

Reseñas/Book Reviews

Research Genres. Explorations and Applications

John M. Swales

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There has not been to date a closer description of the multiple forms of academic literacy practices in the English for Research Purposes (ERP) world as the one offered by John M. Swales's *Research Genres. Explorations and Applications*. This excellent volume provides a comprehensive look at the present status of ERP studies and seeks to open discussion on how both teachers and practitioners should initiate junior researchers into the patterns of disciplinary acculturation.

Authors like Vygotsky (1978), Bahktin (1986) and Bourdieu (1999) have put forward the importance of those processes of social interaction underlying real uses of the language. Endorsing their positioning, prolific Swales articulates a sociorhetorical perspective on genre studies in both empirical and applied terms. As the "father" of genre analysis, he offers readers a deeper insight into the multifarious theoretical views that genre theory nurtures, from applied linguistics, discourse analysis, functional systemic theory or sociolinguistics to the more recent corpus linguistics and contrastive rhetoric studies. For the reader, the most persuasive and powerful proposal of the book is that genre analysis represents a solid theoretical framework that interprets academic communication as an ongoing process of co-constructing meanings and understandings through social interaction.

As a pedagogue, Swales systematically declares the need to enable supportive environments to apprentices in the research world so that they become linguistically and socially proficient in the different academic practices. Relying on his empirical *baggage* the author stresses that the acquisition of academic literacies should foreground the discursive realisations of social roles in institutional contexts such as the university. He insists that understanding communication practices and social identities is only acquired through initiation into the communicative activities of the academic community. Significantly, these reflections come along with current perspectives on ELT (Rogoff, 1994; Norton, 1995; Norton & Toohey, 2001) and raise awareness of what it is that English instructors need to take into account to make informed decisions about teaching/learning priorities.

In order to depict the interplay between genres and social action, the volume is grounded in three important pillars. The first one is the insistence on the interrelatedness of the different research genres as well as on the particular behaviour of each genre within a given context of use. The second one is a reconceptualisation of the concept of communicative purpose in genres, a new stance that brings to the fore the dialogic nature of university life interaction. The third main pillar is, of course, Swales' great concern with students' attainment of genre knowledge and, more specifically, with the acquisition of the structural and rhetorical models established in the different academic interactions.

Chapter 1 sets the concept of genre within several contemporary linguistic trends and exhibits a global view of the different genres in the research world panorama. It considers genre types as both communicative products and processes stemming from interaction in educational settings. From the scholarly research article to the informal university talk, Swales looks at structural models of genres, their intertextual links and their scholarly collectivities. Drawing on research analysis and observation, he persuasively describes genres as metaphorical constellations of interrelated text types and stresses the progressive "genrefication" of communicative practices in the academia. In doing so he seeks a mature definition of genre, now regarded not as isolated discourse with a given communicative purpose but as forming "complex networks" (p. 2) that lead from speech to writing to speech again or vice versa.

In chapter 2 the author tackles the controversial role of English language as part of the globalisation phenomenon. In his view, the most noticeable reason for the ascent of English in the current research world results from the commodification of higher education. Readers are offered an accurate portrait of the generic specialisation of practices in academic settings, of genre hierarchies and genre interconnectedness. By intertwining references to official and occluded genres, to major and minor genres, Swales accurately relates the ascent of English language to researchers' struggle for publication and prestige in academic settings.

But surprisingly for the reader, Swales also believes in "glocalisation" (p. 11), a phenomenon which involves all those localised idiosyncrasies of English usage. He contends that small communities of practice establish their own linguistic and rhetorical peculiarities and display a particular enactment of social entities and interactions. By this means, Swales seeks a reconciliation of both the global and the local, claiming that the two phenomena are "useful concepts when tracking the changing roles of research languages" (p. 11). The chapter closes by revealing the author's endeavour to encourage genre-based methodological approaches in ERP, his

strongest proposal being that of providing rich input on linguistic, rhetorical and critical thinking skills to those climbing up the academic ladder.

Chapter 3 is perhaps the most rhetorically forceful from a theoretical standpoint. Borrowing Fishelov's (1997) metaphors of genre, Swales' vigorous prose focuses on the prominence of some genre types, on the distribution and interrelatedness of genres as well as on their localised settings and institutional conventions. On such enactment of genres –he claims– depends its full interpretation of their linguistic framework. Deepening into rich illustration and exemplification Swales concludes that each genre embodies a particular way of thinking and of organising thoughts and that each genre epitomises different rhetorical responses, research practices and social actions on the part of the community.

Notions such as author agency and reader response, or heteroglossia and citation practices in institutional research are masterfully handled in this chapter. Approaching the domains of the sociology of scientific knowledge Swales also observes the intricacies of scientific reasoning as well as the ideology and epistemology underpinning disciplinary practices. These explorations into the research world inescapably unveil Swales' concern for those junior researchers entering the research arena. Genre proficiency, he claims, is only acquired when novices become aware of the relationship between speech and writing, when they become acquainted with the historical processes of disciplinary formations in different fields and when they successfully interpret language usage by analysing real models from corpora. This comprehensive account of the nature of genres in the research world is remarkably illustrated with a mosaic of personal experiences and intertextual references to the author's previous publications and substantiates Swales' subtle analytical intuition and acute observation of genre functioning in the academic world and elsewhere.

Particularly outstanding is Chapter 4, which focuses on an unexplored research genre type that is none the less crucial in the research career, the PhD dissertation. Swales' multilayered analysis of the genre covers its rhetorical architecture, citation practices and argumentation proceedings, and even reports on discipline variation. In addition, he assesses the real communicative purposes and “use-values” (Beebee, 1994) that this genre represents as a final academic contribution to knowledge. As such the chapter represents an invaluable source of information for those junior researchers who are in the process of writing their PhDs.

But leaving aside the fact that this particular genre also instantiates a process of entering a community of scholars and experts, Swales also takes the opportunity to explore the PhD genre type as a product. To do so, the author looks at the contextual

implications of the genre, namely, its linguistic and discourse conventions, its rhetorical effects and reader response. These views into the social status of the genre help readers gain access to the way disciplinary knowledge is communicated and to the way norms within a given disciplinary community are established and complied with by its members.

The chapter closes with the author's expert advice on the use of editorial services, writing consultancies, handbooks and manuals. His stance is eclectic but realistic and he firmly supports specialised training courses, tailor-made for the real needs of the participants. From this pedagogical standpoint Swales calls for the assistance of junior scholars and encourages ERP instructors to help them in their processes of acculturation by raising a rhetorical consciousness of the social roles and the interactional norms of the academic institution.

Deepening into another unexplored genre, Chapter 5 looks at the dissertation defence and its interconnectedness with academic written genres. Using corpus methodology, Swales relies on the four dissertations of the *Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English* (MICASE) as an empirically consistent source for developing his theoretical insights. He minutely comments on the predominant linguistic, rhetorical and interactivity strategies of this highly ritualistic genre and describes other significant features such as the use of metatextual practices or its standard phraseology. Swales' accurate references to these genre features lay bare the discourse dependence on the different social roles and social identities enacted by the experts of the committee vs. the candidates in these particular academic events.

Chapter 6 is exclusively devoted to another genre that in the past decade has received an increased interest by scholars around the world, the research talk. Although academic lecturing has been traditionally considered as the classroom event *par excellence*, Swales broadens readers' views by including research group meetings, colloquia and conference presentations as research talk events entailing intellectual discussion and interaction. Regarding these four genres as contributions to disciplinary knowledge, he foregrounds their interrelatedness and their homogeneity in terms of linguistic, rhetorical and stylistic conventions.

Using a functional-systemic approach, Swales freely shifts from references to prospective metadiscourse, authorial stance or the use of an informal and casual style in colloquia for reasons of collegiality to references to heteroglossia, intertextuality and information packaging conventions in conference presentations. In doing so, he tries to find a consensus with regards to the established roles and identities for the participants in academic speech. On these premises, he masterfully comments on the homogeneity of their phraseology, the redress of floor-maintaining positions and the

well-defined institutional roles of the participants in the four speech events. In all, the chapter becomes an extremely helpful guide on a comprehensive grammar of academic speech.

Such a solid chapter on research talk is followed by a meditated chapter on the most consolidated of all the academic genre types, the research article or RA. In it, Swales observantly looks at the social and institutional architecture of the genre. He interprets the complexity of its social nature as an opportunity for self promotion, as a need for creating a research space and as a contribution to a better understanding of disciplinary knowledge. With this view in mind, Swales provides readers with a detailed account of the rhetoric of the RA, its structural organisation and moves and its specific rhetorical features.

Interspersing references from different fields of academic specialisation, the author discusses the stylistic technicality of research papers and stresses the existence of discipline variation regarding author's epistemic positioning. These observations pave the way to highly-illuminating reflections on the present status of the genre and on the suitability of contrastive rhetorical analyses to elucidate variations across disciplines and languages. The chapter also lays particular emphasis on the functional purposiveness and rhetorical effectiveness of academic prose, as authors like Mauranen (1993), Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) or Hyland (1998), among others, have also evinced in their studies.

The concluding chapter raises three important issues that, as Swales states, set the foundations of the future scenario of genre theory. The first of them has to do with rhetorical studies. As stated above, the author encourages researchers to investigate cross-cultural, cross-linguistic and cross-disciplinary variation regarding structural models of academic writing. In promoting contrastive analyses he elicits a closer understanding of “the full complexity of discursive practise in workplace settings” (p. 4) hence intuitively suggesting a rich diversity of rhetorical practices across languages and disciplines.

The second issue that Swales points out in the final chapter is the need to rely on the advantages offered by corpus linguistics for both research and pedagogical purposes. In supporting corpus-based methodology, Swales welcomes future research on aspects like phraseology patterns, rhetorical strategies and intertextual practices in order to obtain more detailed accounts of what he humbly calls his “preliminary sketch” of comprehensive grammar of research speech and research writing.

The third and last issue that Swales finds pertinent to raise before ending the book revolves around a redefinition of ERP teaching and learning. Echoing Fairclough's (2003)

critical discourse analysis and Johns' (2001) views on the academic literacies, Swales emphasises the need to help novices develop a critical stance of social processes and traits in genres thus laying bare the textual and social dimension of genre typification. These observations bring to the fore the idea that novices' process of acculturation requires not only a high level of English proficiency but also a rhetorical mastery of genres.

To conclude, the book compiles a meticulous reassessment of the notion of genres and their contextual implications. By recontextualising genres and by repurposing communicative purposes, Swales succeeds in linking genre structures, styles, interactants and social roles to the institutional mapping of academic communication. Through subtle and witty intertextual references to *Genre Analysis* (Swales, 1990), through minute exemplification from the Ann Arbor herbarium or the Business School to Swales's psychology informants, from contacts with European and worldwide researchers, from references to the microcosm of Michigan university and the macrocosm of English as a global phenomenon in the research arena, Swales positions himself both prospective and retrospectively regarding genre theory.

By offering a solid discussion on the significance of genre analysis and its potential for didactic implications *Research Genres* stands as the end product of a professional lifetime entirely devoted to exploring genres and to consolidating genre analysis as a leading theory in the scholarly world of English for Research Purposes.

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