

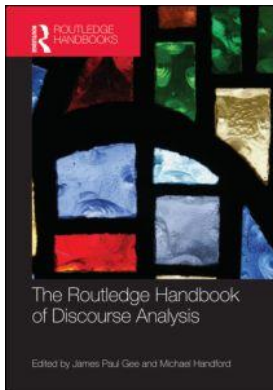
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### **Professional written genres**

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# Professional written genres

Vijay Bhatia

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Written genres in academic and professional contexts have traditionally been the focus of much of ESP (English for specific purposes) inspired genre analysis.<sup>1</sup> However, the emphasis in this tradition has always been on the use of text-internal linguistic resources, in particular, on the use of formal properties of language, especially analysis of rhetorical ‘moves’ with relatively very little in-depth analysis of text-external resources, which play an important role in the socio-pragmatics of professional genres, whether written or spoken. This chapter will give a general overview of this approach to the analysis of professional written genres, and at the same, will also widen the scope of the construction, interpretation and use of professional written genres, focusing in particular, on the socio-pragmatic space within which such professional genres invariably function, and will also consider critically how expert professionals exploit this socio-pragmatic space to create new and hybrid forms across disciplinary, institutional, as well as cultural boundaries.

## Analysing professional genres

One of the most popular frameworks for the analysis of professional written genres has been ‘genre analysis’, which initially was inspired by the studies of functional variation in language use as ‘register’ (Halliday *et al.*, 1964). The early analyses of genres focused on statistically significant features of lexico-grammar, used in a particular subset of texts, namely texts associated with a particular genre in a specific discipline. Barber’s (1962) study was probably one of the earliest ones to identify significant lexico-grammatical features in a corpus of scientific texts. Similarly, Gustafsson (1975) focused on only one syntactic feature of legal discourse: binomials and multinomials. The trend continued with Bhatia and Swales (1983), who identified nominalizations in legislative discourse as their object of study. In all these preliminary attempts we notice two things: an effort to focus on the textualization of specific written professional genres; and an interest in the description of functional variation in discourse by focusing on statistically significant features of lexico-grammar. Both these concerns served well the cause of applied linguistics for language teaching, especially the teaching and learning of English for specific purposes (ESP). Gradually the emphasis shifted to the process of ‘textualization’, by focusing on the rhetorical values of specific features of lexico-grammar in the construction and interpretation of professional genres, though often within clause boundaries without much reference to the organizational properties of the genre in question (Selinker *et al.*, 1973; Swales, 1974; Oster, 1981; Dubois, 1982; Trimble, 1985). Bhatia (1992) extended the study of textualization of lexico-grammatical features to other genres

by comparing their use across different genres. While investigating the use of nominals in professional genres such as advertisements, scientific research reports, and legislative provisions, he discovered that, although nominals were used overwhelmingly in all these genres, they were markedly different not only in their syntactic form, but also in their rhetorical function. In advertising, nominals typically take the form *(Modifier) Head (Qualifier)*, where modifiers are realized primarily through a series of linearly arranged attributes as *(Determiner) (Adjective) (Adjective) (Adjective) ... Head (Qualifier)* – as exemplified in ‘the world’s smallest and lightest digital camcorder that’s also a digital still camera’. Since one of the main concerns in advertising is to offer a positive evaluation of products or services being promoted, and since nominals, in particular noun phrases, are seen as carriers of adjectives, we are likely to find an above-average incidence of nominals in such genres.

On the other hand, nominals in academic research genres, especially in the sciences, are used to create and develop technical concepts. These nominals take the form of nominal compounds of the kind, *(Modifier) (Noun) (Noun) (Noun) ... Head (Qualifier)*, where modifiers are typically realized in terms of a series of linearly arranged nouns functioning as classifiers and occasionally incorporating an adjective. A typical example of this phenomenon is (Bhatia, 1993: 149): ‘nozzle gas ejection space ship attitude control’. In the case of legislative discourse, nominals are typically realized in the form of nominalizations, as these syntactic forms allow draftsmen to condense clauses for subsequent references in the same sentence, adding precision and unambiguity to legislative provisions (Bhatia, 1982, 1993), as illustrated in the following:

No obliteration, interlineation or other alteration made in any will after the execution thereof shall be valid or have effect except so far as the words or effect of the will before such alteration shall not be apparent, unless such alteration shall be executed in like manner as hereinbefore is required for the execution of the will...

(Section 16: *The Wills Act, 1970, Republic of Singapore*)

The next stage of development in the analysis of professional genres came as a result of several studies, particularly those of Widdowson (1973), Beaugrande and Dressler (1981), Brown and Yule (1983), Hoey (1983), and van Dijk (1985), who focused on developing a relationship between the choice of lexico-grammar and specific forms of discourse structures and paid special attention to regularities of organization in written genres, which triggered a serious interest in the analysis of complete genres rather than sections of discourses. In professional genres, these structures were seen in terms of socio-cognitive patterns called ‘moves’, as in Swales (1981, 1990) and Bhatia (1993).

This continual quest for more detailed descriptions of professional genres, primarily focusing on written forms, though equally relevant to spoken genres (see Handford, 2010, for instance), set the agenda for the next decade, without paying serious attention to the context in detail – either to the immediate context in the form of what surrounds a particular text or to context in the much broader sense of what makes a particular text possible and why most of the professionals from the same profession construct, interpret, and use language more or less the same way in specific professional contexts. The focus was centrally on the organization of genre in the form of move structures, which were seen as cognitive structures that professionals often use to make sense of the genres they habitually used. The seminal work by Swales (1990) was probably the most significant contribution to the development of genre theory in this direction; it was followed by Bhatia (1993), who extended the study of move structures in two ways: first, by applying it more generally to a number of other professional genres, most significantly from legal and business domains; and secondly by extending the role of context to bring in a number of other factors, particularly socio-cognitive, motivating discussion about issues related to the rationale for genres.

Genre analysis was, and still is, viewed as the study of situated linguistic behaviour in institutionalized academic or professional settings, whether defined in terms of *typification of rhetorical action*, as in Miller (1984), Bazerman (1994), and Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995); in terms of *regularities of staged, goal oriented social processes*, as in Martin *et al.* (1987), and Martin (1993); or in terms of *consistency of communicative purposes*, as in Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993). Genre theory, in spite of these seemingly different orientations, covers a lot of common ground, some of which may be summarized on the basis of the analysis of these studies.

1. Genres have been viewed as recognizable communicative events, characterized by a set of communicative purpose(s) identified and mutually understood by members of the professional or academic community in which they regularly occur.
2. Genres are highly structured and conventionalized constructs, with constraints on allowable contributions in terms of the intentions one would like to give expression to, the shape they often take, and also in terms of the lexico-grammatical resources one can employ to give discursual values to such formal features.
3. Established members of a particular professional community seem to have a much greater knowledge and understanding of the use and exploitation of genres than those who are apprentices, new members, or outsiders.
4. Although genres are viewed as conventionalized constructs, expert members of the disciplinary and professional communities often exploit generic resources to express their private organizational intentions within the constructs of professionally shared communicative purposes.
5. Genres are reflections of disciplinary and organizational cultures, and in that sense they focus on professional actions embedded within disciplinary, professional, and other institutional practices.
6. All disciplinary and professional genres have integrity of their own, which is often identified by reference to a combination of textual, discursive, and contextual factors.

As we can see, the most important feature of this view of language use is the emphasis on conventions that all the three manifestations of genre theory consider to be central to any form of generic description. To summarize, genre thus essentially refers to language use in a conventionalized communicative setting in order to give expression to the 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 discursual resources. Some of these constraints can also be attributed to variations in disciplinary practices.

The second important aspect of genre theory for the analysis of professional genres is that, although genres are typically associated with recurring rhetorical contexts and are identified on the basis of a shared set of communicative purposes, they are not static. As Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995: 6) point out,

genres are inherently dynamic rhetorical structures that can be manipulated according to conditions of use, and that genre knowledge is therefore best conceptualized as a form of situated cognition embedded in disciplinary cultures.

Emphasis on conventions and propensity for innovation are therefore two important features of professional genres, and they seem to be contradictory in character. On the one hand, we view genre as a rhetorically situated and highly institutionalized textual activity, having its own generic integrity; on the other hand, we assign genre a natural propensity for innovation and change, which is often exploited by the expert members of the specialist community to create new forms in order to respond to novel rhetorical contexts or to convey private intentions within the context

of socially recognized communicative purposes (Bhatia, 1993). How do we account for this seeming contradiction?

Although genres are associated with typical socio-rhetorical situations and in turn shape future responses to similar situations, they have always been ‘sites of contention between stability and change’ (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995: 6). We also know that situations, and more importantly rhetorical contexts, may not always recur exactly in the same way, though they may still be somewhat similar in certain aspects. It may be that a person is required to respond to a somewhat changing socio-cognitive need, which encourages him/her to negotiate his/her response in the light of recognizable or established conventions. It may also be that he or she may decide to communicate additional private intentions within the structure of a different genre (Bhatia, 1993). Established members of professional communities often need to manipulate institutionalized generic forms. Their experience and long association with the professional community give them tactical freedom to exploit generic resources to negotiate individual responses to recurring and novel rhetorical situations. However, such liberties, innovations, creativities, exploitations are invariably realized within rather than outside the genre conventions, whichever way one may draw them – in terms of recurrence of rhetorical situations (Miller, 1984) or in terms of consistency of communicative purposes (Swales, 1990). The nature of genre manipulation thus is invariably subtle, and the manipulation is realized within the broad limits of specific genres. Any serious disregard for these generic conventions leads to opting out of the genre and is noticed by the specialist community as odd. Genre theory as conceptualized in Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993) thus became a favourite tool for the analysis of professional and academic discourses, as it had potential to go beyond textual analysis to explore specific institutional and disciplinary practices, procedures, and cultures in order to understand how members of specific discourse communities construct, interpret, and use these genres to achieve their community goals and why they write them the way they do. Referring to the works of Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993) on the analysis of professional genres, Widdowson (1998: 7) points out:

(Genre analysis) seeks to identify the particular conventions for language use in certain domains of professional and occupational activity. It is a development from, and an improvement on, register analysis because it deals with discourse and not just text: that is to say, it seeks not simply to reveal what linguistic forms are manifested but how they realize, make real, the conceptual and rhetorical structures, modes of thought and action, which are established as conventional for certain discourse communities.

*(Widdowson, 1998: 7)*

To illustrate this kind of analysis, let me take the following letter, from a corporation chairperson, written to the shareholders, often as part of the annual report for the corporation.

Dear fellow shareholders,

I am pleased to present our interim results for the six months ended (date) on behalf of my fellow directors.

It is now two years since the merger of (Name of the Company 1) and (Name of the Company 2), and it is appropriate to address the progress we have made and the challenges ahead. Since the merger, we have concentrated on and successfully pursued three objectives.

First, we have responded to the poor economic environment and intense competition in our industry by driving operating efficiencies within our Company. Secondly, we have increased our financial flexibility, successfully reduced debt to a prudent level; extended the maturity of

our remaining debt and reduced significantly our overall funding costs. Thirdly, we have brought together a world-class management team with broad industry experience and strong leadership qualities. Increased operating efficiencies and reduced funding costs are, in turn, driving strong and accelerating free cash flows to give the Company unprecedented flexibility going forward. Without diminishing our commitment to the objectives set during our first two years and, in particular, our commitment to find greater productivity gains and to reduce debt further, our management team is now concentrated on forming strategies to deliver sustained growth over the coming years.

Since the merger, (Name of the Company 1) has been positioned to prosper in extraordinarily difficult economic and operating conditions.

Accordingly, when our economy and operating environment turns round, (name of the Company 1) will be able to exploit opportunities to the benefit of our shareholders, customers and employees.

(Name) *Chairman*... Date....

A text like this can be analysed in terms of its statistically significant features of lexis and grammar. Two of the important aspects that become immediately obvious for lexico-grammatical attention are the pattern of verb tense and the pattern of nominals. The text contains a very high incidence of present perfect tense, such as *have concentrated*, *have responded to*, *have increased*, *have brought together*, *have concentrated*, *(have) reduced debt*. In addition, verb forms projecting future expectations are also very common. Typical examples include, *has been positioned to prosper*, *will be able to exploit opportunities*. Texts like this one also contain a very high incidence of various kinds of nominals, such as *the progress*, *the challenges*, *economic environment*, *intense competition* – including business terminology such as *operating efficiencies*, *financial flexibility*, *the maturity of our remaining debt*, *overall funding costs*, *free cash flows*, *productivity gains*, etc. Nominals associated with positive attributes leading to higher expectations of future business performance of the company are also favoured. Some examples may include: *a world-class management team*, *broad industry experience*, *strong leadership qualities*, *increased operating efficiencies*, *reduced funding costs*, *strong and accelerating free cash flows*, *unprecedented flexibility*, *commitment to the objectives*, and *commitment to find greater productivity gains* – to mention a few.

An above-average incidence of these features of lexico-grammar interestingly cooperates here to indicate that the text is embedded in a specific business context and that it strongly projects a positive and forward-looking image of the achievements of the specific organization in question. Depending on the typicality of use of such features of language, one may conclude that these features tend to help corporate writers in promoting the image of their respective companies. One may like to go further and explore the relationship between some of these features and the discourse action that is intended through this text; and, in order to investigate this, one may need to go beyond the typical use of these individual linguistic resources to see the whole text as a unit of discourse, its organization, and purpose. On the basis of the study of corporate discourses of 15 different Hong Kong stock-exchange listed companies, and especially of the annual reports over a specific period of five years, Bhatia (2004, 2008, 2010) assigned a 7-Move structure to the chairman's letter to the shareholders (see Table 17.1).

However, this is a minimal move-structure, based on the analysis of one example only. It is necessary to make it more generally valid by looking at a reasonably large representative corpus of several examples, which can give us a more generalized move-structure for the type of texts we are considering here. A more general move-structure looks like the following table (see Table 17.2).

Table 17.1 Analysis of a corporate chairman's letter to the shareholders

Dear fellow shareholders, I am pleased to present our interim results for the six months ended (date) on behalf of my fellow directors.	OPENING (Overview of the review period)
It is now two years since the merger of (Name of the Company 1) and (Name of the Company 2), and it is appropriate to address the progress we have made and the challenges ahead. Since the merger, we have concentrated on and successfully pursued three objectives.	ACHIEVEMENTS & MEASURES TAKEN TO ENSURE FUTURE GROWTH
First, we have responded to the poor economic environment and intense competition in our industry by driving operating efficiencies within our Company. Secondly, we have increased our financial flexibility, successfully reduced debt to a prudent level; extended the maturity of our remaining debt and reduced significantly our overall funding costs. Thirdly, we have brought together a world-class management team with broad industry experience and strong leadership qualities. Increased operating efficiencies and reduced funding costs are, in turn, driving strong and accelerating free cash flows to give the Company unprecedented flexibility going forward.	EVIDENCE (Claims to create value and foundation for growth)
Without diminishing our commitment to the objectives set during our first two years and, in particular, our commitment to find greater productivity gains and to reduce debt further, our management team is now concentrated on forming strategies to deliver sustained growth over the coming years.	EXPECTATIONS & PROMISES (Measures and actions taken in the preceding year)
Since the merger, (Name of the Company 1) has been positioned to prosper in extraordinarily difficult economic and operating conditions. Accordingly, when our economy and operating environment turns round, (name of the Company 1) will be able to exploit opportunities to the benefit of our shareholders, customers and employees. (Name) <i>Chairman</i> ... Date....etc	CLOSING: LOOKING FORWARD (Positive and promising)

### Multiperspective and multidimensional analysis of professional genres

Looking at the organization and layout of a particular genre text, one may notice that the text is a letter from the chairman of the company to its shareholders. It contains a number of conventional indicators that go with such a genre. As an example of a letter, it has all the typical signals such as the opening address, the closing, and of course the body of the letter. Moving more towards treating this as a genre, one may claim that the communicative purpose of this letter is to inform the readers, who are the stakeholders in the company, about the performance of the company in the past year. The rationale for writing this letter the way it has been written, in such a positive tone, is that businesses often downplay any indications of negative performance and instead highlight positive aspects for future growth. Letters like these are often accompanied by annual reports, which are supposed to contain more realistic and objective performance indicators, such as the facts and figures of growth and achievement, indicating profit or loss, past weaknesses and future

Table 17.2 Move-structure in a typical corporate chairman's letter to the shareholders

<i>TIME</i>	<i>MOVE STRUCTURE</i>	<i>LEXICO-GRAMMAR</i>
P	Move 1: OVERVIEW OF THE REVIEW PERIOD Often positive, occasionally cautious or negative mode	Last year was .... Year of value creation ... Year of considerable progress ...
A	Move 2: MAJOR THEMES	
S	Move 3: ACHIEVEMENTS-MEASURES (ELABORATION & EXPLANATION OF THEMES)	Weak economic environment ... Dampening market demands ... Challenging environment ...
T	Major achievements, evidence and detailing	Has enhanced our reputation ... Rapidly growing market ...
↓	Major contributing factors (Often inside the company for success or outside factors for failures)	Strengthening our financial fundamentals ... We expanded our coverage ...
F	Major steps or measure taken to ensure success	Reshaped the cost base ... Changes in our operating environment ...
U	Move 4: EXPECTATIONS AND PROMISES Detailed accounts of future actions Measure to be taken	We expect further improvement Potential to expand our various businesses ...
T	Intended & expected outcomes	Prospects for 2004 are encouraging .... Alliance with China will strengthen our ability ...
U	Move 5: LOOKING FORWARD Positive outlook	
R	Continued challenges (sometimes) Grim outlook (rare)	Thanks to the quality and talent of our staff and management team...
E	Move 6: EXPRESSIONS OF GRATITUDE (Optional) Appreciation to management team	I wish to thank .... team...
↓	Move 7: POSITIVE AND CONFIDENT CLOSING Revisiting themes from Move 1 Summarizing forward looking positive statements	As Chairman, I am diligently working... with the aim of making a significant and positive impact on shareholder value.

strengths of the company in question. In order to get at the real picture, the stakeholders often need to go beyond the rhetoric and interpret the results carefully. All these factors, when analysed closely in the context of the rationale for the genre, of the lexico-grammatical features of the text, and also of the nature of participant relationship, are likely to disclose a number of other interesting interpretations of the genre. In order to be able to have such information, one may need to go beyond the text, look more seriously at what Bhatia (2004) calls the 'contextualization of discourse', and adopt a multiperspective and multidimensional approach to genre analysis (Bhatia, 2004) through an integration of a number of different methodologies (Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson, 1999), such as textography (Swales, 1998), interpretive ethnography (Smart, 1998), corpus analysis (Biber, 1995; Nelson, 2006; Fuertes-Olivera, 2007), participant perspectives on specialist discourses (Rogers, 2000), cross-cultural and intercultural perspectives (Scollon and Scollon, 1995; Gimenez, 2001; Vergaro, 2004; Plancken, 2005), multimodal analysis (Brett, 2000), and observation analysis (Louhiala-Salminen, 2002) – to name only a few. The implication thus is that text-based analyses within register or genre analysis were found to be increasingly inadequate at explaining and accounting for the typical use of language in various



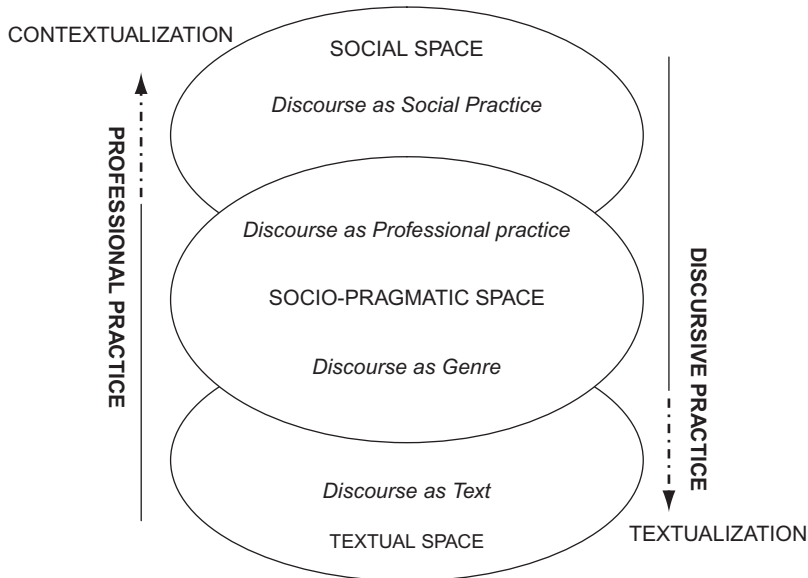


Figure 17.1 Multiperspective genre analytical framework  
Source: adapted from Bhatia, 2004

professional contexts. There is an urgent need to study the context in all its multiple forms. This requires studies of how participants undertake these discursive tasks and what they achieve through these discursive activities, which I hope will make it possible for us to see ‘as much of the elephant as possible’, as the saying goes.

Bhatia (2004) proposed a multiperspective four-space model of genre analysis through the following figure (see Figure 17.1).

In this model, Bhatia uses ‘discourse as text’ to refer to the analysis of language use that is confined to the surface level properties of discourse, which include formal as well as functional aspects of discourse – that is, phonological, lexico-grammatical, semantic, organizational (including cohesion), and other aspects of text structure such as move structure and intertextuality (Devitt, 1991), not necessarily considering *context* in a broad sense but merely taking into account what is known as co-text. Although, as indicated earlier, discourse is essentially embedded in context, *discourse as text* often excludes any significant engagement with context, except in a narrow sense of intertextuality, to include interactions with surrounding texts. A typical example from research articles will include the use of quotes or citations from published sources to support one’s claims or to dispute them by including references to such published sources. *Discourse as text* thus operates essentially within a *textual space* where the knowledge about language structure and its function, which may include the knowledge of intertextuality, is exploited in order to make sense of the text. The emphasis at this level of analysis is essentially on the properties associated with the construction of the textual product, rather than on the interpretation or use of such a product. It largely ignores the contribution often made by the reader on the basis of what he or she brings to the interpretation of the textual output, especially in terms of the knowledge of the world, including the professional, socio-cultural, and institutional knowledge as well as experience that one is likely to use to interpret, use, and exploit such a discourse.

*Discourse as genre*, in contrast, extends the analysis beyond the textual product to incorporate context in a broader sense to account not only for the way text is constructed, but also for the way

it is often interpreted, used, and exploited in specific institutional, or more narrowly professional contexts to achieve specific disciplinary goals. The nature of questions addressed in this kind of analysis may often be not only linguistic, but also socio-cognitive and ethnographic. This kind of grounded analysis of the textual output is very typical of any framework within genre-based theory. Genre knowledge that makes sense of the text at this level includes, in addition to textual knowledge, the awareness and understanding of the shared practices of professional and discourse communities (Swales, 1990), their choice of genres in order to perform their everyday tasks. Genres often operate in what might be viewed as a *socio-pragmatic* (which includes tactical as well as professional) *space*, which allows established members of discourse communities to exploit generic resources to respond to recurring and often novel situational contexts. Closely related to this, one may find the concept of *discourse as professional practice*, which essentially extends the notion of genre use to relate it to professional practice. In order to operate effectively at this stage, one may require professional knowledge and experience of professional practice, in addition to genre knowledge. It operates with what could be regarded as *professional space*.

*Discourse as social practice* takes this interaction with the *context* much further in the direction of broader social context, where the focus shifts significantly from the textual output to the features of the context – such as the changing identities of the participants, the social structures or professional relationships the genres are likely to maintain or change, the advantages or disadvantages such genres are likely to bring to a particular set of readers. *Discourse as social practice* thus functions within a much broader *social space*, where one may essentially need social and pragmatic knowledge in order to operate effectively (Gee, 1999).

It is important to note that the three interacting views of discourse are not mutually exclusive, but essentially complementary to each other. It is possible to use the proposed framework in a number of ways, depending upon the objective one may decide to pursue. A typical sociolinguist interested in discourse analysis will perhaps begin from the top end, looking deeply and exhaustively into the social context, working her way downward, but not often getting seriously engaged in the textual space. An applied linguist, on the other hand, would find it more profitable to begin at the bottom end, exploring the textual space exhaustively, working toward social space, often using social context as explanation for the analysis of textualization of lexico-grammatical and discursive resources. However, most users of the framework, whether interested in socio-cultural issues or in pedagogical ones, at some stage or the other will necessarily pay some attention to the socio-pragmatic space in order to consider strategic and tactical aspects of genre construction, interpretation, use, or exploitation of generic resources. Although the framework specifically refers to written genres, it can equally well be used to analyse spoken genres. Handford (2010) provides an excellent illustration of some of this when he applies it to business meetings.

One can also see the prominence of the socio-pragmatic space, which, again, incorporates two rather overlapping conceptualizations of tactical space and professional space in the proposed framework. These concepts seem to have a large degree of overlap because both of them work within the same socio-cognitive space, and also because genres are an integral part of professional practice, and hence both are closely related to each other in the context of professional cultures. More specifically, to look at professional written genres, we could say that all professional genres operate at least at four different yet overlapping levels and hence can be used as resources to explore all these levels, which can be represented as follows (see Figure 17.2).

In order to look beyond the textual genre within the multiperspective framework, the first thing we need to do is to look at the surrounding texts that seem to be part of the same genre, called ‘annual corporate report’. Let us look at one such text, which is popularly known as disclaimer. The following is a typical example (see Figure 17.3).

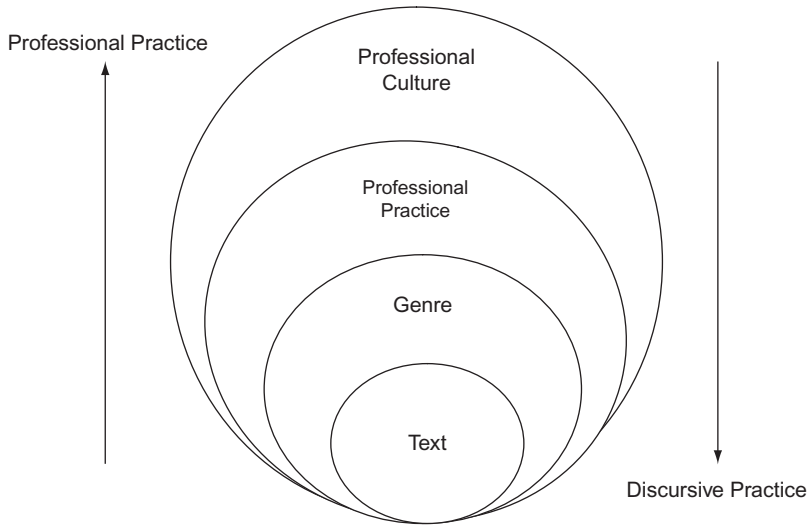


Figure 17.2 Perspectives on professional genres

THE NAME OF THE COMPANY

Disclaimer

FORWARD LOOKING STATEMENTS

This annual report contains forward-looking statements ... These forward-looking statements are not historical facts. Rather, the forward-looking statements are based on the current beliefs, assumptions, expectations, estimates and projections of the directors and management of (The name of the Company) ('the Company') about its business and the industry and markets in which it operates.

These forward-looking statements include, without limitation, statements relating to revenues and earnings. The words 'believe', 'intend', 'expect', 'anticipate', 'project', 'estimate', 'predict' and similar expressions are also intended to identify forward-looking statements. These statements are not guarantees of future performance and are subject to risks, uncertainties and other factors, some of which are beyond the Company's control and are difficult to predict. Consequently, actual results could differ materially from those expressed or forecast in the forward-looking statements.

Reliance should not be placed on these forward-looking statements, which reflect the view of the Company's directors and management as of the date of this report only. The Company undertakes no obligation to publicly revise these forward-looking statements to reflect events or circumstances that arise after publication...

Figure 17.3 A typical disclaimer in a corporate annual report

The disclaimer forms an interesting part of this genre. In the absence of such a disclaimer, one is likely to reach a misleading interpretation of the letter. If the letter is a claimer, in that it was designed to claim a positive and reassuring picture, the disclaimer makes it complete, in that it is meant to remedy any misleading impression it might have given to the shareholders about the future performance of the company. Ideally, the disclaimer, as the name itself suggests, seems to disclaim all that has been claimed in the letter. In addition to this second text, the annual report also contains two more kinds of discourse: 'the accounting discourse', which contains primarily numerical information – such as number and figures, charts and diagrams highlighting the performance of the company and signed by a certified public accounting firm, which gives an

unmistakable impression to the reader that all the financial information given there is reliable and accurate, and the ‘discourse of finance’ in the financial review section of the report, which is generally written by the company’s financial managers supposedly interpreting the accounting information in more reader accessible discourse. Once again, the assumption is that all the descriptions, explanations, and so on in the financial review section are accurately based on the accounting numbers, and hence are as reliable as the certified public accountants. If the reader believes this to be true, he or she may take the third step and think that, since the chairman’s letter is part of the same reporting genre, whatever has been claimed in the letter is equally reliable and trustworthy, little realizing that the chairman’s letter is a typical public relations job, often the work of the public relations department, and their main concern is not to give an accurate and honest interpretation of the figures, but to make an effort to stop any drastic share price movement at the time of weak performance by the company. This may seem a revelation to discourse analysts and to a number of uninitiated readers of annual reports, but it is seen as an established strategy in corporate culture.

It is also possible, and indeed often desirable, to explore other issues connected with contextualization, which will require a deeper understanding of context in addition to textualization and textual organization, and also a deeper understanding of the immediate context, including other relevant texts. One such aspect of contextualization could be the asymmetry in the role relationship between the participants, accompanied by the power distance between the company chairman and the shareholders, on the one hand, and social proximity between the chairman and the fellow directors, on the other. One may also notice the indications of one-way unequal interaction, with the writer providing general information to recipients who may not share the same awareness about the company’s past performance. The social or professional context in which this text or genre plays an important role, the social action that this particular example of text represents, and the institutional, social, or professional culture it invokes when it is constructed and interpreted are some of the important issues that need to be investigated. It is not simply that a professional genre is constructed and used for a specific professional purpose; it may be that a specific genre is deliberately and consciously bent to achieve something more than just a socially accepted and shared professional objective, as we have discovered in the chairman’s letter to shareholders. One may need to investigate how and to what extent this seemingly harmless genre can be used to disinform, if not deliberately misinform, minority shareholders and other stakeholders of the company about the real performance of the company. One may need to develop a much broader understanding not only of the context but also of corporate culture to answer some of these questions. Many of these questions can be explored through discourse and genre analysis, provided that we extend conventional genre analytical framework to a more multiperspective and multidimensional genre analytical framework, which explores a more socio-pragmatic space than just the textual space.

### **Towards critical analysis of professional genres**

The foregoing account of analysis of professional genres, as illustrated through the analysis and discussion of the chairman’s letter to shareholders as part of the annual corporate report, illustrates a quest for increasingly ‘thicker’ descriptions (Geertz, 1973) through detailed and insightful analyses of professional genres. In another way, it is also an effort to explore professional practices, rather than an end in itself. The most interesting part of the analysis is not the use of lexico-grammar, of intertextuality, or even of the move-structure, though it is very important to analyse the genre itself; it is that such analysis can and should be used as a tool to study and understand professional practice, and even professional culture. Only then we will be able to answer some of the questions often raised in the context of professional genres, some of the prominent ones of which may be:

- Why do the members of specific professional communities use language the way they do?
- How do these professionals manipulate professional genres to achieve their corporate objectives?
- How do these professionals ‘bend generic norms’ to achieve their ‘private intentions’ in addition to, and within, the framework of shared generic conventions?

It is therefore necessary to extend the analysis of professional genres beyond the textual space, and to explore more seriously the socio-pragmatic (tactical as well as professional) space within which all professional genres seem to operate. When we start doing this seriously, only then can we claim that we are on our way to look at professional written genres more critically, because only then our focus will extend beyond the genres to professional practice and professional culture, which should be the aim of all good analysis.

### Further reading

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### Note

- 1 Some sections of this chapter draw on the first chapter of an earlier work of mine, published in *Worlds of Written Discourse – A Genre-Based View* by Continuum International.

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