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Who's afraid of genre? Genres, functions, text types and their implications for a pedagogy of critical literacy.

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Abstract
This paper explores some of the challenges facing the attempt to construct concise theories of genre for the purposes of fostering school literacy as a necessary first step towards critical literacy. It is argued that a large part of the terminological and epistemological confusion around genre and related categories such as text type and language functions stems from the interdisciplinarity that is inherent in any approach to text and communication. We maintain that, apart from the inevitable overlaps and disparities among varying attempts at tackling the vagaries of genre, a large part of the confusion is due to the tension between what we term *micro*- and *macro*-analytic approaches to language function, text type and genre. Finally, we propose a pedagogical model of critical/genre literacy that capitalizes on such tensions and disparities rather than shying away from them, and implements the construct of genre as a means of fostering (meta)linguistic awareness.

Résumé
Ce travail explore les difficultés que doivent affronter toute approche théorique qui cherche à préciser ce qu'est le genre textuel, cela dans le but de faciliter et de promouvoir l'alphabétisation. Cette exploration est la première étape nécessaire pour pouvoir définir ce qu'est l'alphabétisation de manière critique. Selon des études antérieures, le caractère interdisciplinaire inhérent à toute approche travaillant sur l'analyse de texte ou la communication serait à l'origine, en grande partie, de la confusion terminologique et épistémologique quant à ce que sont le genre et les catégories qui lui sont affiliées, ainsi le type de texte et la fonction langagière. D'une part cette confusion est le résultat des chevauchements inévitables et des disparités qui caractérisent les tentatives nombreuses et variées de se confronter aux aléas de la notion « genre ». D'autre part, la confusion proviendrait principalement de la tension entre ce que nous comprenons par les termes d' approches *micro*- et *macro*-analytiques », « fonction du langage », « type de texte » et « genre ». Nous proposerons un modèle pédagogique de littératie critique qui mettra à profit ces tensions et ces disparités, au lieu de les éviter. Nous suggérerons aussi que remettre en cause la construction de la notion « genre » serait aussi un moyen de susciter une prise de conscience (méta)linguistique.

1. Introduction

Contrary to (or perhaps in line with) accepted genre conventions, we would like to start this paper on an (auto)biographical note: as language and literacy specialists and as instructors involved in teacher training programs, we frequently have to answer (or pretend to be able to answer) questions such as "how many genres are there?", "how many of these should I teach?", "what happens when the features of a text I have chosen to teach don't tally with what I know about genres?", or, worse, "why are no two descriptive (narrative/expository…) texts ever alike if they belong to the same genre?" Based on our experience from Greece and Cyprus, we would speculate that such questions arise with increased frequency in contexts where the move from sentence-based, grammar-centered and by and large prescriptive language pedagogy to a pedagogy of genre/critical literacy has taken place fairly recently (Kostouli, 2002; Matsagouras, 2001, 2007; Tsiplakou et al., 2006); however, the spirit, if not the wording, of such questions seems to reflect concerns shared by educators across countries and communities, and they seem to arise even in contexts where genre literacy has long been the stated aim of language pedagogy. It could be argued that such questions and concerns in part reflect teacher anxieties vis-à-vis the vicissitudes of tackling an admittedly complex construct such as genre in a pedagogically meaningful way; crucially, though, it is very likely that these questions reflect conflicting and often incompatible approaches to genre and to genre literacy and the terminological and epistemological confusion with regard to notions such as language function, text type, genre, discourse, and the intricate interrelations among these (Moessner, 2001; Paltridge, 1996).

The aim of this paper is to shed some light on the reasons behind such terminological and epistemological confusion; it will be argued that the confusion is,

to a large extent, due to the theoretical and methodological tensions arising between what we shall term *macro-* and *micro-* approaches to text type, genre and language functions; we will further attempt to show that such tensions and disparities ought not to be dismissed as one of the necessary evils of interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approaches to complex objects such as text and (linguistic) communication, but, rather, should be capitalized on as a major means of fostering critical language pedagogy with (meta)linguistic awareness and the honing of (meta)cognitive skills at its core.

2. Genre: a troubled genealogy

It is a commonplace statement in the relevant literature on genre that the genealogy of the concept involves clashes between (ultimately prescriptive) approaches which view genre as a static category, and interdisciplinary approaches which view it as a dynamic construct; the latter came into play in the 20th century, and especially during its last quarter, when language pedagogy and (a large part of) linguistic theory shifted its focus from grammatical/sentence structure to text organization, the exploration of language functions, pragmatic aspects of communication and the role of linguistic variation and, consequently, of social, or rather *sociocognitive*,[1] variables in communication. Within such approaches genres are ultimately viewed as sociocognitive constructs (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995, p. 4), i.e. as templates or frameworks institutionalized to varying degrees for the purposes of regulating and facilitating types of social interaction and social, professional or cultural practice. This entails both the *stativity* and the *dynamism* of genre. The stativity is a function of the fact that genres are mostly institutionalized and as such, identifiable by communicators as concrete matrices of linguistic/textual

features symbolically indexing or codifying and mediating in (or even constructing) specific, situated practices of communication and social action. The dynamism stems from the fact that social action, which naturally involves individual and social agentivity and is subject to the forces of economic, social and cultural change, is itself in a state of flux, which means that indexing/codifying systems such as genre fluctuate and change accordingly; generic change may range from subtle changes in the linguistic form and content of particular genres to their radical linguistic, textual or semantic/functional restructuring, to the obsolescence of particular genres and the emergence of new, hybrid or formally entirely novel ones.[2]

2.1 The classical legacy and Romanticism

The acknowledgement of this state of generic flux is a long way from traditional definitions of genre; as is well-known, the Platonic/Aristotelian essentialist classificatory preoccupation heralded the preoccupation with *genus* and *species*, which prevailed up until the Romantic period and which inevitably extended to the classification of literary genres,[3] literature being conceived of as the supreme mode of linguistic communication, and of the expression of humanity in general. It was the European Romantic movement of the 18th and especially the 19th century that challenged static notions of genre inherited by the authoritative writers of classical antiquity and viewed literary genres as flexible and fluid; hence Friedrich Schlegel's famous dictum that every work of art is *eine Gattung für sich* ("a genre unto itself") Similarly, Benedetto Croce (1946) stressed the fact that each literary work, each "true" work of art, is, or ought to be, a revolution in itself, i.e. it ought to upset and overturn inherited notions of generic norms and "broaden" perceptions of canonical genericity, thereby revolutionizing standard notions of aesthetics.[4]

2. 2 Russian Formalism and Bakhtin

Although establishing or discovering links between schools of thought is a risky business, it might be argued that the romantic constructs of individuality and counter-canonicity in art are reflected in the Russian Formalists' notion of *deautomatization*: among other things, the Russian Formalists sought to account for the development and evolution of literary forms, techniques and genres through the assumption that a genre be comes more "peripheral" when its established techniques of expression become fixed, expected, "automatized"; new forms, and, consequently, novel genres emerge as a reaction to such "automatization". Apart from the fact that genre is no longer viewed as a static construct, it is particularly interesting that these assumptions implicitly bring into the discussion of generic development reader expectations and the reception of genres in their historical context as a factor in their evolution; in other words, the sociological dimension enters the picture, albeit in an implicit and not fully articulated way (see Duff, 2000).

It could be argued, however, that this discussion paved the way for Bakhtin's notion of genre: Bakhtin was probably the first scholar to bring non-literary genres into the debate. In Bakhtin's work non-literary genres, which he calls *primary* or *simple* speech genres, are thought to be less complex, less "developed" than literary genres, which he calls *secondary* genres in view of the fact that they are built on primary genres and "incorporate" primary genres in order to construct more complex generic structures. This hierarchization aside, Bakhtin's contribution to the study of genre is seminal in that the social/cognitive dimension of genre acquires prominence: Bakhtin views genres not merely as patterns and schemata of communication, but as

ways of interpreting social reality and, crucially, of structuring it, i.e. as (the reflection of) social *discourses* (Bakhtin, 1986).

2.3 Genre as a social and linguistic construct: the North American and Australian Schools

What follows is an analysis of modern genre theory as articulated within what we broadly term the North American School and the Australian tradition in the wake of Halliday's systemic-functional linguistics. As will be shown below, both 'schools' view genre as a sociocognitive construct expressed through language; very broadly, the difference between the two lies in the differential emphasis on the linguistic/textual dimension versus the social dimension.

2.3.1 North American genre theory

North American genre theory, as articulated within New Rhetoric,[5] can be viewed as the product of a convergence of (i) a long academic tradition of academic study of rhetorical modes in writing and composition; (ii) advances in pragmatic theory, especially the theory of *speech acts* as developed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) and (iii) theories of social structuration such as that of Giddens (1984). The end result is the viewing of genre as a dynamic product of the complex interplay between language and context, with the emphasis on social context and social action rather than linguistic/textual structures carrying autonomous meaning or semiotic

significance independently of their context of occurrence (see Knapp, 1997; Freedman & Medway, 1994).

The approach to genre as "typified rhetorical action based on recurrent situations" (Miller, 1984, p. 31), effectively as a means for accomplishing social actions, is clearly influenced by speech act theory in more ways than one: recall that a major tenet of speech act theory was the idea that all utterances are performative in that they 'get things done' in the real world; in the absence of explicit linguistic indexing of their performative aim (i.e. a performative verb), most utterances are implicitly performative, the speaker's aim in uttering them being retrieved by the interlocutor as *illocutionary force* or *perlocutionary effect* (Austin 1962); such retrieval is however impossible outside of a situated context; moreover, linguistic forms are finite, while the number of speech acts they accomplish is potentially infinite, given that the contexts of utterance may be infinite. Crucially, the same linguistic form may perform a vast array of speech acts in different contexts; language is underdetermined, and particular linguistic forms are *enriched* in context (a basic tenet of contemporary pragmatic theory; see, e.g. Sperber & Wilson, 1995).

This kind of 'primacy' of context over linguistic form, a natural extension of speech act theory (or of interpretations thereof), lies at the heart of the New Rhetoric approach to genre(s) as functions from social context(s) to linguistic forms. Thus, Miller (1984, p. 25) claims that "a genre becomes a complex of formal and substantive [sic] features that create a particular effect in a given situation", and adds that "a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centered not on the substance or form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish". i.e. a sound understanding of genre hinges on a sound understanding of the broader social context,

(in Miller's words, the broader *discourse community*), the particular context of situation within which a genre emerges, participant roles, the types of social action indexed by genre etc. While Miller is categorically opposed to *simplistic* classifications of genres based on formal linguistic/textual features, she does view genre as a "typified rhetorical action based in recurrent situations" (Miller, 1984, p. 31). According to Miller, this *recursivity* of genre is what grants it some kind of independent status as a construct somewhere in the middle ground between the macro-level of culture and the micro-level of language (Miller, 1994, p. 68). The emphasis, however, remains on understanding the features of the social context and of the discourse community, and on viewing the stable ("typified") rhetorical conventions of genres as somehow derivative of the recurrent social-discursive situations within which genres emerge.

The New Rhetoric tradition however also involves more "instrumentalist" views on genre: given that genre mediates between social contexts and individuals, enabling participants to undertake social actions and also allowing for the structure, features and purpose of the social action to be understood in virtue of textual/generic structure, which can often be very highly articulated (see Bazerman, 1994, p. 79),[6] it seems that genres themselves may deserve to be granted the status of object of study, albeit always in tandem with their contexts of occurrence. This is also the view taken by Bhatia (1993, 2004) and Swales (1990), among others. While Swales prefers to describe genre as a "fuzzy concept" in his work on English for Special Purposes and academic language (Swales, 1990, p. 33) and to view genres as functions of social action,[7] he nonetheless acknowledges that "there may be pedagogical value in sensitizing students to rhetorical effects and to the rhetorical structures that tend to recur in the genre-specific texts" (Swales, 1990, p. 213), and this because, when

recurrent, genre features such as textual structure, content and style generate concrete expectations as to the type of social activity and task that participants are called upon to engage in; moreover, such tasks are part of the overall expectations of their discourse community, and genre is the means par excellence of indexing/symbolically codifying such expectations.

2.3.2 Australian genre theory

What has come to be known as Australian genre theory has its roots in systemic-functional linguistics as articulated by Halliday (see Halliday,1994; Halliday & Hasan, 1991); within the Australian tradition, represented by the work of Halliday's students (Martin, Kress, Christie, Rothery, Threadgold, and to some extent also Cope and Kalantzis), genre theory was developed in relation to first language and literacy learning, the development of pedagogical models for the improvement of reading and writing skills and the honing of adult literacy; the pedagogical concern is therefore a strong component of theory development in the Australian tradition. As is the case with New Rhetoric, the Australian school lays particular emphasis on the role of context in determining and delimiting genre, and this is where the two schools overlap significantly. In Martin's formulation, "genres are how things get done, when language is used to accomplish them" (Martin, 1985, p. 250). Similarly, Cope & Kalantzis define genre as "a social category that describes the relation of the social purpose of text to language structure" (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993, p. 3), or, perhaps more conservatively, as "the different forms texts take with variations in social purpose—not just the formalities of how texts work but also the living social reality of texts-in-use" (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993, p. 7). These formulations largely reflect the

Hallidayan concept of language as social semiotic, whereby aspects of lexis and grammar, the choice of linguistic of variety, together with particular types of textual organization, collectively index aspects of the social context of the interaction. Interestingly, it could be argued that the Australian tradition diverges from North American genre theory precisely because of the former's heavy reliance on Halliday's systemic-functional grammar. This is a conceptual point that merits some discussion.

The underlying premise of systemic-functional grammar(s) is precisely the fact that lexical and structural categories and relations, be they phonetic / phonological, morphological or syntactic, cannot be adequately captured or analyzed outside of their contexts of use. The whole point of abstracting away from traditional, morpheme- or word-based grammars, (or even from sentence-based grammars, which treat sentences as isolated autonomous units of analysis and not as utterance tokens in context) is, if anything, *descriptive adequacy*: grammatical descriptions become infinitely richer and more systematic when units of grammatical description and analysis are extracted from tokens of linguistic production situated in specific contexts of use. To give a couple of examples, morphosyntactic alternation of the type active-passive voice cannot be fully described unless a range of contextual uses of both variants is taken into account, not only in order to unveil the differences in register and formality ensuing from the use of each variant, but also, at a more basic level, to determine which verbs passivize and which do not, and under which syntactic or lexical constraints, and whether such constraints have any effect on the correlation of the grammatical category of voice with register and stylistic differences. Word order variation is another classic example of the merits of the systemic-functional approach, which can account for word order variation in terms of the focus-topic articulation, thematic progression etc. (see Tsiplakou, 1998).

However, this is where the obvious advantages of the systemic-functional approach may paradoxically lead to a restrictive, reductionist and effectively prescriptive conceptualization of genre and of generic variation. The conceptual exigencies leading to a reductionist construction of genre should be obvious: the systemic assignment of particular identifiable stylistic/register functions to grammatical variants in the context of particular genres presupposes a more or less defined and fixed conception of genres, registers and styles. To clarify by means of a simple example, passive voice and nominalizations presumably index formal registers and expository or argumentative genres (or text types; see below); this conclusion is reached on the basis of the fact that tokens of passivization and nominalization are mostly found in such genres. The inherent circularity is clear: particular grammatical structures encode functions specific to particular genres, but these are retrievable because of the text's genre, which is somehow independently identifiable; this entails a predefined notion of which and how many genres there are is required.

Thus, the assignment of *a priori* functions to aspects of grammar and lexis in conjunction with *a priori* notions and numerations of genre led to more or less rigid taxonomies of genres and text types within the Australian tradition (cf., e.g., the taxonomy into *report, explanation, procedure, discussion, recount* and *narrative* proposed in Martin (1989), who investigated genre in student writing). It is true that there is variation in approaches even within the Australian school; for instance, scholars such as Kress (1999, 2003) have abstracted away from the strict taxonomic tradition by formulating more dynamic genre models, in an attempt to take into account contextual and cultural variables (see Knapp, 1997, pp. 115-128 for an overview; see also Martin 1997).

It would appear, then, that the trade-off between more rigidly linguistically taxonomical and more socially oriented approaches to genre is transparency and systematicity in the description of genres versus a multivariate analysis of genres as social products, which may ultimately have very little to say about linguistic and textual structures.

3 Text types and language functions

It follows from the preceding discussion that the taxonomical bias regarding genre is based on perfectly legitimate concerns, arising both from the necessity of adequate taxonomies for the purposes of language pedagogy and literacy learning, for the exploration of Language for Specific Purposes, for academic language, for corpus studies etc., as well as from the incontestable empirical fact that members of a discourse community, especially those who have had access to literacy, seem to have intuitive notions about genre and the ways in which genres may be grouped together, on the basis of similarities of form and function, to form superordinate categories. Such superordinate classes have variously been labelled *prototypical text categories*, *text prototypes*, *deep structure genres*, or, more commonly, *text types* (see Moessner, 2001, pp. 133-135 for a succinct overview).

The criteria according to which a text type is defined are probably as problematic as those applying to definitions of genre, and there is significant overlap between the two sets of criteria; nevertheless, in the relevant literature there is some kind of consensus to the effect that, while genres can be defined using a medley of extralinguistic and linguistic criteria, text types are best defined on the basis of

linguistic criteria alone (Moessner, 2001); however, 'linguistic' criteria do not exclusively involve lexical and grammatical variables, but also, crucially, a strong functional component, namely the types of linguistic *function* particular form-content variables appear to perform. Thus, Longrace (1976, 1983) proposed four "deep structure genres" (narrative, procedural, expository and hortatory); Wehrlich (1983) suggested five text types (descriptive, narrative, expository, argumentative and instructive). Similarly, Biber (1989) defined eight text types on the basis of the clustering of 67 linguistic features across texts belonging to different genres (see also Biber, 1998). The attempt at defining text types based on aggregates of linguistic features as revealed by factor/cluster analysis is taken up in corpus studies, but there is enormous variation in the results, and often the number of taxonomical classes or text types emerging from the statistical analysis is far too large for a superordinate category.[8] A more general conclusion from corpus studies is that genres which are defined as different based on extralinguistic criteria may display greater linguistic homogeneity than expected, which leads to their being categorized as belonging to the same text type.

We would like to argue that the lack of consensus in determining text types, and the overlap between text type and genre, is also partly due to the ways in which the construct of text type is conceptualized. As noted earlier, while broad text types purportedly emerge on the basis of their linguistic features, the categorization of text types into classes such as narrative vs. non-narrative, 'functional'/'procedural' vs. 'notional' (Wehrlich, 1983), expository, argumentative, hortatory etc. (Biber, 1989), points to the fact that some notion of language *function* lies at the heart of the proposed classification; moreover, it seems that aggregates of surface linguistic/textual features are viewed as realizations of such linguistic functions, the

implicit assumption being that ideally there is a one-to-one correspondence between form and function (hence a prototypical narrative text type ought to involve past tenses, temporal sequencing of events etc., whilst a prototypically expository text ought to involve presenting data, comparing and contrasting and drawing conclusions, and should hence feature non-matrix clauses of purpose, effect and conclusion, particular types of sentence and discourse connectives, etc.).

The conceptual problems are immediately apparent: firstly, the *desideratum* of stable linguistic form-linguistic function correspondences such as the above, which conceptually underlie the notion of text types as constructs based on 'linguistic' variables, is hardy ever met with the desired consistency. Secondly, and more importantly for the purposes of this discussion, broad conceptualizations of language functions such as those proposed by Jakobson (1960) and Halliday (1994), among many others, end up having to be vastly modified in order to deal with the functionality of particular texts or genres in context, and hence the numerous extensions, reductions or downright transformations of Jakobsonian and Hallidayan taxonomies of language functions in the attempt to establish taxonomies of text types. This move however results in an extremely disparate set of analytical categories labelling text types, as is evidenced by the varying proposals in the literature. For example, Hoey (1983) talks about problem-solution, general-particular, matching contrast and hypothetical-real text types, Hedge (1988) discusses text types such as static descriptions, process descriptions, narratives, cause and effect, discussions, compare and contrast, classifications, definitions, and reviews, while Hammond et al. (1992) group together procedure, anecdote, description, exposition, problem-solution, recount, procedure, report and review as members of the superordinate category of text types shared by more than one genre (see Paltridge, 1996 for an overview); the

above are in fact categorial medleys consisting of genres, functions and textual, rhetorical or presentational strategies.

5. On the tension between the micro- and the macro-analytic

To sum up the preceding discussion, genre turns out to be a "fuzzy concept" (Swales 1990) because genres are linguistic reflexes of their social-discursive contexts, and social-discursive contexts are by definition multivariate, dynamic constructs; put differently, the epistemology of social-discursive contexts is necessarily interdisciplinary, and hence the fuzziness of genre can be viewed as an artefact of the methodological and analytical approaches to it. As for text types, we have argued that these are a construct which stems from the conceptual and empirical need for a more stringent classificatory mechanism for unifying and placing in broader classes apparently similar or apparently disparate genres; we saw, however, that the attempt to define text types based on (so-called) linguistic features has resulted in even greater disparity, and we argued that this is again an artefact of misconceptions around the notion of language functions. It seems that text types are implicitly conceptualized as the middle ground between language functions and genres; to give a simple example, let's assume that what unifies two empirically distinguishable genres such as political oratory and critical essay is that both are overarchingly *conative* in Jakobsonian terms, although the particular aims and context of utterance-readership of each are of course distinct. Now, the conative function is also predominant in a totally different genre, namely advertisements. As it is hard to argue that all three genres belong to the same text type, given their formal and other disparities, the construct *argumentative text type* can be evoked to subsume the first

two and leave out the third, given that structured argumentation is not usually a textual feature of advertisements. But assigning the argumentative text type independent status as an analytical construct forces us to place under the same text type other genres which feature argumentation, e.g. a live public debate or a personal debate among peers, although it is clear that the types and purpose as well as the content and linguistic/discursive form of the argumentation are very different in each of these cases.

The above example was set up to clarify what we perceive as the tension between macro- and micro-analytic approaches to language function, genre and text type. Language functions such as those proposed by Jakobson and Halliday are doubtless overarching macro-functions, or higher order abstractions. The mapping from these onto genres, which are situated, contextualized and dynamic entities, effectively involves a mapping from macro- onto micro-functions, and micro-functions are necessarily numerous, localized and context-, discourse- and culture-bound. If the above argumentation is on the right track, it would seem that text types mediate between the micro-functions involved in or indexed by particular genres and broader linguistic functions spanning utterances, genres and speech-acts. This can account for the variability and the categorial disparity in text types as proposed in the literature. In this sense, it remains an open issue whether the notion of text type is in any way meaningful as a superordinate category, or whether it is a confounding factor both for the purposes of theories of genre and text and in terms of language pedagogy oriented towards genre/critical literacy.

6 Implications for a pedagogy of critical literacy

Genre literacy is often treated as synonymous with critical literacy, in that understanding genre involves understanding the social-discursive conditions of its production and reception, its role in structuring and indexing experience in particular ways reflecting socially and culturally acceptable behavioral and other norms, and its role in the maintenance and reproduction of such norms (on 'ideological literacy' see Cope & Kalantzis, 1993, 2000; Kalantzis 2006; Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Scollon, 2001; Gee 1996, 2000; Street, 1994, 1995, 1996; Clark & Ivanič, 1997; Ivanic, 1998; Tsiplakou, 2006 among others). Learning generic conventions is therefore a central aspect of fostering critical literacy for social empowerment and social change.

Leaving such socio-political considerations aside, a critical exploration of genre can be central to the honing of metalinguistic and metacognitive skills; recall that genre is a complex construct, mediating as it does between the sociocultural and the linguistic. Tackling genre can therefore be an extremely valuable exercise in critical thinking about language and literacy, not despite the complexity of the latter but precisely in virtue of it; understanding a multivariate object such as genre allows the students to engage in constant cognitive challenges on many levels, ranging from 'lower-level' lexical and grammatical considerations to the interface between social-discursive conventions, audience or reader expectations and their reflexes in text design and organization, codification and distribution of information, choice of register and style, etc. (see also Kress, 2001, 2003; Street & Lea, 2006)

This in turn implies that a 'static' approach to genres in terms of sets of linguistic and textual features with one-to-one correspondence with specific contexts and situations of use is not the desired one, as it can all too easily be one step away from prescriptivism, not in its usual guise of valuing standard linguistic varieties over non-standard ones, but in terms of a reductionist rigidity in the conception of genre which

forges unidimensional links between language(s) and communicative situation(s). Such a move can have wider ideological implications, as it generates implicit hierarchies of genre on a scale of more to less prestigious and empowering (Barrs, 1991; Street 1996; Street & Lea 2006) and it can potentially relegate genre teaching to what the new London Group have termed "a pedagogy of transmission" of accepted linguistic, social and cultural norms (New London Group, 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; see also Fairclough 2001). Apart from its ideological dimension, such prescriptivism deprives genre teaching of its cognitively and pedagogically most challenging dimension, that of allowing students to devise and revise analytical tools and classification systems for the purposes of tackling a complex and multivariate object such as genre, in other words, the dimension of genre teaching most responsible for the honing of (meta)linguistic and broader (meta)cognitive skills.[9]

This approach also has a number of practical implications for language pedagogy. The first major implication is that language teaching which incorporates genre for the purpose of cultivating critical literacy and critical skills as a whole must necessarily involve a contrastive-comparative approach to genres. Crucially, though, a contrastive approach ought not to remain at the simplistic level of 'process writing' (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; see also Hadjioannou & Ioannou (this volume) for an outline of some of the empirical pitfalls of process writing) or of tacit apprenticeship (Berenkotter & Huckin, 1995).[10] If (meta)linguistic skills are the ultimate goal, then evidently a level of explicitness with regard to the features of genre and text type and an explicit and thorough examination of language functions in relation to their micro- and macro-contexts, be they textual or social, is a major *desideratum*. Another major challenge is the discovery of the intricate roles of the so-called 'low-level' linguistc aspects of lexis and grammar in the construction of genre features, an aspect of genre teaching

which has admittedly not met with great success to date, even within the Australian tradition (see, e.g., Thwaite, 2006).

At first blush it may appear that the requirement for contrastivity and explicitness will face the major stumbling-block of the ultimate theoretical indeterminacy and fuzziness of constructs such as genre and text type, as outlined above. We would like to argue, however, that rather than being relegated to the status of 'problem', generic 'fuzziness' can be viewed as a fruitful challenge. If the aim of language pedagogy, and of education in general, is not the retrieval of pre-established and immutable 'truths' but rather the fostering of critical cognitive skills, then the meaningful exploration of the complexities of language and genre is an end in itself. To achieve this goal, students can be urged to act as observers and analysts of their own speech communities (Bloom et al., 2005; Cazden, 2001; Cazden & Beck 2003; Riggenbach 1999, among others), if they are guided towards acting as ethnographers, discourse analysts, sociolinguists and stylisticians (Lea & Street, 1998, 1999; Lea, 2004, 2005; Street & Lea 2006). Assuming these varied yet interrelated roles entails travelling along the continuum ranging from macro- to micro-level structures, from social contexts to genres to register, style and grammar. It is very likely that definitive models of genre, text type, language function and their interplay with social milieus and social action will not emerge through such explorations within the framework of school literacy; the added value of the approach consists in the critical/epistemological benefits of undertaking this theoretically and methodologically challenging journey, the inherent social constructivist dimension of which should also be an added bonus.

NOTES

[1]On why genre and related categories are best treated as sociocognitive rather than social constructs, see Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995.

[2]See, e.g., Askehave & Nielsen, 2005; Herring 2007; Kress, 2003; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001.

[3]For example, Goethe still adopts the tripartite distinction between epic poetry, lyric poetry and drama (see Moessner, 2001, p. 131).

[4]The emphasis on individuality inherent in such statements obviously reflects the intellectual climate of the Enlightenment, Romanticism and early modernity.

[5]We will also tentatively place the work of Bhatia (1993, 2004) and Swales (1990) in this tradition.

[6]Cf. the formulation in Berkenkotter & Huckin (1995) that "genres are the intellectual scaffolds on which community knowledge is constructed" (p. 24).

[7]Swales (1990) defines genre as "a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes which are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community" (p. 58).

[8]For example, the Helsinki historical corpus of English yields a taxonomy of 33 'text classes', which are practically impossible to distinguish from the genres on which they were based (see Moessner, 2001, pp. 135 ff).

[9]See also Kress (1999, 2003) on the cultivation of abstract cognitive skills through genre literacy.

[10]It can be argued that the avoidance of such explicit, conscious learning and the almost total reliance on "exposure" is one major pitfall of so-called 'communicative' approaches to language learning; see Spada 2007 for a critique.

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