Genre Analysis: An Approach to Understanding Text

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Over the last decades, the nature of linguistic analysis has varied significantly. Linguistic analysis began with the specification of statistically significant lexico-grammatical features to the study of textualization in discourse and to the study of macro-structures in texts, thereby highlighting the concept of discourse structure. Another stage is movement from discourse to genre or from syntactic patterns and vocabulary to overall linguistic organization of text. Still another stage connects text to social practices, social structures, social identities, and discourse systems. Teaching linguistic or cognitive processes of writing is inadequate to make students communicatively competent in writing. The cultural assumptions, values, conventions, and social practices cannot be learnt from outside a community. It is only engagement with the community and acquaintance with cultural and linguistic nuances that makes one an insider in the conventions and knowledge of that community. Genre is the study of situated linguistic behavior in institutionalized academic settings in terms of rhetorical action, regularities, staged, goal-directed social processes or goal-directed communicative events, with or without literary aspirations. The genre analyst needs a repertoire of techniques for capturing the complex interactions between socio-historical, technological, demographic and epistemological factors in order to track and interpret changes in disciplinary texts, especially in disciplines such as psychiatry, a profession that traverses the boundaries between the natural and human sciences. This lecture aims to encapsulate the rudimentary features of genre analysis studies, especially in academic contexts and to show that no text analysis can be adequate without recourse to generic characteristics of the text in focus.