



Researching Discourse in Business Genres. Cases and Corpora

Paul Gillaerts, Elizabeth de Groot, Sylvain Dieltjens, Priscilla Heynderickx, Geert Jacobs (eds).

Bern: Peter Lang, 2012. 215 pages. ISBN: 978-3-0343-1092-5.

Business communication has been the target of communicators for long. They emphasize the need to include writing classes across the business curricula (Russell, 2007). Almost two decades ago, Reinsch (1996: 27) spoke of business communication as being “old but immature. It is essential but insecure. It is a practical-science with a potentially bright future”. However, he foresaw this bright future of business communication by enhancing the teaching of business communication skills and by strengthening research. It has not changed so much since then, but the volume being reviewed is a very positive research product.

By the title of the book, *Researching Discourse in Business Genres*, one may think that it addresses a rather restrictive audience, such as academics dealing with discourse genres, which is the object of today’s most business related publications. On the contrary, in this book it appears as if authors have taken heed of Amidon’s (2008: 452) call for further research in business communication, “particularly in one of the main areas that seems to define our discipline – genres of organizational writing”. The papers in this volume view this organizational writing from different angles, but most importantly from the fact that business genres are based on the interrelationship that exists among the variety of genres within a firm. Gillaerts, de Groot, Dieltjens, Heynderickx, and Jacobs provide an introductory overview and organize the collection of essays based on three types of discourse: internal, executive, and organizational.

This selection of papers, in its first part (“Section 1: Internal Discourse”), opens with PAUL GILLAERTS’ approach to email use in a Belgian firm along with a close look at the use of metadiscourse. His conclusion finds a strong interaction between sender and receiver which makes his corpus of emails comparable to oral communication, with an abundance of interactive devices, such as transitions and endophoric markers, which reflect the typical

written business discourse. In addition, he underscores the hybrid nature of email messages, as opposed to other business genres. Also based on a corpus of emails is the essay by NADINE VAN DEN EYNDEN MORPETH. Her approach is aimed at unveiling the influence of gender on workplace emails by applying Eelen's (2001) modern politeness theory through which he was able to distinguish women's language from men's. Van den Eynden Morpeth analyzes her corpus in search of gender differences in reference to the use of distinguishing patterns, for example, the use of positive or negative politeness. She also makes reference to length of texts, social content, and use of emoticons and exclamation marks. Her conclusions point to the fact that no generalizations can be made and that gender, in general, has little effect on workplace emails. STEPHEN BREMNER closes this first section with a paper through which he wants to emphasize that "writers try and manipulate workplace genres to meet their own goals as well as those of the organization" (page 53). Based on Berkenkotter and Huckin's (1995) concept of genres as being social and dynamic in nature, this author confirms that writers specifically obtain results that favor both organizational and individual objectives.

The second section of *Researching Discourse in Business Genres* ("Section 2: Executive Discourse") begins with BERNA HENDRIKS and MARGOT VAN MULKEN's analysis based on internal Chief Executive Officer (CEO) letters; that is, letters addressed to the firm's workers with an informational and motivational goal. Through this essay, the authors want to scrutinize internal CEO letters in terms of themes contained therein, whether the differences in theme preference have to do with cultural background and also how motivational language is used in these letters. Hendriks and van Mulken, through their analysis of two CEO letters, contend that more research is needed to study this top-down genre and further suggest that it will gradually change and become a multimodal genre. Next, BIRGITTE NORLYK analyzes how the characteristics of leadership are reflected in genres at the top of organizations and corporations. She confronts management and leadership responsibilities which reflect problem-solving issues in the former and visionary and transformational qualities in the latter. She contends that this macro-level framework of management and leadership clarifies issues related to genres at the top of organizations. In the next essay, JANET BOWKER studies the discursive practices within the genre of in-house audio conferences. She looks at discourse to identify "keyness" and key semantic fields, their frequencies as well as metaphorical interactions. Bowker's

research is aimed at exploring the notion of interdiscursivity in internal business communications in which internal corporate messaging and education discourse combine.

In the third section of this volume (“Section 3: Organisational Discourse”), ELIZABETH DE GROOT analyzes press releases originated in three different countries: the US, Russia and the Netherlands. In this cross-cultural study, which compares press releases from established and emerging markets, the author shows how this new genre combines reporting and evaluative language. In her analysis, de Groot looks for differences in the three multinational markets and whether there is biased attribution in their respective English financial press releases observing minor differences in the three cultures. BELINDA CRAWFORD CAMICIOTTOLI’s paper deals with earnings calls – as the author says, “a genre on the rise” (page 165) – and the use of rhetorical strategies. These calls have become routine acts in which periodic updates are provided on the company’s financial situation. In these telephone connections between executive managers and financial analysts there is an ample use of promotional and conversational discourse. In her view, the presentations of these earnings calls have a very regular structural patterning made up of seven moves and use the typical rhetorical language found in financial genres. Similar to de Groot’s paper, the last essay by HEIDI VERPLAETSE and BIRGITTA MEEEX takes a cross-cultural view of corporate mission statements. In the authors’ words, these are a “powerful means” (page 181) to create an organizational identity. In this comparison between German and English mission statements of major industrial corporations, the authors look for individual and organizational competencies and how they are constructed linguistically. They underscore not only the hybrid nature of these statements but also the fact that they are aimed at a hybrid target group.

What is most important of this selection of essays is that the issues treated are not covered in the typical business related academic literature. There is an ample array of issues in business communication which are connected to the genres of employee, CEO and organizational communication. These issues, however, have been hardly dealt with before in depth and this is precisely what this volume does. In fact, the strength of these essays is the systematic approach applied by their authors through a sound genre- and corpus-based methodology. The findings drawn from this volume are valuable to both scholars and businessmen interested in becoming more knowledgeable about communication strategies in the workplace among co-

workers and also between management and employees. It is also useful to teaching practitioners to make their teaching more comprehensive by providing guidelines for other genres not frequently included in their teaching curricula. This collection represents therefore a commendable effort that has been carried out and it deserves to be praised and recommended.

[Review received 16 January 2013]
[Revised review accepted 18 March 2013]

Reviewed by **Carmen Piqué-Noguera**
Universitat de València (Spain)
carmen.pique@uv.es

References

- Amidon, S. (2008). "The learning history. Analyzing an emerging genre". *Journal of Business Communication* 45: 451-482.
- Berkenkotter, C. & T.N. Huckin (1995). *Genre Knowledge in Disciplinary Communication: Cognition/Culture/Power*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Eelen, G. (2001). *A Critique of Politeness Theories*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.
- Reinsch Jr., N.L. (1996). "Business communication: present, past, and future". *Management Communication Quarterly* 10: 27-49.
- Russell, D.R. (2007). "Rethinking the articulation between business and technical communication and writing in the disciplines. Useful avenues for teaching and research". *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 21: 248-277.

