



A short cartography of genre studies in Brazil



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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we provide a cartography of Brazilian genre studies, exploring what we call Critical Genre Analysis (CGA) and its interdisciplinary research (e.g., Bonini, 2002; 2010; Meurer, 2002, 2005; Motta-Roth, 1998; 2008a), which draws mainly on John Swales' work (1990; 1998; 2000; 2004) to discuss the concept of genre references. Firstly, we identify the four main schools which have served as theoretical background for the development of genre studies in Brazil: the British tradition of ESP, the American New Rhetoric Studies, the Sydney school, and the Geneva school. We then look at how CGA incorporates interdisciplinary contributions from Swales' Genre Analysis, Sociorhetoric, Systemic Functional Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis. We argue for the need to develop a critical approach to genre, integrating the analysis of lexicogrammar, discourse, sociocultural context, and ideology. We conclude by emphasizing the relevance of CGA for literacy pedagogy, especially in academic contexts.

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1. Introduction

The analysis of genres, as discursive practices involving recurrent social activities in specific contexts, has interested Brazilian scholars since the early 90's. In this paper we provide a short cartography of genre studies in Brazil, exploring what we call Critical Genre Analysis (CGA) and its interdisciplinary research (e.g., Bonini, 2002; 2010; Meurer, 2002, 2005; Motta-Roth, 1998; 2008a), which draws mainly on John Swales' work (1990; 1998; 2000; 2004) to discuss the concept of genre.

First we offer a brief overview of the four main schools that have served as theoretical background for the development of genre studies in Brazil: the so-called British tradition of ESP, heralded mostly by Swales (1981, 1990) and Bhatia (1993); the American New Rhetoric or Sociorhetoric, as proposed by Miller (1984) and Bazerman (1988), among others; the Sydney Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) school, predominantly developed by Hasan (1985/1989) and Martin (1992); and finally the Geneva school, which has drawn chiefly on research by Bronckart (1999) and Schneuwly and Dolz (1999). We then discuss Brazilian research related to these four traditions,³ showing how the concept of genre has served both as a guiding principle in the development of curricular directives for language teaching in Brazil and for official pedagogical proposals.

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³ Paraphrase and citation of publications in Portuguese were translated into English by the authors.

Next, we argue that theoretical arguments from these schools can be articulated in an interdisciplinary and ecological analysis of genre aimed at apprehending the dialectics between social practices and their constitutive texts. We refer to this approach as Critical Genre Analysis (CGA) (Meurer, 2002), a Brazilian interdisciplinary orientation to genre studies which draws on Swales' approach to the analysis of genre in combination with Sociorhetoric, SFL and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

We see genre as language use constitutive of and constituted by social activities, as a relatively stable communicative event, associated with specific purposes in specific sociocultural contexts. We call attention to how CGA takes into account lexicogrammar, discourse and sociocultural context, relating form and function, discourse and ideology, from a critical discourse analytical perspective (Fairclough, 1992, 2003).

Finally we highlight CGA relevance for pedagogical applications, mainly for critical literacy in academic contexts. We wish to foreground the importance of the concept of genre in language use and theorization. In that respect, Swales' (1990; 1998) contribution to the area has been groundbreaking, and his consultancy and participation in Brazilian conferences and research groups has been paramount. His 1990 book *Genre Analysis* has significantly influenced discourse and genre studies internationally. Particularly in Brazil, researchers working with a variety of genres have profited from his articulate elaboration of how people live their lives by participating in communicative events and how we can analyze genres by identifying speech acts and textual stages as realizations of sociocultural contexts.

This short cartography is provisional, but indicative of the genre research landscape in Brazil and of its dialogues with international scholarship. As applied linguists, we do not aim at grand generalizations about Brazilian research on discursive and social practices, but we assume the situatedness and particularity of knowledge production about language in use. Thus we argue for the need to continuously problematize language theories in order to construct interdisciplinary and local theories to account for how language is constitutive of situated social practices.

2. Historical contextualization

In this section, we describe the three international genre traditions originally identified by Hyon (1996), but add a fourth tradition, the Geneva School, which is also prominent within the Brazilian context of language pedagogy. We then attempt to illustrate how these traditions influenced Brazilian scholars and to identify certain areas in which they overlap.

2.1. A brief inventory of international genre schools

Although the study of genre has been undertaken since Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, the concept regained popularity beginning in the late 90's and early 2000's. Since then, multiple perspectives on genre have been consolidated, with frequent reference to Bakhtin's work, emphasizing discourse contextualization and the external aspects of genre in social institutions such as commerce, government, and education (Bhatia, 2004).

Three theoretical frameworks (Bhatia, 2004; Hyon, 1996) have significantly influenced Brazilian genre studies:

1. The British ESP School (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990), which considers genre in terms of its formal properties, rhetorical organization, and communicative purposes within social contexts;
2. The North-American New Rhetoric or Sociorhetoric School (Bazerman, 1988; Miller, 1984), focused on speech acts realized by genres in specific institutional contexts;
3. The Sydney Systemic Functional School (Hasan, 1985/1989; Martin, 1985/1989; 1993), concentrated on lexicogrammar and language metafunctions in social contexts.

Swales pioneered ESP theorization of research article introductions, establishing a particular way to analyze and teach genre as a class of communicative events situated in specific communities of practice, "a system for accomplishing social purposes by verbal means" (p. 41). Miller's (1984) seminal article about genre as sociorhetorical action has also inspired a great number of publications on genre, arguing for an examination of "the connection between genre and recurrent situation and the way in which genre can be said to represent typified rhetorical action" (p. 151). Within the Sydney School, Martin (1985/1989; 2002) has used genre as recurrent and staged meaning configurations to realize social practices to argue for school writing pedagogy as a concrete exploration of, and a form of, action in social reality⁴. Kress (1989) sees genre as a linguistic process in situated social practices associated with discourse and text: "[a]n inventory of things that I read in the course of a day would give you a pretty good indication about my social place" (p. 4).

Due to its current importance in the Brazilian scenario, we identify Socio-Discursive Interactionism (SDI), also known as the Geneva School (Bronckart, 1999; Schneuwly & Dolz, 1999), as a fourth framework. SDI has been described as the study of the semiotization of social relations and social action. In this school, genres are seen as texts with relatively stable features, building on Vygotsky's work on social activity and learning, and on Habermas' concept of communicative action (Bronckart, 2006).

⁴ Regarding academic writing based primarily on SFL, see Ravelli and Ellis (2004), for example.

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