GENRE ANALYSIS AND DISCOURSE PROCESSING

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INTRODUCTION

The dilemma giving rise to the present study is one which has been dogging my linguistic footsteps for several years, ever since I collected and examined a vast amount of naturally occurring oral discourse at Hyde Park Speakers' Corner in London in 1985. In analysing the data, after attempting to apply various existing discourse models, I discovered that there was no suitable model available for the type of data I had in hand and I was unable to find an appropriate genre collocation (genre as a term was still confined to literary studies, and discourse analysts were calling it by a variety of other names; see Section 2 below). It was not conversation although it bore many stylistic resemblances to extemporaneous verbal interaction; it was ostensibly monologic although a clearly marked dialogic structure emerged; it was definitely not public speech variety, though the participant roles were similar: one speaker who held the floor for an extended period before a large audience; and though it was unplanned and displayed the randomness of subject matter typical of conversation (see Crystal & Davy, 1969), much of it was distinctly transactional in nature, as opposed to the interactional nature of informal conversation (Brown & Yule, 1983).

How could it be categorised?

The communicative acts expressed by the different speakers appeared to vary considerably and the attempt to create a descriptive taxonomy of the significant stylistic features led me to the conclusion that the only appropriate variety classification seemed to be "Hyde Park Corner Speech", but this intuitively seemed too restrictive as a label. My rather unsatisfactory conclusions at that time were the following:

> A stylistic or structural framework is, in fact, inadequate for a global description of such complex social interaction as oral utterance ... in that linguistic features or surface forms are a direct result of choices operated by the speaker on the basis of situational and functional constraints and do not, in themselves, reveal the deeper intentions of the speaker.
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> Munat, 1986:46/47

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The present study takes up from there by considering contributions to genre analysis in the intervening years. Similar problems have been and are being debated and it is hoped that this article may add one more tessera to the mosaic.

1. WHY ANALYSE GENRE?

Let us begin by clarifying the importance of genre as a notion. Only by implicit understanding of the features of a given genre (in terms of its linguistic forms, structure, function, purpose, social significance, etc.) can a language user as social actor (either speaker or writer) construct an appropriate discourse, [1] since the producer of language is to some extent merely "a scribe obeying the demands of discourse and of genre" (Kress, 1985:42). There is, therefore, a fundamental relationship between language user and genre which is preliminary to the relationship between participants in a discourse.

However, text reception as well, whether by hearer or reader, is governed by the receiver's implicit knowledge of generic conventions. [2] The interaction with a text which leads to the receiver's interpretation — or reconstruction of meaning — is necessarily a product of his or her position in relation to genre expectations. The users of a system must be aware of the system's functional principles or else utilisation will be impaired or blocked (de Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981) and thus in order to interact effectively we must understand the complicated mechanisms underlying verbal interaction of which genre is a fundamental element.

Therefore genre and its conventions are a means of attaining goals through verbal interaction, above and beyond the specific discourse patterns and speech acts expressed in any given text. A central notion of genre is its role as social action (Miller, 1984, in Nystrand, 1986). Genres "comprise a system for accomplishing social purposes by verbal means" (Swales, 1990:41) and given that genre is fundamental to the realization of verbal goals, it is central to any linguistic interaction.

Genre analysis serves, then, to "clarify certain social and historical aspects of rhetoric" (Miller, 1984:163) and not necessarily or exclusively as a classification system. It is, rather, an illumination of discourse development over time (Swales, 1990). Through genre "we learn ... what ends we may have ... " (Miller, 1984:165).

2. TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF GENRE

> ... we must remember here that the term 'genre' has never been given a precise, generally agreed definition and is regularly used to refer simultaneously to varieties operating at different degrees of theoretical abstraction.
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> Crystal & Davy, 1969:75

This leads to our second objective: that of negotiating a comprehensive and mutually acceptable definition of genre as used in linguistics, which will also involve distinguishing between genre and register, text and discourse, terms adopted at times to indicate distinct notions and at other times applied to an identical concept.

Essential to the notion of genre as we have seen in the foregoing section, is its social function; a genre arises in a specific culture and therefore a specific discourse community, in response to a social situation where "discourse can mediate or accomplish some social action." (Nystrand, 1986:139). Hence "a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centred not on the substance or the form of discourse, but on the action it is used to accomplish.' (Ibid.). Nystrand's examples are inaugural speeches, letters of recommendation, ransom notes or sermons where, he says, each takes on conventional forms in response to the situation. Martin (1985, in Swales) gives yet other examples of genres, from the literary (poems, narratives) to the mundane (recipes, manuals, service encounters, appointment making, etc.) as illustrations of language being used to accomplish things.

Genre, according to Wales (1989), is a term recently borrowed from literary criticism by discourse analysts and textlinguists, which "is used synonymously with the now outmoded term, register" and while Swales (1990) shares the view that "genre is a recent appendage" (p. 41), he also states, in contrast with Wales, that it has "become disentangled from register." (p. 40). He cites Couture (1986) who distinguishes register (which imposes constraints at the levels of vocabulary and syntax) from genre (which, instead, operates at the level of discourse structure). In Couture's distinction, genre is concerned with complete texts (such as research reports, explanations, business reports, etc.), while register is concerned with 'more generalizable' stylistic choices (e.g., language of scientific reporting, bureaucratic language, etc.).

Halliday (1985) defines register as a semantic concept which includes "the expressions, the lexico-grammatical and phonological features" that accompany or realise a "configuration of meanings." (p. 39). He adds that a particular register may also have indexical features such as the form of particular words, grammatical signals or phonological signals. There are 'closed registers' which allow little possibility for individuality or creativity such as the language of air traffic control, or the bidding system in bridge. More open registers are employed in greeting card verses or official forms or newspaper headlines. And toward the most open end of this cline, Halliday cites the register of technical manuals or legal documents. The choice of any one of this wide range of registers is a limiting one because once a choice has been operated, the language user no longer has 'complete freedom to draw upon all the resources of his linguistic system.' (Halliday, 1985:40)

We may therefore make a clear distinction between *register*, which is concerned with stylistic choice, and thus remains at the level of language, and *genre*, operating at the wider level of text. Genres, as Swales (1990) says, have beginnings, middles and ends.

But not only. They also have a certain number of obligatory elements along with other optional elements, which Hasan (Halliday & Hasan, 1985) labels as their 'generic structure potential.' Each genre, according to this view, can be recognised by

a fixed set of obligatory elements or 'realisational criteria' expressed in terms of some semantic property. Hasan introduces the notion of 'contextual configuration' as the means of determining the generic structure potential. By this definition, genre allocation can be determined simply in terms of the presence of certain obligatory and optional elements (seen as goal-oriented verbal actions such as Sale Request, Sale Compliance, etc.) occurring in certain positions within the text. This contextual configuration, according to Hasan, constitutes the identikit of a genre.

Another term frequently used with the same meaning as genre is that of text type. Samuels (1987:316) speaks of "different text types, such as fairy tales, narratives and exposition" having different structures. While it is clear that Samuels employs the term "text-types" to indicate the concept of genre as we have defined it here, his defining characteristic of "different structures", just as Hasan's contextual configuration, we feel is too limiting to serve as the sole parameter for identifying genre. Indeed, if we determine genre membership exclusively in terms of textual structure, we focus on only one, albeit a significant one, of the identifying characteristics.

Swales (1990), instead, expands the descriptive focus to include goals. Genre is, he states, a goal-directed communicative event, therefore comprising not only the discourse, its structure and participants, but also the role of the discourse and the environment of both its production and reception, [3] including historial and cultural associations. The privileged property of texts of the same genre is that they will have some presumably recognisable shared set of communicative purposes.

This evolution in the terminology adopted to indicate a semantic textual unit with identifiable properties and common communicative goals, is well illustrated in the work of van Dijk who, in 1977 speaks of "type of discourse such as narratives or advertisements" (p. 243), specifying that these can be identified through the assignment of simple or complex macrospeech acts. Six years later, in discussing schematic superstructures, he (in van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983) uses inter-changeably the terms 'text-types' or 'discourse types' (such as story), and characterises them as having schematic "superstructures which play a role in the understanding, representation and retrieval of discourse."(p. 57). He further specifies that language users know, implicitly and perhaps explicitly, how to use these superstructures to organize the linguistic structure of the discourse. Hence such superstructures serve as a "frame" upon which the language user constructs the linguistic substance and form of discourse. Most recently (1992) van Dijk adopts the term 'genre' (as examples he cites editorials, news features, news reports, etc.) in place of his earlier 'text' or 'discourse types', and characterises genre as having a schematic (or formal) superstructure and a semantic (or topic) macrostructure; this represents the more narrowly structuralist view of genre as it is employed in text linguistics as opposed to the wider sociological perspective of discourse analysis.

It is significant that each of these authors, while evidently referring to a similar discourse unit, focuses on different aspects of that unit: Couture (1986) on the *completeness* of the text, Hasan (1985) on its internal *functional elements*, van Dijk (1983) on the underlying, and unifying, *schematic structure*. Only Martin (1984),

Nystrand (1986) and Swales (1990) focus on the *social action* performed as a fundamental distinguishing property. The linguistic form (or register) of a given genre is a consequence of the social constraints and hence any genre is a product of a given discourse community. Genres, therefore, are not constant across cultures, but "emerge in a culture as conventional responses to ... situations." (Nystrand, 1986:139) [4].

Finally, I wish to define the terms *discourse* and *text*, as they will be employed in the present article, irregardless of their (past or present) use in the literature. A text is considered to be the concrete linguistic realisation of a discourse or the 'product' of discourse. In Kress' words (1985:18), "Texts are the material form of language ... /they/ give material realisation to discourses.". Discourse, instead, is adopted to refer to the text as process, i.e., seen in its communicative function as social interaction. Discourse comprises the social context or situation, the purposes and goals of participants, including the verbal enactment of these goals. In summary, therefore, the concept of genre carries with it meanings about the conventional social occasions in which discourse takes place, extrinsecated in the form of a text.

3. A SET OF DESCRIPTIVE PARAMETERS FOR GENRE

After the foregoing review of the treatment of genre in the literature, I would like to extract what I feel are the fundamental constraints and properties and expand upon these in order to construct a set of descriptive parameters as a basis on which to analyse discourse types and determine their genre membership.

These parameters must allow us to distinguish between discourses displaying similar surface structures but originating in a response to a different social occasion and identify as similar those with markedly different surface realisations but an identical underlying rationale, yet not so restrictive as to create a series of one-member classes. [5]

Following are what we feel to be the fundamental parameters characterising genre:

1) each genre is an open category which may therefore contain an unlimited number of members;

2) the individual members (discourses) of any genre will be complete texts, therefore finite in length;

3) a text, in order to qualify as genre, must be part of an identifiable discourse context, with identifiable participants expressing an identifiable purpose through verbal interaction;

4) the relevant features of the social and physical context, both at the moment of production and the moment of reception of the communicative act, will be a significant part of the discourse meaning;

5) the underlying rationale (Swales, 1990) which gives rise to the 'schematic structure' of the discourse, will be fundamental in determining the specific lexical and syntactic choices;

6) genre conventions determined by social occasion, goals, modality and chan-

nel serve to shape the discourse, and participant knowledge of these conventions will act as a constraint in formulating the text.

In synthesis, genre is treated here as a formal conventional category "whose meanings and forms arise out of the meanings, form and functions of the conventionalised occasions of social interactions." (Kress, 1985:31).

4. THEORETICAL LEVELS OF ABSTRACTION

Let us now consider the diverse levels of abstraction at which we are operating. Crystal and Davy (1969:90) point out that "it is undesirable ... to refer simultaneously to the kind of difference existing between poetry and prose on the one hand, and essays and letters, both in prose, on the other.". This is a trap into which many theorists have fallen and Swales (1990) sidesteps it by creating the conceptual category of 'pre-genres' which he conceives of as belonging to some pre-history of communication, from which more specific types have evolved or broken away — a linguistic 'Origin of the Species'. He classifies conversation as (dialogic) pre-genre and narrative as (monologic) pre-genre because they are too 'fundamental' to be considered as a genre. Refraining for the moment from expressing any opinion on Swales' classification, it is mentioned only for its interest in terms of the hierarchical levels hypothesised.

In addition to the level of pre-genre, Swales speaks of 'classes of communications' that operate as higher-order categories which he calls 'supragenric discourse assemblies' (or multigeneric generalizations). [6] At this hierarchical level he places groups of discourses such as letters, linked by channel, (which have further subsets such as business letters that are linked by 'field of activity' but still do not qualify as genre) and he seems to allude to others, such as 'instructional process genres' linked by their communicative goals. But only when a discourse emerges from a specific institutional setting, and/or an identifiable social occasion and expresses a goal-directed verbal action (or underlying rationale) can we speak of genre. Thus a 'letter of condolence' or 'begging letter' would qualify, according to Swales, for genre status among the suprageneric assembly of letters, and 'jokes' or 'news stories' would constitute genres emerging from the pre-genre of narrative. However, given Swales' distinction between pre-genre and supragenric assemblies, it is not clear what the relationship is between the two in terms of hierarchical levels if they can both foster genre categories at an identical level.

Other inconsistencies appear frequently in the examples of 'genre' appearing in the literature; by way of illustration we shall cite Kress (1985:20):

> ...the social institution of medicine has given rise to medical discourse. That institution (or *sub-groupings* of it; my italics) also has conventionalised occasions, such as lectures, scientific papers, meetings, research committees, experimentation, job interviews, conversations, formal dinner speeches, etc.

It is not clear whether Kress is speaking of the occasions — meetings, research committees, formal dinners —, the activity being engaged in — experimentation, lectures, job interviews — or the type of discourse being elaborated — scientific papers, conversation, dinner speeches (according to Swales, a goal-directed verbal action is at the basis of genre determination, and thus the last example could not in any case qualify for genre status because only the social occasion giving rise to the discourse is determined, but there is no identifiable purpose: is it a 'thank-you' speech, a 'good-bye' speech, a fund-raising speech?). Hence Kress has, we feel, thrown into the same ragbag constraints operating at very different levels.

Martin (1985:250, in Swales, 1990) commits a similar mistake in his list of genres, throwing together poems, narratives, expositions, lectures, seminars, recipes, manuals, appointment making, etc. Did not Swales exclude narrative from genre status as being too generalized and fundamental a verbal activity? And is exposition not, instead, a rhetorical strategy present in a wide variety of text-types (scientific articles, text books, encyclopaedias, essays, etc.). It would also appear that appointment making is an activity that may be expressed through various channels and hence, different genres.

The danger is clear: we must beware of creating categories and applying constraints which function at different levels. Genre must be kept distinct from more generalized categories determined by communicative activity or function or strategy.

5. A CLOSER LOOK AT SPECIFIC GENRES

We shall now look more closely at a variety of discourse types to determine the adequacy of the parameters established above. In each case we shall consider the underlying forces which have combined to shape the texts and their effects on surface structures.

Moving down our theoretical scale of hierarchical levels we can now circumscribe genre as distinct from the more general levels of abstraction such as supra-generic assemblies or, possibly, pre-genre.

5.1 *Written communication*

5.1.1 *Administrative correspondence*

Let us return to Swales' (1990) hypothetical suprageneric category of letters with its sub-category of business letters. Not even the further sub-category of "response to applications", according to Swales, will be admissible as a genre category because a positive or a negative response will exhibit different schematic structures determined by distinct underlying rationales. The language user producing the text will make a preliminary supposition as to whether the information to be communicated is welcome or unwelcome to the receiver. This factor will constrain lexical and

syntactic choices in formulating the message, but even more, will determine a unique structure which we schematise as follows (elaborating on that postulated by Swales):

Ex. 1a Good news letter
SALUTATION
COMMUNICATION OF NEWS
CONGRATULATORY EXPRESSION
FURTHER DETAILS FOR CONTINUING CONTACTS
CLOSING FORMULA

Ex. 1b Bad news letter
SALUTATION
BUFFER
COMMUNICATION OF NEWS
EXPRESSION OF REGRETS
CLOSING OF CONTACTS
CLOSING FORMULA

As can be seen, the elements present in the two texts differ; only the opening and closing formulas and the Communication of News remain constant. The most evident differences then are that no Buffer element is necessary in the good-news letter and no Regrets are expressed. Therefore, not only linguistic style but the surface structure as well will be recognisably different (Swales, 1990) because the communicative occasion is different. Although the predominant verbal function is that of communicating news, different constraints will operate depending on the welcomeness or unwelcomeness of the news from the receiver's perspective.

5.1.2 *Informal written communication*

A set of discourse-types which shares properties of informality as well as modality is that of written informal communications. Some of these may occasionally also share communicative purpose, but the occasions giving rise to the communicative act and the conventionalised channel of the message are in each case different. The genres we propose as members of this assembly are the following, although we do not exclude the eventuality of others:

Memo
Note
Post card
Letter

The following texts will serve as representative examples of the above genres:

Ex 5a TO: Joe
FROM: Mark

RE: Staff Meeting
I've set a staff meeting for Wednesday, June 2 at 9,00 a.m. to discuss the problem of information leakage. See you there.

Ex. 5b Gone shopping. Be back by noon. Luv you.

Ex. 5c Hello from Spain from me! Hope you are over the Christmas-card blues. Love, Michael

Ex. 5d Dear John,
This is just to tell you that after last night I think it's better to call it off. Don't bother to look for me.
Sue

Even without labels, any native speaker will have no difficulty identifying the genre of each of the above and in reconstructing its original textual environment. The first is identifiable by the ritualised format of the office memo while the second we can well imagine as scribbled on a post-it and stuck on the fridge door. Ex. 5c reveals the picture post card context with its brief and impersonal message. The 'Dear John' letter speaks for itself.

Only the messages in Ex. 5a and 5d reveal a precise communicative purpose, while in the other examples the interpersonal function predominates, just as in friendly phone calls or conversations (see Section 5.2 below). The post-it on the fridge bears no immediacy or serious comunicative purpose and the picture post card as a communicative channel does not, by its nature, bear any urgency or admit content of any seriousness given that the message is open to the eyes of all. Also, the more intimate the relationship between the participants (the maximum being that of shared physical context) the less need for greetings or conventionalised formulaic openings and closings.

The differences distinguishing the office memo from the personal letter are less complex. Behind the first lurks the institution; no matter how 'intimate' the relation between sender and receiver, the institutional context and conventionalised format will determine a distancing effect (much as a telegram, even when used to convey a personal message). The memo, like the post card, may be read by others, and in any case the producer of the message will only choose the memo format if the message content is in some way connected with the institution. The message determines the vehicle and the vehicle ultimately conditions the message. Sue, sender of the letter in Ex 5d, would not have chosen an office memo or a post card to convey her message, requiring, as it does, privacy. But the choice of a written communication as opposed to a face-to-face confrontation or even a telephone call bears significant implications for the message which is, in the final analysis, a reflection of many subterranean currents of human interaction.

The constraints that ultimately determine the genre in the cases examined above are the social occasion giving rise to the verbal interaction and the communicative intention behind this interaction, in addition to the degree of intimacy between par-

ticipants. The 'vehicle' of communication which is part and parcel of the genre profile, is a result of these factors.

5.2 *Oral communication*

5.2.1 *Conversation — genre, pre-genre or register?*

Returning to Swales' (1990) claim that conversation is too pervasive and generalized an activity to be treated as genre, we feel that such motivations are not adequate justification for creating a hypothetical pre-genre category. A more acceptable motivation might at first appear to be its lack of an identifiable purpose and the fact that it does not arise in any specific or identifiable institutional or social setting. Nevertheless we claim that it *does* indeed have an underlying rationale: that of maintaining interpersonal relations (Brown & Yule, 1983). Moreover, this underlying rationale determines a variety of stylistic features recognisable as conversational register (see Crystal & Davy, 1969) and the participants engaging in a conversation are well aware of the constraints governing the formulation of the message. The fact that a conversational text may contain within its boundaries other genres, such as a joke or an argument does not detract from its claim to genre status; an advertising text may contain a poem and a radio news broadcast an interview. The essential requirement is that the genre contained within the wider genre share an identical communicative purpose: in the case of conversation, that of maintaining social contacts.

5.2.2 *Telephone conversations*

Telephone Conversations differ from face-to-face conversation in the conventions required by the channel, and in the fact that they are frequently, though not always, goal-directed. While a telephone call may serve a purely interactional function, like that of extemporaneous conversation, many telephone calls entail a more specific communicative goal.

Swales (1990) classifies telephone calls as 'pre-genre' (along with conversation and narrative) but I would prefer to consider them an assembly of discourses as in the case of letters, which can be subdivided into specific genres depending on the occasion and purpose underlying the communication.

Following are some of the possible members of this hypothetical suprageneric assembly, although I am sure others could be added:

Friendly chat
Request for information
Wake up call
Opinion survey
Disturbance call
Invitation

Setting an appointment
Good-news call
Bad-news call, etc.

While telephone conversations are normally dialogic in nature, two members of the above list strike me as decidedly un-dialogic: the wake-up call, which may require no response at all on the part of the receiver beyond picking up the telephone, since the message is often computerised (this might, in fact, be a possible candidate for membership in another discourse genre of "recorded messages"); nor would a disturbance call normally be particularly dialogic, beyond an epithet and the slamming of the telephone receiver.

What we have termed a "friendly chat" phone call, having no other scope than that of maintaining personal contacts, is the telephone equivalent of conversational genre. However, once again, the telephone channel, with its lack of shared physical context between participants, will bring consequent changes in the linguistic form of the message (such as the need to explicitly identify the participants, generally shorter turns than in face-to-face communication, and the need for frequent verbal signals on the part of the listener to indicate her continued presence). Thus the channel is a decisive factor in shaping the discourse.

The telephone Request for Information is yet another plausible genre which has a close counterpart in face-to-face communication: that of the Service Encounter. The two will differ very little in their schematic structure. The structural elements considered obligatory (see Halliday and Hasan, 1985) in a Service Encounter are Sale Request, Sale Compliance, Sale Purchase and Purchase Closure (though in many Service Encounters, we object, a purchase does not actually take place) whereas the optional elements according to Hasan are Greeting and Finis. Let us compare these with the elements identified in the following text of a Telephone Enquiry:

Ex. 3 A Hello. Electronic Assistance./G/
B Hello, I have a Sony CD player which
has been acting up. /Stmt of prob/
Do you do SONY repairs? /Infor. Req./
A No, actually we don't. /Neg response/
B Then could you please tell me who it is
that handles SONY assistance? /Follow-up request/
A Well, yes, just a minute please ... here it is.
XXXX Their phone number is ———/Infor. Compliance/
B Right. Got it. Thanks very much. /Thanks/ ⟶ /Finis/
A Don't mention it. Bye. /Closing/ ⟶ /Finis/
B Bye.

The obligatory elements in our telephone enquiry are Greeting, Information Request, Response-Compliance and Closing, whereas optional elements are Statement of Problem and Thanks (unless Thanks is considered part of the closing formula). Consequently, the structures of the two discourse types differ only in the obligatoriness of Greeting and Closing in the Telephone Conversation. [7] Statement of Problem (or Need) and Thanks are optional elements here as they would be in a

Service Encounter. Thus, if we exclude the Sale and Purchase elements as being effectively necessary in a Service Encounter interaction, the contextual configuration of the two texts are nearly identical, reflecting their common communicative purpose. Once again, it is only the channel which renders the Telephone Request identifiable as a distinct genre.

Other members of the above list which share a strong family resemblance with genres of different modalities are, obviously, the hypothesised Good-news call and Bad-news call—to be compared to our earlier description of Good-news and Bad-news letters as distinct genres of the category of (written) Response to Applications. But here, too, the oral mode and the telephone channel will affect the surface structure of the message even though the underlying rationale is identical. We can reasonably presume that both the good-news as well as the bad-news telephone call will be framed by a certain number of civilities; even in the least formal of telephone calls, the caller is unlikely to go directly to the point. Any native speaker would be aware of the conventions imposed by the channel as well as the more general constraints determined by communicative purpose in determining the form of the verbal interaction.

5.2.3 *Suprageneric Assembly of Oral Interview*

Conversation, as Fox (1987) says, constitutes the 'unmarked text-type' in oral communication, being the most pervasive form of orality. [8] Consequently it is useful as a 'basic measuring-rod' (Crystal & Davy, 1969) by which to compare and contrast other oral genres. Our suprageneric assembly of 'oral interviews' shares with conversational genre its dialogic nature as well as a certain degree of extemporaneity and unplannedness. Among the possible members of this assembly we shall consider the following:

Police interrogations
Oral examinations
Journalistic interviews
Job interviews

Where these diverge from conversational norms is, principally, in the status between the speakers. Conversation is the genre "with least or no power difference" (Kress, 1985:25) whereas in the above discourse types one person, the interviewer, holds the reins of "power" and determines the direction of the interaction, but this power difference diminishes progressively as we go down the list. We might prospect other types of oral interaction, such as broadcast discussions, political debates or committee meetings in which this control over topic decreases even more sharply (seemingly in direct proportion to the number of participants). For our present purposes, however, in order to reduce the number of variables, [9] let us confine ourselves to one-to-one discourse situations in which the interaction is controlled by a dominant member, the interviewer. This is evidenced at surface level by a recurring question/answer pattern in text structure.

The police investigator wields great power insofar as he is a representative of institutional power with the possibility of determining (in some cases) the 'interviewee's' very future. This very real power will predictably create deference and even fear in the object of the interrogation. The discourse strategies of the police investigator will be aimed at "tripping up" the suspect, at uncovering some truth which is possibly being withheld, and the responses are likely to be evasive, certainly reduced to the essential facts. There is unlikely to be much branching randomness of topic structure in such an 'interview'.

A professor's strategies in an oral examination will not be altogether dissimilar from those of the police sleuth, in attempting to reveal the limits and breadth of the student's knowledge; the professor also holds very real power in his role of judge and evaluator and will very possibly evoke a sense of trepidation in the student/interviewee although the outcome will be a pass or fail, not a prison cell. Here a favourable outcome will to a large extent be determined by how *much* the student says, not how *little*. The responses, therefore, are likely to be structured in a series of mini-monologues to display the maximum information possible and may well exhibit some degree of randomness from the topic at hand.The journalistic interview shares with the oral exam the monologic nature of the replies, replies which draw their cohesiveness from the interviewer's questions. But it will also be a more collaborative effort, neither sleuthing nor evaluative, the questions serving merely as a stimulus for the interviewee to 'tell his tale.' The job interview is also likely to be collaborative but less monologic; here, too, the underlying purpose is evaluative, though reciprocally so; both parties, in fact, are judging, evaluating, deciding. And hence the roles will be inverted as the interviewee is allowed to become the questioner. This is, in fact, the only of the above genres in which a reciprocal question/answer pattern is likely to occur.

Each of the foregoing discourses, therefore, is marked by a different underlying rationale which emerges at surface level in a unique structure. It is beyond the scope of this article to carry out extensive textual analyses, but we have merely attempted to illustrate how various factors — the underlying set of communicative purposes, the social occasion and institution giving rise to the interaction, as well as what each participant knows about the conventions of the discourse situation in which s/he is engaging — will contribute, each in its own measure, to the construction of the discourse. The difficulty lies in identifying which is the most important of these factors in determining genre, along with the constraints imposed by modality and channel.

6. CONCLUSIONS

If space permitted, it would be interesting to carry on with further such comparisons, considering other possible suprageneric assemblies such as BOOKS or ADVERTISING.

The case of advertising is particularly interesting in that it constitutes a set of

discourses linked by the predominant intention — that of persuasion. [10] The channel in this case has primacy in determining the form of the message: it is highly likely that TV commercials, billboards, press advertisements and loudspeaker ads will each present a recognisably different message. But how can these differences be quantified and catalogued? And will each constitute a separate genre? But this goes beyond the limits of the present study and deserves separate and more detailed treatment.

The types of questions raised are those raised at the outset by the Hyde Park Corner Speaker data. The answers necessarily remain tentative in lieu of more definitive empirical research. The hypothesis of a Hyde Park Corner Speech genre might seem appealing and justifiable based on the social occasion behind the collective communicative act AND the shared set of communicative purposes of the participants — that of engaging in mutually entertaining, interactive discourse aimed at provoking a reaction in the listeners.

However, at least one other type of discourse also emerged, in which the speakers were engaging in more transactional speech and this would seem to warrant a separate genre classification, more like public speech. Perhaps we should then hypothesise a suprageneric assembly of discourse types, linked by the social institution of Hyde Park Corner in which at least two separate genres might be identified: 'performance' and 'political speech.' But then the social occasion of Hyde Park Corner is merely incidental. Persuasive public speech occurs in other settings, election campaigns for example. And a similar dialogic 'performance' genre might be identified in certain night-club comedy routines. Thus it is not the social institution but the communicative purpose of the speaker to determine the genre.

The interrogatives are also those at the origin of our discussion of genre theory and the foregoing reflections on the factors determining genre. The 'social action' cited by Miller (1984) as central to a theory of genre in which discourse 'serves to mediate or accomplish some social action' (Nystrand, 1986:139) is therefore the initiating factor in determining genre, and the language user's subsequent choice of modality and channel will be the primary constraints in shaping the text, but the wider discourse will be molded to a varying degree by participant goals, relations between participants and the setting. Only when we have fully understood the degree to which each contributes to genre formation can we create a comprehensive theoretical model of genre.

In the present study an attempt has been made to indicate the directions for the construction of such a social/functional model of discourse, allowing us to account for all possible communicative acts by going beneath the surface in analysing the multi-faceted nature of genres. This in turn will serve to understand the relationship between language and society, between individual language users and between them and discourse. It will also enable us to account for language behaviour in terms of the motivating forces and contextual constraints at the root of the interaction avoiding all a priori assumptions.

Notes

1. Susan George, in her detailed study of oral interaction within a Neapolitan social setting (*Getting Things Done in Naples*. 1990, Bologna:Clueb), in fact, outlines the 'total speech act situation' as a combination of factors, among which are the "discourse patterns which have developed as a result of the relationship between institutions and the social organisation of a particular community" (p. 84). The language user as social actor, according to George, is obliged to make use of discourse patterns which have emerged from a particular social organisation and is, therefore, at one and the same time, a manipulator of resources as well as being constrained by them. The discourse patterns to which George makes reference are an essential part of the concept of genre and knowledge of them on the part of the participants is essential in order to interact effectively.
2. In the hierarchic wedge of constraints on the (reading) comprehension process as hypothesised by Nystrand (1986), is the consideration of what text genre the reader has before her; thus genre is a primary concern of the reader in this top-down view of the comprehension process. A reader will, according to Nystrand, "evaluate the relevance of details in terms of the purpose of the genre" (p. 59), and deductions based on contextual 'clues' to genre are made even prior to the reading of the text (as in the case of a letter, for example, when preliminary deductions are made on the basis of the interpretive context provided by the envelope, the letterhead, etc.)
3. For a discussion of this distinction see Nystrand (1986).
4. "The number of genres in any society is indeterminate and depends upon the complexity and diversity of society." (Miller, 1984:163). An incoronation address would thus be limited to a monarchy and tribal chants would be specific to a tribal society, etc.
5. Swales (1990) specifies that classes with few instances (such as Papal Encyclicals or Presidential Press Conferences) must have prominence in the relevant culture to qualify as a genre class.
6. This bears certain similarities with Hoey's concept of 'discourse colony' (Hoey, M. "The Discourse Colony: a preliminary study of a neglected discourse type" in Coulthard, M. (Ed.) (1986) *Talking about Text. Essays in honour of Brazil.*) which refers to a 'relatively homogeneous class' (homogeneous in respect of their discourse characteristics), but highly heterogeneous in appearance and use. Sub-discourses may also be embedded within larger discourses (e.g., a list within a larger text of expository prose). However, such colonies can only be understood WITHIN THEIR FRAMING CONTEXT (e.g., the communicative function of the entries in a telephone directory is comprehensible only if they are recognised as telephone listings; otherwise they might have any number of possible meanings: a list of clients or a list of mafia suspects, etc.).
7. For a discussion of situation-bound opening and closing procedures see Richards & Schmidt (Eds.) 1983 *Language and communication.* Harlow: Longman.
8. Conversation is the primordial communicative act in that all human beings raised in human society and having no physiological impediments to speech or hearing learn this form of oral interaction even though they may learn no other oratorical skills and, indeed, often never learn to manipulate written communication. See Ong, W. (1982) *Orality and Literacy*, London: Methuen, for a thorough study of oral communication. Conversation is, as Crystal and Davy (1969) point out, unmarked for situation and therefore the most 'neutral' kind of English as well as the most frequently occurring.
9. Coulthard, Montgomery and Brazil, in their collection *Studies in Discourse Analysis*, 1981, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, in fact speak of the difficulty in deciding which situational factors in oral interaction might be the "most important in determining the structure of the discourse." (p. 14). Among the potentially significant factors they list degree of control over topic and degree of control over turn-taking invested in one person, existence of status difference between participants either because of acknowledged superior expertise or situationally assigned role, degree of familiarity between participants, where the information lies, the purpose of the interaction and whether there is one or more goals achievable within the interaction. The consequent difficulty in establishing which constraints predominate in determining the textual properties of discourse is evident.
10. If an informative function seems to surface in certain advertising texts, it is, however, subordinate to the basic persuasive goal, and at best is only pseudo-informative (i.e., the information content, when present, is likely to be biased and at times even false). It is important therefore to identify the predominant discourse function in determining genre. Whether we consider a tourist brochure, for example, as predominantly persuasive or informative will determine its collocation as an advertising text or as the descriptive expository prose typical of a public service brochure.

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