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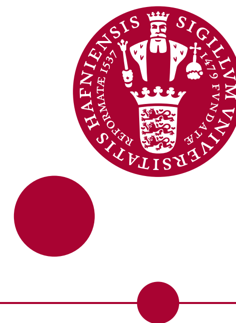

# Genre and Everyday Conversation

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# GENRE AND ...

## Copenhagen Studies in Genre 2

Ekbátana

Ed. Sune Auken,
Palle Schantz Lauridsen, &
Anders Juhl Rasmussen

# GENRE AND ...

## Copenhagen Studies in Genre 2

Edited by
Sune Auken, Palle Schantz Lauridsen,
& Anders Juhl Rasmussen

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# APPROACHES THROUGH THEORY

# GENRE AND EVERYDAY CONVERSATION

Frans Gregersen

EVERYDAY CONVERSATION occupies a peculiar position in the language sciences. All linguists seem to agree, at least in principle, that the primary object of linguistics is spoken language. Some even stress the fact that everyday spoken language is a flexible tool in which any thought can be formulated—albeit not in exactly the same manner: some thoughts lend themselves to elegant phrasing in specific languages but not in others, due to the relations among phonetic, morphological, and syntactic structure and semantic content. This may seem to suggest that everyday conversation is well researched. Not so.

Genre is a ubiquitous concept. Like "style," it is tantalizingly close to becoming a free-for-all, with the result that communications about genre should always include an initial lexical entry specifying its use in what is to come.

Genre has not played a huge role within linguistics as such, but has always lurked at the outskirts, i.e. in the stylistic enterprise of attempting to characterize types of texts, or types of language users, or both simultaneously. In recent years, however, genre has emerged as dominant in two disciplines that are themselves newcomers to the linguistic scene, namely, discourse analysis and corpus linguistics.[1]

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[1] I will not here comment on the history of the notion of genre, except to note in passing that there is a tradition, going back to Dell Hymes' SPEAKING formula (Hymes, 1972), cf. e.g. Downes, 1984, p. 257, of mentioning that genre is an ingredient of the speech event. (Actually it is the G in SPEAKIN<u>G</u>). When you peruse the index of any leading course book, however, it is evident that genre, like style, is not what sociolinguistics is about (cf. Coupland, 2007). The exception to this generalization is R.K.S. Macaulay's work, e.g. Macaulay, 2001; 2005. It may, however, very well be what the ethnography of speaking is about; cf. below: Hanks, 1996. There is also a text-linguistic tradition of genre analysis. That will not be treated here either, but cf. Swales, 2009.

Discourse analysis is a broad discipline concerned with analysis of the semantics of textual practices. In the many extant introductions to discourse analysis, the field is delimited in various ways, but it is rare that Bakhtin and his notion of speech genres are not mentioned.[2] The concept of genre figures prominently in Critical Discourse Analysis, e.g. Fairclough (2003), with reference to the Systemic Functional Linguistic use of genre (cf. Hasan, 1984, 1984a; Christie & Martin, 1997). Common to the discourse analytical approach to genre is that genre is regarded as the framework for a textual analysis of meaning. The stance of Critical Discourse Analysis may be taken as emblematic: genre is seen as at least partly determined by external forces, and the intention is to detect the influence of history and social exigencies on the varieties of genre available at a given time, and exploitations of them, as frames for the production of specific ideologies and extended discourses. In this way, genres are looked at from above, so to speak, and the real interest is to get to the juicy stuff that is inside them.

To assemble corpora of written or spoken texts requires that one specify what kinds of texts one is collecting. Often there will be questions of balanced samples, which again require that one specify text types. This means that from the very outset, corpus linguistics has needed a concept of text type or *Textformen* (cf. the fine discussion in Adolphs, 2008, pp. 76-78). To take an early example that is used in two recent books on corpus linguistics, consider the Lancaster Oslo Bergen corpus, often abbreviated as the LOB corpus, which was compiled in the 1980s. The LOB corpus was planned to become a British counterpart of the renowned Brown corpus, and boasts 15 labeled genres or text categories. Analyzing similarities

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[2] For example, Jaworski & Coupland, 1999, include an abridged version of (a translation of) the original paper as chapter 7, while Janet Maybin introduces the concept by reviewing the Bakhtin-Voloshinov literature in chapter 6 of Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001.

and differences between these genres seems to be a favorite pastime for corpus pros (Baker, 2010, pp. 91-93; Oakes, 2009, p. 174).

Corpus linguistics is an inductive discipline, building on the possibility of storing and annotating large amounts of data in computers in order to make them available for various kinds of more or less automated analysis. Either you can analyze the orthographical string directly (if the text was originally spoken, then it is a prerequisite for analysis that it be transcribed), in order to make lexical semantic profiles or frequency counts; or you can annotate the string of letters and words automatically or manually (Sinclair, 2004). In most corpus linguistic analyses, the annotation tools are derived from the classical notion of word classes. Given a precise delimitation of the various word classes in a given language, computers can be taught to Part-of-Speech tag large corpora to a tolerable degree of precision. Taking unanalyzed texts as their input, and giving texts-cum-PoS tags as their output, the notion of genre is necessary to control the analysis. It has thereby been shown that genres differ in a number of linguistic dimensions historically as well as synchronically (cf. Biber & Finegan, 1989; Biber & Conrad, 2009).

One important divide in this connection is the speech/writing divide. More accurately, this is a speech/writing continuum, since modern media have developed hybrids to bridge the ancient gap between the written and the spoken—notably, chats, instant messages, Facebook updates, emails, and text messages, all of which are clearly written, and thus in a sense permanent and preconceived, but are just as clearly produced instantly, and so share the contextualized and immediate nature of talk. In the useful survey of genre studies in Biber & Conrad, 2009, Federica Barbieri lists an impressive number of recent studies. It is noteworthy that only a few of the listed items are concerned with oral genres. And only a minority of these are concerned with anything other than institutionalized genres stemming from the educational or counseling systems. This is my cue. In the following, I will concentrate on everyday genres of talk: speech genres.

Ever since M. M. Bakhtin's seminal and trailblazing paper on the problem of speech genres (1952-1953/1986), discussion has raged about the relationship between such speech genres and the conventional genres of literary analysis. Given that one of its stated aims of the genre group at the University of Copenhagen is to discuss the usefulness of the genre perspective in all kinds of textual worlds, it is obvious that this discussion must be addressed in this collection of papers as well. Within the world of language, speech is evolutionarily as well as historically prior to writing, and it thus stands to reason that speech genres have a much longer history than written genres do. Yet we cannot prove this directly, since only the advent of writing has made it possible for us to argue about historical records on the basis of solid evidence. This is no different than in other historical sciences, e.g. geology or the nexus of history and archaeology. Everywhere in these sciences, as soon as we progress backward past the earliest written evidence, we must rely on abduction or inference to the best explanation.

Let me attempt a broad and sweeping statement here. The historical record shows us that literature, as precisely written products, has evolved toward an ever more complex relationship with its spoken counterpart. For quite a long time now we have thought of the Homeric poems as the product of an oral culture (Jensen, 2011), and the study of the oldest written documents in Danish, the regional laws, is replete with statements about the oral nature of their prose style (Skautrup, 1944, p. 208, cf. 280; Ståhle, 1965, cf. Brink, 2005). In keeping with the evolution of writing as a medium in its own right, written genres evolved which have no counterpart in the spoken language mode. In part this is a matter of scale. Written language grants us the possibility of tying so many utterances together that no speaker could possibly hold the floor with them, nor would any listener have the patience for such a speech. As a result, written genres have evolved that have only a distant relationship to the primary speech genres of everyday conversation, precisely because they have the possibility of

including all primary speech genres in a fictional world. Bakhtin argues convincingly that the novel is such a genre, and the analysis by Sune Auken (this volume) of the "letter" (itself modeled on the speech genre of Confidences) demonstrates that such written genres may be embedded in fictional worlds (see also Auken, 2013)—or indeed, as in the so-called "epistolary novels," may establish such a fictional world by themselves (Jørgensen, 2005).

This development over centuries means that any attempt at forging a synchronic relationship between speech genres and contemporary written (and in particular, fictional) genres runs the risk of missing the point. Only a historical approach may contribute to solving this problem.

## A HISTORICAL APPROACH TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPOKEN AND WRITTEN GENRES

In modern everyday conversation we find the traces of age-old genres. Narrative genres survive in the guise of the so-called "Personal Narrative": still a showstopper that claims the floor for its own, but in return has to live up to the perennially dangerous audience reaction of "so what?" Wherever we have discussion between two or more parties, we have the source for all argumentation—and let it be noted that we thereby see that its source lies in interaction, in contrast to the narrative monologue: two or more perspectives are outlined and variously aligned or contrasted in conversation, as in all argumentative prose where lines of argument are played out as two or more "voices," point and counterpoint. The aesthetic effects of the condensed lyrical mode have their sources in proverbs and sayings, as Jakobson convincingly demonstrated in his famous analysis of the "I like Ike" slogan (Jakobson, 1960).

We must imagine that the evolutionary origin of the speech genres is to be found in the hunter-gatherer societies of the distant past. I am no expert on hunter gatherers, but a reasonable suggestion is to relate the speech genres of such communities to the lived practices of this mode of

subsistence. According to Dunbar (1996), the role of the spoken language was to replace the grooming so characteristic of the primate groups of human apes. Grooming is a one-to-one business, with only one groomer and one groomee, and has the crucial function of upholding a hierarchy as well as the group as such. The nearest equivalent to grooming is gossiping, here taken in its broadest sense as talking about each other and displaying the moral order or making it explicit. Gossip crucially has the added advantage of making a larger group possible, since it is not necessarily a one-to-one mode of communication but may involve more individuals. Dunbar gives a number of examples of primary groups, what would now be called "Communities of Practice," and finally focuses on the interesting example of military units. He asks how large a military unit can be (pp. 74-76) while still being of optimal size for efficiency. The result is close to 200, and the conclusion is obvious: "Thus it seems that, even in large-scale societies, the extent of our social networks is not much greater than that typical of the hunter-gatherer's world" (p. 77). A group size like this, which is larger than that of other primates (p. 63), is only possible because the acquisition of language has made social contacts among this many members feasible.

Gossip is thus the preeminent example of the so-called "phatic (communion) function" in Roman Jakobson's famous model of the dimensions of language (1960). It serves to intensify contact between the speaker and the addressee(s). Jakobson explicitly states that "The endeavor to start and sustain communication is typical of talking birds; thus the phatic function of language is the only one they share with human beings. It is also the first verbal function acquired by infants; they are prone to communicate before being able to send or receive informative communication" (p. 356).

What I suggest is not that babies gossip to their mothers or fathers when they communicate without being able to say anything, but that gossip is the extended use of information that is relevant to the group in being about potential breaches of the social order. In this way the group may celebrate their agreement as to what the moral order indeed is. As such,

gossip is a crystallization of elementary acts into a genre, a genre of speech that has always been with us, but which is constantly being transformed to fit our present social needs.

Let us ponder what the equivalent of gossip was in preliterate societies. In such communities any information about social relations would be valuable. Thus we see that in the Icelandic sagas, any information about others is worth having. In communities without any authoritative source of information apart from the annual meeting at the Allting, farmers were dependent on travelers to provide information about those whom they had just visited or heard about when visiting others. Obviously, such information may be inaccurate or twisted; in many cases, the sagas report on such breaches of the principle of relevance as the origin of feuds.

Gossip has as its modern equivalents the countless magazines and TV reports on the private lives of famous people (Hollywood couples, etc.) whose main characteristic is the blunt invasion of any privacy at all. "The more the merrier" seems to be their watchword. But gossip has also developed (or stayed completely the same) as a genre in everyday conversation. Nordenstam (1998) gives a particularly precise characterization of this type of speech from a gender perspective. The distinctive characteristic of this genre thus seems to be its stability, although we may perfectly well imagine that what is being *gossiped about* has developed somewhat since the time when hunter-gatherer groups roamed the land. But then again: I must confess that I am at a loss to define what a possible breach of the moral order might qualify as being juicy enough to be the stuff of gossip in such communities.

Gossip and Personal Narrative make up a peculiar tandem, and probably always have. In the Personal Narrative, the storyteller imparts experiences of reportable events in a dramatized form to an audience. In the genre of Gossip, in contrast, events are recounted that bring to light events that may or may not constitute violations of the moral order. Thus the Narrative presupposes a moral order—otherwise we would not know what was "re-

portable" and what was tedious; whereas the genre of Gossip recreates a moral order challenging its limits by retelling unheard-of actions. Historically, the focus on individuals must be new in both genres, since (the focus on) the individual itself is a comparatively late invention.

Genres in speech originate with the needs of the social group. Since history is only possible with written records, we can only see the transformation of speech genres whenever they are committed to writing. This means that we may follow the long lines of narrative text types, for example, as they crystallize into now well-known genres as these develop through time. Just as it is hard to see the grammaticalization process which goes on under our very noses but much easier to perceive the result ("peut être" into "peut-etre", "por che" into "porche", "må ske" into "måske"), and just as it is difficult to get at the canonization process that elevates certain authors to the rank of immortality, while at the same time relegating others to oblivion (what happened to J.P. Donleavy?), it is almost impossible to see the crystallization of textual elements it takes to establish a genre out of a "candidate text type."

But while it is indeed difficult, it is essential to differentiate along this dimension so that we distinguish text types, of which there is a large number, from "real" genres, which are not that numerous. More about this later.

### THE SYNCHRONIC VIEW

Genre is a patterned and recurring set of linguistic practices that serve a family of functions. So much we all agree on. The original intention of having a level of genre at all is emblematically captured by Hanks (1996) when he writes:

> In order to describe communicative practices, we need a unit of description that is greater than the single utterance but less than a language. We need a way of distinguishing kinds of practice. One way to do this

> would be to differentiate by the fields in which communicative practices occur, but to do this would be to imply that kinds of practice and kinds of field covary perfectly, so that a description of one would suffice to describe the other. This implication is manifestly false, since speech of various kinds occurs in virtually all fields (although some, like ritual or legal fields, may be relatively constraining). An alternative would be to rely on the types of illocutionary forces distinguished in classical speech act theory, but we have already seen the weaknesses of such an approach, which is in any case focused on single utterance types and not larger discourse practices (…). The unit we shall use for this level of description is the discourse genre. (p. 242)

Hanks neatly introduces us to the two neighboring levels of "fields" (or spheres of life), which resides "above" the level of genre, and of utterances, which lies "below" it. Genre is a typical meso-level notion.

Two approaches can be outlined. One underlines the creative nature of genre practices or stylistic practices. This approach is particularly prevalent in literary aesthetics (for obvious reasons), but may certainly also be found in studies which stem from the so-called "third wave" of sociolinguistics (Eckert, 2012; Coupland, 2007). The complementary approach focuses on genre as constraining practice and has to its credit studies of how genre frames are necessary in order to live an everyday practical life navigating between TV programs that advertise "thrillers," "romantic comedies," "news," and "sports event commentaries," or people who presuppose that you can distinguish a juicy story about the boss from slander. This conception of genre has proven ideal for the teaching of written genres (cf. Smedegaard, this volume).

I hope to strike a compromise between the two in my conception of genre as *constrained creativity*: every time we indulge in a genre, we recreate it by following patterns that make it obvious to the individuals we interact with what we are "doing"—while at the same time filling this pat-

tern with our own home-grown content, or even modifying some of the optional features of the genre at hand.

## CONVERSATION, AND THE RECORDING OF IT

The characteristic feature of everyday spoken language is that it is relatively private. We may record and analyze all kinds of institutional talk (Drew & Heritage, 1992) and a number of discourse analyses treat for instance teaching talk (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1992, plus the studies annotated in Biber & Conrad, 2009, pp. 272-274). But what goes on in institutions is institutionalized, which makes it neither the only nor the typical kind of spoken language. Apart from public speeches and lectures, the typical form is conversation.

In conversation two or more parties, but rarely more than six individuals in total, exchange information. This means that conversation ranges from comparison of reactions to bits of public news to confidences meant only for closest friends. Everyday conversation is not public speech. This is the primary reason for the so-called "observer's paradox" in sociolinguistic interviews (Labov, 1972a, p. 209): we want to know how informants talk when we are not there, but we have to be there to record it.[3]

If everyday conversation were not part of the private lives of our fellow citizens, we would not have any second thoughts about spying on them, and indeed it is a moot question whether it would be defensible to record those (one-sided) conversations on mobile phones, which actually often pollute public spaces. As it is, sociolinguists agree on following strict rules of ethics which call for informed consent whenever a recording is made—and this is regardless of its purpose. Research does not occupy a privileged place outside of the speech community as such, and informants are—no less than other language users—in charge of their own production.

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3 In recent years, various sociolinguists have experimented with lending recording devices to informants so that they may make so-called "self-recordings" (Wilson 1987). Self-recordings raise a number of other issues (Schøning & Spindler Møller, 2009).

At the Danish National Research Foundation LANCHART Centre at the University of Copenhagen, we repeat earlier studies (most of them are from the late 1980s) of spoken Danish from six different locations all over Denmark in order to chart the change of spoken Danish in real time (Gregersen, 2009a). In 231 cases we have succeeded in locating informants who participated in previous studies and re-recording them. This so-called "panel study" is supplemented by recordings of informants who are similar in all other respects to those who were recorded originally (thus making up a so-called "trend study"). The panel study makes it possible to ascertain to what degree individuals change in real time (if at all). The trend study, on the other hand, studies the speech community and its possibility of changing in real time. Our primary research tool is (various versions of) the sociolinguistic interview.

### THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC INTERVIEW AS A SPEECH EVENT

The classic text for this section is Labov (1984). I will be referring to this text as the baseline from which sociolinguists of all kinds diverge more or less consciously.

The sociolinguistic interview is a solution to the perennial problem of reduction. The world as such is too complex to research, and so we have to find some manageable representation of the object under study. In this case, we are interested in spoken language and in the variation of spoken language both intra-individually and inter-individually. To document spoken language we have to make a recording. Recording equipment is not a natural part of the everyday lives of the informants (yet), and still less is the intrusion of a field worker on their privacy. Objective reasons are always presented, but in most cases they fade quite quickly (pace Wolfson, 1976) whenever the informant gets the idea of the sociolinguistic interview. The clear message is: "you (the informant) just talk, and I (the field worker) will listen carefully and prompt you as needed with new subjects of mutual interest."

Most sociolinguists have been surprised to find how easy it is to make people participate in interviews. There are two reasons for this. First of all: it is highly unusual to sit for any length of time with a sympathetic listener who really pays attention to whatever you utter without having any stake in it apart from getting the tape back home with him. The special role of the interviewer, which will normally develop during the interview only to become clearer the longer it lasts, has been called that of "the intimate stranger" (Albris, 1991). This captures the urge of the interviewee to use the interviewer for his or her own purposes: if s/he wants to confide in the interviewer, s/he can do so in the safe knowledge that the interviewer will not reappear—at least not for the next 20 years. Secondly, most interviews center upon the life and experiences of the interviewee and it seems that people enjoy talking about themselves. Wouldn't you?

## FROM STYLE TO DISCOURSE CONTEXT ANALYSIS[4]

The LANCHART database consists of more than 1800 recordings, only a fraction of which have been transcribed and proofread. Nevertheless, when faced with so many recordings, stemming from six different sites and from original studies which were carried out with different purposes (cf. Gregersen, 2009a), the need for an instrument to ensure comparability arose and soon became acute. The trouble with comparability can be sketched briefly as follows (Gregersen & Barner-Rasmussen, 2011): individuals vary linguistically during interviews. This much we know. So how can we make sure that we are comparing commensurables, even when we are comparing two different recordings with the same informant?

In Labov (1966), arguably the Old Testament of sociolinguistics, this is called "the style problem." The concept of style here, as most often in variationist sociolinguistics, refers to intra-individual variation. As a lin-

[4] A very large part of this section is adapted from a working paper for the International Council meeting at the LANCHART Centre (Gregersen, Larsen, Olesen & Møller, 2006).

guistic phenomenon, a style is a pattern of variable values: values that differ from those that the same individual uses at another time or in other circumstances. If a sociolinguistic project aims to discover such intra-individual variation, it may either follow the same individual across a number of (or at least two) situational contexts, or it may use the conventional methods of staging sociolinguistic interviews.

In the first case, individual language use is compared across situations. The textbook example of this is Labov's description of two different interview situations with the same eight-year-old Leon C yielding dramatically different speech samples. In the first interview, the adult field worker was alone with the child, resulting in minimal answers and several passages of awkward silence. In the second interview, the same field worker brought both chips and Leon's best friend along as well as introduced taboo words himself. This strategy is thus *situation-based*, since the interviews from this point of view constituted two different situations. The first one was (classified as) a formal interview while the second one was seen as a party (Labov, 1972b, pp. 207-209, cf. in particular 209). Often this strategy will involve an ethnographic approach and a longitudinal perspective. The "styles," so to speak, are more or less given with the situations or Communities of Practice selected beforehand.

In the second case, there is only one (macro-)situation, viz. the sociolinguistic interview, but the relationship between the interlocutors may develop during the interview, so that situations arise within the macro-situation that resemble, or even imitate, other situations or other Communities of Practice—thus calling forth linguistic patterns which more or less closely resemble those used in these situations. The strategy is willy-nilly *relationship-based*, since it hinges on the ability and willingness of the interlocutors to develop the relationship as they go along. Only in the latter case you need a metric or a method for delimiting style contexts within the global situation of the interview. The metric would lead to the isolation of specific patterns of variable use.

However style is delimited, not any old pattern of variable values will do. What patterns are recognized as distinct styles is also a question of social stereotyping, i.e. interpretation. Thus we may distinguish in principle between a "producer-oriented" style analysis focusing on the value patterns themselves, and simply search inductively for possible significant differences in variable use. Or we may look at style from the point of view of the audience ("audience-oriented" style analysis). This will consist in sorting out which among the many patterns actually have a social life as stereotypes, i.e. as recognizably distinct patterns of variable values. For any audience-oriented style analysis it is of paramount importance to recognize what type of effect is evoked in social terms. Thus, stylistic stereotypes can only be argued into existence by pointing to data that support their stereotypical social existence in the community studied. This is the province of perceptual dialectology (Preston, 1999) and language attitude studies in general (Kristiansen, 2009).

It is quite easy to see that both of the two methods described and the two uses delineated are closely related, and have been so since the foundational work by Labov (cf. below). The relationship between intra-individual variation, i.e. style, and stylistic stereotypes has to do with the fact that intra-individual variation has to mean something in order for it to be a significant social fact. For that to happen, style has to evoke in the audience some sort of response, i.e. it has to be interpretable. "Interpretability" means some sort of social stereotyping such as the following: whenever a person deviates stylistically in a certain direction, this will, other things being equal, be interpreted as signalling such and such a social identity.

## DIACHRONY AND SYNCHRONY IN THE STUDY OF GENRE

The LANCHART Discourse Context Analysis (DCA) is developed as a tool for the analysis of contemporary data stemming historically from the same time slice. As such, it does not contain any solution to the problem of

how genres are born. The classification grid presupposes that the genres delimited are already socially recognized as such and belong to the repertoire of the analyzed speech community. But genre is obviously also a historical concept (Fowler, 1982). The genres recognized in the DCA may be very old or even ancient, such as the personal narrative, gossip, or the joke; but it is also necessary to recognize, in any analysis of speech genres in present day communities, that some patterns have not yet been conventionalized and are to be seen as *candidates* for recognition as genres in the long run. Compare "the rise of the novel" (Watt, 1957) in literary studies, or "the advent of the piano sonata" in the study of classical music, with the situation in the study of speech genres, and you will find that such candidates are ubiquitous.

A particularly pertinent example is offered by the internet. The early history of the internet is well known from the work of Susan Herring (e.g. Herring 1996), David Crystal (e.g. 2001), Naomi Baron (e.g. Baron 2008), and others, but the web is expanding every day and so too, probably, is the repertory of genres. An interesting example is the advent of personal video blogs, so-called "v-logs" (Frobenius, 2011). Individuals who are not satisfied to blog in writing alone put up a camera in their home or some well-chosen place, and record themselves for a short period giving a poignant statement or a personal message. They put these video snatches on a personal web page, and some of them thus become more or less professional v-loggers. The vexing problem here is whether this is actually a new genre or just an old one—let us call it "opining"—in a new format, produced under the conditions of a new communication channel. Opinions about this differ.

In Gregersen (2009b) I studied the speech genre of the MUS (i.e. conversations which annually take place between an employer and his employee in order to channel frustrations between the various layers of the workplace organization; in principle this is a two-way street, but it seems that most often the employer uses the MUS to give feedback to the em-

ployee and not necessarily the other way around). The MUS has its origins in the negotiation of wages and the theory of the organization as a learning organism; obviously these are historical developments, and have not existed throughout human history. Nevertheless, elements of this speech genre, by now highly conventionalized, may be identical structurally and content-wise to the genres of Discussion and Confidences.

Generally speaking, it could be fruitful to distinguish between three stages in the historical development of a genre: the first stage comprises not yet conventionalized text or speech types, which could be termed "genre candidates." We realize that something special is going on: a particular combination of elements that we recognize as forming a more or less constantly recurring pattern has crystallized into a candidate for recognition as a genre. It has not just yet established itself with a recognizable structure, but it is about to do so. In the example of the v-logs, the limits of this candidate genre have yet to be found. Until then, from this point of view, it remains a candidate.

The second stage or layer is the one we will be detailing below: the conventionalized patterns of elements which make up a recognized genre, psychologically real for all relevant members of the speech community in both recognition and production.

Finally, I want to raise the possibility of bundling genres into "supertypes" so that we arrive at a level equivalent to the Aristotelian genres, or a level which makes it possible to state generalizations about similarities across domains between exemplary genres as, for instance, those indicating closeness and intimacy (the genres of Confidences and Gossip are obvious candidates) in contrast to, for example, Soap Box, Public Speeches (which may themselves again contain Jokes and (mock) Confidences ("just between you and me" (and the audience)) and other genres signaling distance. To my mind, such oral genre supertypes would offer a fruitful direction to work in both synchronically and diachronically.

## THE LANCHART DCA, AN OVERVIEW

Following Nikolas Coupland's critical dissection of the notion of style (Coupland, 2007), the LANCHART Centre solution to the problem of comparability left the Labovian notion of style as a one-dimensional concept based on various determining and clearly detectable contexts (Gregersen, Nielsen, & Thøgersen, 2009). We kept the notion of detectable contexts, but multiplied the dimensions so that more aspects of the recordings could be taken into consideration. More specifically, we adopted the following six dimensions:

For total annotation/coding of recordings, all passages have to be assigned to a category in the following three dimensions. The manual[5] lists the characteristics:

- Type of Speech Event (the S-dimension): 5 subcategories
- Activity Type (the A-dimension): 6 subcategories
- Type of Macro Speech Act (the M-dimension): 5 subcategories: Exchange of information, Exchange of attitudes, Exchange of emotions, Speech accompanying action, Exchange of fiction.

For partial coding/annotation, only passages which fulfill stated criteria for assignment to a category are coded. The manual lists the criteria:

- Type of Interaction (the I-dimension): 5 subcategories
- Type of Enunciation (the U-dimension): 6 subcategories
- **Genre (the G-dimension):** 8 subcategories: Narrative, General Account, Specific Account, Soap Box, Gossip, Confidences, Reflections, Jokes.

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[5] The manual for the Discourse Context Analysis (DCA) is available both in Danish and in English at the DGCSS (Danish)/LANCHART (English) website: DGCSS or Lanchart.

As stated above, I will concentrate on the dimensions of Macro Speech Act and Genre, since on this conception they are complementary. But first a practical introduction to the DCA.

When analyzing a recording, we start out by characterizing its type as a speech event. Three dimensions are relevant here, namely, whether there are multiple interviewees, whether the interviewer is present or not (this is obviously relevant only for the recordings with more than one interviewee), and finally whether the interviewer and interviewee(s) know each other beforehand. This matrix gives us a first classification, but in the LANCHART case the main differences are clearly between single person and group recordings.

Within the recordings we have to distinguish among several activities, inasmuch as the interviewer is on a mission to get several types of information to take back home: in all Labovian-type interviews like those from the early Copenhagen Study (Albris, 1991), the interviewer wants to be sure that he is indeed talking to a person who fits into the distinction between Working Class and Middle Class as defined (Gregersen, Albris, & Pedersen, 1991, pp. 19-21). In the re-recordings, this part of the interview was extended to include filling out a questionnaire, in an attempt to elicit a somewhat formal style at the beginning of the interview. We suspected that it would otherwise be difficult to get formal speech represented in the new recordings, because a massive informalization process had taken place in the period between the two recordings in the speech community. The main body of the interviews and group discussions is designed to be what we call the activity type "conversations." Note that this definition only partially corresponds to the delimitation of conversation within corpus linguistics.

The subcategory of conversations is the unmarked activity type in recordings, and hence also functions as the residual category: all passages which have not been otherwise classified into an activity type are "conver-

sation" by definition. Because of the way the LANCHART recordings were carried out, three subcategories are relevant here: first of all, we must single out those passages in which a non-participant enters the room and actually participates by being addressed by one or more of the licensed ones. Secondly, in some interviews we included elicitation in order to get infrequent variables represented, or to get essential information about intonation. Finally, in all interviews it was an important part of the field worker's job to carry out a study of the informant's language attitudes (Kristiansen, 2009). These activity types must be delimited before we can assign the rest of the recording to the category of conversation.

It is important to know who is actually talking in the recordings. Thus we included the dimension "Enunciation," so important in and dear to literary analysis since Benveniste and Génette. This dimension is designed to capture quotations and other introductions of "other voices" in the speech of any single informant. If the passage is designed as being that of "another voice," it is by definition unsuited for comparison. The categories are necessarily very broad, and serve only to focus on passages where the speaker is taking on another voice than "his or her own." Note that the annotation is carried out on the basis of the transcripts only, in order to avoid vicious circles of argumentation in the phonetic analysis, which is based on the DCA.

To be a field worker in a sociolinguistic study is a highly refined role. It is distinct from the role of a friend or associate both in the expectations on the part of the interviewee and in practice. The role and the ensuing relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee may certainly develop during the recording process—that is actually the point. But in order to capture this, we must specify what types of interaction are represented and at which points in the process. For this reason, we developed the subcategories of the "Interaction" dimension. The expectations inherent in the interview as a genre, and consequently also in the sociolinguistic interview, are that the interviewer is a question machine that will produce

questions at every junction, while the role of the interviewee is to answer. In the course of developing this dimension, we actually skipped the default interactional structure, ending up with only the five subcategories that indicate deviations from the default: "Absence of asymmetry," "Reversal of interactional roles," "Struggle for the floor," "Informants taking over" (relevant primarily in recordings with more than one informant, hence the plural form), and finally a category which is not exactly a deviation from the default, but rather an extension of it: "Monologue" (i.e. one person holding the floor for an extended stretch of discourse).

## GENRE AND MACRO SPEECH ACT IN THE LANCHART INTERVIEWS

The classification of everything that goes on within the recordings as one of the Types of Macro Speech Acts specified above is a pivotal move in the DCA: it deviates from the Bakhtinian notion "One utterance—one genre," which could easily be translated into "One speech act—one genre." The label "Macro Speech Act" is intended to clarify that several utterances make up one type of (Macro) Speech Act in that they are produced to accomplish "the same function." It is also important that the notion of Macro Speech Act is inherently interactional, hence the central notion of "exchange." The interlocutors cooperate to accomplish an exchange that is primarily focused on either information (cf. Halliday's ideational function, Bühler's *sachbezogene*) or attitudes or emotions (cf. Bühler's notions of sender and addressee). Add to this that we have to make room for the change in interaction and focus that takes place during the interview sessions when speech is accompanied by an action, like putting water in an electric kettle or putting plates on the table (cf. Vygotsky's and Luria's notion of speech directing action).

The classification scheme was developed in constant dialogue with the material in the so-called "exploratory corpus". This selection of 20 recordings was intended to maximize variation in the corpus, and so included all kinds of recordings, among them a group recording without any

interviewer. Here the boys invented and developed a fictitious world as part of the drawing task they were assigned. This made it mandatory to develop a final subcategory of the Macro Speech Act dimension: Exchange of Fiction. It is not exactly common in the recordings, but then again neither are jokes—and that does not prevent jokes from being a fact of life outside of recording sessions.

The dimension of Macro Speech Acts, being an annotation which obligatorily assigns a code to any passage in the recordings, functioned as the necessary backdrop for the genre classification itself. It made it possible to develop the genre classification *so that a sizable proportion of the recordings would not be assigned to any genre at all.* Here again there is an obvious departure from what a Bakhtinian conception of genre would lead to (cf., Andersen, this volume). At the same time, the subcategories of the Macro Speech Act dimension are admittedly broad and less precise (and hence carry less information) than the categories developed for the Genre dimension. Here we include both structural and semantico-functional characteristics to characterize genres that also may be found outside this set of recordings.

Within sociolinguistics, special attention has been given to what we may call "the narrative field," due to the early detection by Labov and Waletzky (1967) of the Personal Narrative as one context for the production of an informal, vernacular style. But the Personal Narrative as delimited by Labov (cf. Møller, 1993) is really only one kind of narrative discourse; hence the need for the two other categories within the narrative field: Specific Accounts (Gsr), which are intended to cover personal narratives containing non-reportable events, and General Accounts (Ggr), which roughly capture non-personal narratives. Together, the categories of (Labovian) Narratives (Gna), General Accounts (Ggr) and Specific Accounts (Gsr) cover the entire narrative field, thus making it possible to see how much of specific passages are produced in a narrative (epic) mold.

The narrative field has an obvious affinity to the interactional category of monologue but so does the genre Soap Box (Gsb). Soap Box was developed by Labov (cf. Labov, 2001) and surfaces in the work of the Milroys (Milroy & Milroy, 1977) in Belfast for obvious reasons. The Milroys did their fieldwork in Northern Ireland at the time of "the troubles," and the category of Soap Box covers political statements given as a sort of public speech in a private home. This category is particularly interesting for its bracketing of the recording session as an intrusion into the sphere of intimacy. Soap Boxes point the other way: out of the sphere of intimacy and towards the public sphere.

By contrast, the categories of Gossip (Gsl), Confidences (Gbe), and to a certain extent Jokes (Gvi) all belong squarely in a relationship that presupposes trust, and hence might be taken as indicators of what used to be called "informal, vernacular style" on a par with Personal Narratives or even more so. Particularly the category of Confidences (Gbe) construes the relationship between interviewer and interviewee as close, since it follows from the definition of Confidences that they are exclusive information meant for trusted partners.

Finally, the category of Reflections (Gre) marks a sort of middle ground between Soap Box (Gsb) (indicating the opening of the sphere of intimacy in the direction of the public sphere) and Confidences (Gbe) (indicating the opposite movement), in that this genre includes the interviewee's distance towards his or her own life and experiences which are made the object of a sort of interpretation of them in the light of their importance to the lived life. Together with Personal Narratives (Gna), this is the closest we come to the writing of an autobiography in the course of a recording session.

In Figures 1 and 2, I demonstrate the genre distribution of the sociolinguistic interviews making up the entire Copenhagen data set of 43 x 2 (old and new) interviews. One first observation when inspecting the figures is that the narrative field dominates. Only very few passages are clas-

sified as belonging to the genres Gossip (Gsl), Soap Box (Gsb), or Reflections (Gre), and there are simply no passages belonging to the genres Jokes and Confidences. From the point of view of getting close to the informal mode where precisely Confidences would abound, this result is disappointing.[6] On the other hand, the hallmark of vernacular speech production, the Personal Narrative (Gna), is strongly present in the old study (S1) and, slightly more so, in the new one (S2):

[6] This is not entirely true, but is in part an artifact of the method used in the figures. It is worthy of mention that there were actually passages which were double-coded as involving Confidences. All double codes have, however, been left out of consideration in the preparation of the figures 1 through 3 for methodological reasons.

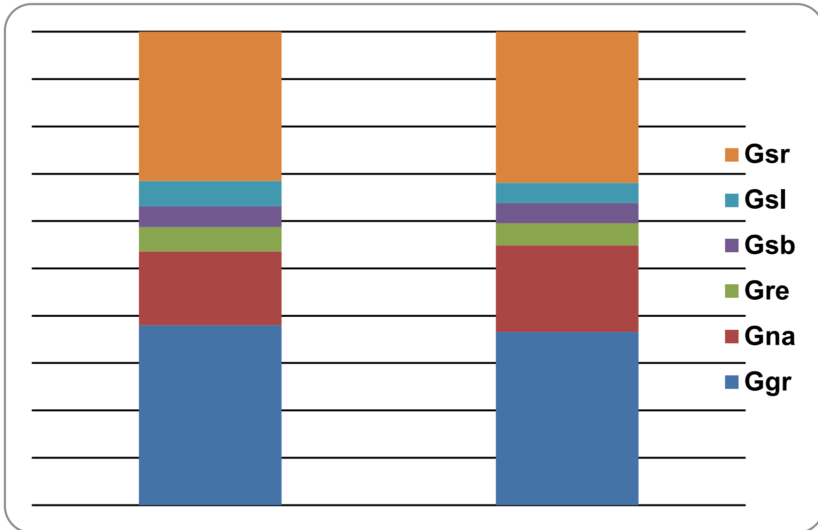


*Figure 1:*

The distribution of genres in the Copenhagen data set, generation 1 in S1 (the old recordings from the late 1980s) and S2 (the re-recordings from 2006-07). Note that the distributions are virtually identical, lending some credence to the idea that the sociolinguistic interviews in this data set have the same general make up. The figures all show the relative weight of Genres in the data based on the number of passages assigned a specific Genre label. It does not say anything about how many words a passage contains, and thus does not give a clear picture of the weight of the specific passages.

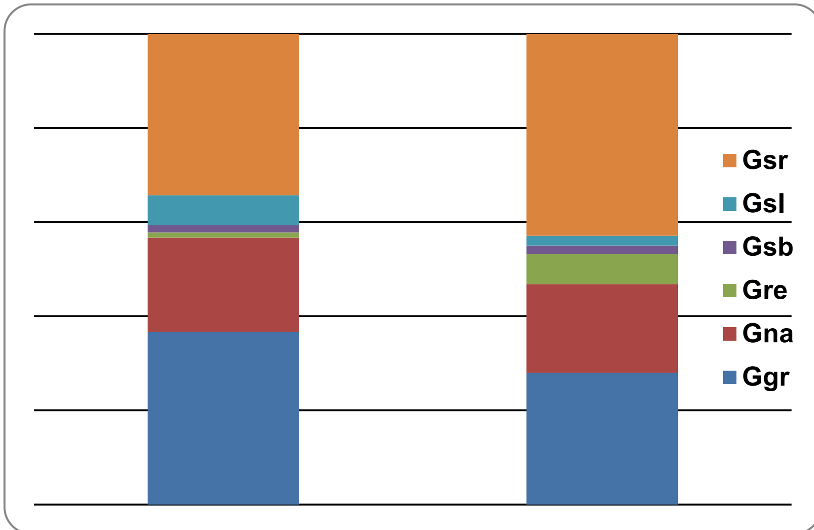


*Figure 2:*
The genre distribution in S1 and S2 for the younger generation of Copenhagen informants, generation 2. Here the distribution seems to reflect that the informants have passed a critical limit between ages, i.e. developing from youngsters or young adults into more settled individuals: less Gossip and more Reflections. The proportion of passages labeled as Specific Accounts (Gsr) distinguishes the generation 2 S2 figures from those of generation 1.

In Figure 3 I have taken the narrative field out for special consideration, in order to ascertain whether any differences emerge between the generations.

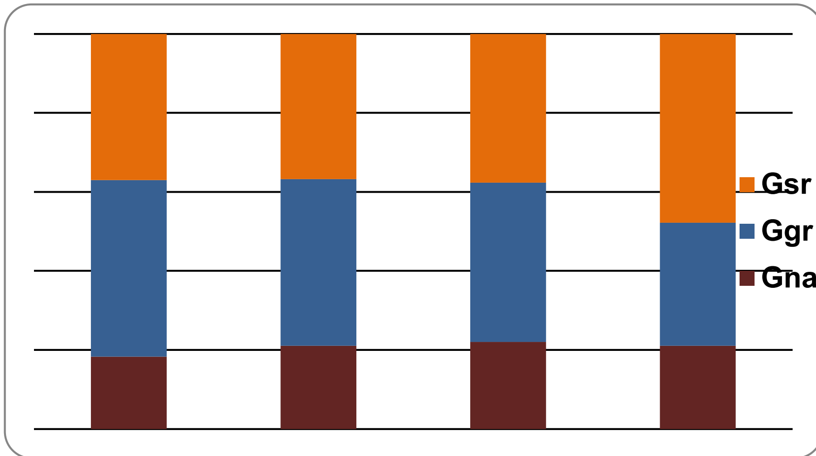


*Figure 3:*

The genre distributions in interviews from Copenhagen with both Generation 1 and 2 informants. Only passages coded as belonging to the narrative field, viz. Specific Accounts (Gsr), General Accounts (Ggr) and Personal Narratives (Gna) have been selected. The proportion of passages labeled as Personal Narrative seems to be fairly stable, whereas there are particular fluctuations in the relative weight of Specific and General Accounts in the Generation 2 S2 recordings.

Summarizing this section: I have presented a grid for the analysis of six dimensions of recorded speech as transcribed orthographically (i.e. as texts). I honed in on the dimensions of Macro Speech Act and Genre, and demonstrated that the sociolinguistic interviews do indeed manifest a variety of genres, although some of the genres defined beforehand are very sparsely represented. All of the categories that compose the narrative field, on the other hand, are present in high numbers in the interviews.

## CONFIDENCES

By definition, confidences are rare in everyday conversation. Confidences present privileged information given only "in confidence," which means that the interviewer is made privy to a secret or information that may never be revealed to outsiders. In the sociolinguistic interviews carried out during the LANCHART project in Copenhagen, this genre is so rare that it does not figure in the statistics given above. Only very few cases are in evidence. But they are so much the more interesting as a backdrop for the analysis of a work of fiction that follows in the next section—since my analysis of the work in question, a short story by Katrine Marie Guldager, classifies it as one long confidence.

What do confidences look like? It is not enough to talk about themes or subjects that are not fit for publicizing to outsiders. The interviews abound with such sections. Rather, it must be the case that the informant him- or herself raises the question of the status of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, either before or immediately after she divulges the confidential information. In recording sociolinguistic interviews, it is customary to give the informant a letter to sign which specifies the nature of the relationship. In our case this letter classifies the information given during the interview as given in confidence, meaning that it cannot be used for other purposes than research, and that the informant may under no circumstances be identifiable when parts of the interviews are rendered verbatim for research purposes. The transcribers likewise sign

an agreement that they will never disclose any information that they have come by while working as transcribers of the files. This is to enable the informants to feel free to talk about matters so close to them that they may be thought to bring out the renowned Labovian vernacular, i.e. the form of speech used when the observer is not present. Nevertheless, the vast majority of informants do not raise the issue of who will listen to the tapes at all, and thus seem to be perfectly confident that what they choose to disclose will never be revealed to others.

In at least two cases, however, the informant does raise the issue of confidentiality. Focusing on these two cases may bring us a bit closer to the nature of confidences. One case is fairly straightforward. It is a matter of routine to ask about the informant's present job, and this may lead to discussions of job satisfaction. In one case it led to the revelation of confident information, viz. that the informant had applied for a new job. Since our contact to this informant was her employer, she was in need of reassurance that the tape would not be listened to by our contact. The privileged information was only privileged in relation to her present situation of employment.

The other case is rather more reminiscent of the short story by Guldager. It concerns a female informant who is interviewed together with her husband. The reason this passage is coded as an instance of the genre of Confidences is that after long passages detailing the informant's relationship to her father, who divorced her mother quite early, the informant and her husband start to discuss an interpretation of his behavior in recent years. In doing so, they give privileged information about the father's life. Apparently, this information is so revealing about the father's characteristics and his motivations in life that the couple end up stating that the interviewer now has an overview of the father's private life—and immediately add: *Nå men det er jo ikke noget går videre til nogen* [Well, this isn't something that will be passed on to anyone, anyway]. The interviewer hastily reassures her that he does not know anyone who would take a spe-

cial interest in this material, and that it will not be passed on in any case. It is the very fact that the informant raises the flag of warning, only to take comfort in the fact that the interview is indeed a privileged room of confidence, that is of interest here. The reason seems to be not only that she has disclosed secrets about her father and her relationship to him, but more importantly that he is completely ignorant of being talked about to a stranger, however intimate this person may be in the situation.

Confidences concern privileged information. Privilege entails a code of morality. It is not and could never be privileged if the father had lived up to any standard of fatherhood in his bringing up the children. There has to be a breach of the code. Otherwise the information is not reportable and suitable for privy

lege. And in this case there really was. What it consisted of is confidential information and has to remain secret—since it not my secret to disclose.

## EVERYDAY GENRES IN *VOKSNE MENNESKER KAN GODT TALE OM SEX*

In 2009, the Danish poet and author of short stories Katrine Marie Guldager published a collection of short stories entitled *Nu er vi så her* (*Now at last we are here*). The first story is called "Voksne mennesker kan godt tale om sex" ("Adults are certainly able to talk about sex"). As with all collections of short stories, the architecture lends a special significance to the first story. This first story is no exception. It strikes up the theme that resounds throughout the collection, the theme of a clash of generations, the parental one being the one known as the "'68 generation," i.e., the generation that was active in the revolt against the nuclear family.

In the press statements published at the time of the appearance of the book, Katrine Marie Guldager positioned herself as the spokesperson for the children of the '68 generation, and this is exactly what the narrator of the first short story does, too. The format and the front cover of the book

cleverly signal two things simultaneously, cf. Figures 4 and 5: first, the photo adorning the front cover is obviously a period piece, although presumably reconstructed. It shows an eating scene, but the camera is placed above the table so that we can see all the persons present. There are at least nine of them and there are also nine chairs. This is probably a collective, so typical of the epoch. Since the camera views the scene from a distance, it gives us a hint that the author will do the same. I am not quite certain, however, that this is what actually happens.

Secondly, the whole format signals that this is a Katrine Marie Guldager book. Figure 5 shows her previous collection of short stories; the format and the color design are exactly the same. In other words we are witnessing a branding process here: “Buy this product if you enjoyed the previous one!” The similarity positions the new collection as one in a series of collections (in fact three) by the same author. The list of previous publications by the same author, and the romantically smiling portrait of the author on the inside flap both point in the same direction.

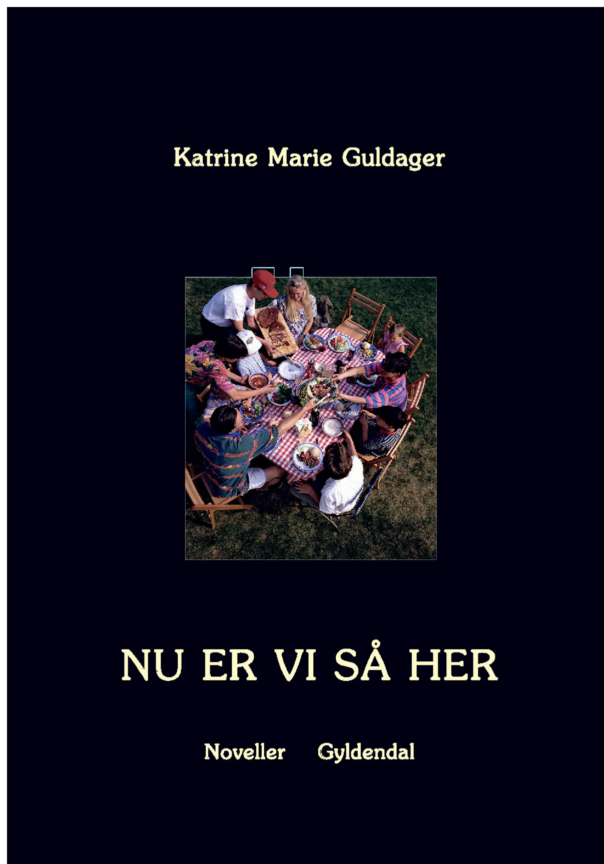


*Figure 4:* Front cover of the *Nu er vi så her* collection of short stories by Katrine Marie Guldager from 2009.

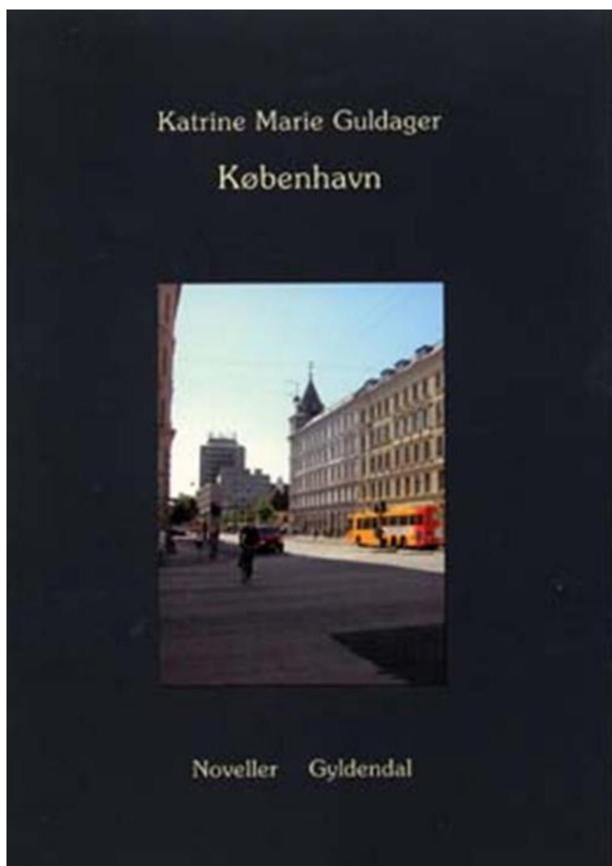


*Figure 5:* Front cover of the collection of short stories by Katrine Marie Guldager entitled *København* (Copenhagen) 2004.

The story I am about to analyze has not, however, been selected as representative of the brand of Katrine Marie Guldager. The choice has been made because the story is an example of the complexity of modern prose in exploiting the simple genres of everyday talk through successive embedding of exemplars (Gregersen, 2010).

The title of the story recurs as the concluding line in an argument that explains to the daughter, the narrator, why her mother left her at the age of five, along the rest of the family (at least one other daughter) in Denmark, in order to realize her potential as a "free" woman together with her lover in India. The framing event of the story is the occasion of the second daughter giving birth to a baby at the national hospital in the center of Copenhagen. Since the narrator knows that her mother is in town, she phones her and suggests that they meet at the hospital in order to welcome the new baby. We note in passing that this is a "typical" "family event" and it is "natural" that this triggers the narrative about another family event, the mother's departure back in 1977. In this paper I am particularly interested in two aspects of this story: the way the author includes the stance of the narrator in her narration, and the classification of the simulated speech genres that are printed in the story.

The introduction to the story clearly indicates that this is a simulated oral Personal Narrative:

"Nu er jeg ikke forfatter, men der er alligevel en lille historie fra mit eget liv, jeg gerne vil fortælle." (p. 9) ["Now I'm no writer, but there is still a little story from my own life that I'd like to tell."] There is something fishy about the initial concessive clause, the very first words in this collection of short stories, proclaiming that the author is no author. The narrator of this story is construed by the real author as being no professional, hence more credible. She does not tell stories unless she has something to say—which according to her is the most important prerequisite. The next sentence in-

troduces the narrator's close family in the guise of her husband who is quoted as stating that she is not only not an author—rather, she is notoriously bad at telling stories. Within the first two sentences, then, we have been introduced to a narrator who is about to embark on telling a story, but at the same time tells us that she is not good at it! The "bad" story is, not surprisingly—after all, this is a collection of stories written by a professional—very complex. This should also come as no surprise to the reader, since the husband's quoted view is that the narrator's stories lack structure. Her rebuttal, by her own admission, is to have something heartfelt to say. "Og det har jeg." (p. 9) ["And that I do."].

The next paragraph performs the same trick as to the thematic content of what the heartfelt story has to say. On the one hand, the narrator agrees with her husband that one should not criticise one's parents. On the other hand, the narrator wants to "betvivle et par ting, de har gjort" [cast doubt on a couple of the things that they did"] in the following.

The two introductory paragraphs have been concerned with meta-reflections on what we are going to hear (or rather read but the assumptions is throughout that we are hearing the story as told by the narrator). In contrast, the next paragraph contains typical background knowledge of the kind that makes up the orientation section in Labovian Personal Narratives. We are told that the narrator was born 1972 when her parents lived in a collective in Birkerød (northwest of Copenhagen, a place replete with more well-to-do people) and that her mother decided to divorce her father and to leave for India with her new lover in 1977. An intertextual reference to a Danish women's classic lib song develops the theme of THEN. This is still orientation and emulates rather nicely the oral narrative except for the section where the narrator uses numbers to sum up the breach: "*hun besluttede sig for 1) at hun ville skilles, og 2) at hun ville rejse til Indien med sin nye kæreste*." (p. 9) ["She decided that 1) she wanted a divorce and 2) she would go to India with her new boyfriend."] But the illusion of an oral confidence is broken much more profoundly by a typical literary flash

forward: “Dengang var der nok ikke nogen af os, der vidste, at hun ville væk så længe, og heller ikke at hun ville blive katolik og tilknyttet Mother Teresas børnehjem i Calcutta” (p. 10) [“Probably none of us knew, back then, that she would be gone so long, nor that she would convert to Catholicism and become affiliated with Mother Teresa’s orphanage in Calcutta.]. This is not oral narrative: such flash forwards are extremely rare. But it is not purely literary style either—especially the strange use of the sentence adverb and the tense of the verb. Obviously *none* of them could have known, and this cannot be modified logically, just as nobody *knew* it since it was in the future back then.

This concludes the general orientation section.

The next section specifies the orientation for the real complicating action. This is the core of the story: the narrator has had a call from her brother in law telling her that she has gotten a niece. This is inextricably bound to the confidential private information of which the narrator herself cannot conceive. The narrator wants to confide in her mother, or at least she tells us so; but instead she leaves the door open for the mother to confide in her, a confidence she emphatically does not want.

The narrator has just phoned her mother to tell her about the news of the sister’s baby and to suggest that they visit the sister at the Main Central Hospital together. It appears from the story that, although her mother has been in Denmark for over a month at the time of telling the story, they have not been in contact for a long time. This is when the action starts in historical present tense:

“Hej mor, siger jeg og giver hende et lille klem” (p. 10) [“Hi Mom, I say, and give her a little squeeze”]. It turns out that the mother has already visited her (other) daughter, and in fact wants to produce, instead, one of the genres that we have singled out as the most intimate of all: she wants to confide in her daughter. Skipping a section, we will now focus on the sec-

tion that contains the mother's Confidence, which is so to speak embedded in the narrator's confidence to us, the readers (saying: I am extremely ambivalent about my mother). This is introduced by a cliché on the part of the narrator when she states that, looking back, she would have wished to fill in the minutes preceding the Confidence with some remark. In this way she might have escaped the Confidence (p.12), which culminates in the story about how the lack of passion in the original marriage led to the divorce and the exodus to India. It turns out that the mother wants not only to confide in her daughter, but also to appeal for forgiveness ("Var det meget forkert af mig at forlade din far?" ["Was it awfully wrong of me to leave your father?"], a forgiveness she does not quite get from the daughter ("Der er ingen der bebrejder dig noget" (p. 14) ["There's no one blaming you for anything, I said"]. Actually, the daughter's story is one sustained plea that the divorce was morally wrong, i.e. precisely equivalent to the speech act of blame: "Det var forkert af hende at tage til Indien, og det var forkert af hende at lade os andre i stikken. Livet handler nu engang ikke bare om at jagte lykken. Livet handler også om forpligtelser og om at gøre det rigtige" (p. 16) ["It was wrong of her to go to India, and it was wrong of her to leave the rest of us in the lurch. After all, life isn't just about seeking happiness. Life is also about obligations, and about doing the right thing"]. Naturally, the narrator gets the last word. She has told us, the audience, something in the strictest confidence that she has not told her mother—that she and her husband are unable to conceive children and are discussing whether to adopt—and she explains to us why she does not confide this in her mother: "Men selvom min mor nogle gange føles tæt på, så føles hun det meste af tiden meget langt væk" (p. 15) ["But even though my mother sometimes feels close to me, most of the time she feels very far away"]. Again, there is a certain weird asymmetry between the narrator confiding in us, an audience of strangers, something that she refuses to share with her mother, and the mother confiding in her daughter who is unwilling to hear her Confidences. This ambivalence is aptly put in

the polysemous wording, where “close” may be understood in both a psychological and a geographical sense.

The short story is normally a written piece of prose, and volumes have been written in order to define the limits and core of the short story as a genre. In this particular case, we find a system of Chinese boxes or Russian Babushkas. First comes a frame that negates the value and structure of what is inside it—except that it comes straight from the narrator’s heart. The next box contains the narrator’s story, which again embeds the mother’s own Confidence about the events that led to the divorce. We then return to the narrator’s story, but are directed to the absent Confidence by ourselves learning new, and supposedly very private, confidential information about the trouble conceiving a child, and we finish the whole voyage by returning to the meta-reflection about the generations. Again the husband is quoted as saying that the narrator should not spend her time criticizing her mother. She agrees superficially with him but immediately proceeds to the moral judgment that her mother was wrong.

The final sentence is much more ambivalent though: “Nu ender det med, at hun bliver gammel I Indien, og jeg kommer aldrig til at lære hende at kende” (p. 16) [“Here’s how it will end: she will grow old in India, and I will never get to know her”]. Aesthetically, this is a more satisfying conclusion, in that it vibrates with the repressed anger and regret that we have felt throughout. The illusion of the oral narrative is borne out by the peculiar infantile complaint mirrored in the coordination of the *at*-sentence (“she will grow old in India”) and the *og*-sentence (“I will never get to know her”).

I hope that I have demonstrated that this short story is based on our ability to understand what goes on in this simulated dialogue between the narrator and her audience (us) as various manifestations of the everyday genres of Narrative and Confidence. Additionally, the short story cleverly uses this fact in an intricate embedding of the everyday genres in layers of narration which seem to deny each other full credibility: if the narrator is

really a bad narrator, then what are we reading? A “bad” story, i.e., a loosely structured story? Obviously not. But if the narrator is not a bad one, then why say so?

Is it a brave attempt at getting it right?

Like all of the above.

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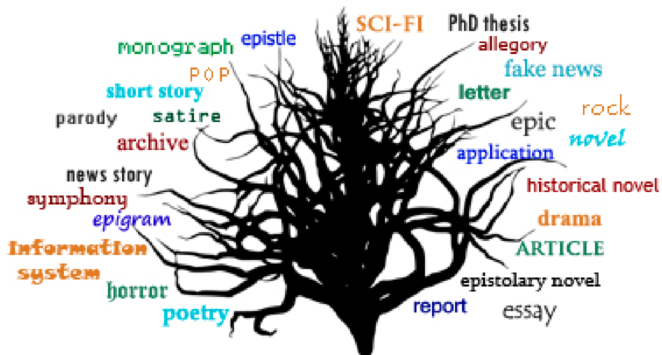
# RESEARCH GROUP FOR GENRE STUDIES (RGGS)




The Research Group for Genre Studies moves at the forefront of existing genre research, with a wide international network, a developing interdisciplinary research profile in both English and Danish, and extensive teaching activities at all levels, including a strong profile in research education.

RGGS embraces the highly developed research in current Genre Studies. At the core of this research is the advanced, remarkably cohesive, and extensive body of knowledge established in Rhetorical Genre Studies, in English for Specific Purposes, and in Systemic Functional Linguistics. The field now spans important work within Rhetoric, Composition, Linguistics, Sociology, Ethnography, Business Communication, Composition and Information Studies.

RGGS seeks to develop and expand this research by examining and challenging its theoretical underpinnings, by expanding its scholarly reach, and by reintegrating a number of subjects into Genre Studies that have been left behind in the development of current Genre Studies. Specifically, RGGS strives to establish a cohesive connection between aesthetic and functional theories of genre, in order to **reinvigorate** the study of genre in aesthetic research fields, and the inclusion of aesthetic subjects in Genre Studies.

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