Stephanie Ramirez

Professor Leslie Wolcott

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Genre Analysis

A category of artistic, musical, or literary composition characterized by a particular style, form or content is the definition of genre according to Merriam-Webster dictionary. A style or a category of art, music or literature is the definition of genre that the Oxford dictionary came up with. A class or category of artistic endeavor having a particular form, content, technique or the like is yet another definition provided by one of the many dictionaries available to us through the internet, the library or even the bookstore. Those commonly used definitions are what we grew up with, and then Devitt writes a book completely dedicated to genre and confronts everything we were ever taught. She says: “the common understanding of genre among too many composition scholars and teachers today is that genre is a relatively trivial concept classification system deriving from literary criticism that names types of texts according to their forms. Viewed in this way, genre is not only a rather trivial concept but also a potentially destructive one, one that conflicts with our best under- standings of how writing, writers, and readers work, one that encourages the dichotomies in our field.” According to Devitt once we stop separating content from form genre becomes the outcome of a text rather than the classification of the texts.

The practice of genre as “a complex whole” provides us with a new way of thinking of a text. No longer is the genre of a text stuck in a square box with boundaries and limits now the genre is fluid and constantly changing. This new changing genre is clearly visible as an output of constantly changing discourse communities. The way the members communicate and the texts that they utilize to communicate provide each community with a genre of their own. For example doctors have intake forms, police officers have tickets, lawyers have rules and public relation specialists have critical journals in which communication about the field and the problems arising within the field are discussed in depth. Each one of those genres is different in their own way and they provide us the readers with different information at the same time separating the common reader from the member of the actual discourse community.

Public relations for example is a discourse community that encourages a lot of criticism because of the topics it deals with. In order to discuss those issues in a way that the members of the community could participate actively journals emerged. One the most referred to not only by members of the field but also by critics of the field is the “Public Relations Review”. “Public Relations Review is the only journal published five times a year devoted to articles that examine public relations in depth. Most of the articles are based on empirical research undertaken by professionals and academics in the field.” Like in any discourse community this journal requires its articles to follow a certain type of format and it requires the writer to provide the reader with enough information so that they can easily understand the situation that is being discussed.

All of the articles begin with a heading that provides the name of the journal. The heading is always done with the same font and in the same manner. By doing so the journal can establish itself in the eyes of the reader as official and not just as some article that someone wrote and posted on the internet. When you see a heading and a relationship is immediately made with a certain journal it provides the reader with a sense of certainty that what they are about to read come from a reliable source. The articles that are posted on this specific journal are geared towards a specific audience. They are not written for the common public to read rather they are specifically meant for public relations specialists, and people interested in public relations research. The articles provide information on topics such as nation branding, new public diplomacy, the excellence theory, PRSA and APR all things that might mean absolutely nothing to a simple bystander but to the trained eye of someone who is actively involved in the field they provide insight on new issues arising or old issues they might be trying to resolve. Each one of the articles that I have chosen to discuss and every article published on the journal is required to have keywords at the beginning of the text. The emphasis on the key words is especially evident in article two where the repetition of the word activism is repeated as much as eight times within one paragraph. Features like those provide Public Relations Specialist a quick overview of what the article is going to touch on. Now not only do they have a title telling them what the article is about they also have keywords that make sure that they know exactly where the article will be heading. Features like those in the articles are important because they show a significant characteristic in the PR world which is the fact that they are constantly on the move. Public Relations specialist have to be in charge of multiple events at one time and they don’t have time to sit down and simply read for pleasure so by providing keywords for them to relate the articles to the journal becomes appealing to the discourse community and becomes an inviting feature of the genre. Just the same charts and tables that are used to condense the information to a quick and easy method of presentation that is quick to read and easy to understand provides the articles with an edge that appeals to the logos of the discourse community. For example in article three which speaks about a study that was done so that “public relations scholars could better accommodate for sampling bias in their research, regardless of whether they use the PRSA membership as their sampling frame” (p.444), the use of charts and tables to display the results of the “occupational employment statistics survey” in comparison with the “current population survey” (p.439) becomes indispensible to the understanding of the results of the study. Without the use of those aids the article would not only become long and difficult to understand but it would not appeal to the eye of someone who needs the information in quick manner in order to prepare a report for the company whom they are trying to provide their services to. Another noticeable feature within the genre of all three texts is that the texts are all broken into paragraphs with titles and then there are subtitles. Within those subtitles though on many occasions there are numbered lists or items listed with bullets. It’s important to take into consideration this as it ties into the rest of the genre of having a quick and concise journal that gets the main point across and doesn’t expand on things just to provide fluff. It’s also evident that main focus of the articles is not to have an extensive journal because of the number of pages within each article. Two of the articles only have eight pages and the other one only has nine which gives the reader more motivation to read the text. The journal that I chose is mainly used to write articles that have research and that have some sort of support behind the research. Items like foot notes providing further information on where the research came from gives the author that much more credibility. Like in article one there is a foot notes that explains the research behind the case study that is being reviewed within the article and the reasons why the whole analysis of the case study is not available on the paper. “But as a detailed analysis would be too extensive and beyond the scope of this paper this section is limited to brief review of empirical findings and observations on issues that pertain to the discussion in this paper”(p.814). And of course like any respectable research paper all three texts and every text included in the journal is required to have a works cited page. The works cited is probably the most extensive part of the articles and they have to be cited in APA format rather than MLA. This is important to note because it shows how heavily the discourse community of public relations relies on other people’s work.

Keeping in mind that a genre is not a classification of a text, the genre of the texts that I elected to analyze all have similarities. Things like the importance of efficiently getting the point across and the importance of having support for the research and the facts that are provided within the texts. Features like those are what make a genre unique to each discourse community.

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