

Anis S. Bawarshi and Mary-Jo Reiff 2010: *Genre. An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy*. West Lafayette: Parlor Press and The WAC Clearinghouse. xi + 263pp. Glossary and Annotated Bibliography by Melanie Kill. ISBN 978-1-60235-173-8

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Genre theory and research contributes to and draws on a number of academic traditions: literary (from typological classifications to cultural studies); linguistics (applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis, English for Academic Purposes [EAP] and English for Specific Purposes [ESP]); communication studies (film and news media, i.e. digital and electronic forms); philosophy (phenomenological and social action theories); anthropology (ethnomethodological research); and psychology and education (Rhetorical Genre Studies [RGS] and Vygotskian approaches).

Given the range of disciplinary communities studied, all of which are underpinned by genre systems, this 2010 book, titled *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy* (hereafter *Genre*), provides a timely critical review of a rich body of scholarship that has brought about a reconceptualization of genre in multiple contexts. Although each academic community may make use of the concept in diverse ways, in all contexts *genre* is presently conceived of as encompassing social ways of knowing and acting in order to bring about consequential, recognizable effects (Miller 1984). In this respect, in this volume of 11 chapters – grouped into 3 parts – the authors' concept of genre provides a central nexus for the book: genre is considered as communicative action carried out within typified, recurring social situations and forming part of genre systems which are used by agents to enact conventionalized behaviors. Such a broad definition as this one may be put to work for unifying the goals of university departments that encompass both literary and language studies (discussed below), as is the case in many European universities.

Part 1 of *Genre*, 'Historical Review and Theories of Genre', presenting various approaches to the application of genre in diverse disciplines, is subdivided into the following chapters (2 through 6): 2, Genre in Literary Traditions; 3, Genre in Linguistic Traditions: Systemic Functional and Corpus Linguistics; 4, Genre in Linguistic Traditions: English for Specific Purposes (a particularly interesting section in that these studies challenge process-based writing instruction); 5, Genre in Rhetorical and Sociological Traditions; and 6, Rhetorical Genre Studies. It is Part 1 that might provide the appropriate unifying framework for university degrees which combine Language/Linguistics with Literature studies. By structuring their syllabi around genre features and their semantic processing (i.e. making meaning with the choice of textual features), Language/Linguistics and Literature studies, which often times appear to be working in opposition to each other, might unify their pedagogy around genre-based approaches involving scaffolded modelling and text deconstruction (Byrnes 2006: 240-43).

For those of us who teach EAP (in L1 or L2 contexts, the latter is this reviewer's context) and have only kept up with literary studies insofar as they are present in cultural studies approaches to genre, the chapters of Part 1 (chapter 2: Neoclassical approaches to genre; Structuralist approaches to genre; Romantic and Post-romantic approaches to genre; Reader response approaches to genre; and Cultural studies approaches to genre) provide an opportune comparison of the various analytical methods that have been used to classify literary texts. Although genre analysis has come in for very heavy criticism (Patton 1976; Conley 1979, cited in Miller 1984) – and not only in literary studies, but in linguistic studies as well (see the discussion below) – humans are classifying animals and any type of cultural artefact that is similar and has been previously observed will inevitably be used to make associations (Rumelhart 1980). For humans, categorization permits conceptualization. As Jauss has noted:

[A literary work] awakens memories of that which was already read, brings the reader to a specific emotional attitude and with its beginning arouses expectations for the middle and end, which can then be maintained intact or altered, reoriented, or even fulfilled ironically in the course of the reading, according to specific rules of the genre or type of text. The psychic process in the reception of a text is, in the primary horizon of aesthetic experience, by no means only an arbitrary series of specific instructions in a process of directed perception, which can be comprehended according to its constitutive motivations and triggering signals, and which also can be described by textual analysis (1986: 167).

The idea, springing from Romanticism, that the use of genre theory may stultify literary creativity or criticism by setting up too many rhetorical constraints is as bogus in literary studies as it is in applied linguistics (see the discussion of Part 2). It is precisely the recognition that a text, literary or otherwise, forms part of one (or several) genre types that creates the basis for the recognition of a “change of horizons” (Jauss 1986: 168) in the readers'/public's expectations (Culler 1975, 1980). And this is so because genre analysis situates texts within textual and social contexts, putting emphasis on the social nature of the production and reading of texts.

Part 2 of *Genre* (chapters 7 through 9), ‘Genre Research in Multiple Contexts’, examines an important body of empirical research carried out in a wide range of contexts: the learning, teaching and production of academic, workplace and public documents. Included are studies, mostly concerning EAP in L1 contexts, which display diverse developments relating to the focus and purposes of research, designs and methods, and possible application of results for pedagogical purposes. This section of the volume can offer readers insights into how different types of training for the comprehension and writing of texts may or may not transfer from the academic setting into workplace genres. It seems that, of the three areas listed above, workplace writing might show the least transfer of EAP training. But this is most probably because most EAP or composition classes for native or non-native students in Anglophone contexts have a mixed population of students (i.e. from various disciplines), which sometimes limits the specificity of the texts that composition teachers may work with. However, this problem does not necessarily affect EAP courses given to non-native students within specific academic disciplines, as is the case in English Studies in Spain (comprising Linguistics and Literature), or in the various technical studies areas in Spain and some other European countries.

Part 2 is potentially the most controversial section of the volume, as it deals with fiercely debated issues such as the implicit/explicit teaching of genre features, the differences among genre traditions of RGS, ESP, SFL (Systemic Functional Linguistics, especially the Sydney School's application of genre-based teaching in primary and secondary schooling) and the validity of the use of dichotomous terms in developmental psychology (un/conscious learning, procedural/declarative knowledge, etc.), issues which are all linked to larger philosophical questions.

Part 2 includes the following chapters: 7, Genre Research in Academic Contexts; 8, Genre Research in Workplace and Professional Contexts; and 9, Genre in Public and New Media Contexts. Of these, chapter 7 is perhaps the most interesting in that it takes up the question of whether the explicit teaching of genre features can, or should, be part of university courses (e.g. EAP courses for native or non-native speakers), or, on the other hand, whether students can acquire genre tacitly as they become increasingly inducted into their discipline's uses of genres. Far from being a conflict limited to local disciplinary concerns, this debate points rather to one more modern manifestation of the historical conflict (Crick 2003) between social constructivism and expressivism, sometimes referred to as the opposition of the skills approach to the experience approach (Vygotsky 1960; Bruner 1966).

Regarding the implicit/explicit teaching of genre characteristics, there has been very heated debate since the 1993 publication of a special issue of *Research in the Teaching of English*, in which the Canadian writing scholar Aviva Freedman proposed two hypotheses: a strong hypothesis (explicit teaching of genre features is neither necessary nor useful, and perhaps even harmful) and a restricted hypothesis (there are certain carefully specified conditions under which explicit teaching of genre features may be helpful). Freedman's abstract makes a plea for more focused research and theoretical consideration of genre teaching in the varieties of school writing in native-speaker Anglophone contexts, but, in reality, her article only considers the strong and the restricted hypotheses and does not do justice at all to the idea of "pushed output" (Swain 1985), i.e. explicit teaching of concepts or features at the next level of student development, or the *zone of proximal development* (Vygotsky 1960), that is, the level at which optimal learning takes place, the learning of something that is neither too easy nor too difficult.

Since Barwarshi and Reiff do not criticize Freedman's rather protracted insistence (over a period of at least 10 years) on implicit learning of genre features nor do they allude to any of Freedman's underlying assumptions about learning processes, they appear to be much too indulgent with Freedman's 'evidence', which is not based on diverse empirical studies. The implicit/explicit debate is important since it underpins the significant discord between ESP/EAP and SFL, on the one hand, and RGS, on the other.

In her first article (Freedman 1993) and successive articles (Freedman 1994) and several books (Freedman and Medway 1994a and 1994b), Freedman turns to L2 specialist Krashen ("Competence in writing does not come from the study of form directly ... Writing competence ... is acquired subconsciously; readers are unaware they are acquiring competence while they are reading and are unaware that this accomplishment has taken place", quoted in Freedman 1993: 230-13) and to Chomsky, whom Freedman (1993: 232) alludes to by stating that: "those who discuss first-language acquisition like to point to the tremendous complexity and sophistication of the laws of syntax, morphology, phonology

– such that even Noam Chomsky cannot, at least not yet, adequately formulate a set of rules to account entirely for the grammar of our language”.

It is puzzling that such a distinguished writing specialist would use the hypotheses put forth by either of these two theorists. It is well-known that Krashen (1993, 1981) has carried out most of his L2 research on reading, and therefore, has few *empirical* results to show as far as explicit or implicit learning of textual features in writing instruction are concerned. Regarding Freedman's comments on Chomsky's 'laws of syntax, morphology, phonology', this argument is beside the point when one is considering native speakers of English in secondary and university contexts (Freedman's declared area of research). These students' knowledge of their own language is well beyond the morphological and syntactic competencies referred to in syntactic theories (which have little to say about the construction of rhetorical elements in extended texts). In any case, the 'rules' or laws a writing instructor might find useful will most probably be those that stem from usage-based research, quantitative approaches such as corpus linguistics or qualitative methods such as discourse analysis, on a variety of expert texts, whose features can then be contrasted with the characteristics found in the texts of novice writers, native or non-native. To be fair to Freedman, it must be stated that she does refer to Ellis's 1990 model of instructed acquisition, but again to emphasize that Ellis proposes a model similar to Krashen's, i.e. that implicit knowledge is unconscious and procedural while explicit knowledge is conscious and declarative and that these two kinds of knowledge *usually* do not interact.

In their review of this implicit/explicit knowledge debate, Bawarshi and Reiff present much evidence to counter Freedman's weak hypothesis, but they do so in a context of also referring to Freedman's plea for more genre research (alluded to more than 15 times) rather than criticizing her unsubstantial arguments. Nor do Bawarshi and Reiff turn to developmental psychology, a field in which the dichotomy between implicit and explicit knowledge in learning processes (and the concomitant dichotomous terms: un/consciousness, voluntariness-automaticity, procedural/declarative knowledge, etc.) has been increasingly questioned (McLaughlin 1990; Widdowson 1990). For one thing, explicit knowledge is not synonymous with 'verbalizability', and, at least some types of explicit expression of knowledge include the implicit attitude or belief in the necessary supporting facts, i.e. presuppositions which are not verbalized but must necessarily be implied (Dienes and Perner 2010).

Bawarshi and Reiff, like many North American RGS specialists – most of whom were first trained in English and Composition or Rhetoric Departments – have lacked explicit instructional frameworks (Hyon 1996: 701), probably due to their focus on the situational contexts in which the genres at hand occur. According to Miller, “a rhetorically sound definition of genre must not be centered on the substance or the form of the discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish” (1984: 151). Although this view provides a much richer perspective of how discourse communities work, it also raises the question as to how, *without* focusing on the substance or form, the reader is able to comprehend what 'action' is being accomplished by the text. As Devitt notes, genre becomes “visible through perceived patterns in the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features of particular texts” (1993: 580), which can be identified. Another reason for the RGS scepticism regarding pedagogical applications is that because genres

are always in a state of flux, the linguistic characteristics really might not be sufficiently recurring to be made use of in classroom applications. However, if genres actually changed so rapidly, publishing an academic paper would probably turn into a chaotic process rather than having to go through the present strenuous reviewing procedures in which genre expectations loom large on the part of the reviewers. This rationale of 'genre fluctuation' is then related to the alleged unauthentic nature of the classroom teaching of genres, which, supposedly, does not lead students to be co-participants in disciplinary communities (Hyland 2004: 39). But this begs the question of whether teaching students argumentation patterns (problem-solution, general to specific structuring of arguments, etc., [Freedman 1996]), with their related linguistic expressions, should really be considered to be *outside* the disciplinary fields in which the students are inserted. Even if the student is writing for the teacher, the generic patterns practiced are still part of 'becoming a member of an academic community'.

In the section within chapter 7, titled 'Intercultural Research on Genre within Academic Settings', Bawarshi and Reiff give an account of cultural influences in genre acquisition but, disappointingly for an EAP teacher in non-Anglo contexts, they focus mostly on genre acquisition in L1, for example, in the Brazilian system of education studies linked to Bazerman's Brazilian genre projects with Brazilian Portuguese in L1 writing (Bazerman, Bonini and Figueiredo 2009). This chapter also presents one British study carried out by Myhill (2005), mostly on the influence of social class in the acculturation processes to academic genres. Not surprisingly, Myhill found that middle-class children were those most well-positioned to make use of school genres. At the end of this section, two final studies are included: Kapp and Bangeni (2005), a case study of first-year students of humanities at the University of Cape Town; and Sunny Hyon's study of EFL students enrolled in a writing course at the University of Michigan. Kapp and Bangeni found that "while students can learn from explicit teaching of forms, acquiring genre knowledge and discourse knowledge takes time" (quoted by Bawarshi and Reiff [129]), a truly unamazing finding. Hyon's excellent 2002 study on ESL university student writing (one of the few ESL studies included in this volume) led her to state that "ESL university students may be among the 'some' for whom explicit genre-based teaching is helpful, as they have not had as much tacit exposure to English-language genre as their L1 counterparts" (2002: 136).

At this point, this researcher of Spanish EFL writing – convinced of the usefulness of explicit genre instruction, as Bawarshi and Reiff's 15-year review of research seems to support – is beginning to become rather impatient with these authors' constant reference to the arguments first set out by Freedman (1993, 1994), since it does not seem that Freedman has ever presented sufficient evidence that would support either the strong or weak hypotheses regarding explicit genre instruction. Bawarshi and Reiff's cautious sidestepping of this contentious issue seems to point more to the existence of a strong pecking order in North American RGS.

With some sense of relief from these tedious references to the implicit/explicit methodology debates, the reader advances to chapter 9, which presents 'Genre Research in Public and New Media Contexts', with an emphasis on RGS as used in historical studies (i.e. tracing the historical process of a particular genre) of widely diverse documents, such as tax forms (Bazerman, Little and Chavkin 2003), journalistic

contexts (Bonini 2009), personal narrative in public discourse (Segal 2007), radio genres (Edwards and McKee 2005), and blogs and other internet media (Miller and Shepherd 2004/2007). This information opens up useful avenues of research for ‘writing across the curriculum’ specialists. Finally, in the conclusion to Part 2, after 171 pages of the 209-page volume, Bawarshi and Reiff state that Freedman (2006) ‘acknowledges’ that “especially extensive empirical research ... has provided composition researchers with a very rich body of highly textured, largely qualitative work that has explained and elaborated on the discursive practices of professionals in their workplace and students in universities”; and that Freedman also ‘acknowledges’ “the complex, reciprocal relationship between theory and empirical research”, noting that “sometimes the data force researchers to reconsider the theory to modify, revise or even reject aspects or the whole of a theory that had been in use” (2006: 102).

With this last statement Bawarshi and Reiff seem to suggest to the reader that they have given sufficient evidence in order to have warded off some of RGS’s past harsh criticism of pedagogical applications of genre theory in North America. Thus, in Part 3 (chapters 10 and 11) of the volume, ‘Genre Approaches to Teaching Writing’, as its subtitle indicates, Bawarshi and Reiff move ahead to focus on genre as used in writing instruction. Chapter 10, ‘From Research to Pedagogy: Multiple Pedagogical Approaches to Teaching Genres’, focuses on “a range of pedagogical approaches informed by genre research and scholarship ...”. The authors discuss “varied but overlapping pedagogical approaches” (176) by presenting a review of Hyon’s 1996 study of three different approaches: 1) the Sydney School approach (curriculum development based on SFL); 2) ESP (teaching of specific genres, much of which is based on Swales’ 1990 text-based theory of discourse moves); and 3) the New Rhetoric (RGS), with a focus on critical analysis of genres, including the rhetorical and social purposes. In addition to these, Bawarshi and Reiff propose a fourth approach, which they call *the Brazilian educational model*, and which draws on Bakhtinian communicative interaction and Vygotskian learning theories. The authors describe the new approach as ‘marked by’ the following working principles: 1) characterization of the social context of the genre; 2) study of the social history of the genre; 3) characterization of the context of production; 4) analysis of the thematic content; and 5) analysis of the compositional construction of the genre – style of the genre and of the author. Bawarshi and Reiff suggest that the Brazilian approach “brings together a focus on genre awareness, analysis of linguistic conventions and attention to social context” (177).

In the remainder of this chapter, Bawarshi and Reiff (177-88) present various frameworks for genre pedagogies: Freedman’s model of (tacitly) acquiring new genres, and other explicit pedagogies – the SFL approach of the teaching-learning cycle; Swales’ CARS model; Devitt’s project model; and Guimarães’s didactic workshop sequence approach. All of these models might provide useful starting points for EAP teachers to draw up a syllabus adapted to their contexts.

In chapter 11, ‘Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS) Approaches to Teaching Writing’, the center of attention is on the transfer of genre knowledge, both from teachers to students and in student learning, from one genre context to another. Here again, the authors suggest a series of frameworks, including their own which they presented in a book with Amy Devitt, *Scenes of Writing: Strategies for Composing with Genres* (Devitt,

Bawarshi and Reiff 2004), which offers the following guidelines: 1) collect samples of the genre; 2) identify and describe the situation of the genre; 3) identify and describe patterns of the genre's features; and 4) analyze what the patterns reveal. Actually, much of this methodology has already been suggested in discourse analysis or critical discourse analysis (Titscher *et al.* 2000). This chapter also incorporates indications about how to teach critical awareness to students so that they can use 'alternative responses' to a genre context. This is a somewhat curious ending to the volume, since Bawarshi and Reiff's own response to genre throughout the book seems to be overly anxious about RGS's reaction to genre pedagogy.

In the introduction to their book, Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff state that their overarching goal "is to provide readers with an overview of what genre approaches have to offer for the study and teaching of writing" (10). As the title indicates, the authors must weave together various different perspectives – Historical, Theoretical, Research and Pedagogical – of the term *genre*, itself fraught with confusion, not least because of the different implications arising from its deployment in various disciplinary endeavors. To a specialist in applied linguistics, the extended discussion of the implicit/explicit debate provided by Bawarshi and Reiff may seem somewhat superficial. The underlying assumptions of RGS are not discussed critically and the authors' discussion of methodologies focuses almost completely on the findings from qualitative studies, while almost ignoring (they include only 4 pages) the wealth of information coming out of text-based quantitative studies, especially in L2 research. No doubt these oversights arise out of the different theoretical concerns of RGS, and the authors' attempts to reduce some of the contention between various disciplinary groups. However, the RGS perspective of the volume is apparent to some extent in the *Glossary* by Melanie Kill (210-19) in that it contains mostly linguistic terms, implying that RGS readers will need to have some of this background information at hand. One certainly cannot deny the RGS contributions to the study of written texts, but any detailed view of genre must include linguistically oriented research because authors' language choices constitute part of the information readers receive in order to be able to classify a text as belonging to a particular genre. Authors' ideas are set out in patterns of argumentation, but the construal of those meanings occurs through the deployment of linguistic features.

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