ABSTRACT: Although it is generally accepted that professional genres are better understood and analyzed in terms of the professional practices that they invariably co-construct in specific contexts, in genre literature, they are often analyzed in isolation, thus undervaluing the role and function of interdiscursivity in professional genres. This paper will draw on a number of professional contexts and argue for a closer study of interdiscursivity to facilitate a more comprehensive and critical understanding of discursive and professional practices.

KEYWORDS: genre; discourse; professional practice.

1. Introduction

Text and context have been assigned varying importance in the analysis of professional genres. In the early conceptualizations of genre the focus was more centrally on text, and context played a relatively less important background role. However, in more recent versions of genre analysis context has been assigned a more important role, redefining genre as a configuration of text-internal and text-external resources, thus highlighting two kinds of relationships involving texts and contexts. Interrelationships within and across texts focusing primarily on text-internal properties are viewed as intertextual in nature, whereas interactions within and across genres involving primarily text-external resources may be viewed as interdiscursive in nature. Intertextuality has been given considerable attention in discourse and genre theory; interdiscursivity however has attracted relatively little attention. This paper explores the nature and function of interdiscursivity in genre theory, claiming that it is central to the understanding of professional genres, thus arguing for a move towards Critical Genre Analysis. In doing so, the paper also identifies and explores a number of relevant implications for discursive as well as professional practices in professional, corporate, and institutional contexts.

2. Interdiscursivity

Bhatia (2004), in proposing a three space multidimensional and multi-perspective model for analysing written discourse, underpins the importance of context in genre theory. The three overlapping concepts of space, which include textual, socio-pragmatic (incorporating both generic as well as professional practice), and more generally, social, help a discourse analyst to focus more appropriately on one or more of these three dimensions of space analysing and interpreting professional discourse. However when we focus on professional discourse, we find that most forms of professional discourse appropriate semiotic and contextual resources within and across four main dimensions of space in order to construct and interpret meanings in typical professional contexts. Drawing on the framework mentioned above (Bhatia: 2004), these dimensions can be
identified as textual, genre-specific, professional practice, and professional culture, which can be represented visually as follows:

![Diagram: Patterns of discourse realisation in professional contexts](image)

The interesting aspect of this aspect of professional discourse is that it gives rise to two kinds of clines crucial for genre analysis, one underpinning text-context relationship and the other discursive-professional practice relationship. These two clines seem to be the function of text-internal and text-external semiotic resources and constraints. Text-internal resources have been well-researched within the notion of ‘intertextuality’, however text-external resources so far have not been treated with in detail in genre Studies. Text-external resources include the conventions that constrain generic constructs as well as professional practices, and perhaps more appropriately, specific disciplinary cultures that motivate these practices, both discursive as well as professional practices. A comprehensive analysis of any professional activity therefore needs to consider and integrate the use of all these semiotic resources, that is, textual resources, generic conventions, professional practices and professional cultures in the context of which the other three are invariably embedded. Any theory or framework that chooses to underemphasize any of these four aspects of language use is likely to miss input of potential value to a comprehensive and insightful understanding of a specific genre used as part of a professional activity to achieve specific disciplinary objectives.

Textual as well as other semiotic resources and conventions at various levels of professional engagement are often appropriated and exploited for the construction and interpretation of discursive as well as disciplinary practices, thus establishing interesting interactive patterns of interdiscursivity. The concept of interdiscursivity, which is sometimes subsumed under intertextuality, is not entirely new and can be traced back to the works of Foucault (1981), Bakhtin (1986), Kristeva (1980), Fairclough (1995), and Candlin and Maley (1997). However, it has not been fully explored, especially to investigate some of the complexities we find in discursive and professional practices. To make a distinction between the two related concepts, where intertextuality refers to the use of prior texts transforming the past into the present often in relatively conventionalized and somewhat standardized ways; interdiscursivity, on the other hand, refers to more innovative attempts to create hybrid or relatively novel constructs by appropriating or exploiting established conventions or resources associated with other genres and practices. Interdiscursivity thus accounts for a variety of discursive processes.
and professional practices, often resulting in mixing, embedding, and bending of generic norms in professional contexts. More importantly for our discussion here, interdiscursivity can be viewed as appropriation of semiotic resources (which may include textual, semantic, socio-pragmatic, generic, and professional) across any two or more of these different levels, especially those of genre, professional practice and professional culture. Appropriations across texts thus give rise to intertextual relations, whereas appropriations across professional genres, practices and cultures constitute interdiscursive relations.

In order to develop a comprehensive and evidence-based awareness of the motives and intentions of such disciplinary and professional practices (Swales, 1998), one needs to look closely at the multiple discourses, actions and voices that play a significant role in the formation of specific discursive practices within relevant institutional and organizational frameworks, in addition to the conventional systems of genres (Bazerman, 1994), often used to fulfil professional objectives of specific disciplinary or discourse communities. This is possible within the notion of ‘interdiscursivity’ which is one of the important functions of appropriation of text-external generic resources across professional genres and professional practices. It is important to note here that although intertextuality has been discussed extensively in text and discourse analysis in general, it plays a somewhat modest role in professional discourse, where interdiscursivity plays a more significant role in the construction, interpretation, and exploitation of text-external resources at various levels.

In what follows therefore, I would like to take specific instances of interdiscursivity from a variety of professional contexts not only to illustrate that it operates at all levels, generic, professional practice, and professional culture, but also to claim that it not only allows a more rigorous and comprehensive analysis of genres in and as professional practice, but at the same time also encourages evidenced-based studies of professional and institutional practices and cultures through the genres they often use. I would like to take up instances of interdiscursivity from three rather different professional contexts, all of which result from an appropriation of generic resources across two different genres, practices and/or cultures in and across professional contexts to argue for a critical study of professional genres.

3. Critical genre analysis

This section briefly outlines three rather different instances of interdiscursivity. The first one illustrates the use of two different genres in a strategic context of corporate disclosure practices; the second one focuses on the colonisation of two different professional practices, one from arbitration and the other from litigation, to see how one interdiscursively colonizes the other, and the final example draws on the study of fundraising discourse in Bhatia (2004), which underpins the importance of interdiscursive appropriation by one from another, rather different professional culture, within the context of appropriation of linguistic resources across different discursive activities.
(a) Analysis of corporate disclosure documents

The study, based on 15 Hong Kong Stock Exchange listed companies, critically examines corporate disclosure practices and processes through corporate disclosure genres. The focus in this paper is not on what the companies did or did not disclose in a particular year, but more importantly, on the hidden intentions and motivations for such corporate actions in the context of specific corporate and professional cultures. A critical aspect of the investigation thus is not simply to focus on the use of linguistic resources that often make it possible for corporate writers to persuade and convince a varied audience of stakeholders, in particular, minority shareholders, to accept their accounts, estimates, and projections of the future performance of the corporation in question, but also to demystify corporate disclosure practices in the prevailing competitive corporate culture of sustaining shareholders’ interest and investment in the corporation.

The companies categorized into three groups based on their corporate performance, that is, good, moderate or poor performance, during the 1998 to 2005 period. The selection of the corpus, especially the performance of companies as revealed in corporate periodic and annual reports and several other documents, was made in consultation with two specialists in business and finance, keeping in mind overall turnover progress during the specified period, return on equity, in addition to various other indicators.

The main corpus for linguistic analysis consists of corporate disclosure documents, which include annual and other periodical performance reports, press releases by these companies about their corporate performance, and other communications from management to (minority) shareholders. These comprised sections of annual and other interim reports, press releases by these companies, earnings/results announcements, shareholder circulars, notes from general meetings, transcripts/slides from speeches/presentations, and a number of other corporate publications such as the company newsletters.

In addition to this primary corpus, the secondary data includes newspaper reports on corporate performance, journal articles highlighting or reviewing the performance of these companies, assessments of the performance of these companies by rating agencies, such as the Standard and Poor’s and other financial institutions, such as the Monetary Authority of Hong Kong, etc. The main function of the secondary data, which is primarily drawn from newspapers, magazine articles, and through internet websites of rating agencies and institutions, incorporating assessments, reviews, and evaluations of performance by outside rating agencies, is to provide additional authoritative third-party perspectives on the performance of these companies.

It is important to recognise that corporate disclosures documents such as corporate annual reports have long been considered the pulse of corporate realities. Their main purpose is to inform their shareholders about the performance and health of the company, specifically its successes and failures, current problems and prospects for its future development. However, corporate annual disclosure documents seem to be changing in

\[1\] The work described in this part of the paper was supported by a grant from the Research Grants Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China [Project No. 9041056 (CityU 1454/05H)].
their function from ‘informing and reporting’ to increasingly ‘promoting’ the companies by underplaying corporate weaknesses through a subtle ‘bending’ of the norms of such corporate disclosure genres.

One of the interesting findings of the analysis was that one of the legally required modes of disclosure, that is, the annual report, was a typical combination of two interesting but different discourses included in the same document, both of which, partly because of the interdiscursive relations between them and partly through the expert use of specific lexico-syntactic as well as socio-pragmatic resources, are cleverly exploited to ‘bend’ the norms and conventions of ‘reporting’ to promote a positive image of the company, even in adverse and challenging economic circumstances. The companies through these annual reports often seem to negotiate the tension between the need to underplay the relatively weak past corporate performance and to project the expectations of good performance (speculation about the future outlook), especially in contexts when uncertainties about future economic and corporate growth and performance threaten good prospects in the coming years. The two kinds of discourse are:

- Accounting discourse, which forms a major part of the Annual Reports, duly endorsed, certified by public accountants.
- Public relations discourse, in the form of the chairman’s letter to shareholders, for which public accounting firms do not take any responsibility.

In the present study, when a senior public relations manager was interviewed about the role of the chairman’s letter in the annual report, she pointed out:

…the Chairman’s Statement in a company report (is) the PR’s job…At times when profit is not so good, her role as a PR manager is to manage the sentiments of the public and the shareholders so as not to make any dramatic share price movement. This involves management of tone and manner of writing the reports as well as meeting the expectations of the Management.

On the other hand, a senior public accountant pointed out:

The accountant’s job is to note any inconsistency in the company reports and…to go through the banking mechanism of the management…Accountants are not responsible for the forecasting of the company’s future.

These two discourses thus tend to serve two very different purposes: the accounting discourse tends to report accurately and factually on the basis of financial evidence of the past corporate performance, whereas the chairman’s letter is meant to promote a positive image of the company to its shareholders and other stakeholders in order to sustain their confidence in the future corporate performance. Both these discourses are products of two very different corporate practices: one is centrally located in the conventional and legally required practice of auditing corporate results, and the other is an instance of marketing and public relations practice. They also use very different textual resources and rhetorical strategies: one uses numerical data consistent with audit and accountancy practices, whereas the other makes use of promotional as well as forecasting rhetorical strategies. However, it is interesting to note that the two discourses are strategically placed in the same document, that is, the annual report, thus
establishing an interesting interdiscursive relationship between these two different corporate genres. The real motivation for placing the two discourses within the boundaries of the same corporate annual report is that such textual proximity is likely to lend marketing and public relations discourse the same factual reliability and hence credibility that is often presupposed from the use of numerical data. The public relations discourse, on its own, is likely to be viewed by intended audience of (minority) shareholders as a promotional effort, but when it is placed in the discoursal context of accounting discourse, which is often viewed as more evidence-based, factual and therefore reliable, is likely to raise a legitimate presupposition that it may be drawing its conclusions from the accounting numbers that are certified by a public authority accepted by the controlling government agencies. Many of the minority shareholders, whose numbers have increased considerably in recent years, often lack expertise and even linguistic skills to fully understand the implications of the accounting discourse in the annual report, but when they see the chairman’s letter to shareholders in the same report, which is ‘assumed’ to be based on the accounting data, they are likely to take at least some of the predictions and speculative statements in the letter rather more seriously than otherwise.

This rather brief account of corporate disclosure practices clearly underpins the importance of corporate practices in the study of corporate genres. A purely textual or discoursal study of lexico-grammatical, semantico-pragmatic, and rhetorical or discourse organization is unlikely to reveal the intricacies of the construction, interpretation, use and especially exploitation of these corporate genres in achieving their corporate objectives within the requirements of disclosure practices imposed by corporate governance bodies and rating agencies. In order to fully appreciate and understand the full implications of such discursive practices, in particular to investigate how these corporate players ‘bend’ generic norms and conventions to communicate modest or weak corporate performance without undermining investor confidence in their company, one needs to combine the analysis of professional discourses with the disciplinary practices of the professions in question. The data we analysed indicated that although it did not directly involved appropriation of generic resources across two genres, it certainly placed public relations discourse embedded with an accounting discourse for the readers to draw positive implications from this interdiscursive proximity. The study also indicates that it is also possible to study a specific professional practice, e.g., how corporate leaders strategically meet the statutory requirements of periodical disclosures of corporate performance without undermining investor confidence at difficult times, by studying the discourses in and of corporate disclosure practices as these disclosure practices are constituted by a relevant set of professional discourses and genres in both on-stage and off-stage contexts (Goffman, 1959).

(b) Critical analysis of colonization of arbitration practices

The second illustration comes from international commercial arbitration practice. Arbitration is intended to be an efficient, economical and effective alternative to litigation

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2 The work described in this part of the paper was supported by a grant from the Research Grants Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China [Project No. 9041191 (CityU 1501/06H)].
for settling disputes, almost entirely based on the free will of the parties. In actual practice, however, parties do not hesitate to go for litigation when the outcome does not favour them. To better protect their interests, the parties often have recourse to legal experts rather than non-legal experts as arbitrators, which has the effect of making arbitration similar to litigation, often encouraging the importation of typical litigation processes and procedures into arbitration practices. This leads to an increasing mixture of discourses as arbitration becomes, as it were, ‘colonized’ by litigation practices, threatening the integrity of arbitration practice to resolve disputes outside of the courts, and thus going contrary to the spirit of arbitration as a non-legal practice. Nariman (2000), a distinguished international scholar in International Commercial Arbitration, rightly claims that International Commercial Arbitration has become almost indistinguishable from litigation, which it was at one time intended to supplant. Commercial arbitration practice thus provides an excellent context for the study of interdiscursivity where two rather different professional practices, each one well-established in its own right, interact with each other, creating a perfect environment for the ‘colonization’ of one practice by the other. Although interdiscursivity in this context is not directly the result of interaction between two genres or discourses, but more interestingly between two rather different professional practices, that is, litigation and arbitration, where one seeks to undermine the ‘integrity’ of the other.

In order to investigate the ‘integrity’ of international arbitration practices, it is not enough to look at language in use as either text, or even as genre, but one may need to go beyond these to language use as professional practice. In particular, one needs to determine the extent to which arbitration interdiscursively ‘appropriates’ generic forms and conventions from litigation, particularly in terms of the intentions, purposes, processes, procedures, and the shared expertise expected on the part of the participants involved. Most of these factors can be studied on the basis of the discourses employed by the participants, in addition to other sets of complementary textual, narrative, and discourse data.

To provide an evidence-based exploration of the integrity of arbitration practice therefore, one may need to adopt a multi-perspective and multidimensional analytical framework (Bhatia, 2004). This will involve an integration of three data sets: an examination of the intertextual relationships amongst documents recording discursive practices typically selected from arbitration and litigation practices; narratives of experience drawn from key practitioners within these institutional cultures and tested against the experiences of other community members; and selective analyses of critical moments in the discourses of arbitration practices in selected sites of engagement.

This kind of study is consistent with what Goffman (1959) suggests through his theatrical metaphor of front-stage interactions, which include documentation such as primary interactional data and final documents such as arbitration award, cases, as well as participant interactions, wherever possible, and back-stage interactions which include, colleague-colleague discussions, preparation notes, impressions and views informally expressed, through interviews, and focus groups. Of course, these ‘stages’ are not always clear-cut; their boundaries can be frequently blurred. However, it is possible to take advantage of such blurring by reflexively seeking confirmations of the communicative characteristics of critical moments in the arbitration process by testing practitioner hypotheses against other practitioners’ experiences and against the actualities of
interaction in key sites. This corroborating reflexivity becomes crucial as one investigates the contested degree to which, in given arbitration contexts and sites, interdiscursivities between the arbitrational and the litigational become manifest and oriented to by the participants. In analyzing such areas of interdiscursivity, although the evidence comes from the use of language and discourse, the focus is on the study of arbitration practice, in particular on the extent to which arbitration practice is influenced by what is popularly known as litigation practice.

(C) Interdiscursive appropriation across professional cultures

The third and final illustration is from the study of fundraising practices. Although philanthropic fundraising and commercial advertising genres are embedded in very different professional cultures and ideologies, they appear to have remarkable surface-level similarities. Both discursive activities primarily aim at capital-raising, though in one, the objective is to accumulate profit for corporate purposes, whereas in the second, the objective is to raise money for social and welfare purposes, which is essentially a non-profit activity. In most cases of philanthropic fundraising the main driving force is the mission of the organization or the fundraising agency, which is primarily used as a strategy to mobilize fundraising. In the case of corporate advertising, on the contrary, the mission is to maximize profits, either for individual or corporate purposes. Even in companies where explicit mission statements are publicized, the real intention invariably is capital growth, profit-enhancement and corporate success. In the case of philanthropic fundraising there is always a cause for which fundraising is undertaken and that cause very often is the mission. In either case, the cause is always taken to be more important than the mission. In the case of corporate advertising, however, profit maximization is the mission and the cause, if any.

The two sets of social actions (Miller, 1984) thus differ significantly in terms of the motivating factors that make them successful. In the case of corporate advertising, it is the resources and expertise accessible in the form of a business proposition that will convince the audience about the potential strength and eventual success of the activity, whereas in the case of philanthropic fundraising, it is more a case of self-less motivation, social responsibility and an urge to take moral action that will ensure the eventual success of the enterprise. Philanthropic fundraising is essentially viewed as a form of moral action, whereas the corporate advertising is seen as a business proposition. However, in spite these fundamental differences in the professional cultures of these two social actions, one may find remarkable overlap in the use of lexico-grammatical and rhetorical resources in the two forms of discursive actions.

One of the most fundamental features of philanthropic fundraising, which differentiates it from much of corporate advertising, is the assumption that the society has self-interest in the establishment and maintenance of community values. Corporations and other business organizations are also sometimes tempted to go beyond their profit motivation to sponsor or contribute to fundraising in the hope that it will bring them community recognition and hence give them advantage over their competitors. However, this raises a number of interesting issues from the point of view of appropriation of generic resources and development in genres in the context of philanthropic fundraising discourse. Some of these include the relationship between the discourse of fundraising
and corporate advertising, and the nature and extent of appropriation of rhetorical and linguistic devices to achieve fundraising objectives, which further raise a more general issue of the implications of this territorial invasion for the integrity of fundraising discourse. Although there are rhetorical similarities between corporate advertisements and philanthropic fundraising discourse, there are a number of significant factors that give fundraising genres their very distinctive generic integrity, some of which include ‘community participation’ (Payton et al, 1991:4) within a ‘framework of social consciousness’ (Schervish, 1997) primarily undertaken as voluntary action, the whole practice essentially undertaken with a non-competitiveness stance. These characteristics are all embedded in a ‘culture of giving’ within which all fundraising activities take place. However, fundraising discursive practices are being increasingly influenced by the corporate culture of marketing and advising, as evidenced in the appropriation of semiotic resources.

4. Concluding Remarks

Focusing on genre-based professional, corporate and institutional actions, this paper has made an attempt to examine the interrelationship between discursive practices (constructing, interpreting and using professional genres) and professional practices (managing professional activities such as corporate disclosures, public relations, negotiating investor confidence, selling corporate performance, conducting arbitrations negotiations, raising funds for philanthropic purposes etc.) in typical professional, corporate and institutional contexts. At a more theoretical level, the paper underpins the importance of interdiscursivity in genre analysis, highlighting the notion of a tension between ‘generic integrity’ (Bhatia, 1993, 1994, 1995, 2004) and ‘appropriation of generic resources’ (Bhatia, 1997, 2004) in professional discourse. The paper argues for a critical study of discursive activities of professional cultures by focusing on ‘interdiscursivity’ as interaction between discursive and professional practices in the context of specific professional, corporate and institutional cultures, which I would like to characterise as a move towards critical genre analysis.

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