2 Written Genres: Towards a Comprehensive Understanding from a Socio-Cognitive Perspective

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The concept of genre has been the focus of an important debate over the past ten to fifteen years. During this time, multiple alternative conceptions and classifications have emerged marked by divergent and at times extreme theoretical and empirical perspectives. In response, this chapter presents an interdisciplinary theoretical approach which strives for a comprehensive understanding of genres. Acknowledging social and semiotic factors, it offers a theoretical framework for and definition of genres which places a significant emphasis on cognitive perspectives and underscores the active role of individuals in genre construction. The chapter also provides empirically-based, robust support for the design and implementation of a specialized writing pedagogy emerging from the genres representative of disciplines.

What are genres, really? Are they self-contained units, easily defined and operationalized? Do they truly exist "out there," as some suggest, or are they "purely mental" constructs, as others propose? Are genres simply units of analysis constructed by radical empirical scientists? Is it possible to develop pedagogies or models of academic instruction based on genre theory, i.e., are they "teachable" or "merely employable"?

Many or all of these questions surround genre theory in an erratic way. Some appear overly exclusionary. But they all show diverse interests, purposes, origins, and natures.

Simultaneously, as readily observed, the elusive and divergent theoretical conceptions underlying the term *genre* offer a wide range of alternative options. Undoubtedly, this can confuse both novices and experts alike. Genre theory has been approached from an extensive spectrum of valuable perspectives, such as the new rhetoric, languages for specific purposes, systemic functional linguistics, semiolinguistics, and discourse analysis, among others.

In some cases, there are highly relevant contrasts both in the nature of the phenomenon and in the parameters of classification and of educational applications. Thus, in some cases, there are important variations in the points of attention and approach to the analysis, the types of categorizations or taxonomies, and the ways of conducting empirical inquiries. In certain cases, antagonistic principles make it impossible to reconcile approaches.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive framework, reflective of my own perspective, which emphasizes, in particular, a sociocognitive approach to genres (with special attention to the written mode) from the principles of the *Valparaíso Linguistic School* (*Escuela Lingüística de Valparaíso* in Spanish) and an empirical exploration of certain academic and professional genres in certain scientific disciplines. This proposal is part of an on-going discussion open to revision and criticism. As noted, in this work I do not intend to identify nor compare the main approaches to genres. Nor do I intend to register a historical account of the evolution of the concept nor trace its progress or map its issues. There is already much fine scholarship in this regard (among others, Bhatia, 1993, 2004; Bruce, 2008; Devitt, 2004; Hyland, 2007, 2008).

This chapter is linked to the foundational developments of the Valparaíso Linguistic School (Gómez Macker, 1998; Parodi, 2007a, 2008a; Peronard, 2007; Peronard & Gómez Macker, 1985) and presents and advocates for a theoretical-empirical thesis that may be obvious to many researchers outside the field of linguistics (such as psycholinguists, cognitive scientists, evolutionary psychologists, and discourse psychologists) who usually embrace an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary perspective. This theoretical-empirical thesis may be controversial to a significant number of researchers from communication theory, sociology, discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, and, in general, certain areas of the humanities, social sciences, and computational sciences.

This topic pertains to the ontological and epistemological principles of our conception of human beings and language and, therefore, to our integral and multidimensional conception of genres. These principles are crucial for exploring a theory of academic and professional genres and for specialized disciplinary writing instruction. Thus, from our psycho-socio-discursive view of language (Parodi, 2003, 2005), in which a speaker/writer and a listener/reader play a central role (Parodi, 2007a, 2008a), genres are articulated comprehensively from a socioconstructivist approach across—at least—three dimensions: cognitive, social, and linguistic.

Undoubtedly, the cognitive dimension provides a fundamental, hitherto somewhat absent, component, which is articulated with the social through the linguistic dimension. In this way, the cognitive dimension posits the human being as a vital communicative agent, avoiding excessive reifications and

externalisms to account for genres. This thematic core will be a central point to develop in what follows in this chapter.

Genres as Cognitive Constructs

There is no doubt that the status of the cognitive dimension in language studies has followed an uncertain path. Therefore, the use of the terms *cognition* and *cognitive* has been scarce for the last 20 to 30 years. Of course, this does not include contributions by Noam Chomsky, nor what is called *cognitive linguistics*. The relative absence of cognitive terminology not only reveals little attention to these aspects, but also demonstrates that the focus of these concerns has taken other paths. However, what stands out is the continual presence of terms such as *knowledge, thought, experience, meaning, processing, concepts,* and *ideas*. This means that, in a way, there actually is what we might call a mentalist or psychological approach within linguistics, in which mental events are recognized in the process of language use, but in which there are limited inquiries into processes that are distinctly cognitivist. In this way, conceptual and definitional vagueness becomes apparent, and it is clear that there tends to be an exclusion of any matter involving the cognitive dimension of language (Parodi, 2008a).

The analysis of genres from a linguistic standpoint shows no major use of these terms and, when it occurs, it is sparse and vague. There are a few exceptions, and in recent years there has been increasing attention to the cognitive dimension of genres (Bhatia, 2004; Virtanen, 2004; van Dijk, 2008; Bruce, 2008). This lack of commitment and precision is widespread. It is then clear that genre theorists have tended to exclude the cognitive dimension or have denied, underestimated, or deemphasized the relationship between cognition and language.

In my opinion, a multidimensional conception of genres must display the different axes of which they are comprised. As Figure 2.1 shows, the cognitive dimension, social dimension, and linguistic dimension are all considered essential and thus shape genres. These founding axes are presented interactively in the figure.

From Figure 2.1 it is evident that the relationship across these three dimensions is not symmetrical. The linguistic dimension plays a fundamental and synergistic role among the three, but at the same time establishes a connection between the other two. For much of what happens in the social world to achieve a cognitive status, language as a central tool of human life conveys semiosis to a cognitive substrate and simultaneously reconstructs the same semiotic fact.
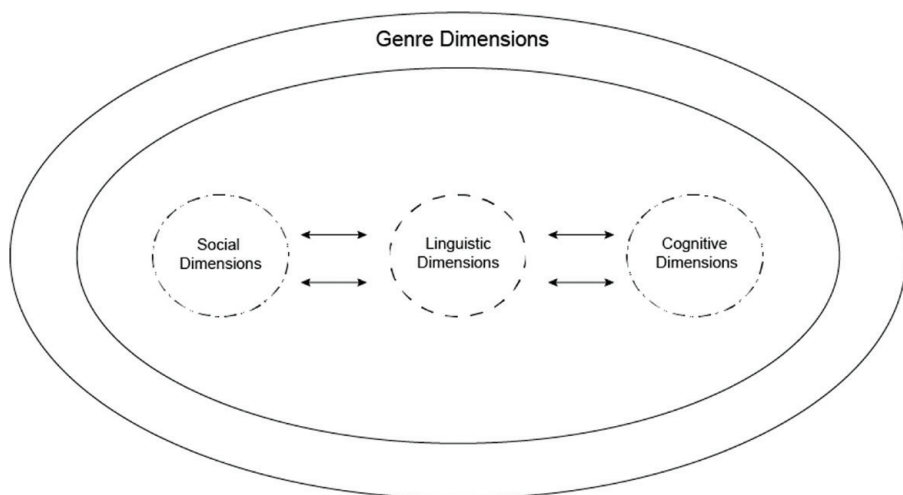
*Figure 2.1 Fundamental Dimensions that Interact
in the Construction of Genres*

However, without denying these three proposed axes and the various interactions involved in this concept of *genre*, I wish—at this moment—to highlight a conception of genres, preferably, as cognitive constructs. In my opinion, the dimension that I highlight has not been sufficiently considered, and there has been a tendency toward an excessive externalistic semiotic view of the concept of genre (Halliday, 1978; Kress & Threadgold, 1988; Martin, 1992; Stubbs, 2007). In any case, in no way do I seek to atomize the exquisite richness surrounding genres, but rather to introduce a dimension that I believe has been intentionally or inadvertently overlooked or neglected, and that to me is crucial to a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter (a more detailed discussion regarding the internalism-externalism *continuum* can be found in Parodi, 2008a).

That said, it is indeed true that each individual constructs knowledge in interaction with other individuals and in contexts that require diverse discursive instruments, but the fact remains that this knowledge, elaborated through ontogenetic processes, is stored in the memory of readers/writers and speakers/listeners in a complex representational format, not yet fully determined. In this regard, two particular concepts are relevant to the cognitive dimension of genres. In recent years, the so-called *situation model* (van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983) has become increasingly relevant as a high-level representational instance of knowledge in discourse processing. It is possible to claim that such a level of cognitive representation could also account for genre knowledge, since genres exist because the expert reader/listener has a mental representation of

the social situation in which the genres are produced and used. Furthermore, the concept of *context model*, recently coined by van Dijk (van Dijk, 1999, 2006, 2008), also accounts for this type of representational knowledge and highlights the cognitive character of the "context" construct in discourse processing. These two models account for diverse types of knowledge, some more procedural, others more declarative. Both models are offered as a pathway to better understand and explain the cognitive operation of genres, but empirical research is clearly required to support this claim (due to space constraints, I do not delve into detailed explanations of either model here. In this regard, see the previous van Dijk references). Figure 2.2 captures the proposal.

So, as seen in Figure 2.2, these two representational constructs provide unique cognitive scaffolding for a genre theory in which the cognitive component imparts stability to knowledge. On the one hand, it allows us to explain the psychological substrate of written discourse processing. On the other hand, it accounts for the fact that genres are not entities that exist exclusively "out there," but rather emerge from socioconstructively elaborated knowledge which is stored and activated from various types of memories. In this view, the linguistic dimension enables the cognitive construction of meaning through its interaction with the external social context.
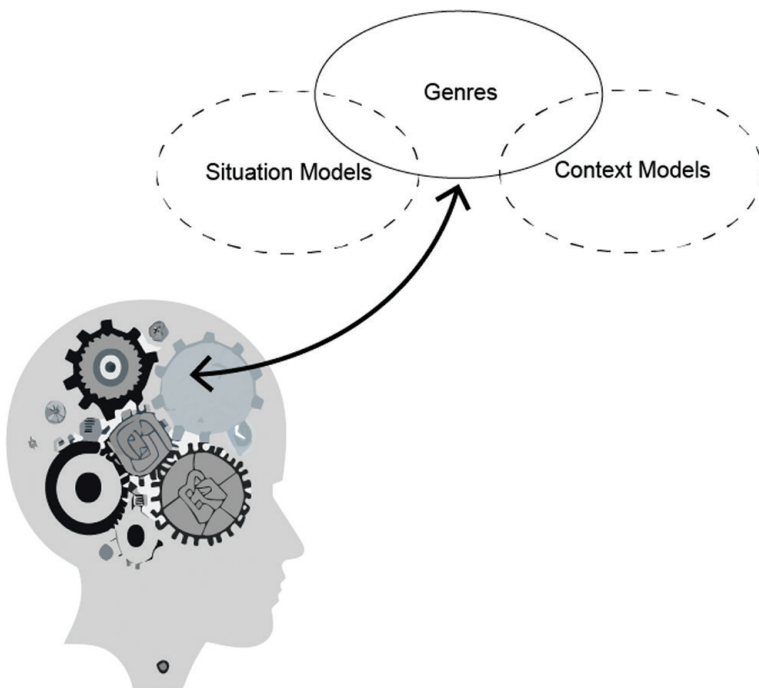

Figure 2.2 Genres and Situation and Context Models

This comprehensive conception accounts for a broader view and reflects the multidimensionality of the concept of genre. Accordingly, it is assumed that genres are more than mere social constants such as behavior and interaction patterns (defined solely by variables of social context: place, participants, etc.). With this in mind, I seek to contribute a more comprehensive perspective with cognitive substrate and, if possible, to overcome the reductionisms that emerge from extremely rhetorical or contextualist perspectives (Parodi, 2008a). Similarly, as mentioned above, I highlight the cognitive dimension of genres because with it I seek to point out the key role of the human being as a speaker/writer and a listener/reader within a highly dynamic and participative communication process. This subject is who—ultimately—constructs genres in their mind as communicative instruments as drawn from specific social contexts and situations and—of course—in interaction with others mediated through language. Thus, genre knowledge, constructed individually and socially, is stored as cognitive representations and, from this perspective, will be activated and materialized in specific texts, within social and cultural contexts.

As has been argued, I defend a comprehensive concept of genre and make no distinctions between social genres and cognitive genres (Bruce, 2008), or between more social approaches compared to more linguistic or cognitive ones (van Dijk, 2008). If what Bruce or van Dijk aim at is to distinguish dimensions within a comprehensive conception, it means that we are talking about the same thing. If what we borrow from any of these authors are different genres in different dimension, then I certainly do not agree with such an approach.

That said, from my perspective, the Bakhtinian concept of genre (although powerful in a sense and tremendously enlightening for the initial discussion) becomes narrow. In my view, the excessive contextualistic emphasis from a social semiotic perspective has led to a new theoretical and methodological reductionism. Thus, it becomes imperative to overcome these weaknesses in the conception of genres. Certainly, there are a series of social interaction mechanisms happening through genres that allow the construction of discursive actions, but these rely upon and are built and rebuilt through cognitive and linguistic constructs that, all together, are complexly articulated and interanimating. Ultimately, the genres' discursive context rests upon knowledge that is fundamentally cognitive in nature, since what gives permanence to the concept of genre is the person and their memory of previous events experienced in particular environments and interactions.

This same socio-constructivist principle is the one that allows for claims that genres evolve and respond to new communicative demands. Each individual organizes their knowledge dynamically through cognitive representation systems that have categorization and prioritization mechanisms. There

are diverse theories that account for the structuring of knowledge in specific domains, such as schema theory, frame theory, and script theory. Other theories integrate knowledge from multiple sources and seek to account for procedurally-based dynamic representation structures. A core issue that is currently highly controversial is dealing with the format and operating mode of the cognitive representations of knowledge: basically (and very succinctly) we have a propositional option, a connectionist option, and a hybrid option, as a combination of the first two (Kintsch, 1988, 1998; Rumelhart & MacClelland, 1986; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983). For a brief review and critical analysis of these approaches, see Parodi (2005a, 2007a) and Ibáñez (2007).

In this context, my view of the term genre implies a progressive enrichment of my own conception of human language in concrete manifestations that operationalize situations and communicative interactions. In this sense, it is feasible that terms such as textual type or class allude to a slightly reductive and somewhat excessively linguistic perspective. In this way, I believe that the term genre accounts for a broader conception which reflects the multidimensionality of language in action. With this, I attempt—as mentioned before—to seek a more comprehensive and integral perspective of genre and to overcome, as far as possible, the reductionism involved in extreme internalist or contextualist views.

Thus, the cognitive dimension, the social dimension, and the linguistic dimension interact in a complex manner to shape genres. This integrative and comprehensive conception tends toward understanding a person and their language, but with a focus on the person and their social construction of knowledge. Within the three dimensions, the role of the linguistic dimension is relevant, as the conduit through which the other two dimensions mostly connect. Thus, the person interacts in a specific context and constructs their reality through situated cognitions and deliberately purposeful behaviors while in interaction with other subjects.

The cognitive conception of genres entails a direct connection with the processing, in this case, of written discourse. Thus, from this perspective, the relationship between types of genres, their respective linguistic structures, and their subsequent psycholinguistic processing opens many new scenarios for research. For example, the possible existing relationship between types of written genres and their degree of comprehension thereof is a highly relevant issue. In particular, the study of the connections between the cognitive organization of genres, the structure of specialized cognitive knowledge, the linguistic organization of texts, and the comprehension of those written texts offers a novel field of inquiry. These fundamental interactions are represented in Figure 2.3.
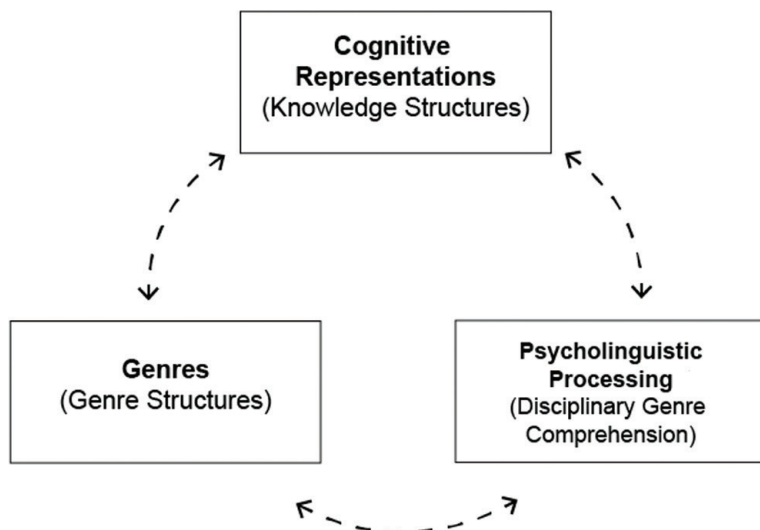
Figure 2.3 Interactions among Linguistic Structures, Cognitive Representations, and Psycholinguistic Processing

Understanding written texts that convey disciplinary knowledge in relation to the lexicogrammatical structure and the reader's prior knowledge constitutes an underexplored area. This research space is necessary to investigate for a thorough understanding of the processes of specialized literacy instruction of disciplinary genres. As is known, diverse types of genres emerge to respond to and satisfy the different communicative demands of any situation and, thus, their rhetorical-linguistic structure and organization are arranged to respond to these demands. Figure 2.3 poses the question as to whether different genres involve and imply different types and levels of cognitive processing, which in turn materialize into diverse representations and demand different types of inferences.

From this point of view, it is not only necessary to investigate the specialized communicative demands required of students within a specific discipline, but it is also relevant to inquire if these demands vary between disciplines. Despite these statements of principle, it is crucial to clarify that the construction of theories must be scaffolded on a system of experimental empirical approaches that provide information to nourish new reflections. Whether these data corroborate the researcher's hypotheses or refute them, the permanent synergistic relationships between the theoretical and empirical axes constitute a mechanism for ensuring revision and continuous construction and reconstruction of some theoretical principles, scaffolded in progressive approaches to reality.

Genres: A Definition

Proffering a concise definition of genre is undoubtedly a complex matter. Indeed, there are a wide variety of definitions already available. Multiple disciplines have approached the construct theoretically, educationally, rhetorically, and grammatically. However, in my opinion, there is a tendency to overemphasize one component over another, or to focus on one dimension to the detriment of others, leaving the definition, in some cases, somewhat unbalanced and, in others, dangerously underdeveloped. On the one hand, this constitutes a matter of theoretical and methodological options and orientations; on the other hand, it points out that only one definition does not easily describe the richness of the concept. Whether a definition of genre is defended from the perspective of the new rhetoric (Bazerman, 1994, 2008; Freedman & Medway, 1994;), applied linguistics (Bhatia, 1993, 2004; Swales, 1990, 2004), discursive semiotic perspectives (Charaudeau, 2004), the Sydney school (Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Martin, 1992; Martin & Rose, 2008), the German communicative perspective (Heinemann, 2000; Heinemann & Viehweger, 1991), or discourse analysis (van Dijk, 1997, 2002, 2008), the key requirement—from my perspective—is to be able to look at the phenomenon integrally.

In my opinion, genre constitutes a constellation of potentialities of discursive conventions, sustained by the prior knowledge of the speaker/writer and listener/reader (stored in the memory of each individual), based on contextual, social, and cognitive constraints and parameters. This knowledge—socio-cognitively constructed—is instantiated in sets of conventionalized selections, which present certain synchronically identifiable regularities but are also susceptible to observation as diachronic variations because they are not static but highly dynamic entities. In their concrete manifestation, genres are varieties of a language that operate through sets of linguistic-textual features co-occurring systematically throughout the threads of a text, and that are linguistically circumscribed according to communicative purposes, involved participants (writers and readers), production contexts, domains of use, discursive organization modes, medium, etc. These sets of linguistic-textual features can be identified in corpora representative of instantiations in particular texts, from which prototypical regularities characterizing a particular genre at a higher level of abstraction are projected.

Figure 2.4 captures some of the core features constituting genres. Through their combination and the operationalization of more specific variables, a singular genre emerges. When any of the core components is updated, the genre may in turn vary accordingly.
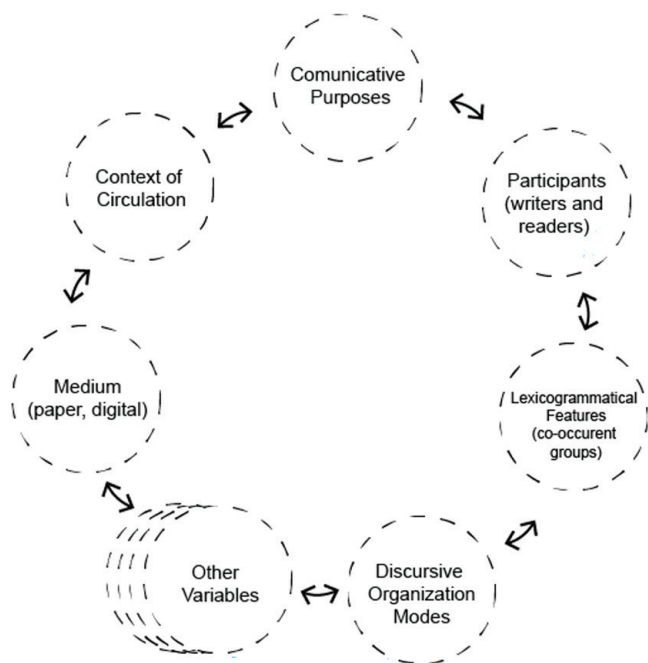
Figure 2.4 Components of Genres

As depicted, the figure is open to new core or satellite components, as greater precision and evolution of these components may bring about enriched variations. For further details and definitions, see Parodi, Venegas, Ibáñez, and Gutiérrez (2008).

From this perspective, genres, as structures of cognitive knowledge stored as dynamic mental representations, constitute a knowledge of conventions acquired interactively by a subject in their relationships with others. This conventionalized knowledge, cognitively constructed from cultural contexts, guides the discursive processes that participants implement in the social contract. For this to occur, from the perspective of an expert subject, a vital requirement is the participation of conscious subjects in their active role in the communicative interaction and the pursuit of the fulfillment of the purposes they seek. The subjects must plan, monitor, and review their participation to regulate compliance with the communicative act. Context and social roles shape and impose restrictions on genre; however, a subject in their discursive maturity (a product of ontogenetic recursive processes) and in knowledge of the possibilities and resources can choose discursive alternatives, make adjustments, propose changes, and vary the purpose, focus, etc. Undoubtedly, with these adjustments, it is feasible for a genre to vary and constitute another

genre altogether, but that is the prerogative of the participants in the discursive act. In brief, the expert person in discursive management is not constrained by context, but rather can and must freely decide to adjust to and act within that frame. Thus, a person may knowingly infringe upon or defy some of the conventions of a particular genre, but it will be their interlocutors who will assess the appropriateness of such a possible transgression.

Socio-Cognitively and Ontogenetically Constructed Genres

As I have argued and as a form of clarifying my standpoint even more, in the following figure I show part of the knowledge that a writer/reader will cognitively construct through complex ontogenetic processes in interaction with the physical, social, and cultural environment. This means that the subject must elaborate cognitive representations of—among other—diverse objects, processes, and mechanisms, and store them in diverse mnemonic systems. Many of the objects, mechanisms, processes, physical environments, etc., that the subject must grasp are obviously in the external world, and from those and from the interaction with others, the subject gradually processes and organizes a heterogeneous variety of knowledge. The linguistic dimension plays a fundamental role since it is precisely what articulates the social and cognitive dimensions; without it, the interaction between the two would be scarce and limited. Figure 2.5 shows the distribution, in our view, in which these external objects come to have a cognitive correlate.
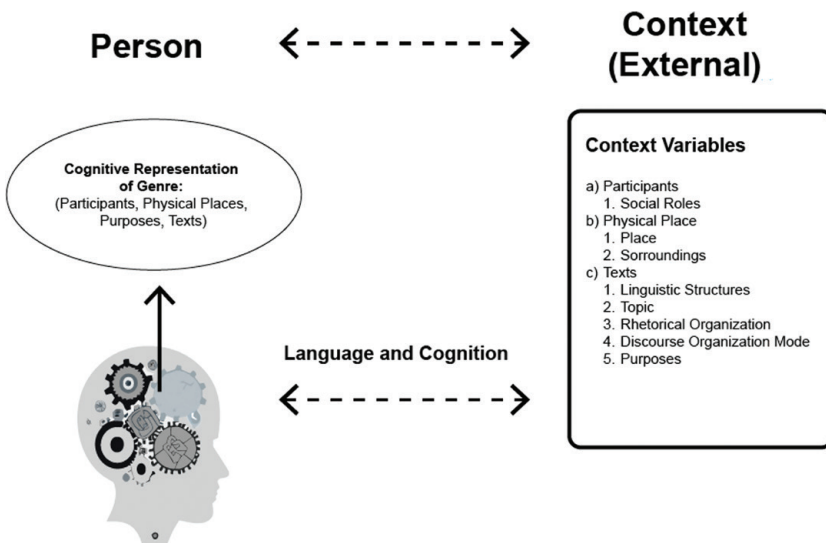

Figure 2.5 Interactions between Subject and Context

As shown in Figure 2.5, through processes of informal interaction and other formal and systematic educational experiences, subjects know, handle, and subsequently represent in their memories parts of these external objects. These constructs, once cognitive, are now highly dynamic, evolutionary, and variable over time stemming from the subsequent interactions of the subject with diverse environments and experiences. Many of these constructs are those that shape and constitute what we call *genres*.

From this approach, the external world is established as a starting point for the relative and intersubjective construction of individual knowledge. More specifically, concerning genres and, for example, the participants and their social roles, it is clear that they exist "out there." However, since the genre is a discursive tool of social interaction, there must necessarily exist a cognitive representation of these participants and their potential roles so that a writer and a speaker can understand what they are talking about and what communicative functions come into play through language. Certainly, it is the context that eventually can activate this knowledge, but if there is no prior construction of that knowledge stored in the subject's memory, social interaction will fail in its communicative objective.

Seeking to contribute greater details to my approach, in Figure 2.6 I attempt to account for the knowledge that a subject constructs based on language as it relates to society and culture and, of course, to other subjects; among others, genre knowledge, world knowledge, and discourse competence.
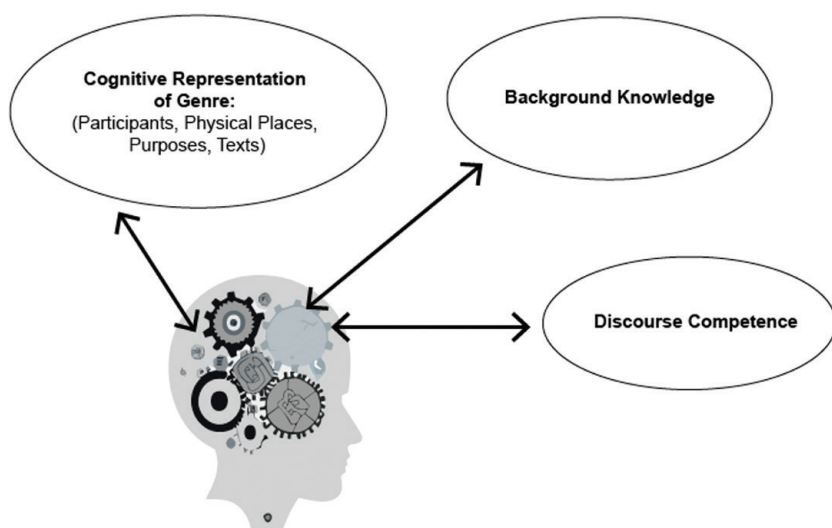

Figure 2.6 The Reader/Speaker and the Cognitive Representation of Genres

Certainly, the formal processes of instruction in certain disciplinary domains and the various processes of academic literacy instruction that a subject experiences during their lifespan are some of the sources that contribute to the construction of these and other multiple knowledges.

Now, the socio-cognitive construction of genre materializes in a purely cognitive genre. This is because the substrate of representation, storage, activation, and possible reorganization of all of this information is basically cognitive. The fact that it is achieved through social interactions and with people, social roles, and particular cultural objects that, for instance, comprise the physical environments in which a particular genre is displayed, may be fundamentally true, but that does not directly influence the type of format or mechanism used for cognitive information storage.

Academic Genres and Professional Genres

Genres, Educational Settings, and Scientific Disciplines

As we know, written language is the preferred medium through which disciplinary knowledge is created, established, and transmitted; specifically, through those prototypical genres that scaffold the initial construction of specialized knowledge and that, through their gradual establishment, integrate into a particular discourse community. From this context, in my opinion, academic and professional genres are operationalized through a set of texts that are organized along a *continuum*, linked from general school texts to university academic and professional texts. The progression below is based on a person navigating their way through academic education, during which diverse scenarios and genres must be gradually addressed. In Figure 2.7 I attempt to graphically capture this conceptualization under, among others, the medium and context of production and circulation.
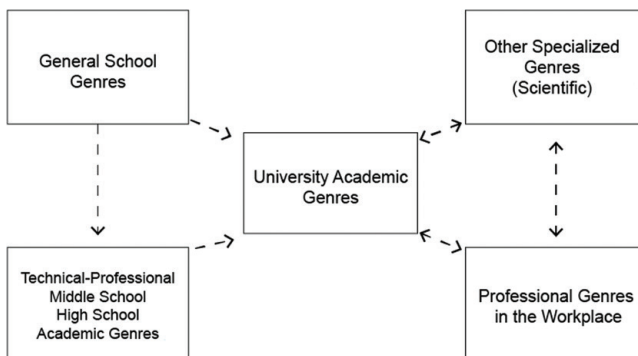

Figure 2.7 Continuum of Genres in Different Areas and Levels

The unidirectional arrows show the progression from certain alternative genres, which eventually an apprentice could bypass with optional exits (such as technical-professional education). However, it is clear that in elementary and secondary education these genres have a somewhat more mandatory character. For example, it is well-known that exposure to technical-professional genres is comparatively lower in Chile (Parodi, 2005) since students tend to focus mainly on completing primary or secondary education, with a progressive increase in Chile towards interest in university education.

The centrality of academic genres within this *continuum* as the axes between professional and other specialized genres (e.g., scientific genres) reveals its fundamental role in the construction of a specialized set of disciplinary expectations. Thus, this academic training space acts as an initial guideline, offering a repertory of genres that become access points to written specialized knowledge and practices, that is, to *knowing* and *doing*. These diverse relationships, represented in Figure 2.7, attempt to express my conception of the interactions a learner must experience to be able to construct a discursive domain in academic and professional contexts. This implies that a certain individual, through these possibly interlinked genres, should undergo a progressive development of their literacy.

That said, given my interest in academic and professional genres, two specific areas are relevant to this point. Among them, I hope to find certain genres that intersect and constitute epistemic anchors as communication vessels between an academic field and its professional counterpart. This passing between the university world and the professional world would provide niches in which knowledge progresses more fluidly, in such a way that the reader is expected to rely on an already known genre to explore new discursive scenarios. Figure 2.8 shows these interactions and overlaps, while also accounting for the possible transversality of certain genres throughout disciplines. Of course, these theoretical assumptions will be contrasted with subsequent empirical research.

This figure shows an intersecting region which is expected to have genres common to the academic and professional areas; likewise, there will be other genres that are more specific and prototypical. All this reveals a great dynamism in the construction, evolution, and circulation of genres. Thus, it is expected that there are some genres that circulate between the academic and professional worlds within the same discipline.

Until very recently, or even still for some, the conception of academic discourse tended toward a very unified set of genres, particularly within the domains of language teaching and learning (Hyland, 1998, 2000, 2004; Swales, 1990, 1998, 2004). My perspective in this regard, on the one hand, points out that some of these genres may vary greatly across disciplines and even within one same discipline (Bhatia, 1993, 2004; Parodi, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2008b).
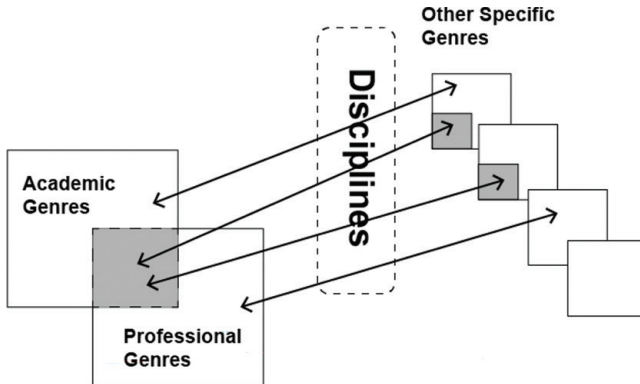
Figure 2.8 Disciplines and the Academic and Professional Genres

On the other hand, empirical research has also shown that other very specific genres can remain relatively homogeneous across various scientific disciplines (Venegas, 2006; Parodi, 2007a, b and c). As Bhatia (2004) rightly argues, genres cut across disciplines, even though it is feasible that, of course, there is heterogeneity within the same genre as well as between disciplines. The idea of sets of genres and systems of genres (Bazerman, 1994), colonies of genres (Bhatia, 2004), or macro-genres (Martin & Rose, 2008) seeks—in part—to account for this. Thus, genres can cut transversely through both academic and professional discourse, across one or several disciplines.

Returning to Figure 2.8, the bidirectional arrows show these possible intersecting points among academic, professional, and other specialized genres, as they all transit through diverse disciplines; both from the common areas and the highly specific areas within a discipline or between genres. Indeed, the marked intersecting area attempts to account for this. A new range of research possibilities certainly opens up. Among others, determining these discursive scenarios presents interesting scientific implications, in a theoretical, applied, and/or pedagogical terrain. Thus, from a linguistic perspective, it will be possible to explore and contribute grammatical, semantic, and discursive descriptions; from the processing of these genres, it will be possible to identify certain psycholinguistic processes; and from specialized literacy instruction, it will be possible to obtain information for the design of teaching materials, pedagogical procedures, etc.

Some of these genres will be prototypical of only one field, either academic or professional, or only contingent to one discipline. Others shall remain present in diverse contexts and in doing so acquire diverse forms and functions. In fact, the dotted lines of the academic-professional intersection in Figure 2.9 highlight the temporary character of the genres found there. It is a blurred line that can eventually be transgressed by genres in transition.

That said, seeking to refine the concept of academic and professional genres, in the following figure I illustrate the levels in which, I suggest, they interact, from a wider hierarchical framework in which specialized discourse acts as a higher level of abstraction.

In Figure 2.9, I show the hierarchical interaction between specialized discourse, academic and professional genres, disciplinary discourse, and the final instantiation in particular texts, as linguistic units but also as meaning units. All of them establish progressive degrees from a more abstract to a more concrete level, such as academic and professional genres and even texts. This *continuum* shows how the linguistic system offers multiple potentialities, which are selected and organized according to certain variables until becoming operationalized objects, that is, the texts themselves, such as—for instance—the *Organic Chemistry Textbook* from the Industrial Chemistry program and the *Teaching Guide No. 3* of the Organizational Psychology subject from the Psychology program.

This approach to specialized discourse organization, based on specific texts and reaching more abstract levels such as genres, is highly consistent with my research approach based on ecological and representative corpora from the principles of corpus linguistics (Parodi, 2008c) as a starting point and comparison for theoretical reflections. Thus, this approach includes progressive abstraction levels (genre and discourse) from particular data and particular realizations (texts). This way, a circular model of "theory-empiricism-application-theory" (Parodi, 2008a) which goes through diverse stages allows registering relevant information to theoretically and empirically inform educational approaches in specific disciplinary areas.
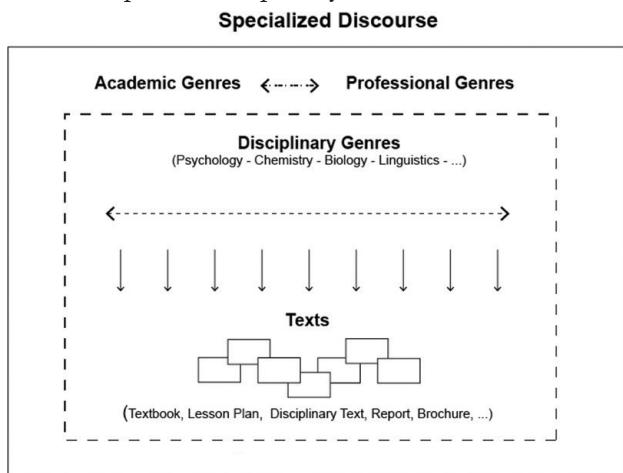

Figure 2.9 Realization and Hierarchical Integration
Levels in the Genre Continuum

Towards a Disciplinary Literacy Instruction Based on Genres

In an attempt to conceptualize the complex process of construction and learning from academic and professional discursive practices, I present a view of these processes as a circuit, given the highly synergistic nature in which diverse communicative instances contribute and re-contribute to the social construction of specialized knowledge. In this circuit, I try to capture a set of variables relevant to the process of construction and appropriation of disciplinary genres, as well as to highlight the directional and bidirectional connections in which I conceive the flow of knowledge and situated cognitive activities for both individuals and in connection to their communities. Figure 2.10 illustrates this circuit that is framed in the cognitive, discursive, social, and cultural context.

As shown in Figure 2.10, the dimensions involved in genres entail actions and binding relationships that lead to the construction of specialized knowledge. In this circuit of construction of specialized genres, a novice subject entering a discourse community at the university level must access disciplinary knowledge, preferably through reading the texts included in its curriculum. All of this in the context of a series of formal activities such as the courses of the curriculum, evaluation requirements, and interactions with professors and classmates. This novice is, thus, submerged in a set of oral and written genres that progressively sustain their construction of specialized knowledge.

Figure 2.10 shows how the focus in written discourse (the understanding of specific written information) becomes a fundamental axis for the academic education of a person. Thus, disciplinary genres are those that progressively make disciplinary knowledge available to the reader/writer and support them in their gradual access to the respective discursive communities to which they (seek to) belong.
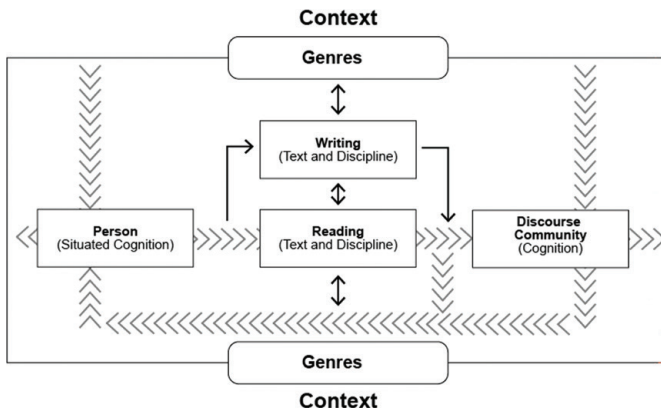

Figure 2.10 Circuit for the Construction of Academic and Professional Genres

In the context of this circuit of construction and reconstruction of discursive practices, the understanding of written materials is gradually supplemented through the practice of writing specialized genres. The synergistic relationships between both specialized reading and writing practices transform disciplinary knowledge, and the individual progressively acquires mastery of disciplinary genres through an ontogenetic process. Some of these genres will only be read as access to specific knowledge; others will become writing tasks to communicate specific information. Some of these academic genres must be initially read and, subsequently, will perform their maximum communicative function when the learner, upon becoming an expert, is able to write them adequately; thus, they will fulfill communicative functions relevant to social practices, both academic and professional. As noted, when the writer becomes competent in those highly prototypical specialized genres of the discipline and demonstrates full mastery of discursive practices within that community, they will have shown their effective participation in at least one disciplinary genre that allows them to communicate specialized meanings. In this way, reading is a fundamental step in accessing knowledge and the discursive structure of written material, but only the effective written production of the required genre reveals the maximum level of discourse competence of an expert member of the discipline. Reading and writing are thus synergistically linked and reveal their permanent connection (Parodi, 2003).

Concluding Remarks

I started the chapter by outlining a series of questions relevant to genre theory, although not necessarily seeking answers to all of them in the context of this chapter. I also emphasized the multiplicity of terminological and conceptual possibilities, as well as theoretical and applied complexities. I strived to limit my reflection to the development of theoretical principles particularly framed from a socio-cognitive and discursive perspective of language, emphasizing the cognitive dimension of genres. I also worked towards some principles for disciplinary literacy instruction based on specialized genres, both academic and professional. Thus, it is possible to access disciplinary knowledge encoded in specialized genres through the understanding and production of written texts. Therefore, the development of expert discourse competence that also incorporates the adequate management of academic and professional genres must be scaffolded at university and workplace contexts.

Based on these reflections and directly linked to specialized literacy instruction, the study of the interactions between linguistic structures, cognitive representations, and specific psycholinguistic processes emerges as of interest

both theoretically and applied. The understanding of written texts that convey disciplinary knowledge in their relationship to the lexicogrammatical structure of texts of those genres and the reader's previous knowledge constitutes an underexplored or unexplored area. Of course, any research addressing this niche should first carry out a meticulous collection and description of the genres that circulate in the area under study.

Exploring the cognitive aspects of genre theory remains an interesting challenge that continues to require theoretical reflection and empirical inquiry. The connection established between the situation model and the context model as cognitive representations of knowledge fundamental to genre processing is—in my opinion—an innovative path that can allow a better understanding of the multidimensional cognitive, linguistic, and social articulation of genres. Likewise, a comprehensive view of a theory of genres in which each dimension is articulated integrally without a greater emphasis on one over the other presents important challenges. Lastly, the variables in which each of these dimensions is operationalized in the more detailed formation of a genre constitute another timely niche.

In brief, in this chapter I have provided a reflection on genres, moving from a theoretical perspective to specialized literacy instruction and corpus-based empirical techniques, and returning back to theory. This model represents—in my opinion—a beneficial process that strengthens the construction of empirically-based theories which provide robust support for the design and implementation of specialized writing pedagogies emerging from the genres representative of disciplines. All of this rests on solid theoretical principles that highlight our underlying assumptions and thus allow for coherent progress toward more applied and experimental scenarios. I hope that these diverse and progressive connections will also become more evident and emerge empirically grounded through the rest of the contributions of the chapters that shape this volume.

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Reflection

The chapter published about fifteen years ago by Giovanni Parodi (1962-2020) aimed to offer a reflection about and proposal for the study of genres. After considering multiple different definitions of genre, he found that the majority of them took a socio-cultural approach while others used systemic linguistics. According to Parodi, there was an underexplored aspect mediating among these definitions: human cognition from a psycho-socio-discursive perspective. He developed this approach based on his previous psycholinguistic studies of written language and with an emphasis on the processes of comprehension of texts.

The chapter proposes a consideration of genres from a multidimensional approach. Under this perspective, the linguistic dimension mediates between the social and cognitive dimensions. In this way, the genre is not only an external abstraction of the subject, but also a part of the subject itself. Parodi argues that through a mental representation of the genres' patterns, the subject can understand and produce texts in specific contexts. He also proposes his own definition of genre. Of note is that his proposal led to international discussions regarding the understanding of genre as an object of study from the sociocognitive perspective and the many different approaches to analyzing genres.

Moreover, Parodi proposed how to apply this approach in the process of academic and professional development. In order to do so, he developed

the idea of a *continuum* of genres in different contexts and levels of people's development. In particular, this continuum focused on the interrelationship and impact of genres in academic literacy. Specifically, it focuses on the development of skills regarding written comprehension and production within a framework of social cognition, characteristic of discourse communities, and situated in the learning processes of the community's novice members. The operationalization of these ideas was presented in the book's second chapter. In that chapter, Parodi presented the variables and frequent markers necessary for the identification, description, and characterization of genres in the university context.

Parodi's later work stood out for focusing on the mental representation of genres, their lexical and grammatical features, and, more importantly, the multimodal dimension of professional and academic genres. Specifically, during his last years he stood out for his approach to experimental psycholinguistics using eye-tracking techniques and their relationship with the processes of comprehending written texts. In that sense, the cognitive dimension linked to the social and the linguistic dimensions of the genre were complementary with one another, especially in genres of economics.

What distinguishes Parodi's work is a comprehensive and complex approach to this discursive phenomenon, and his ability to outline a research path for both the process of comprehending the characteristics of genres and their role in the processes of academic literacy in diverse disciplines. The impact of his interdisciplinary research work was outstanding, and especially on the different current methodological approaches regarding genres in music, sports, economy, education, etc. His ideas and contributions continue to prevail and will continue to inform the work of colleagues from all around the world.

– René Venegas, on behalf of Giovanni Parodi