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REVIEW: Carmen Pérez-Llantada (2021). *Research Genres Across Languages*. Cambridge University Press.

AUTHOR: Carmen Pérez-Llantada
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REVIEWER: Dominique Dias, Université Grenoble Alpes

SUMMARY

This monograph is one of the results of a project funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness and the European Social Fund aiming to describe and analyze genres that academics use in their professional practices. In this book, Carmen Pérez-Llantada discusses the impact of Web 2.0 on research genres and focuses on the STEMM sciences (science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine). She investigates the interdependence of traditional and emerging genres, considering also the fact that science communication occurs often in a multilingual context. The book is made up of seven chapters each one with a different perspective from a theoretical one to others with some pedagogical considerations.

Chapter 1, “Research Genres in Context” is a long introduction that positions research genres in changing technological and social contexts. In the opening remarks, the author explains that her aim is to show the interdependence of traditional and emerging research genres. By genre, she does not simply mean a categorization of text types, but a social way of recognizing and responding to recurrent situations. Her methodology for conducting genre research is based on Swale’s genre analysis and focuses on two specific issues. The first one is the impact of internet-mediated communication on the dynamics of knowledge production and distribution. In order to describe this phenomenon, Pérez-Llantada refers to the concept of “context collapse” (Marwick and boyd 2011) that describes the fact that digital media makes different audiences and contexts collapse into one. The polycontextuality of digital media has necessarily an impact on the techniques used to communicate online. To explain the role of a genre and the emergence of new ones, the author refers to the theory of structuration proposed by Anthony Giddens (1986) according to which social interaction practices lie at the intersection of structures and agents. An example to illustrate this relation between structures and agents is the case of genres related to science education. Scientific contents distributed via digital media such as academic social networking sites (e.g. ResearchGate or Academia.edu) or microblogging sites (e.g. Twitter) tend to inform and trigger debates about science with broader audiences. This can contribute to shaping research genres in accordance with new social demands such as making science more trust-worthy to non-expert audiences. In addition to the affordances of Web 2.0, Pérez-Llantada raises the issue of multilingual science production and dissemination, which she considers has been so far under-researched.

After this introducing chapter, Chapter 2 entitled “Theories and metaphors” begins with a review of genre research in the past decade that relies on Swale’s conception of genre. It has

already been pointed out that research genres have been evolving as a result of new dynamics emerging in the social organization of the scientific community. In this respect, a relevant concept is that of generic hybrids. This concept refers to the fact that new genres take often the form of already existing genres that are adapted to a new environment, especially when it comes to digital genres. That is the reason why Pérez-Llantada uses the metaphor of genres as biological species, borrowed by Swale from Fishelov (1993): genres form an ecosystem, i.e. an interdependent system of genres that evolve because they are continually being shaped and negotiated by their users. This ecosystem is all the more complex because it is multilingual. Especially on the web, boundaries between languages have become fuzzier since it is easier to engage with multilingual audiences. To describe these multilingual genre ecologies, Pérez-Llantada coins the concepts of “language collisions” (the academic ecosystem is a site of competing genres with English as shared lingua franca) and “language collusion” (local communities can contribute in their own language to global knowledge). Digital genres such as blogs are a relevant example for multilingual science communication.

Chapter 3 (“Science, Genres and Social Action”) examines the role of genre research in light of broader social theories like Giddens’s structuration theory or Russel’s activity theory in order to show how genres are part of social systems. Pérez-Llantada explains for instance that according to Russel’s activity theory (1995), genres are mediational tools. Activity theory describes human behavior in terms of activity systems. Those systems are conceptualized as goal-directed, historically-situated and cooperative interactions. Research genres are in activity systems tools to reach a specific goal, but these tools are continually transformed by their use. In other words, genre analysts cannot focus only on the tool, but they have to consider – among others – political, economic, social agendas on the one hand, and the participants on the other hand to understand how communicative repertoires are shaped and how they evolve. In Giddens’s theory, this corresponds for instance to the concepts of structure and agents, as already described in the first chapter. Whatever the social theory in which her definition of genre fits, Pérez-Llantada considers the Web 2.0 as a decisive driver of innovation and change that tends to reconfigure the relation between agent, structure and tool.

Chapter 4, entitled “Language Diversity in Genred Activity”, focuses on multilingualism in academic and research settings. The author refers to the term “languaging” to denote the language diversity in people’s discursive practices and she uses the term “polylanguaging” to describe the use of several languages from the individual’s linguistic repertoires. It appears that the nature and the diversity of the polylanguaging depends on the context and on situational factors. The choice of a language can correspond to a function: in the STEM disciplines, English is often used when addressing experts and the local language when addressing the non-expert audience. The use of two languages simultaneously is also possible, for instance to distinguish between scientific and interpersonal interactions. Pérez-Llantada notes besides that the use of English is already a case of polylanguaging. World Englishes coexist with several academic Englishes, all of which are equally legitimate and should not be considered as defective forms. The author argues that polylanguaging needs to be theorized in a more explicit manner in genre research because it is associated with parascientific genres on the web, targeting non-specialist audiences and making science more trustable for society.

Chapter 5 (“Genres and Multiliteracies”) highlights didactic considerations about the skills needed to compose traditional and emerging digital genres in one or more languages. The activity of creating academic texts requires specific skills and involves strategic choices. The

author borrows from the didactics of Languages for Academic Purposes the notions of critical moments of interaction and critical sites of engagement to describe how novice researchers acquire new skills. In genre research, it is generally assumed that genre knowledge is acquired by perceptions of responses to recurring situational demands. The role played by the Internet and the new technological affordances in the evolution of genres has necessarily an impact on literacy development processes. For instance, some traditional skills are transferred to emerging genres, which is conceptualized as strategies of interdiscursivity. Genre knowledge also contains specific aspects of cultural context that need to be taken into account by researchers when targeting different languages and cultures. In other words, genre knowledge has a cognitive, but also a sociocultural dimension, which is particularly obvious in the case of an import of genres to another culture. All the aforementioned aspects suppose a multiliteracy in genre practices in order to compose a wide repertoire of research genres.

Chapter 6, entitled “Innovation and Change in Genre-Based Pedagogies”, outlines teaching proposals involving genre-based approaches to Languages for Academic Purposes. The author identifies three main challenges in learning and mastering digital genres: ensuring clarity in the message conveyed, overcoming knowledge asymmetries of audiences with different knowledge backgrounds or perceptions, and building trust and credibility with lay audiences. Building on the well-known cycle of rhetorical consciousness-raising, Pérez-Llantada proposes a pedagogical approach consisting of four interrelated modules. These modules contain strategies of metacognition and aim at raising awareness of genre change in the processes of genre remediation. Her method also shows how and why genres in digital environments create interrelationships among them. Generally speaking, this chapter sheds light on how results from corpus research and exploratory qualitative research can help conceive teaching material.

In the last chapter, “The Way Ahead”, the author draws several conclusions reminding the reader how unprecedented technological advances have given rise to digital genres and have deeply modified science communication. She admits that one of the limits to this research area is that emerging genres are not fully stabilized within the STEMM scientific community and are therefore hard to examine. Digital genres have in any case built new information access paths. As possibilities for future research, Pérez-Llantada proposes to examine further multimodal genres, because they offer the scientific community complex ways of composing multilayered texts. Interdiscursivity is also a research area that should be further explored according to the author. The affordances of Web 2.0 provide dynamic forms of dialogic encounters such as informal discussion among peers. All these considerations show that several research gaps remain, which need a robust analytical framework that this book proposes to outline.

EVALUATION

By introducing a participative dimension that leads users to produce content and interact with each other on different platforms, Web 2.0 has indeed significantly changed the way knowledge is produced and disseminated. The main contribution of this book is to think about these changes in the lens of research genres. Genres are not simply considered here as a list of defining parameters to describe written productions, but they are theorized by Pérez-Llantada in their social and professional dimensions. The book thus provides an understanding of what

genres are used by academics in their everyday professional practices and how their evolution impacts the scientific community. The metaphor of genre as an ecosystem as described in Chapter 2 is very enlightening in this respect.

The book is an excellent introduction to genre issues. It is based on a substantial bibliography and on a rigorous methodology. In addition to this theoretical foundation, the book proposes several possibilities for the practical use of the results, particularly in terms of learning and teaching. Some aspects of the book sometimes make it difficult to read: despite the presence of a list of abbreviations at the beginning of the book, their recurrent use, particularly in Chapters 1 and 2, tends to make reading difficult. Moreover, although the author systematically illustrates her theoretical demonstrations with empirical examples, it is not always easy to grasp their significance. But this is due more to the large size of the corpus and to the nature of the object of study: it is inevitably more difficult to illustrate generic than micro-structural phenomena.

These remarks do not, however, overshadow the interest of the book, which updates research on genre. One of the undeniable merits of the book is the consideration of multilingualism, which is not limited to the use of English as a lingua franca in STEMM disciplines. English and its different variants certainly play an undeniable role in the construction of knowledge, but its dissemination and acquisition must be considered in a multilingual world. This a point that the author demonstrates perfectly and with very relevant examples (notably in Chapter 4).

The structure of the book is coherent insofar as it provides an overview of different issues related to research genres: their nature, their role in science and society, their multilingual dimension, and the question of their learning. Beyond these different considerations, the author proposes several areas of research for future studies, both empirical and theoretical. One can only agree with her: the plurilingual dimension of research genres still deserves to be further explored, especially beyond the STEMM disciplines. The multimodal dimension of research genres is also central to the dissemination of knowledge and certainly requires new skills in both the production and reception of knowledge. This book is intended for students who can gain a rich overview of the issue and for specialists interested in current research genre issues.

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