefore, on present evidence, it would seem sensible to exclude personal telephone conversations from genre status and to consider them, despite their relatively short history, as part of the pre-genre.

In contrast, we can immediately recognize the unusual nature of radio-telephony. Robertson (1985; 1988), for example, outlines the purposes of plane-ground radio-telephony as to:

- i) prevent collisions in the air;
- ii) prevent collisions between aircraft and between aircraft and obstructions on the manoeuvring area;
- iii) expedite and maintain orderly flow of air-traffic;
- iv) provide advice and information useful for the safe and efficient conduct of flights.

(Robertson, 1985:295)

Given these aims it is not surprising that there have evolved especially rigid rules for *turn-taking* (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974) and special conventions for clarifying both rhetorical function and identity. These conventions have to be learnt by native speakers as well as non-native speakers, as the following fragment illustrates:

Control: Sierra Fox 132, correction, Sierra Fox 123,  
what is your flight level?  
Pilot: Flight level 150, Sierra Fox 123.  
Control: Say again flight level, Sierra Fox.  
Pilot: Flight level 150, Sierra Fox 123.

(Robertson, 1985:303)

Radio-telephonic Air Traffic Control meets the criteria for genre status.

If casual conversation is a pre-generic dialogic activity, is there a comparable pre-genre for monologue? The obvious candidate is *narration* (if viewed as a process) or *narrative* (if viewed as product). Narrative, like conversation, is a fast expanding research field (Van Dijk, 1972; Grimes, 1975; Longacre, 1983) and has developed its own disciplinary name, *Narratology* (Prince, 1982). For present purposes I will simply follow Longacre and suggest that narration (spoken or written) operates through a framework of temporal succession in which at least some of the events are reactions to the previous events. Further characteristics of narrative are that such discourses tend to be strongly oriented towards the agents of the events being described, rather than to the events themselves, and that the structure is typically that of 'a plot'. These pre-generic long turns commonly occur in letters and also arise as responses to such prompts as 'How was the vacation?' or 'How did the meeting go?' and so on.

In a way analogous to that described for conversation, specific types of narrative diverge from the pre-generic norm and thus begin to acquire genre status. Thus in news stories the temporal succession is disturbed by putting 'the freshest on the top'. In reports of various kinds, such as those describing scientific work, events rather than agents predominate. Jokes have temporal sequences, agent orientation and plot, but the resolution of the plot is specific: the moment of resolution needs to be overtly signaled (the onset of the punch line) whilst the manner of resolution needs to be unpredictable.

A final point perhaps worth making at this juncture is that the English-speaking world (as one of many) uses *names* to describe classes of communications that quite appropriately operate as higher-order categories than genres. One very common example is the *letter*. This useful term, of course, makes reference to the *means* of communication, but lacks as a class sufficient indication of purpose for genre status. The same observation holds for subsets of the class that refer to fields of activity such as business letters or official letters. It is only when purpose becomes ascribable that the issue of genre arises, as in begging letters or letters of condolence. Category labels like *letters* do not therefore refer to pre-genres in the sense used here, but operate as convenient multigeneric generalizations.

### 3.7 Differences among genres

If there were only minor differences among genres there would be little need for genre analysis as a theoretical activity separable from discourse analysis, and probably no need at all for an analysis driven by applied concerns. But, of course, it turns out that genres vary significantly along

quite a number of different parameters. We have already seen that they vary according to complexity of rhetorical purpose – from the ostensibly simple *recipe* to the ostensibly complex *political speech*. They also vary greatly in the degree to which exemplars of the genre are prepared or constructed in advance of their communicative instantiation (Nystrand, 1986). Typical prepared genres might include research papers, letters of personal reference, poems, recipes, news broadcasts and so on, while at the other extreme arguments and rows typically flare up without malice aforethought. Genres also vary in terms of the mode or medium through which they are expressed; indeed the configurations of speech versus writing can become quite complex (Gregory, 1967). For instance, of the previous examples of prepared genres, most are predominantly written. However, research papers can be presented at conferences in ‘manuscript delivery’ (Dubois, 1985) or as ‘aloud reading’ (Goffman, 1981), while references and recipes can in an emergency be communicated by the telephone. Poems in western cultures have in modern times been a predominantly written form, although ‘aloud reading’ of them is an ongoing tradition and one thought of as requiring uncommon skill in modulated performance (in the case of actors) or in interpretation (in the case of poets reading their own work). In other cultures the converse may apply with poetry as an essentially oral medium, written forms operating as archival repositories. News broadcasts are scripted and then read aloud.

Prepared-text genres like those we have been considering vary also in the extent to which their producers are conventionally expected to consider their anticipated audiences and readerships. However, this variability is somewhat at odds with much current thinking on and research into writing processes. An influential and representative advocate of the interactional orientation to reading and writing processes is Widdowson (Widdowson, 1979; 1983; 1984). He expresses his 1979 position, which has little changed (cf. 1984:220) in this way:

As I write, I make judgements about the reader’s possible reactions, anticipate any difficulties that I think he might have in understanding and following my directions, conduct, in short, covert dialogue with my supposed interlocutor.

(Widdowson, 1979:176)

According to this view, writers, at least competent ones, are trying to second-guess both their readers’ general state of background knowledge and their potential immediate processing problems. At the same time (competent) readers are interrogating authors on their present positions as well as trying to predict where the authors’ lines of thought or description will lead. There is, as it were, a reciprocity of semantic effort

to be engaged in by both sides; a contract binding writer and reader together in reaction and counter-reaction.

Investigations into various genres would, however, suggest that this supposed sociocognitive activity is over-generalized, since a producer’s contract with a receiver is not general, but subject to quite sharp genre fluctuations. Of course, the interactional view is obviously both appropriate and useful in certain contexts such as the processing of recipes and news broadcasts. Indeed, Hugh L’Estrange (personal communication) has pointed to the fact that recipe-mongers who fail to be considerate of the reader can contribute to gastronomical shipwreck, as in ‘Transfer immediately to a *pre-greased* tin’. And news broadcasts go to quite considerable lengths to ensure that they are comprehensible both by repetition (‘Here are the main points again’) and by providing background information (‘President Kyprianou of Cyprus’, ‘Faya-Largau, a strategic town in Northern Chad . . .’) (Al-Shabbab, 1986). While recipes and news broadcasts may be marginal to the purposes of this book, we can also affirm that a unifying characteristic of instructional-process genres will be consideration for the reader or listener.

However, it remains the case that in certain genres, usually written ones, the writer has the right to withdraw from the contract to consider the reader because of an overriding imperative to be ‘true’ to the complexity of subject matter or to the subtlety of thought and imagination (Elbow, 1988). Thus we find that in a significant number of genre texts, in laws and other regulatory writings, in original works in philosophy, theology and mathematics (and arguably theoretical linguistics), in many poems, and in certain novels of which Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake* would be an extreme example, there is a diminished consideration for the reader. Joyce, after all, is reported to have commented on *Finnegan’s Wake* to the effect that as the book took him 18 years to write he didn’t see why the reader shouldn’t take as long to read it.

There is in fact a standard defense of the legal draughtsman’s practice of using very long sentences containing numerous and elaborate qualifications (all those elements beginning *notwithstanding*, *in accordance with*, *without prejudice to* etc.). This defense would claim that it is ultimately more satisfactory for a legal text to reveal clarity after detailed and expert study than to be a text that, however immediately accessible to an educated lay audience, falls into ambiguity upon multiple reading (Bhatia, 1983).

Thus it turns out that certain legal, academic and literary texts all point to another kind of contract that can exist between writer and reader. This is one not based on ‘consideration’ but on *respect*. If we use Widdowson’s device of imagining the thoughts of the writer, it might come out something like this:

As I write, I am aware that, whatever I do, what I write will be difficult for most readers. Because of what I am trying to achieve, this is unavoidable. This is why I must convince the readers that their efforts will be rewarded; I need to keep their faith that I am not making my text unnecessarily difficult.

While Flower (1979) and her co-workers may be generally right in their theory that the immature writer produces 'writer-based prose' and the mature writer 'reader-based prose', it would seem equally clear that in certain genres mature writers also produce 'writer-based prose'.

Genres also vary in the extent to which they are likely to exhibit universal or language-specific tendencies. On the one hand, it would appear that the diplomatic press communiqué has developed a global if devious set of conventions whereby, for instance, 'a full and frank exchange of views' is interpreted by discourse community members throughout the capitals of the world as signifying that the parties failed to agree. On the other hand, one might reasonably assume that marriage proposals will differ widely from one language community to another because they are deeply embedded in particular socioeconomic cultural matrices.

The sociolinguistic literature on the form, structure and rationale of specific communicative events is vast and falls largely outside the scope of this book (see Saville-Troike, 1982; Downes, 1984; and Preston, 1989 for overviews). However, there is one investigative area that is directly relevant to a pedagogically-oriented study of academic English, one known as *Contrastive Rhetoric*.

The concept of Contrastive Rhetoric was originally elaborated by Robert Kaplan in a 1966 article entitled 'Cultural thought patterns in intercultural education' (Kaplan, 1966). Kaplan, who has remained active in this area, more recently summarized the concept as follows:

There are, it seems to me, important differences between languages in the way in which discourse topic is identified in a text and in the way in which discourse topic is developed in terms of exemplification, definition, and so on.

(Kaplan, 1987:10)

The notion that the rhetorical structure of languages differs is not only relevant in itself, but more particularly because much of the work to date has been based on the study of expository prose (Connor and Kaplan, 1987). Kaplan and Ostler (1982), in a review of the literature, conclude, despite a minority of studies to the contrary, that different languages have different preferences for certain kinds of discourse patterns. For instance, they argue that English expository prose has an essentially linear rhetorical pattern which consists of:

... a clearly defined topic, introduction, body which explicates all but nothing more than the stated topic, paragraphs which chain from one to the next, and a conclusion which tells the reader what has been discussed ... no digression, no matter how interesting, is permitted on the grounds that it would violate unity.

(Kaplan and Ostler, 1982:14)

They then contrast this pattern with the elaborate parallel structures found in Arabic prose, with the more digressive patterns of writing in Romance languages which permit 'tangential' material to be introduced in the discourse, and so on. Clyne (1987), in a particularly careful study, has examined the *Exkurs* or 'digression' in contemporary academic German and is able to show, among other things, that the *Exkurs* is not only institutionalized in certain German genres but has no easy translation equivalent in English.

Comparison of languages is notoriously difficult, especially at the discursive level (see Houghton and Hoey, 1983, for a specification of *caveats*). Among such caveats it is important to compare texts of the same *genre* in two languages. Ostler (1987), for example, can be criticized for comparing student placement essays with extracts from published texts.

In general terms the existence today of 'invisible colleges' and of transnational discourse communities is likely to lead to universalist tendencies in research genres. A strong form of the universalist hypothesis is offered by Widdowson:

Scientific exposition is structured according to certain patterns of rhetorical organization which, with some tolerance for individual stylistic variation, imposes a conformity on members of the scientific community no matter what language they happen to use.

(Widdowson, 1979:61)

Najjar's 1988 study of research articles in English and Arabic dealing with agricultural science shows sufficiently few and sufficiently unimportant differences to provide some support for the universalist argument. However, as we have seen, Clyne (1987) provides some counter-evidence from German as does Peng (personal communication) from Mandarin. The jury is still out.

Although universalist tendencies may be apparent in research activities, those who have taught in different higher education institutions around the world have typically been struck by the peculiarities of study modes, teaching styles and of general educational expectations within particular institutions (James, 1980). If we examine, say, the first years of undergraduate study in Faculties of Science, I believe it would be difficult to argue that what goes on in those faculties is part of a universal scientific culture. Rather, we tend to find in this area of scientific activity

powerful local influences of many kinds: national, social, cultural, technical and religious. The ways in which such influences form particular 'educational cultures' have been described for various parts of the world: Thailand (Hawkey and Nakornchai, 1980); Iran (Houghton, 1980); the Arab World (Dudley-Evans and Swales, 1980; Holliday, 1984); Asia (Ballard and Clanchy, 1984). There have also been some interesting studies of the 'rhetorical gaps' that apprentice researchers from overseas have to cross when learning English academic style: a Yemeni Arab student (Holes, 1984); a Brazilian (James, 1984a); a Thai and a Japanese (Ballard, 1984). All in all, it looks as though the relativist hypothesis has some substance in teacher-student genres such as textbooks, lectures and tutorials. Nevertheless, we face a difficulty in interpretation. We can either lean towards intrinsic cultural differences, or we can prefer an explanation that would go no further than stress the relevance of recent history. For instance, are the differences between western and Arab educational genres a reflection of differences in rhetorical and ideological codes, or do they signify little more than different stages in an educational cycle? More precisely, would we do better to interpret such differences as deriving principally from, on the one hand, an Islamicized verbalistic tradition and, on the other, a secularized pragmatic European or North American tradition? Or should we conclude that modes of study and modes of expression commonly accepted and practiced in the Arab World today are in surprising numbers of ways similar to those existing in the West 50 years ago (the teacher *qua* teacher as respected authority, a stress on rote-learning, a style of writing in the tradition of *belles-lettres* etc.)? An educational ethos which may, of course, yet revive in the West.

At present, our perspectives on the formative influence of the educational environment rest largely on anecdote, incidental observation and the single-subject case study. Mohan and Lo (1985:515) are certainly correct in their critique of Contrastive Rhetoric when they point to 'a need for greater awareness of students' native literacy and educational experience as factors influencing the development of academic writing in a second language'. It is hoped that the concept of genre developed in this book, especially with regard to features of text-role and text-environment, will contribute to a less narrowly linguistic orientation in Contrastive Rhetoric studies. And indeed, independently, there are signs that this is already happening. Hinds (1987:143-4) has suggested that English-language cultures tend to charge the writer 'with the responsibility to make clear and well-organized statements', whereas in Japanese culture 'it is the responsibility of the listener (or reader) to understand what it is that the speaker or author had intended to say'. Hinds' typology can thus be related, in a cross-cutting way, to the previous discussion on genre-specific differences in the writer's responsibility. Finally, Eggington

(1987) has shown the existence of two rhetorical styles in contemporary academic Korean, one deriving from traditional rhetoric and the other much influenced by English. Although Eggington does not put it in these terms, we can see here the existence of two discourse communities: an elite group of US-educated scholars who are members of the international community of researchers in their specialization, and a larger national community using traditional Korean rhetoric. Indeed, the discourse community concept, as a sociorhetorical construct, offers some general illumination on the difficult and important question of academic language variation across cultures and generations.