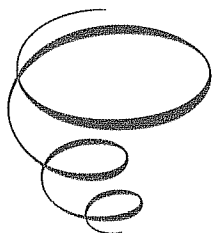


# Professional Genres from an Interpersonal Perspective

Edited by

Renáta Tomášková,  
Christopher Hopkinson  
and Gabriela Zapletalová

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# INTRODUCTION

RENÁTA TOMÁŠKOVÁ

As the title implies, the present monograph is focused on and shaped by two areas of linguistic research: genre analysis and the interpersonal component of language and discourse. The general, unifying objective of the monograph is to explore the interplay and interaction of genre and the interpersonal component – in other words, to reveal potential connections or interdependencies between genre conventions and the realization of interpersonal meanings, viewed from the perspective of the systemic functional approach to language and discourse analysis. Language is thus viewed as social semiotic – a socially and culturally grounded tool of communication (Halliday 1978) incorporating the interpersonal meaning-component as one of its simultaneously co-operating metafunctions. Genre is understood, in accordance with Martin’s approach, as representing “staged goal-oriented social processes through which social subjects in a given culture live their lives” (1997: 13).

The interpersonal metafunction – the capability of language to reflect and build social relationships – is closely related to the concept of intersubjective positioning, viewed by Widdowson as an interaction between the participants’ conceptual spaces, in which each participant seeks to have an effect on the other (Widdowson 2012: 11-12). Widdowson in fact uses the terms ‘intersubjective positioning’ and ‘interpersonal positioning’ interchangeably with reference to this concept (Widdowson 2012). The interpersonal component and intersubjective positioning are also viewed as inseparable concepts by systemic functional linguists, who relate intersubjective positioning to speakers’/writers’ intersubjective stance/stancing. In such accounts, “the interpersonal in language” (Martin and White 2005: 1) and intersubjective positioning merge together, and are interpreted as “the subjective presence of writers/speakers in texts as they adopt stances towards both the material they present and those with whom they communicate. It is concerned with how writers/speakers approve and disapprove, enthuse and abhor, applaud and criticise, and with how they position their readers/listeners to do likewise” (Martin and White 2005: 1).

Intersubjective positioning in discourse appears to operate on two levels. “One is conventional and social and sets the recognized purpose and direction of discourse” (Widdowson 2012: 20), while “the other is the individual level, which is a matter of participants negotiating their positions on line, [...] exercising whatever room for manoeuvre they can find” (ibid). It is social conventions that represent the scene of the interaction between intersubjective positioning and genre. Conventions, combined with a communicative purpose recognized by a community, are constitutive of a genre, ensuring its stability and functionality in communication. At the same time, however, genres are not states but processes (cf. Martin 1997 above), which flexibly reflect the changing requirements of current contexts, including the personalities of the participants, and allow the generic prototype to be shaped accordingly. Thus an analysis of the “individual level” is equally relevant for the exploration of genres, revealing the individualizing elements as a source of the dynamics of generic development.

In the present volume the focus is on analyzing a variety of aspects of the interpersonal in selected genres of professional discourse. The concept of professional discourse as applied here includes not only communication among professionals but also genres produced by professionals to address non-specialists (cf. Gunnarsson 2009); the goal realized in these genres is obviously related to the professional activity of their producers.

The monograph consists of nine chapters grouped into three sections, guiding readers through four major discourse domains: media discourse, academic discourse, institutional discourse and promotional discourse. Institutional and promotional discourses are combined in a single section, reflecting the hybridism of the majority of the genres under investigation here: genres of institutional discourse typically exhibit features akin to advertising, not only presenting the institutions in terms of the scope of their activities and services, but also serving a clear promotional purpose.

In the first chapter Zuzana Nádraská investigates the generic structure of hard news. Acknowledging the model of the satellite organization of news reports developed by Iedema, she draws attention to phenomena which work counter to the orbital structure and thus enrich the coherence mechanism of paragraphing. Analyzing mutually related concessive, concurring or concessive-concurring sequences of paragraphs, she demonstrates that their use appears to be primarily motivated by interpersonal objectives: the juxtaposition of alternative (or at least multiple) points of view elaborates the internal dialogicity of the text and enhances the acceptability as well as the perceived objectivity of the report.

Lenka Kopečková explores the genre of the political speech from a cross-cultural perspective, contrasting features of intersubjective positioning in the public presentations of British and Czech prime ministers. The comparison indicates certain distinctions result from significant differences between the British and Czech political systems and the positions assigned within them to the prime ministers. Differences can also be traced to certain dissimilarities in the conventions underlying the genre: while the British sub-corpus indicates that UK prime ministers' speeches can afford a lower level of formality yet follow a rather rigid structure, the Czech political speeches manifest a higher level of formality, though featuring more noticeable individualizing elements.

The second section, *Genres in academic settings*, provides insights into three genres which occupy a stable position within academia: conference papers, undergraduate textbooks and book reviews. In the third chapter Gabriela Zapletalová offers a survey of the move structure in the genre of a conference paper, focusing her attention on those stages which are distinctively dominant in conference talks and differentiating them from other closely related genres, particularly from research articles – which follow on from conference presentations in a typical academic genre chain. Her analysis demonstrates that the dominant strategies pursue interpersonal aims, reflecting the interactional character of the genre; the interpersonal thus has a substantial effect on the way in which the genre is composed. The generic structure also proves to be sensitive to the speaker's individual characteristics, particularly their age and academic experience, exhibiting differences in the preferences for certain moves between graduate students and senior researchers.

Tereza Guziurová, examining a selection of undergraduate textbooks in comparison with research articles from corresponding fields, discusses the forms and functions of metadiscourse, originally related to the realization of Jakobson's metalinguistic function but recently often viewed as carrying mainly interpersonal meanings. The study not only explores the metadiscourse devices used in the corpus, providing both quantitative and – even more importantly – qualitative data demonstrating the genre-specific nature of both the functions and the types of these expressions; it also analyzes the concept of metadiscourse itself, considering a variety of contemporary approaches as well as the author's own findings.

Olga Dontcheva-Navratilova explores the strategies which writers use to comply with the expectations imposed upon book reviews – a genre which is not only expected to be objective, but which at the same time enables reviewers to position themselves as experts in the field and as fellow members of the same discourse community as the authors of the

books under review. The analysis is innovative in revealing differences in the expression of praise and criticism dependent on the authorship of the publications being reviewed: reviewers tend to minimize criticism of single-authored monographs, though they are less cautious when evaluating multi-authored collections and handbooks.

In the sixth chapter, Christopher Hopkinson introduces a relatively new genre of institutional discourse – the genre of responses to customers' reviews published on the *TripAdvisor* website. The website offers hoteliers a unique opportunity to respond to the evaluative reviews of their customers in a public space visited by other potential clients. While the majority of institutional responses follow generally accepted conventions, seeking agreement and showing respect to customers, the study presented here focuses on the relatively rare cases of antagonistic and aggressive behaviour towards complainants. The analysis provides a model example of intersubjective positioning arising from a tension between the conventional and the individual (see Widdowson 2012 above), convincingly demonstrating how the unconventional may yield benefits to the respondents, helping them win favour with potential new customers.

The following chapter, by Renáta Tomášková, explores the ways in which universities attempt to constructively undermine traditionally impersonal and matter-of-fact institutional discourse by embedding a fundamentally personal genre of the blog into their websites. The study focuses on student blogs, which represent alternative accounts of university presentations, running parallel to mainstream texts prepared by the university itself. Student blogs enrich the genre of an institutional website with a polyphony of voices, personalize and specify the general and generic descriptions of the university offer and student life, and conversationalize the language – also opening up the possibility of interaction. As the analysis has shown, student blogs are chiefly employed as tools of intersubjective positioning.

Dita Trčková's study explores a specific area of intersubjective positioning defined as discursive legitimation. Although institutions in general are increasingly expected to legitimate themselves (i.e. their activities, their impact, or their very existence), for certain organizations and companies the need for legitimation is even more pressing. This chapter provides a thorough analysis of an array of discursive legitimation strategies implemented by major oil companies in order to build an image of their social necessity and environmental sustainability. The interpersonal strategies strive to position the institutions as rational and moral and persuade the addressees to accept them as such.



In the ninth chapter, Ivana Řezníčková seeks to reveal relevant aspects of the establishment of relationships between producers and receivers of leaflets promoting non-prescription pharmaceutical products. The multi-faceted analysis covers both verbal and non-verbal modes and adds a cross-cultural comparison of British and Czech corpora. The research results indicate that the realization of the genre reflects distinctions in the social conventions related to these products and their sale in the two environments: whereas British leaflets largely exhibit features typical of advertisements, offering goods to customers and backgrounding the elements of professional discourse, the Czech materials manifest features of professional medical texts, positioning the addressees as patients rather than clients.

The studies of the interpersonal in a variety of genres produced by professionals (either for their peers or to address lay audiences) document how omnipresent, varied and plentiful the strategies of intersubjective positioning are, and how significant – or indeed central – their position in genres and discourses invariably is. The social and cultural grounding of genres requires them to be conventional, yet it also ensures their flexibility, continuous development and change – and these are qualities which make genres a permanent challenge and inspiration for research and discussion. This volume hopefully contributes a meaningful piece to this never-ending mosaic.

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