Genre, Discourse and Text Analysis

TIIAME

Definitions of Genre

1. **A General Definition**

a category of artistic, musical, or literary composition characterized by a particular style, form, or content (Webster's Dictionary)

2. **'Linguistics' Definitions**

***Genre** is a class of communicative events that share some set of communicative purposes. (Swales 1990)*

***Genre** is a category used to classify discourse and literary works, usually by form, technique, or content.*

(http://www-01.sil.org/linguistics/GlossaryOfLinguisticTerms/WhatIsGenre.htm) accessed 8 August 2017

Examples of Genres

- Stories
- Recipes
- Poems
- Biographies
- After-dinner speeches
- Shopping lists
- Scientific reports
- Reviews
- Articles (in newspapers, magazines or journals)
- Seminar discussions
- Text messages
- Emails

Definitions of Discourse

(1) A unit of language longer than a single sentence.

(2) More broadly, the use of spoken or written language in a social context.

(http://grammar.about.com/od/d/g/discourseterm.htm) accessed 8 August 2017

(3) A discourse is an instance of language use whose type can be classified on the basis of such factors as grammatical and lexical choices.

(http://www-01.sil.org/linguistics/GlossaryOfLinguisticTerms/WhatIsADiscourse.htm) accessed 8 August 2017

Examples of Discourse Types (written and spoken)

- Descriptive
- Argumentative
- Narrative
- Instructional
- Explanatory/Expository
- Informative
- Reporting
- Evaluative
- Conversational
- Interactive
- Persuasive
- Propositional
- Transactional

Characteristics of Discourse Analysis

- Authentic texts as a basis
- Texts can be of any size, spoken or written
- Texts to be studied and analysed with reference to the *contexts* in which they are created and used (social, cultural, professional, academic, etc)
- Importance of *intertextual* relationships
- Importance of the ideologies and viewpoints that underpin texts
- Importance of socio-political implications and consequences

(adapted and extended from Bax 2011)

Characteristics of Discourse Analysis (2)

"Discourse analysis is the examination of language use by members of a speech community. It involves looking at both language form and language function and includes the study of both spoken interaction and written texts. It identifies linguistic features that characterize different genres as well as social and cultural factors that aid in our interpretation and understanding of different texts and types of talk. A discourse analysis of written texts might include a study of topic development and cohesion across the sentences, while an analysis of spoken language might focus on these aspects plus turn-taking practices, opening and closing sequences of social encounters, or narrative structure."

(http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/0107demo.html) accessed 3 April 2013 (no longer directly accessible)

Basics of Text Analysis (Written or Spoken)

- Coherence
- Cohesion
- Grammatical choices
- Lexical choices
- Stylistic choices
- Register
- Appropriacy

Cohesion

(based on Yule 2010)

"My father once bought a Lincoln convertible. He did it by saving every penny he could. That car would be worth a fortune nowadays. However, he sold it to help pay for my college education. Sometimes I think I'd rather have the convertible."

Cohesive links (reference)

- **Father > he > he > he**

- **A Lincoln convertible > That car > it > the convertible**

Cohesive link (textual): However

Cohesion

"My father once bought a Lincoln convertible. He did it by saving every penny he could. That car would be worth a fortune nowadays. However, he sold it to help pay for my college education. Sometimes I think I'd rather have the convertible."

Cohesive links (lexical)

(money) bought – saving – penny – worth a fortune – sold – pay

(time) once – nowadays – sometimes

Cohesive links (grammatical)

(tense and time) bought – did – could – sold

Cohesion ≠ Coherence

Look at this text:

"The boys and girls went for a picnic on Saturday. However, the TV was not working. Eating outside is not recommended in April. They couldn't catch any fish. They lost the pink tablecloth and my mother was upset. The apples were not ripe enough. So the car broke down. They wanted to go to the shops but no-one had any money."

Spot the cohesive links. But does the text make sense?

Grammatical & Lexical Choices

Grammatical choice is restricted to a limited number of options, e.g. Which verb tense? Active or passive? Direct or indirect reporting of speech? Which pronoun?

Lexical choice is potentially infinite, though in practice restricted by the writer's or speaker's intentions about meaning.

Good writers and clear speakers always have a reason for the choices they make.

Stylistic Choices, Register and Appropriacy

Stylistic Choice: Writers and speakers may choose sparse, functional discourse or they may go for ways of embellishing their message (e.g. hyperbole in reports or ads, colourful language in novels or poetry), depending on their purposes and constraints.

A writer or speaker makes choices about **register** according to the addressee and the field of their discourse. Two specialists in a discipline or profession will not need to make concessions, whereas a specialist talking to or writing for lay people will need to adopt a more accessible register.

Appropriacy is all about the way a speaker or writer addresses others in social interaction. It includes politeness, cultural factors etc

Coherence………

….. is about sense and meaning in a text or conversational exchange. Look at this example:

Mother: Don't be late!

Son: I forgot my biscuits yesterday

Mother: The bus won't wait.!

Son: Where's my exercise book?

Mother: Not again!

Coherent? Cohesive links? What do you need to make sense of this?

Basis for understanding a conversational exchange

- Nature of speech event
- The participants (interlocutors) and the relationship between them
- Setting
- Topic
- Cultural factors

Analysing Conversation

➢ Turn-taking (unspoken 'rules': based on pragmatic competence)

➢ Adjacency pairs (e.g. in question and answer)

➢ The Co-operative Principle (Grice's Maxims)

❖ Maxim of quantity (not too much & not too little)

❖ Maxim of quality (about truth)

❖ Maxim of relation (relevance)

❖ Maxim of manner (about organising the contribution)

➢Hedges

➢Background knowledge

Basis for understanding a lecture or presentation

- Basic familiarity with subject matter
- Understanding and dealing with the lecturer's speech habits
- Recognising discourse markers
- Recognising key points
- Relating details to key points, e.g. examples, evidence etc
- Recognising and discarding asides and digressions
- Relating lecturer's points to any visual support
- (if on-line) listening more than once

Why is all this important in subject-related English?

- Restricted range of relevant text types with their own characteristics

- Differences between the typical discourse types and discourse patterns of academic communities, *e.g. pure scientists vs social scientists*

- Discourse patterns reveal the thinking styles and methods underlying any text

- Materials preparation – text selection, task design etc

Teachers of advanced English need to know how to analyse texts!

References

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