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## Introduction to Thematic Section: Critical Genre Analysis

### Introduction

Genre Analysis has been a popular discourse analytical framework for the last three decades, in particular for the study of academic and professional discourses and its applications to ESP and professional communication programme design and implementation. Although it has been a very relevant, insightful and useful framework, its main focus on language description and use has some limitations when it comes to bridging the gap between the academy and the world of work. One of the main reasons for this perceived inadequacy is the lack of understanding of professional practices in the real world of professions. Currently used frameworks of genre analysis (Bhatia 1993, Martin 1993, Swales 1990) have not paid explicit attention to the interdiscursive processes so crucially employed in the construction, interpretation, use and exploitation of professional discourses in the realisation of their typical professional practices that are invariably embedded in various aspects of specific professional, institutional and organisational cultures. So there is a need to further develop currently established genre analytical theory in the direction of a more multiperspective and multidimensional ‘critical’ approach (Bhatia 2008, 2010) that will focus more centrally on ‘interdiscursive performance’ rather than just on the description and analysis of professional genres, which has been the main focus of much of genre analytical work so far. There needs to be greater focus on the role of interdiscursivity in professional practice and the use of a multi-perspective framework. This special issue is intended to be a move towards achieving this objective, illustrating some of these distinctive characteristics of critical genre theory in order to help those interested in the dynamic complexities of professional communication in the world of work.

The special issue consists of four papers especially commissioned to highlight some of the significant aspects of critical genre theory and its application. The first paper by Vijay Bhatia on *Critical Genre Analysis: Theoretical Preliminaries* begins with a brief overview of genre analysis making a case for a much needed move towards critical genre analysis. He then offers a theoretical perspective on the notion of ‘criticality’ in critical genre analysis, distinguishing it from its use in critical discourse analysis (CDA), and highlighting some of its significant aspects, in particular focusing on critical genre analysis as a theory of interdiscursive performance.

The next paper by Jane Lung, entitled *Interdiscursivity in Public Relations Communication: Appropriation of Genre and Genre Resources* applies some aspects of critical genre theory, in particular the notion of interdiscursivity, to understand the changing workplace environment in public relations contexts to account for how PR practitioners cope with discursive challenges in their profession. To achieve these aims, she employs a multiperspective framework. This includes in-depth interviews with public relations practitioners to gain their perceptions of their daily activities and the language and communication skills required by public relations practitioners to improve their effective professional communication, as well as critical genre analyses of a number of crucial discursive practices illustrating the relationship between discursive and professional

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practices in public relations contexts, thus claiming that interdiscursivity is essentially built into PR genres.

The third paper by Antoinette Fage-Butler entitled *Investigating Interdiscursivity in Hospital Strategic Plans Using Foucauldian Discourse Analysis* both argues for as well as illustrates that Foucauldian discourse analysis is a very valuable approach with which to analyse interdiscursivity in critical genre analysis. Foucauldian discourse analysis is used to analyse the move of priorities/goals (Cornut et al. 2012) in strategic plans produced by British hospitals, revealing three different discourses, namely: strategic management, public service accountability, and patient centeredness. As interdiscursive analysis reveals the discursive foundations of organizational practices, it is argued that critical genre analysis, supported by the analytical approach of Foucauldian discourse analysis, can make valuable contributions to organizational research.

The final paper by Antonio Compagnone entitled *The Reconceptualization of Academic Discourse as a Professional Practice in the Digital Age: A Critical Genre Analysis of TED Talks* employs critical genre analysis and discourse analysis to compare academics' communicative purposes in two data sets: transcribed TED talks given by academics, and a corpus of university lecture transcripts drawn from the *Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English*. Specifically, the author analyses pronoun use, and finds that in TED Talks, speakers use language to construct their identity as experts as well as promote their research and scholarship, thereby extending the purposes which are often associated with academic discourse in the more typical offline university lecture setting.

We hope that the articles in this thematic section on critical genre analysis indicate the value of using critical genre analysis in a broad range of professional communicative settings, and clarify some important methodological issues.

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