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Genre Awareness in Professional and Academic Language: the Importance of “Packing” Knowledge Appropriately in Professional Settings and Academia

Abstract

The aim of this article is to provide insights on the importance of genre awareness in the study, correct understanding and accurate use of Professional and Academic Language (PAL), with special emphasis being placed on the language of industrial ceramics and that used in academia. First of all, the concept of PAL as the big “container” of specialised languages is put forward and linked with the notion of genre as a communicative event characterised by its recurrent, dynamic, recognisable, expectable and conventionalised nature and by the communicative purpose it aims to achieve. Such a description attempts to show how the correct understanding and use of PAL goes beyond merely terminological considerations and in fact needs genre so that it can be “packed” appropriately for the audience. Thus, the importance of genre in PAL is analysed from two main points of view: firstly, by focusing on its more professional aspects (dealing with the relevance of generic balance in corpus compilation and of genre awareness in general in discourse communities) and, secondly, by focusing on the importance of observing generic conventions (even “constraints”) in academia. Additionally, digital genres are also analysed as an increasingly significant way of packaging information, all this leading to the conclusion that genre awareness necessarily implies accomplishing the expectations and conventionalised use of language (both general or professional and academic) established by discourse communities.

Keywords: genre, Professional and Academic Language (PAL), specialised language, corpus, discourse community, cybergenre and industrial ceramics

1 Professional and Academic Language (PAL), the big “container” of specialised languages

Alcaraz (2000) defines language as the instrument by which a community communicates and, as such, it is used both in everyday communication and in specialised contexts – what he calls “professional contexts” and what I will be calling “professional settings”. The language used in everyday communication has been traditionally known as general or common language, whereas the language used in specific professional settings is usually called specialised, special or speciality language, the different examples of these specialised languages traditionally being grouped under the label “Language for Specific Purposes” (LSP). General or common language is made up of a series of subcodes that are selected by speakers throughout the communicative process,

Edo Nuria:

*Genre Awareness in Professional and Academic Language:
the Importance of “Packing” Knowledge Appropriately in Professional Settings and Academia
Argumentum 7 (2011), 184-202
Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó*

depending on what they want to express and the communicative situation in which they are immersed. For this same author, the term *lengua de especialidad* (specialised language), derived from the French term *langue d’espécialité*, refers to the specific language used by some specialists and professionals in order to transmit information and negotiate the terms, concepts and knowledge of a given field of knowledge, that is to say, to confirm the existing terms by delimiting their field of application and modifying them, either totally or partially (Alcaraz 2000). For Cabré (1993: 127), each general language consists of a set of rules and units (phonological, morphological, lexical, semantic and discursive) that are common to every speaker of that language. Therefore, the set of rules, units and restrictions that form part of the knowledge of most of the speakers of a language constitutes the so-called common or general language, and the units of this common language are used in situations that can be described as “unmarked”, whereas specialised languages present a series of specific, characteristic features that are “marked”.

The term “specialised language” has also received a number of alternative names that may be considered, in general terms, as being synonymous: the already-mentioned special language, speciality language, special subject language and language for specific purposes (LSP),¹ although this last denomination is better applied, in accordance with its origin, to the field of teaching (Sager et al. 1980).

Additionally, Alcaraz (2000) elaborates upon his definition of specialised language by pointing out that this “kind” of language has also been called “technolect”, although he concedes it is more restrictive and less preferable than the label “specialised language”. This is so because “technolects” only comprise the subcode made up of the lexicon of a given discipline, while specialised languages present many other aspects and constitute a more complex phenomenon than the mere study of specialised vocabulary. Thus, in Alcaraz’s (2000) views, the term “specialised language” and the grouping of some of these specialised languages under the aforementioned label of LSP (in the case of English, ESP, or English for Specific Purposes) is better and more accurately expressed, again when referring to English, by the Spanish acronym IPA (*Inglés Profesional y Académico*), which I have translated into English as PAE² (Professional and Academic English). Vargas (2005) explains that Alcaraz (2000) coined this term to refer to the modality of English that includes the grouping of the different specialised languages that arise in the academic world and during the practice of the corresponding professions.

Consequently, by widening this view and as a result of the above-mentioned reflection, we get what has been called here (following Alcaraz’s [2000] and Aguado’s [2001] proposal) PAL.³ This can be understood as a big “container” or comprehensive label which gathers all specialised languages under a single denomination, subsuming thus all the specific features of specialised languages. Accordingly, and in order to follow a

¹ In contrast to Language for General Purposes (LGP).

² Together with PAE, we may also have PAS (Professional and Academic Spanish), PAF (Professional and Academic French), etc. which would be another dimension of PAL (Professional and Academic Language).

³ Aguado (2001) points out that the findings of the investigations in this field can be extended to every language and give as a result what would be called LPAs (“Lenguajes Profesionales y Académicos”), which I have called PAL(s) (Professional and Academic Language(s)) in English.

Edo Nuria:

*Genre Awareness in Professional and Academic Language:
the Importance of “Packing” Knowledge Appropriately in Professional Settings and Academia
Argumentum 7 (2011), 184-202
Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó*

consistent and coherent manner of referring to this linguistic phenomenon, in general, throughout this article the term “specialised language” has been the most commonly used to refer to a single specific specialised language (in this case, the one used in the ceramics industry), whereas PAL has been the preferred denomination to refer to the grouping of specialised languages as a whole.

Hence, as has been progressively acknowledged by earlier researchers, especially over the last few decades, the study of PAL must not be limited to the study of its terminology or lexical aspect. As Arntz and Picht (1995) concede, only the knowledge of all the linguistic, pragmatic and social aspects involved in PAL and thus in specific specialised languages can guarantee successful and fruitful communication among the members of a discourse community, and genre awareness is, no doubt, one of these aspects to be borne in mind. From a linguistic point of view, the importance of the study of PAL in specific domains of knowledge is undeniable and a fact. The existence of specialised languages arises out of necessity and in spite of sharing with common language many features inherent to natural language, it also shows peculiarities that should be taken into consideration, especially those regarding the correct use of terminology and genre conventions, on which accuracy, adequacy and membership⁴ so strongly depend. As Arntz and Picht (1995) concede, the main justification for the existence and development of specialised languages deals with demanding an effort for precision, even in the linguistic field, for scientists and technicians since new ideas and new objects require new denominations that are not yet assigned and that cannot be confused with other denominations. Common language could only do that by means of long paraphrases which would not be adequate for a kind of communication – the specialised one – which demands concision and clarity. That is the reason why a series of special, agreed means are necessary to make communication in and about a speciality area possible.

EAP (English for Academic Purposes), on the other hand, has traditionally been distinguished from ESP or considered to be a branch of it. The notion of PAL in this article is a way to integrate the wider notions of language for academic purposes (LAP) and language for specific purposes (LSP) (arising from EAP and ESP) under a single denomination that covers the main aspects of the two in an attempt to show how most of their foundations – including generic conventions – are common to these two broad kinds of special languages used in very specific settings.

2 The concept of genre

Despite the fact that there is no universal agreement on what genre is (hence the different views on it to be found in the field of applied linguistics), since this research focuses on the perspectives on genre and its importance for gaining competence in PAL – what has traditionally been known as ESP perspectives on genre – I would like to begin this reflection by briefly outlining Swales’ (1990) and Bhatia’s (1993, 2004) views on genre.

⁴ [Membership] In a discourse community.

Edo Nuria:

*Genre Awareness in Professional and Academic Language:
the Importance of “Packing” Knowledge Appropriately in Professional Settings and Academia
Argumentum 7 (2011), 184-202
Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó*

Over the years, work in academic discourse analysis has become *narrower and deeper* (Swales 1990: 3) – narrower because of the focus on specific genres, and deeper insofar as it has sought to investigate communicative purposes, not just formal features. Academic discourse analysis reached its maturity with the studies of Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993), both of whom put forward models for genre analysis, Swales in the field of academic discourse and Bhatia in business, academic, and legal genres (Flowerdew 2002: 1-2). On the one hand, focusing on the ESP perspective on genre, Swales (1990: 58) understands it as *a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes* that are recognised by the members of the academic or professional community in which it is given *and therefore constitute the rationale for the genre* (Swales 1990: 58). On the other hand, Bhatia (2004: 23) subsumes the tradition of new rhetoric genre studies, the perspective of systemic functional linguistics and the ESP tradition in a comprehensive definition of genre:

Genre essentially refers to language use in a conventionalised communicative setting in order to give expression to a specific set of communicative goals of a disciplinary or social institution, which give rise to stable structural forms by imposing constraints on the use of lexico-grammatical as well as discursal resources.

The ESP approach to genre, which in this study has been widened to what can be called the PAL approach to genre, is somehow influenced nowadays by new rhetoric genre theory. In this sense, new rhetoric genre researchers hold that genre has its origin in repeated social action in recurring situations which give rise to regularities in form and content (Bazerman 1988, 1997, Devitt 2004, & Miller 1984 and 1994). Therefore, Miller’s notion of “genre as social action” is highly influential in ESP research. It is thus very enlightening to notice how, without abandoning earlier conceptions of genre as “kinds” or “types” of discourse that share similarities in content and form, new rhetoric genre theorists focus on *tying these linguistic and substantive similarities to regularities in human spheres of activities* (Freedman & Medway 1994: 1). The correct understanding of genre is thus important to relate regularities in discourse types with a broader social and cultural understanding of language in use, something necessary for a correct understanding and adequate production of specialised language discourse.

As mentioned above, the appropriate use and understanding of PAL goes beyond the lexical study of specialised languages. PAL is not merely concerned with terminology. These languages, even though they find in terminology their most prototypical aspect, cannot be reduced to it and need the study and observation of genre conventions in order to acquire their discursive dimension and meet the expectations of the discourse community that constantly uses and thus “packs” knowledge with them. Accordingly, as Bhatia (1993: 13) concedes:

A genre is a recognisable communicative event characterised by a set of communicative purpose(s) identified and mutually understood by the members of the professional or academic community in which it regularly occurs. Most often it is highly structured and conventionalised with constraints on allowable contributions in terms of their intent, positioning, form and functional value. These constraints, however, are often exploited by the expert members of the discourse community to achieve private intentions within the framework of socially recognised purpose.

Accordingly, subsequent sections introduce a review on the importance of genre, genre analysis and genre awareness in the study of PAL, with special attention being given to certain aspects of this awareness process.

3 Genre awareness in PAL: why, what for?

Now that the notions of PAL and genre have been introduced for the purposes of this study, what follows is an account on the crucial role played by genre in the understanding, analysis and correct use of PAL (and thus of specific specialised languages) regarding two main aspects: professional settings (by analysing the importance of genre for the balanced compilation of specialised corpora and for discourse communities, with a special focus on industrial ceramics) and the use of genres and their conventions in academia.

3.1 The importance of genre in balanced corpus compilation: the specialised corpus on industrial ceramics

The importance of genre in corpus compilation can be easily justified by the need to achieve representativeness of the domain under study and a equilibrium/balance in its composition so that what a corpus shows illustrates extended and accepted use. Representativeness implies the inclusion of textual samples that faithfully reflect or represent the field under study as a whole, together with its subfields and related areas, and therefore the prototypical “communicative events” (genres) that characterise the domain in any of its integrating aspects. Additionally, this must normally be performed in a balanced way in which no genre is favoured⁵ over another one so that an unbiased representation of the domain is achieved. A corpus might, however, be compiled for the study of a specific genre, a specific author or a specific feature; then, balance is not a priority and “genre equilibrium” would be detrimental instead of beneficial, but this is not the case in this study or in any other in which the aim is to characterise the specialised language of a domain as a whole. Hence, taking representativeness and equilibrium/balance into account when compiling a corpus is the only way to obtain a corpus that realistically describes a language and which allows the user to make reliable generalisations about extended use.

This need to look for representativeness has also been favoured by modern computer technology and the development of terminotics, since they do not only allow researchers to collect and compile much larger corpora, but also to construct less biased and far more representative ones, in which data retrieval is much quicker, easier, more complete and trustworthy. Furthermore, corpus frequency counts and statistical analyses are made possible and are always objective.

Accordingly, following McEnery and Wilson (2001):

We are therefore interested in creating a corpus which is maximally representative of the variety under examination, that is, which provides us with an as accurate a picture as possible of the tendencies of that variety, as well as their proportions. What we are looking for is a broad range of

⁵ Unless the domain as such clearly favours one genre and thus its representativeness depends on giving priority to this genre over the other ones.

Edo Nuria:
Genre Awareness in Professional and Academic Language:
the Importance of “Packing” Knowledge Appropriately in Professional Settings and Academia
Argumentum 7 (2011), 184-202
Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó

authors and genres which, when taken together, may be considered to “average out” and provide a reasonably accurate picture of the entire language population in which we are interested.

Following Vargas’ (2005) classification, broadly speaking, the main genres considered for the compilation of a specialised corpus (in Vargas’ case it was a corpus on natural stone and allied industries and in my case it is a corpus on industrial ceramics and allied industries) are those shown in Figure 1, which, again in general, can be considered as the most prototypical genres in scientific-technical areas of knowledge.

RELATIONSHIP	FUNCTION	GENRE
Expert-expert	Didactic-instructive	Working instructions
Expert-expert	Didactic-instructive	Instruction manual
Expert-expert	Didactic-instructive	Production plan
Expert-expert	Informative	Specialised journal article
Expert-expert	Informative	Project report
Expert-expert	Informative	Technical cards catalogue
Expert-expert	Informative	Commercial article
Expert-expert	Informative	Sectorial journal article
Expert-expert	Informative	Technical report
Expert-expert	Informative	Project report
Expert-expert	Informative	Monographic work
Expert-expert	Informative	Yearbook
Expert-expert	Legal-normative	Patents
Expert-expert	Legal-normative	Essay norms
Expert-expert	Legal-normative	Working norms
Expert-expert	Compilatory	Vocabulary
Expert-expert	Compilatory	Dictionary
Expert-expert	Compilatory	Glossary
Expert-semi-expert	Didactic-instructive	Technical manual
Expert-semi-expert	Didactic-instructive	Textbook
Expert-semi-expert	Didactic-instructive	Instructions manual
Expert-semi-expert	Informative	Specialised journal article
Expert-semi-expert	Informative	Sectorial journal article
Expert-semi-expert	Informative	Monographic work
Expert-semi-expert	Informative	Yearbook
Expert-semi-expert	Informative	Cards catalogue
Expert-semi-expert	Compilatory	Encyclopaedic article
Expert-semi-expert	Compilatory	Vocabulary
Expert-semi-expert	Compilatory	Glossary
Expert-semi-expert	Compilatory	Dictionary
Expert-layman	Popularising	Advertising brochure
Expert-layman	Popularising	Catalogue
Expert-layman	Popularising	Popularising article
Expert-layman	Compilatory	Encyclopaedic article
Expert-layman	Compilatory	Dictionary
Expert-layman	Compilatory	Glossary
Expert-layman	Compilatory	Vocabulary

Fig. 1: Vargas’ (2005) classification (translated from Spanish) of the main genres for the compilation of specialised corpora

Edo Nuria:

*Genre Awareness in Professional and Academic Language:
the Importance of “Packing” Knowledge Appropriately in Professional Settings and Academia
Argumentum 7 (2011), 184-202
Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó*

However, in spite of the convenience of relying on some sort of classification that provides clues about the kind of generic variation a corpus must contain in order to be a balanced and representative compilation of texts, Miller (1984/1994) also advocates an open principle of genre classification based on rhetorical practice, rather than a closed one based solely on structure, substance, or aim. Genres merge, are embedded into other ones, develop, change, new ones are created, old ones are forgotten or even revoked, and, to sum up, they are complex dynamic instances that do not accept watertight classifications. Moreover, genre classifications are not absolute truths and even the names of the genres may not be generally agreed upon. Nonetheless, it is in their essence and in the way of “packing knowledge” that we find the way of distinguishing, characterising and “expecting” genres and thus of classifying them. It therefore seems realistic to concede that certain features would *identify the extent to which an exemplar is prototypical of a particular genre* (Swales 1990: 52). This is the base on which Vargas’ classification relies and which may, in a way, help to simplify the study of genre in PAL by helping to provide a plausible balanced generic representation of the domain.

3.2 *The importance of genre in discourse communities: the specific case of the ceramic industrial community*

Swales’ views on genre are deeply grounded in the concept of discourse communities. As the following paragraphs explain, the notion of discourse community needs specialised languages and consequently also generic conventions to successfully guarantee communication among its members. As Bhatia concedes (2004: 23) *genres are recognisable communicative events, characterised by a set of communicative purposes identified and mutually understood by members of the professional or academic community in which they regularly occur*. Accordingly, the knowledge of a specialised language like the one of industrial ceramics (and thus the fact of being part of its discursive community) necessarily entails the correct usage and understanding of its genre conventions.

The ceramic industrial community is a linguistic or discourse community which communicates and is represented through a series of genres that characterise it (see Figure 1). Like any other community, it evolves and adapts to its new necessities, and genres are a faithful reflection of this adaptation. The fact of being a member of a discourse community necessarily implies successfully communicating within that community and being aware of its idiosyncrasy at every level: socially, linguistically, technically, and so forth. Within a community, its representative specialised language must be mastered by its members, which implies an in-depth knowledge of genre. This is so and acquires its whole meaning within discourse communities because, as mentioned earlier, a genre can be understood as a frequently repeated social action on the part of an individual social actor or group of actors that is performed in order to fulfil their rhetorical purpose.

Use of the term ‘discourse community’ testifies to the increasingly common assumption that discourse operates within conventions defined by communities, be they academic disciplines or social groups [...] use the notion of ‘discourse communities’ to signify a cluster of ideas: that language use in a group is a form of social behaviour, that discourse is a means of maintaining and extend-

Edo Nuria:
Genre Awareness in Professional and Academic Language:
the Importance of “Packing” Knowledge Appropriately in Professional Settings and Academia
Argumentum 7 (2011), 184-202
Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó

ing the group’s knowledge and of initiating new members into the group, and that discourse is epistemic or constitutive of the group’s knowledge (Hezberg 1986: 1).

As a basic foundation, communication is frequent and necessary among the members of a community. Following Agre (1997), although a community might have a stronger or weaker sense of itself as such, most communities have a certain degree of collective cognition. In the specific case of the ceramic industrial community, through interaction, the different companies learn from each other’s experiences, set out common strategies against competitors at an international level, build up a shared vocabulary (specialised terminology on the discipline) and develop a distinctive way of thinking and acting – what could be called “the politics of the community”.

Discourse communities present a series of features that make them so and language is implicitly or explicitly involved in all of them. In Swales’ (1990) view, the concept of discourse communities can be summarised in the identification of six defining characteristics which will be necessary and sufficient to identify a group of individuals as a discourse community:

1) *A discourse community has a broadly agreed set of common public goals* (Swales 1990: 24-25). In the case of the ceramic industrial community these public goals could be qualified as expectable and evident since, as in any other industrial business-related activity, the objectives are, in general: to gain leadership in the sector; to maximise profits and minimise losses; to gain the battle of market competition, and to be at the forefront of infrastructures, technology and innovation. Nonetheless, the ceramic industrial community as such is made up of individual firms which, broadly speaking, share common objectives like those we have just mentioned, but which, at the end of the day, also have to compete amongst themselves (Edo 2007).

2) *A discourse community has mechanisms of intercommunication among its members* (Swales 1990: 25). These mechanisms vary from one community to another, but in the specific case of the ceramic industrial community include international fairs (Cevisama, Cersaie, etc.), journals and periodicals (*Tile and Brick International*, *Ziegelindustrie International*, *Técnica Cerámica*, *Ceramica Informazine*, *Industrial Ceramics*, *Boletín de la Sociedad Española de Cerámica y Vidrio*, etc.), conversations, e-mails, faxes, correspondence, and so forth (Edo 2007).

3) *A discourse community uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback* (Swales 1990: 26). As he proceeds *membership implies uptake of the informational opportunities* (Swales 1990: 26), which in a way is the result of having mechanisms of intercommunication, and *the secondary purposes of the information exchange will vary according to the common goals* mentioned above (Edo 2007).

In the ceramic industrial community, ASCER⁶ would be the prototypical example of a participatory mechanism, together with the use of related websites to find out about other companies’ philosophies, products, innovations, trends, techniques, procedures, and so on. Informational opportunities can be used to take advantage of competitors’ weaknesses, simply for informational purposes or even to satisfy the curiosity of other members of the community (Edo 2007).

⁶ *Asociación Española de Fabricantes de Azulejos y Pavimentos Cerámico* (Spanish Association of Ceramic Tile Manufacturers).

Edo Nuria:

*Genre Awareness in Professional and Academic Language:
the Importance of “Packing” Knowledge Appropriately in Professional Settings and Academia
Argumentum 7 (2011), 184-202
Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó*

4) *A discourse community utilises and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims* (Swales 1990: 26). Starting out from the fact that, broadly speaking, *genres are how things get done, when language is used to accomplish them* (Martin 1985: 250 in Swales 1990: 26), discursive expectations are created by the *genres* that articulate the operations of the discourse community (Swales 1990: 26). Each kind of discourse community favours certain genres more than others because its goals are better accomplished through them and the community as such is better represented by them (Edo 2007); an example of this would be the classification in Figure 1.

5) *In addition to owning genres, a discourse community has acquired some specific lexis* (Swales 1990: 26-27). The use of specific vocabulary is a feature that is present in any domain of knowledge. The specialisation represented by the ceramic industry as a professional (and sometimes academic) field of knowledge or discipline is also coherently expressed by its terminology. Community membership is strongly determined by the efficient communication exchange among its members or experts, and proper communication within a community involves accurately and correctly using the vocabulary specific to that community (Edo 2007).

6) *A discourse community has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discursual expertise* (Swales 1990: 27). Discourse communities have changing memberships; individuals enter as apprentices and leave by death or in other less involuntary ways. However, survival of the community depends on a reasonable ratio between novices and experts (Swales 1990: 27) and the knowledge and understanding of generic conventions is one of the aspects that best reflects this expertise. Usually, the member belonging to a community like the one under analysis has a degree of expertise in the subject (procedures, materials, transformation, final product, etc.) that the layman does not possess. This expertise, however, is not limited to technical knowledge but also includes linguistic and pragmatic knowledge (Edo 2007) in which genre plays a key role: texts do not stand in isolation and are normally created in a certain “context of situation” and so their relationship to the context must be appropriately expressed. Texts simultaneously have characteristics that enable us to show their generic resemblance to other texts of the same genre, a related genre, a contrasting genre, etc. (Ventola 1996).

Almost every item enumerated above highlights in one way or another the important role played by genre in specialised languages and thus in discourse communities. Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) suggest that writers in a discourse community acquire and employ genre knowledge as they participate in producing activities. For these same authors, genre knowledge refers to the repertoires of *situationally appropriate responses to recurrent situations* (Berkenkotter & Huckin 1995); that is, the knowledge that is needed to successfully communicate in a particular discourse community. This genre knowledge, they argue, is acquired through communication within the discourse community, so that an understanding and consideration of both of them in the study of PAL and specific specialised languages seems an absolute must.

In an attempt to take another step forward, at this point we might also introduce a notion that is closely related to the discourse community analysed above – that of community of practice (CofP) (Lave & Wenger 1991; Holmes & Meyerhoff 1999). In Davies’ (2005) words, social network analysis (e.g. Milroy 1987; Lippi-Green 1989),

like communities of practice, is concerned with the links between individuals, and how those links draw them into or away from a group identity. The same author goes on to say that the core of these communities of practice resides in the importance of *doing* and, more particularly, of doing things in a way that helps to reinforce membership in such communities. These societies transcend merely linguistic considerations and make membership prevail over everything else so that every aspect of involvement in an individual group is considered. If we expanded on this concept in this article, it would be seen how, in a way, it goes beyond the considerations of a discourse community and, even though the ceramic industrial community could be considered a community of practice, I have considered it more convenient – given the purposes of this study – to concentrate on the more straightforward⁷ notion of discourse community. Nonetheless, the important point when placing our attention on these two concepts of community in this article is not so much to disentangle how they may be differentiated but to highlight the fact that, whatever they are called, the construction of membership is a more complex operation than “simply” making the right lexical, syntactic and phonological choices (Davies 2005). “Getting things right” is hard work and obviously involves, as the concept of discourse community and community of practice suggest, considerations that go beyond specialised language and genre.

3.3 *The importance of genre in academia*

As has been stated in previous sections, genre awareness is crucial in every activity involving language and, when referring to academic discourse, this importance is no exception and turns out to be even more constraining. In the academic world, generic conventions are “tightly fastened” and “highly predictable” and no one would expect, for instance, to see a PhD dissertation without a section devoted to references or a research article with a section entitled “ingredients”. Among the most easily recognisable academic genres we find conference proceedings, research articles, lectures, PhD dissertations, textbooks, case studies, and so forth, which are so because they follow a series of agreed generic conventions that make them easily identifiable as such almost at first glance. Information is packed and offered in a universally recognisable “envelope” which could be considered as constraining at times but which tends to be accepted both by genre producers and their audiences. Rejecting or ignoring these conventions would most probably lead to subsequent questioning as to whether the individual ignoring these conventions is really a member of the discourse community. It is also true that genres, as dynamic instances of knowledge, are not fixed or static and what may at first seem a vacuous attempt to break the rules without necessity may later become a recurrent, conventionalised and recognisable “package of knowledge”, that is, an accepted genre. Cybergenres (see section 4) are a good example of this. However, the academia is probably one of the most constrained and constraining communities regarding generic

⁷ Straightforward for the aims of this study, since communities of practice tend to involve aspects that are closer to sociological analysis than to linguistic factors. To illustrate this, broadly speaking, it could be stated that CofPs are communities of practitioners into which newcomers would enter and attempt to acquire the sociocultural practices of the community; Milroy (1987 in Davies 2005), for instance, mentions choice of dress in one particular group as a feature of a given community of practice.

conventions, apart from being one of the settings in which a complete break can, a priori, only be envisaged for or tolerated from “the big names”, that is, those who are honoured members of the community and whose membership seems beyond all doubt. Academic genres require rhetorical appropriacy to meet readers’ expectations. Accordingly, a crucial element in genre awareness is the ability to produce a discourse that is appropriate to the situation or context (Bazerman 1994). To succeed in the academic world, the production of academic genres must be mastered and thus scholars must show competence in the production of such genres. This entails taking into account the target audience (Nwogu & Bloor 1991), the communicative purpose of the discourse, and the conventions that have been socially constructed by the discourse community, which in turn will have an impact on the linguistic choices that are made (Swales 1990).

As Rowley-Jolivet and Carter Thomas (2005) state, the purpose of scientific research communication is not only informative, but also rhetorical, in that it aims to persuade. To achieve this dual purpose, mastery of the information flow requires a syntactic organisation that is adapted to the genre, communicative context, and audience. As the same authors go on to state, only genre awareness will let us know that:

In proceedings articles, for example, the passive is a frequently used structure, as it enables writers to manage the complex noun groups typical of scientific writing and to maintain thematic continuity between clauses. Extraposition is likewise frequent in the articles as it allows the heavy information load to be distributed in a balanced way over the clause and also provides the writer with a grammatical framework for expressing stance or evaluation while at the same time, like the passive, respecting the impersonal tone often found in this genre. [...] Inversion, which enables the enunciator to integrate the two channels of communication (visual and verbal) used in scientific conference presentations, and also to chunk the discourse into easily manageable units for the audience, proves to be a particularly effective and relevant information packaging strategy in this genre [...] (Rowley-Jolivet & Carter Thomas 2005: 59).

Myers (1992: 18), for instance, deals with this reflection in depth and examines the importance of genre and the need to avoid oversimplifying the linguistic reality by underlining that *although all scientific knowledge is expressed impersonally, first person pronominals are often found in textbooks and journal articles in highly specific contexts*. In this way, *a reader who just assumes that scientific writing is impersonal because textbooks usually are, and because style guides say it is, will miss the significance of the rare but important use of personal pronouns* (Myers 1992: 10) conferred by particular genre conventions.

Genre awareness is thus a crucial notion for achieving rhetorical appropriacy, pragmatic competence and the cognitive mechanisms for adequately conveying information, as well as for correctly understanding the complex phenomenon of language in academia.

Edo Nuria:

*Genre Awareness in Professional and Academic Language:
the Importance of “Packing” Knowledge Appropriately in Professional Settings and Academia
Argumentum 7 (2011), 184-202
Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó*

4 Traditional and digital genres (cybergenres) at the service of discourse communities

To elaborate on this idea of genre, the industrial ceramics discourse community and the broader⁸ academic community can nowadays, like any other discourse community, rely on both traditional and new digital genres to foster its development and internal cohesion as such. A genre – traditional or otherwise – might be addressed to several different purposes simultaneously and may be representative of and useful for several different communities. The very same notion of genre inherently implies a high degree of dynamism and evolution, which constantly originates and favours the uprising of new genres that better fit the necessity of communities which are also in constant change, with scientific-technical communities generally at the forefront of this evolution. It is in this light that PAL in general and the specialised language of industrial ceramics (and therefore its discourse community) in particular also take advantage of evolution in genres.

Hence, the concept of genre has adapted to the new technologies by developing into new concepts such as that of digital genre, or cybergenre, which is defined by Watters and Shepherd (1997: 54) as follows: *Digital genres extend the concept of a literary or rhetorical genre by incorporating the notions of user interactions and processing.* The “here and now” effect of digital genres is especially beneficial in business-like activities that constitute discourse communities, since they allow the audience fast and widespread access to information. Digital genres such as company websites may be a guide for prospective buyers/clients and a helpful tool for a terminographer in order to observe how PAL and, more specifically, terms work in real virtual contexts.

Watters and Sheperd (1997) and Shepherd and Watters (1998) coined the term *cybergenre* to denote these new digital genres and divided them into two subgenres: extant and novel, which are explained and exemplified in Figure 2 below.

⁸ The academic community may at the same time be subdivided into smaller communities such as those of chemists, engineers, linguists, and so forth.

Edo Nuria:

*Genre Awareness in Professional and Academic Language:
the Importance of “Packing” Knowledge Appropriately in Professional Settings and Academia
Argumentum 7 (2011), 184-202
Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó*

CLASSIFICATION AND EVOLUTION OF CYBERGENRES		DEFINITION	EXAMPLES
Digital genres or Cybergenres (Following Shepherd and Watters' classification, 1998)	Extant Subgenres based on already existing genres which can be found in other media and that have been recast in a digital form.	Replicated 	Already existing genres which migrate without modification to a computer environment without taking full advantage of the capabilities of the new medium. Digitised documents, such as PDF documents.
		Variant 	Genres that emerge due to the technical capabilities of the new medium by adding multimedia features and interactivity. The evolution from newspapers to digital or electronic news.
	Novel Subgenres that are wholly dependent on the new medium.	Emergent 	Genres that originate from extant genres through replication and variants. Providing news through agents and personalised interfaces.
		Spontaneous	Genres that have no counterpart in other media. FAQ and hotlists.

Fig. 2: Adaptation of Shepherd and Watters' (1998) views on the evolution of cybergenres

In Yates and Orlikowski's (1992, 1994) views, many genres are being or have already been adapted to take advantage of the linking and interactivity of the medium, and the ceramic industrial community, like many others, has been no exception. Cybergenres, however, must fulfil expectations and adapt to generic conventions in the same way as traditional genres do, with the only particularity that these expectations and conventions are relatively new and, in some cases, still under development. Nonetheless, new digital genres arise with a certain amount of frequency and they are normally accepted more quickly than traditional ones because of the immediacy of the medium in which they are created.

Edo Nuria:

*Genre Awareness in Professional and Academic Language:
the Importance of "Packing" Knowledge Appropriately in Professional Settings and Academia
Argumentum 7 (2011), 184-202
Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó*

The study of genre in professional communication (including, of course, the study of new digital genres) provides important information about how discourse communities are organised, use PAL, and about their textual dynamics. When Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) refer to genre knowledge in disciplinary or professional contexts, as is the case with the ceramic industrial community, they are referring to the knowledge that professionals need to communicate within their communities, which necessarily implies the knowledge of generic conventions and the specialised language on which the community is "settled". Therefore, in general, genres have implications in the way a specific specialised language is poured or materialised into them in order to satisfy a community's expectations and its communicative needs.

Given the fact that the genre repertoire is both a product and a shaper of the communicative practices of a community (Orlikowski & Yates 1994), it seems logical that new digital genres are created according to the demands of the community, that is to say, that genres fit the type of communication and thus the kind of language that is expected.

The effect of genre on user expectations also for cybergenres is confirmed by Dillon and Gushrowski (2000), who, after examining more than 100 personal homepages, asked subjects to select those elements that they thought should be included in any good personal homepage. Results largely agreed on what a homepage should contain.

The presence of the ceramic industrial community on the Internet is also a fact, and mainly takes the form of websites which open up a range of possibilities that are more restricted in traditional genres. Crowston and Williams (1997) were among the first to realise the importance of the concept of genre also for analysing communication on the Internet. They noted that the Web was an excellent place to study the development of genres, because of its easy access and its inherent capabilities of experimentation, freedom of structuring, and interactions among many communities. They documented the range of genres in use on the Web by sampling and classifying 1000 randomly selected websites. Distinction was based on purpose, rather than on physical form, and they identified 48 different genres:

Archive item	Filmography	Problem set
Article	Genealogy	Product information
Book	Government programme description	Product reviews
Box score	Guide	Publication list
Chronicle	Home page	Ratings
Column	Hot list	Regulation or rule
Computer documentation	Index	Report
Concert review	Library acquisition list	Script
Demographic data	List of research projects	Server statistics
Directory	Meeting minutes	Source code
Discography	Memorial	Submission instruction
E-mail directory listing	Newsletter	Table of contents
Essay	News wire article	Testimonial
Faculty information	Order form	Univ. course listing

Edo Nuria:
Genre Awareness in Professional and Academic Language:
the Importance of “Packing” Knowledge Appropriately in Professional Settings and Academia
Argumentum 7 (2011), 184-202
Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó

FAQ	Pamphlet	Users' manual
File directory listing	Political party platform	Vitae

Of these digital genres listed above, the ones in bold type are the ones I consider to be the most frequently used by the ceramic industrial community. Once again, the inclusion of a balanced representation of cybergenres in a corpus will determine its representativeness and equilibrium and their correct representation of the domain as a whole.

As observed throughout this article, transformation in genres or in generic conventions is always shaped by the interplay between technological and social forces. Digital genres are rooted in the social practices of a discourse community and, in the specific case of the ceramic industrial community, the prototypical example is that of ceramic companies or industries announcing new products, publishing catalogues and providing online information about themselves on their websites. This has also opened up the possibility for non-members of the community to gain easier access to certain kinds of information, which makes the boundaries of a community more blurred and turns a community into a more open collectivity.

In conclusion, it may be argued that the ceramic industrial community is represented by both traditional and digital genres. New digital genres, such as websites, fit perfectly well into the “philosophy” of the community because they allow firms to achieve rapid communication, greater visual potential and a wider reach or scope (Edo 2007). Traditional genres are being increasingly substituted by or combined with digital genres because the dynamic nature of genres is even more acute in certain disciplines, such as all computer-related areas of development (Posteguillo 1996, 1999, 2000 in Posteguillo 2003: 31). However, the general trend is for these genres to reproduce (to a greater or lesser extent) the traditional genres of this community, each of them displaying a different degree of evolution in Shepherd and Watter’s (1998) classification.

5 Conclusion

All through this paper, the fundamental knowledge of generic conventions for the correct use of specialised languages in professional and academic settings, and thus for those using them on a regular basis in their respective discourse communities, has acted as a conducting thread. It is a fact that the active members of a linguistic community normally show greater skill in the use of genre within their communities than those who are not members of it, and they are expected to resort to conventionalised, recurrent and predictable forms of expression. Since genres are communicative events acting as providers of recurrent rhetorical action, those recurrently “enacting” this rhetorical action within their communities constitute the best example of the importance of its study and knowledge for PAL.

Being aware of the rationale of genre is the only way to correctly shape and “pack” discourse in which specialised languages are involved, since the schematic structure of discourse influences and restricts the choice of style and content. If one intends to use and know a specialised language correctly and consequently “sound professional and competent” within his/her community, be accurate in what is being said and reaffirm his/her membership to the discourse community, knowledge of genre is fundamental.

Edo Nuria:

*Genre Awareness in Professional and Academic Language:
the Importance of “Packing” Knowledge Appropriately in Professional Settings and Academia
Argumentum 7 (2011), 184-202
Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó*

On the purely academic side of PAL, questions of genre are important, for instance, when texts are judged and evaluated, and in 99% of cases the expectations regarding genre need to be accomplished.

In professional settings, the need to understand and recognise genres in order to include a balanced number and selection of them in a corpus will determine the representativeness of this corpus and likewise its quality for the study of PAL or specific specialised languages.

Genres are dynamic instances that evolve as society changes and which, accordingly, also take advantage of technological developments, giving way to new digital genres. Thus, for a correct and accurate use of specialised languages, the conventions of each genre – whether traditional or digital – must be considered. Nowadays, it is increasingly common for companies to present themselves on the Internet by means of websites that allow them to advertise their products and services, display their catalogues, establish and maintain contact with others and be known by other similar communities worldwide. In a way, the evolution from traditional to digital genres and the increasing presence of the latter in our lives is a way of responding to the globalising trends that govern 21st century societies and knowledge/discourse communities. These digital genres allow for the “here and now” effect that traditional genres cannot achieve so easily. In this way, the use of digital genres by the ceramic industrial community can be considered a step forward in innovation and adaptation to current market trends and an essential condition to increase profits.

In conclusion, more attention should be paid to mastering the specialised language and the genres of a given community, and thus the knowledge necessary to be considered part of it. It may be hard to raise genre awareness and even for new genres to become accepted, but if their introduction is progressive and the prototypical genres that people usually associate to a given community are not abruptly disregarded and substituted, the new ones may also be incorporated into the communication of the discourse community and become part of its “knowledge-packing practices”.

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Edo Nuria:

*Genre Awareness in Professional and Academic Language:
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Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó

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*Genre Awareness in Professional and Academic Language:
the Importance of "Packing" Knowledge Appropriately in Professional Settings and Academia*
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Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó

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