

## Genre, discipline and identity

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### Genres: constraints and schema

Few concepts have had a greater impact on how we understand and teach language than *genre*. The idea that prior texts have a key role in shaping communicative practices has been so influential for so long that it is hard to imagine how discourse analysts, or EAP practitioners, ever got along without it. Strictly, of course, the term refers to abstract, socially recognised ways of using language, but like any well-worn concept, genre is understood in a variety of ways: from an emphasis on context and Bakhtinian notions of intertextuality and dialogism (e.g. Coe, 2001) to descriptions of configurations of systematic language choices (e.g. Martin, 2012). John Swales's contribution, which we celebrate in this volume, has been to steer a path which acknowledges both these traditions and carves out a distinctive space for the 'ESP' concept by focusing on the texts and practices which are recognised and valued by specific communities. In *Genre Analysis* (Swales, 1990) and beyond, Swales has encouraged us to see genres in terms of the communities in which they are used and to understand texts as a function of the choices and constraints acting on text producers.

He has also shown us that genres are not merely collections of similar texts but the schema we develop through our shared experiences to see how these texts help construct particular contexts. They are Bazerman's (1997: 17) "frames for social action" and provide the sightlines by which we orient to our environment and create meanings. Swales's work has helped us to see how the inhabitants of academic communities use the regularities of genres to develop relationships, reinforce and challenge their communities, float and dispute ideas, and generally get things done. As a result, we now know a lot more about the conventions that characterize certain genres and discourse communities (Hyland, 2004; Swales, 2004), how such conventions come into being, how they change

over time, how they give rise to new genres, and how, in turn, they influence and are influenced by community practices, beliefs and other genre systems (Berkenkotter, 2001; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995).

So genres are community resources which allow users to create and read texts with some assurance that they know what they are dealing with. They enable the particularities of any situation to connect with wider norms and practices. This is not because members rationally decide that these norms are sensible, but because constant exposure to a discourse leads them to work out what norm the group favours. Choices are narrowed to the point where we don't have to decide on every option available. As O'Sullivan et al (1994: 128), have it, 'genres are agents of ideological closure - they limit the meaning-potential of a given text'. But this sensitivity to community-based uses of language, together with a search for pedagogically applicable generalisations, has made this model of genre vulnerable to accusations of structuralist straightjacketing which ignores individual creativity and textual variability. This paper challenges this view and instead suggests that the perspective Swales outlined in his 1990 book provides the basis for an understanding of genre which offers insights into two of the most problematic concepts in the social sciences: discipline and identity.

### **Proximity and positioning**

It is true that many attempts to pin down these "typified acts of communication" have tended to emphasise similarity rather than difference and conformity at the expense of flexibility, but the idea has also enabled us to see more clearly how writers and readers rely on their inside knowledge to create a mutual frame of reference and ensure their purposes will be retrieved by their audiences. At the same time, we have learnt to see genres as broad guides to action rather than as constraining templates and to understand that there is some scope for individuals to improvise or play with genres (Devitt, 2011; Schryer, 2011). More relevantly in academic contexts we have begun to explore how individuals are able to exploit genre options to create some personal wriggle-room and express a persona they feel comfortable with. I have referred to this fit between rhetorical conventions and the persona one wishes to project as a distinction between *proximity*, or the relationship between the self

and community, and *positioning*, the relationship between the speaker and what is being said (Hyland, 2012).

Proximity implies a receiver-oriented view of communication and is closely related to Sacks et al's (1974: 272) notion of "recipient design", or how talk is shaped to make sense to the current interactant. Writers, no less than speakers, construct texts which engage with readers and display a community-based competence and valued identity, as lexical choice, topic selection, conventions of argument, and so on also display an orientation and sensitivity to co-participants. Proximity ties the individual into a web of disciplinary texts and discourses, allowing authors to create a text they assume the reader will recognize and expect and readers to draw on assumptions about what the writer is trying to do. While *proximity* highlights shared social representations which provide broad templates for recognising 'the ways things are done', *positioning* emphasises how writers appropriate these discourses to make a name for themselves and stand out from the crowd (e.g. Davies & Harré, 1990). Engaging in disciplinary genres does not involve stepping into a pre-packaged self as individuals can use the options available to *position themselves* in terms of a personal stance and interpersonal alignments. Genre constraints are simultaneously the enabling conditions for originality.

Genre, then, is the interface between individual and community: the ways that academics who, at the same time as they construct their texts, also construct themselves as competent disciplinary members who have something worthwhile to say. The remainder of this paper is an attempt to elaborate these ideas and extend what Swales's notion of genre has to say about the relationships between community expectations and the individual writer, about community and individuality.

### **Discipline and community**

Community is a somewhat troubled concept and has been in and out of favour among genre analysts almost since Swales linked it with genre in 1990. Treated with suspicion by both Thatcherite individualists and those worried by its more structuralist and static interpretations, the notion of community has had a chequered past. Few communities, however, are either fixed or entirely

harmonious and those based around occupation, recreation, family, and so on, provide meaningful reference points which help shape collective definitions of membership and identity within their frameworks of understandings and values. Communities can be seen as sites of engagement rather than of commitment, providing a shorthand for the practices and discourses routinely used by a particular group. Swales recognised this in his later conceptualisation (Swales, 1998), where he shifts his idea of communities from a focus on goals to a way of “being in the world”, of interacting with colleagues and the acts which comprise the creation of community knowledge. Essentially, communities provide the context within which we learn to communicate and to interpret each other’s talk, gradually acquiring the specialized discourse competencies to participate as members. They are the places we craft our identities, cement relationships and achieve recognition, where we find the tools and resources to live out our professional lives. We can therefore see disciplines as language using communities which help us join writers, texts and readers together (see, for example, Geertz, 1973).

In EAP, the idea of community is generally associated with that of discipline as we have become more sensitive to the ways genres are written and responded to by individuals acting as members of scholarly groups. But while a common enough label, disciplines have been seen as institutional conveniences, networks of communication, political institutions, domains of values, modes of enquiry, and ideological power-bases. Some writers, in fact, see the term as little more than a convenient shorthand for practices that are less distinguishable and stable than we usually suppose (e.g. Mauranen, 2006) while others, writing from Post-modern positions, argue that the fragmentation of academic life has resulted in the death of disciplines (e.g. Gergen and Thatchenkery, 1996). Clearly, local struggles, intellectual developments and institutional convenience ensure that boundaries are never stable nor objects of study fixed in stone. As Becher and Trowler (2001: 65) observe, ‘there is no single method of enquiry, no standard verification procedure, no definitive set of concepts that uniquely characterizes each particular discipline’.

Discipline is, however, a notion with remarkable persistence and the distinctive existence of disciplines can be informed by study of their rhetorical practices. This is because successful academic writing depends on the individual writers' projection of a shared professional context as they seek to embed their writing in a particular social world which they reflect and conjure up through approved discourses. Members have a sense of being part of a discipline and of having a stake in something with others. So we can see disciplines as particular ways of doing things – particularly of using language to engage with others in certain recognised and familiar ways – and it is the enactment of these uses that I am referring to as proximity. Academic texts are about *persuasion* and this involves making choices to gain support, express collegiality and resolve difficulties in ways which fit the community's assumptions, methods, and knowledge. This is how Wells (1992) sees matters:

*Each subject discipline constitutes a way of making sense of human experience that has evolved over generations and each is dependent on its own particular practices: its instrumental procedures, its criteria for judging relevance and validity, and its conventions of acceptable forms of argument. In a word each has developed its own modes of discourse.*

To work in a discipline, then, we need to be able to engage in these practices and, in particular, in its discourses. We need to proximate to the rhetorical conventions it routinely employs to claim membership and learn how to use these conventions to take positions on matters the community values. In this context genres play a key role as they are the institutionally recognised ways of producing agreement. They are the oil which keep disciplines running. The most productive way to get at these community approved and personally meaningful discourses is through corpora. ESP genre analysts have taken to corpora with some enthusiasm precisely because they reveal these constraints and contexts in the repeated patterns of everyday language use. Moreover, by showing how language is typically used in a given context, corpora offer evidence of actors' orientations to scholarly communities and the ways they stake out individual positions. Because identity comprises dispositions to behave in certain ways, to make particular discourse choices in routine situations, these enactments of identity can be recovered in corpus analyses.

Genre, as revealed through the study of corpora, can therefore not only tell us something about the broad community constraints which influence interaction (the context of culture), but also how actors understand the here-and now of interaction (the context of situation) itself. They can also reveal the ways members rhetorically craft proximity and positionings.

### **Genres and the construction of disciplines**

Thus far the discussion has been rather abstract, but in *Genre Analysis* Swales suggested ways in which we might unpick the rhetorical complexities of texts to reveal something of the ways they express community practices. In this section I ransack some of my earlier work to show how genres realise disciplines through the routine performance of rhetorical actions. This is the exercise of proximity: how the preferred ways of crafting meanings constructs individuals as members.

Swales's 'Genre Analysis' reveals something of how successfully engaging in the discourses of one's discipline, as a student, researcher or teacher, involves making rhetorical choices which instantiate key epistemological and social beliefs of that discipline. Writers represent themselves and their work in different ways, with those in the humanities and social sciences taking far more explicitly involved and personal positions than those in the science and engineering fields (Hyland, 2004; 2005). While the hard-soft distinction is a blunt instrument to elaborate these differences, it helps reveal some of the ways that authoring involves writers relating their rhetorical choices to wider social and academic understandings. Some examples of these differences are shown in Table 1, based on the analysis of features in a corpus of 120 research articles from the ten leading journals in 8 disciplines, comprising 1.4 million words (Hyland, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2005).

*Table 1: Selected features across fields (per 1000 words)*

Fields	Self-mention	Citation	Self-citation	Hedges	Boosters	Directives
Arts/Humanities	34.2	11.1	0.4	17.5	6.9	1.2
Science/Engineering	12.1	5.8	0.6	10.25	4.5	2.5

Most predictably, we find that authors in the soft knowledge disciplines intrude into their texts through use of ‘*I*’ or ‘*we*’ almost three times more frequently than scientists. This allows them to both claim authority through personal conviction and to emphasize their contribution to the field. It sends a clear indication to the reader of the perspective from which statements should be interpreted and distinguishes the writer’s own work from that of others. But while self-mention can help construct an authoritative authorial self in the humanities, authors in the hard sciences generally seek to downplay their personal role to highlight the phenomena under study, the replicability of research activities, and the generality of the findings. They distance themselves from interpretations with a higher use of the passive voice (1), dummy ‘it’ subjects (2), and the attribution of agency to inanimate things (3):

(1) This suggestion was confirmed by the observation that only plants carrying the pAG-I::GUS transgene showed a gain of GUS staining in leaves of *clf-2* plants.  
(Biology)

(2) It was found that a larger stand-off height would give a smaller maximum shear strain when subjected to thermal fatigue... (Mechanical Engineering)

(3) The images demonstrate that the null point is once again well resolved and that diffusion is symmetric (Physics)

Instead of using the first person to demonstrate an individual contribution and establish a claim for priority, scientists display their proximity to the norms of their communities through decisions which rely on the persuasive force of lab procedures rather than the force of their writing.

Similarly, Table 1 shows that citation practices also differ enormously, reflecting the extent writers can assume a shared context with readers (Hyland, 1999). ‘Normal science’ (Kuhn, 1970) produces public knowledge through cumulative growth; research is intensively conducted in specific areas so that problems emerge sequentially from earlier problems. This allows writers to rely on readers recovering the significance of the research without extensive referencing as they are often working on the same problems and are familiar with the earlier work. In the humanities and social sciences, on the other hand, research is less linear, the literature more dispersed and the readership more heterogeneous, so writers can’t presuppose a shared context to the same extent, but have to build one

far more through citation. This also helps account for the much higher proportion of self-citation in the sciences (12.5% compared with 4.3% in the humanities) as the linearity of research means that scientists are constantly building on their previous work far more than writers in the soft knowledge fields (Hyland, 2003).

The table also suggests how hedges and boosters index disciplinary authoring practices, with both occurring more frequently in published papers in the arts and humanities. Hedges (e.g. *possible*, *might*, *likely*) function to withhold complete commitment to a proposition. They not only protect writers from imprudent claims by implying that statements are based on plausible reasoning rather than certain knowledge, but they also open a discursive space for readers to dispute interpretations (Hyland, 1998). Authoring in the more discursive fields depends far more on recognizing alternative voices as there is less control of variables, more diversity of research outcomes, and fewer clear bases for accepting claims than in the sciences. Writers can't assume that readers will share their interpretations and so express arguments more cautiously by using more hedges. However, because methods and results are also more open to question, writers also use more boosters in some circumstances to establish the significance of their work against alternative interpretations, using forms like *definitely*, *prove* and *certain* to restrict alternative voices. But while hedges and boosters represent the writer's direct involvement in a text, the positivist epistemologies of the hard sciences encourage writers to subordinate their individual authority to the authority of the text. They therefore use fewer hedges and boosters to downplay their personal role and suggest that results would be the same whoever conducted the research.

A major distinction between hard and soft knowledge areas is the extent to which succinctness and precision are valued, or even possible, and this brings us to the last feature in Table 1: directives. These are devices such as imperatives and obligation modals which instruct the reader to perform an action or to see things in a way determined by the writer (Hyland, 2002). They are not only more frequent in science texts, but also function differently. While 60% of directives in the soft knowledge texts (excluding philosophy) direct readers to tables or references (e.g. *see Smith 1999*, *refer to table 2*),



those in the sciences largely function to guide readers explicitly through an argument, emphasising what they should attend to and the way they should understand it:

(4) What has to be recognized is that these issues..... (Mechanical Eng)

Consider the case where a very versatile milling machine of type M5... (Electrical Eng)

A distinction must be made between cytogenetic and molecular resolution. (Biology)

As mentioned above, the linear, problem-oriented nature of the natural sciences enables research to occur within an established framework of theoretical knowledge and routine practices which means writers can presuppose a certain amount of background, argument, and technical lexis in their writing. This allows authors to report their experiments using a highly standardized code and to frame arguments in familiar, almost shorthand, ways. Moreover, succinctness is highly prized by information saturated scientists who tend to read for the bottom line, quickly scanning texts to recover results of novelty and personal relevance in rapidly moving fields. Directives offer writers an economy of expression and allow them to cut quickly to the heart of an argument. In contrast, knowledge-making in the humanities often needs to be accomplished with greater elaboration, its more diverse components reconstructed for a less cohesive readership. While authoring in empirical fields relies on encapsulating reasoning and getting the reader to 'look' in the right place to accept the veracity of the data, in the humanities it means leading the reader along through the often complex chain of conditions and causal links. What amounts to proximity for authors thus varies considerably.

This brief overview has suggested how the epistemological and social character of disciplines is both reflected and constructed through their rhetorical conventions. By taking Swales's perspective on genre as community situated actions seriously, we can not only see how particular language choices help construct locally persuasive and valid arguments, but also how they contribute to the reinforcement of group membership and disciplinary practices. Academic authors, in other words, need to give some attention to their communities in their argumentative practices, using language to engage with colleagues and code knowledge in accepted modes of argument.

## Genre and the construction of identities

Swales's admonishments to study genres as community practices not only encourages us to focus on disciplinary ways of negotiating meaning, but also tells us something of how writers understand their communities – what they believe their readers are likely to find convincing and persuasive. So these repeated rhetorical decisions don't just construct communities, they also construct individuals.

Research on academic writing has long stressed the connection between writing and the creation of an author's identity (Hyland, 2010; Ivanic, 1998). Identity is said to be created from the texts we engage in and the linguistic choices we make, thus relocating it from hidden processes of cognition to its social construction in discourse. Issues of agency and conformity, stability and change, remain controversial, however. Some writers question whether there is an unchanging self which loiters behind such discourse and suggest that identity is a *performance* (e.g. Butler, 1990) while others see identity as the product of dominant discourses tied to institutional practices (Foucault, 1972).

Generally, though, contemporary perspectives see identity as part of a social and collective endeavour created through participation in our social groups and the ways we are linked to situations, to relationships, and to the rhetorical positions we adopt in our routine interactions with others.

So while identity may be a 'performance', and subject to change, it is a performance which is re-inscribed in us over time. It involves taking on and shaping the discourses and practices of our communities to construct a self both distinctive from and similar to those of its members. As I have argued, these individual and collective identifications are symbolized in genres, so that speaking and writing in community-specific ways proclaims both individuality and membership of a group and a culture. Identity thus involves *proximity*: it depends on *identification with* something as we draw on the disciplinary schema which both shape and enable particular 'speaking positions' and disable others (Baynham, 2006). At the same time, these broad templates for how we see and talk about the world are also the resources we need to present our own perspectives. Academic reputations are based on saying something new, but doing so in ways that are familiar to those we are trying to convince. So while proximity concerns how genre choices

construct individuals as members, *positioning* is how these choices construct members as individuals.

The community's collaborative practices do not just crush users into conformity but are also the options which allow writers to engage in a community and perform an identity. In other words, identity is what makes us *similar to* and *different from* each other and for academics it is how they both achieve credibility as insiders and reputations as individuals. We can see something of this in three genres to which Swales did not turn his attention but where self-representation is most explicit: the homepage, prize application and academic bio.

### ***The academic homepage***

Identity partly involves *identification*: identifying ourselves as belonging to a particular group by taking on its discourses, genres and understandings, what I have called proximity. Creating an academic homepage thus involves presenting the self by selecting materials likely to be valued by a particular group; it means making an identity claim. But there are tensions here as identity has become a marketing tool for universities who frequently manage this genre in ways which promote the institution at the expense of the individual. As Thoms and Thelwell (2005) observe:

The institution merely constructs academics in the model that is ideologically suited in order to promote the institution. Academics are thus denied any autonomous subjectivity construction, and yield to the constructed display items in the university electronic window.

The individuality of academics is marginalized in the name of university branding, suppressing a multi-dimensional view of the person to better showcase the university.

To regain some control over their representations, many academics create their own pages and to understand differences in the claims being made for the individual subjects I compared differences in the two versions of this genre. This involved examining a corpus of 100 homepages in philosophy and physics: 50 university hosted and 50 individual pages by the same authors and taking equal numbers of full professors and Assistant Professors and of men and women from each discipline (Hyland,

2012). I studied the visual design, hyperlinks, and textual representations - all of which are potential materials to construct identity through proximity to community-valued practices and experiences while simultaneously using these materials to position oneself as an individual player.

Visual representation is important in constructing identity in homepages and the most striking feature of the university staff pages is their glossy uniformity. Design, format, colour and images are determined by the institution and duplicated for every member in a department. This repetition imposes a university branding on academics. While located in different disciplines, universities, and countries, the pages in figures 1 and 2 have a similar grid structure and narrow colour range. The pages are dominated by banner headings carrying institutional logos and department and university names, and by sidebars with departmental information. These features act as symbols of ownership which remove agency and position the individual as an employee. Following left to right reading conventions, for example, the text on the left is scanned first. It is the 'given' of the text, providing the context in which we 'read' the author himself. The institutional context is therefore the point of departure for the representation of the academic's identity.

Squeezed into the remaining space, subjects are presented through a brief paragraph, contact details, publication list, and a photograph. The tightly cropped portrait minimizes context and disconnects the subject from time and place. Depicting individuals in this way offers nothing to contradict an exclusively professional persona and reduces our ability to see the individual as anything more than a generic academic filling a vacant place on the homepage. Repeated across an entire department these features construct the subject as just one academic among many - subjugating individuality to the institution (Hyland, 2013).

Figure 1: A Harvard academic university homepage

The screenshot shows the Harvard University Department of Physics homepage for Howard Berg. The header includes the Harvard University logo, the department name, and navigation links like 'Home', 'About', 'People', 'Academics', 'Research', 'Administration', 'Services & Facilities', 'Events', and 'Library'. A sidebar on the left contains navigation options like 'Faculty by Name' and 'Faculty by Research Area', along with contact information for Donna Lundberg, staff support, and links to MCB Page, Berg Lab, and CV. The main content area features a portrait of Howard Berg, his title as Herchel Smith Professor, and a detailed paragraph about his research on bacterial motility. Below this is a 'Selected Publications' section listing several academic papers with their titles, authors, and journal information.

Figure 2: University College London academic university homepage

The screenshot shows the University College London Philosophy Department homepage for Professor Michael Martin. The header features the UCL logo and a search bar. A navigation menu on the left lists various departmental links. The main content area includes a portrait of Professor Martin, his qualifications (B.Phil, MA, D.Phil), research interests in philosophy of mind, psychology, epistemology, and language, and contact information. Below this are sections for 'CURRENT RESEARCH' and 'PUBLICATIONS INCLUDE', listing his work on naive realism and various academic papers.

Hyperlinks are also important as they help construct identity by association. Who we publicly connect with says something about our interests, our communities and how we want to be seen. Through links to the pages of research groups, labs, friends or other departments, authors can construct a 'virtual community' (Rheingold 1995) and claim membership of particular groups. Unsurprisingly, however, the university pages were dominated by institutional links with 31.8% to the department, 12.9% to the university and 16% to courses and student matters. Almost two thirds of the 700 links connected to institutional targets and just 11% to the individual subject.

Because of this, academics attempt to reclaim some control over their identity representations through personal pages. Visually these are generally more homespun and individual. Stripped of university branding, logos, institutional advertising and glossy homogeneity, these 'home-made' pages generally adopt a more personal way of addressing readers. They are altogether more idiosyncratic and distinctive, conveying integrity through minimalism and DIY design. One way authors personalised their homepages is through more and more varied photographs, so there were 5 times more photos in the personal pages and 80% of these were of children, partners, pets, landscapes and hobbies rather than the author, revealing the writer as someone with a life outside university. In these pages the visual does not merely embellish text, but plays a central role in presenting the self.

Links are also different on personal pages – contributing to a more individual identity by creating a network of personally meaningful connections. When given a choice, authors reduced links to their university and department, which fell to 6.5% and 5.3%, respectively, and increased them to their publications and disciplines. Links to publications shot up from 14.2% to 49% and most academics linked to their pdfs and reference lists, but disciplinary links are also far more important here, rising from 4.8% to 10%, taking readers to labs, journal sites, professional associations, and so on. Thus authors used their personal pages to showcase *themselves* as academics rather than their institutions.

Despite these differences, however, there were considerable resemblances in the ways authors described themselves with over 80% of the pages mentioning jobs, research and publications and only

11 giving any personal information at all. Of the 800 links on personally constructed homepages just 88 (10.8%) referred readers to non-work pages, usually personal interest and hobby sites, another third, however, simply loaded a curriculum vitae which re-presented the writer's academic credentials. So while some used their personal page as a chance to present an academic-self more creatively, most remained adamantly professional scholars. But while academics aren't obliged to post personal information, there is a marked absence of any sense of authors' individuality. A homepage generates strong *expectations* of personal disclosure and the decision to present only a professional suggests that the bland academic presented is all there is.

### ***Identity in prize applications***

An equally explicit identity claim is made when applying for prizes and awards. A graduate thesis prize, for example, often entails a supporting statement from the applicant which requires writers to marshal, in a text of around 300 words, their rhetorical and linguistic resources to persuade reviewers of the value of the research. My corpus of 70 statements supporting applications for a doctoral prize in Education submitted over three years and containing just over 23,000 words, is typical of the genre.

These graduate writers sought to take on the voice of competent academics by the skilful adoption of a disciplinary value system, aligning with its shared concerns. The expression of value represents a clear signal of disciplinary identity, particularly proximity, by stressing novelty (5), contribution to the field (6) and clarity of argument (7), with the first two of these occurring in every text:

(5) Part of its originality lies in the conceptualisation and organisation of a theoretical model that has not been presented before.

This thesis was groundbreaking in that it was the first study to look at the non-formal learning of novice teachers in medical settings.

(6) It provides an original contribution to the study of educational accountability, understood in a comparative and cross-cultural perspective, which is neglected in this field. It demonstrates the importance of the concepts of cultural location and of cultural sensitivity.

My thesis will make a major contribution to global literature in the field of research methodology in general and Sri Lankan literature in particular.

(7) It constructs, however, a clear and continuous argument through these multiple engagements.

The work culminates in a strong argument regarding the directions developments in adult learning and educational policy should take.

These doctoral graduates also pressed their claims to a competent academic identity by highlighting expertise in various areas of research. One indication of an academic identity, for instance, is to suggest proximity through know-how in the development of theory and innovative research methodologies, drawing on shared symbolic meanings to do so. The applicants managed this with some assurance:

(8) As such, my study offers a sturdy theoretical framework and a clear methodological path through rich data.

I employed a modified version of the 'circuit of culture' – a theoretical model which holds that meanings are distributed across a series of key moments from product production through to consumption. This original descriptive-cum-analytical framework combines elements of content, discourse and social semiotic analysis.

The use of the first person here is clearly not a casual choice. It functions to display a professional competence by suggesting that, in other hands, things could have been done differently. Similarly, their years of study in doctoral research have enculturated these students into the discursive practices of their disciplines, enabling them to speak fluently using specialized terminology and to discuss esoteric theories and celebrated theorists:

(9) This thesis works within Geographical and Environmental Education and Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) to address matters pertinent to 'philosophy of education' (notably psychology, comparative philosophy and postmodern and critical theorising).

A major theme is the theoretical development of Dowling's Social Activity Method.



The study is a multidimensional, multiscalar and holistic conceptual enquiry into the nature of 'human-place' relations with a view to suggesting crucial dimensions of a '*place-based education*'.

The control of these disciplinary resources and knowledge of in-group terms, concepts and celebrities not only represent specific understandings and a grasp of membership mechanisms, but allows their authors to construct a competent academic self.

Writing like a disciplinary expert is, therefore, more than mastery of particular disciplinary genres such as research articles or theses. It is a process of disciplinary coming that involves control of an entire semiotic system of rhetorical resources and values. The ways that these authors construct these texts is therefore also a way of constructing themselves; a gradual acquisition of the resources necessary to stake a claim for membership and a sufficient grasp of them to carve an individual space for themselves. Prize applications therefor illustrate one of the ways that the concepts of proximity and positioning play out for those new to a discipline, something we can also see in bios.

### ***Identity in the academic bio***

A key aspect of *Genre Analysis* is Swales's assumption that we organise our everyday behaviour through a repertoire of genres, many of which are part of the routinized background of our professional lives. The academic bio is one of these unregarded genres, but it is also an important site where experts and novices alike can position themselves in relation to their discipline and colleagues. Here is an explicit opportunity to present a scholarly identity: drawing on disciplinary-valued experiences and resources to shape a community-situated self. Juxtaposed with the prescribed anonymity of the article itself, which has been stripped of identifying information for blind peer review, this is a genre where, in 50 to 100 words, individuals stake a claim for a particular version of themselves and so indicate what writers see as important and valued by a community. The study summarised here was conducted by Polly Tse and myself (Hyland & Tse, 2012) using a corpus of 600 bios, with 200 from leading journals in each of Applied Linguistics, Electrical Engineering, and

Philosophy. We explored how academics sought to construct their identities in this genre through what they say (moves) and how they say it (process types).

Over half of all moves comprised references to employment and research interests. Rank and experience play a role in what individuals have to say about themselves and we find an upward curve in the mention of research, employment, publication and achievement in traversing the status cline. Senior scholars, in particular, were significantly more likely to discuss both their research interests and publications while, in the absence of a publication record, students largely focused on their educational background. They attempted to manufacture a credible disciplinary identity by highlighting their attendance at a prestigious university, often together with their research interests:

(10) Hua Luan is currently a Ph.D. student in School of Information, Renmin University of China. Her research interests include data warehousing, data mining, .... (EE)

Helen Melander is a Ph.D. student at the Department of Education, Uppsala University, Sweden. Her research interests are learning as an interactional achievement and cognition in a lived social and material world. (AL)

Gender seems relatively unimportant in identity construction in this genre, as men and women said similar things about themselves, and discipline was the most significant influence on what authors included in their bios. The biggest disciplinary difference was the weight engineers gave to education, where it was typically linked with the area of study, thereby demonstrating a specific expertise and insider-competence:

(11) She is currently working toward the Ph.D. degree at the French Aerospace Laboratory, in the Theoretical and Applied Optics Department, Palaiseau, France..

Irene Ntoutsis received her Ph.D. in Informatics from the Department of Informatics, University of Piraeus, Greece.

This reflects a more apprenticeship-based system of research training in the hard sciences where novices enjoy opportunities to participate in research and publishing as part of a lab-based team while

pursuing their studies. For many engineers educational training is a significant aspect of their career profile and therefore tends to be given more attention in their bios.

Applied linguists, in contrast, give greater prominence to their research interests with this move comprising about a third of all moves in their bios:

(12) Her research interests include analyzing student performance on large-scale writing assessments. (AL)

Jennifer deWinter's scholarship unpacks traditional and new media convergence within global markets. (AL)

This not only stakes a claim for academic credibility through familiarity with hot topics, but also aligns the writer with like-minded individuals. Philosophers, on the other hand, highlight their publications, perhaps because the slow publication times and preference for books may count for more when constructing a self than the experience of work in the frenetically paced and multiply authored hard sciences.

Identity is expressed not only in terms of *what* we talk about but *how* we talk about it. One way of understanding identity in this way is to focus on verbs, or *process types*. Here, Systemic Linguistics recognises a distinction between *mental* and *material* processes:

- *mental processes* – are verbs relating to *sensing* (*think, believe, feel*)
- *material processes* – are concerned with *doing* (*work, write, study*)
- A third form are *relational* processes and these express *being*.

Thus, acting on the world in some way (a material process) represents greater visibility than subjectively interpreting it with mental processes. Overall, writers used relational and material processes in 95% of all clauses, stressing what they *are* and what they *do*. Interestingly, relational forms increased with rank and material forms decreased with rank, suggesting, perhaps, a shift from seeing our activities as something we *do* to something we *are* as we move through our careers.

Relational process types were predominantly what Halliday (1994: 119) calls *intensive* types, where a writer claims to *be* something, such as an assistant professor or journal editor. These types made up two thirds of all relational processes. Once again, rank influenced identity construction in this genre with senior academics twice as likely to select *identifying* over *attributive* choices:

(13) Arnold Berleant is Professor of Philosophy (Emeritus) at Long Island University. He is the author of six books that elaborate a field theory of aesthetics  
(Phil)

She is the author or co-author of over 40 technical papers and is the holder of two patents.  
(EE)

These identifying options strengthen identity claims by uniquely *identifying* the writer and signalling that this is an important part of who they see themselves to be. Students and non- non-professorial writers, on the other hand, overwhelmingly selected attributive options, signalling class membership rather than a unique identity:

(14) Sampath is a member of the Institute of Industrial Engineers. (EE)

She is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Comparative Media Studies program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. (AL)

Here writers make claims to be seen as one of many, so their status is part of a wider group and not an exclusive position or distinctive aspect of their persona.

Discipline, however, was again the major influence on choices. Applied linguists, for example, were more likely to add a more reflective and studious shade to their bios through mental processes:

(15) Her research explores prosody as an interactional resource... (AL)

He investigates writing skill in classroom and workplace settings... (AL)

This represents the writer as a thinking academic rather than as an intellectual worker grinding out a quota of papers. Engineers, in contrast, used more verbal forms to present themselves as active discussers, but the greatest variations were in the ways philosophers employed identifying relational clauses. Explicitly naming oneself as something is a significant aspect of identity and philosophers did this twice as frequently as applied linguists and nearly four times more than engineers:

(16) Francisco Díez de Velasco is Professor of History of Religions in the University of La Laguna. (Phil)

He has been President of the International Association for Aesthetics, Secretary Treasurer of the American Society for Aesthetics, and... (Phil)

This option stresses a unique position for the writer and its prevalence in Philosophy may be due to the highly individualistic ethos of the discipline. Proximity here recognises that research practices stress interpretations and arguments as the creative insights of the author rather than as the collective endeavours of a laboratory team and so offer a way of positioning oneself in relation to colleagues.

### **Genre options, agency and positioning**

I have stressed that identities are constructed out of the rhetorical options our communities make available, so we gain credibility as members and approval for our performances as a result of our control of its discourses. We use these to achieve proximity in relation to others and to position ourselves in relation to their ideas. In turn, we are ourselves *positioned by* these same discourses. So there is a tension between using genre conventions to index membership and so claim *similarity* and gaining a reputation by taking a *different* stand using a distinctive set of genre options. In this final section I will take this up briefly by comparing the work of two well-known applied linguists, Debbie Cameron and John Swales, with a larger corpus of work from the same genres to show how they construct very different identities – both from each other and the mainstream (Hyland, 2010).

Deborah Cameron is Rupert Murdoch Professor of Language and Communication at the University of Oxford. A sociolinguist and radical feminist known most widely for her work on gender, globalization and language, and discourse in the workplace, she also has a recognisably confident and assertive style. One of the ways she conveys this is through her significantly above average use of *is* – which is as the 5th most frequent keyword in the her corpus. *It* collocates most frequently in her writing with *it* (370 times) and particularly in the form *it is+Adj.+ to infinitive* (161 times):

(17) It is important to distinguish between the ideological representations of gender found in texts like conduct books and the actual practice of real historical gendered subjects.

To answer these questions it is necessary to consider the influence of a number of vested interests

Thematic *it* introducing an embedded clause as subject helps to shift new or complex information towards the end of a sentence, to the rheme, where it is easier for readers to process. It also, however, asserts the writer's opinion and recruits the reader into it. But because it attempts explicitly to take control of readers' thinking, it is a potentially threatening strategy and so carries a high risk of rejection. To pull it off, Cameron has to recognize a diversity of viewpoints and be prepared to engage with these and she does this by writing the reader into the text, encouraging the addressee to share the conviction she has in her views.

This assertiveness in Cameron's authorial positioning is also expressed through the co-occurrence of *it* with *that* (which occurs 250 times). Hyland and Tse (2005) have called this 'evaluative *that*', a grammatical structure in which a complement clause is embedded in a super-ordinate clause to project the writer's attitudes or ideas.

(18) ...it is my opinion that the classifications used in the BNC are insufficiently delicate for this filter to be effective.

It is not my contention that top-down talk challenges CA's general account of how talk-in-interaction works.

If so, it is evident that inequality, rather than just difference, shapes the relationship of language to gender.

This is a powerful way of projecting ideas as it makes the writer's attitude the starting point of the message and the perspective from which we interpret what follows it, leaving us in no doubt of her attitude.

Another way in which Cameron deploys disciplinary rhetorical resources to construct a distinctive identity is through the use of rebuttal and counter-argument, with *not* (904 times), *but* (572), and *though* (144), all in her top 20 keywords. Thus Cameron employs negation far more than is common in applied linguistics,

using the discipline's resources to directly challenging alternative positions. Once again this is a forceful and dialogistic means of taking a position by engaging with others. This is a typical example:

(19) The idea that access to higher education should be widened, that degree courses should be for the many and not just the few, has attained the status of received wisdom, and it is hard to dispute it without appearing snobbish, reactionary or simply out of date. What lies behind it is not, however, a desire to democratise the 'life of the mind', but a set of ideas about the changing nature of work.

Here Cameron seems to go along with the reasonable policies promoting wider access to university but then turns to question the underlying assumptions of the argument, presenting her own position that 'knowledge work' is actually training for the benefit of employers.

John Swales is an altogether different character. Known for his promotion of ESP and champion of *genre* in English language teaching and research, Swale' rhetorical choices project an identity as a cautious and inquiring colleague rather than a combative advocate and he positions himself in this way largely through genre choices which convey clear personal attitudes and a strong *interpersonal* connection to readers.

Frequent use of the first person is the most striking feature of Swales's discourse, with both *I* and *my* occurring in the top ten keywords. Self-referential *I*, *me* and *my*, in fact, occur almost twice as often in the Swales corpus than in the applied linguistics reference corpus, imparting a clear authorial presence and a strong sense of personal investment to his writing. We see a writer making decisions, weighing evidence and drawing conclusions, as here:

(17) I believe that ESP practitioners find something very appealing in fashioning materials for tight circumstances.

I eventually abandoned my efforts to trace increasing lexical abstraction due to a lack of firm evidence.

In fact, first person in Swales work is mainly associated with mitigation and attitude. A concordance of the first person shows how far agency is associated with modality, or at least a deliberative attitude in his writing. The most frequent main verbs related to *I* are *think* (86), *believe* (71), *suspect* (35), *hope*

(33), *tried* (31) and *guess* (29), all of which point to some degree of tentativeness in handling claims and readers. This reflexivity contributes to an identifiable ‘voice’ and a key aspect of this voice is the frequency with which self-mention is used in a self-deprecatory way:

(18) But I am very unsure whether I will ever use these particular materials again.  
As matters stand at the moment, these materials have been, I believe, an educational failure.

Indeed, despite some trying, I have so far been unable to repeat my earlier success. Perhaps in the same way that composers only seem able to write one violin concerto, discourse analysts can produce only one successful model.

## **Conclusions**

In promoting the study of genres in EAP Swales propelled a generation of teachers and discourse analysts into an absorbing enterprise, opening a window onto the ways individuals understand, sustain and change their communities and their professional selves. ‘Genre Analysis’ offers tantalising glimpses of a world of academic genres, revealing some of the ways we choose our words to connect with others and present ideas in ways that make most sense to them. By privileging certain ways of making meanings, genres help to perpetuate the norms and thinking of disciplinary communities and so encourage the performance of certain kinds of professional identities, but at the same time they also provide the boundaries within which those identities are valued. They are how individuals not only present ideas in ways that are comprehensible and persuasive to a target audience, but also convey the writer’s personality, reliability and relationship to a message. The concepts of proximity and positioning therefore seek to capture the essential dilemma involved in presenting a self: control of genre conventions to index belonging and manipulation of those conventions to establish individuality. While not synonymous with identity, these features perhaps provide the most immediate access to its rhetorical construction because they focus on what individuals do to project themselves as credible academics within a shared professional context.

By encouraging us to see genres as community processes, rather than as artefacts of wider society, Swales opened up a way of exploring the texts and identities that mean the most to community



members. He showed us that genres are the ways we relate independent beliefs to shared experience so that in studying them we are able to see how, through repeated choices from a repertoire of options, people display themselves as the people they want to be. Put most simply, the view which Swales first discussed in *Genre Analysis* provided the seed which allows us to understand the production of genres as both the production of community and the production of self.

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