Typologies in ESP: From Theory to Practice

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ABSTRACT

Text Typologies resulted from a need to map text studies. It is a reassuring feeling to be able to list and classify what you know. This idea was discovered a long time ago. Indeed we can trace text typologies as far back as Aristotle. Like Aristotle’s, Bain’s typology dating from the 19th century has been a beacon to many a rhetorician, composition teacher, and discourse analyst. In the span of a century, several other typologies have been proposed to systematize text studies. Two main schools have been active in this area: Research done on textsorte in German (Wolfgang Dressler; Rosemarie Glaser) and work done in English on text-types. In this paper I shall expound on the importance of text-typologies in ESP. As a theoretical springboard in the area of discourse analysis, devising typologies has been instrumental in clarifying content and more pragmatic pedagogical issues in the area of curriculum design.

KEYWORDS: Text typologies, Language for specific purposes, Foreign language.

RESUMEN

Las tipologías de texto son el resultado de una necesidad de organizar los trabajos sobre lingüística de texto. El poder listar y clasificar aquello que sabemos nos produce una sensación de seguridad. Esa idea se remonta a Aristóteles, quien nos dejó de regalo una pragmática tipología del texto. En este último siglo, Alexandre Bain, puede ser considerado como la gran referencia de los estudiosos de Retórica, Composición y Análisis de Discurso en esta área. En los tiempos más recientes, destacan dos escuelas principales: los trabajos realizados por alemanes, tales como Wolfgang Dressler y Rosemarie Glaser (sobre textsorte); y los trabajos en inglés (sobre text-types). En este artículo pongo de relieve la importancia de tipologías del texto en el estudio del inglés para fines específicos. Como si de una rampa de lanzamiento se tratara, las tipologías de texto son de gran importancia en el esclarecimiento de contenidos y aspectos más pragmáticos en el campo de la planificación curricular.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Tipologías de texto, Lenguas aplicadas, Lengua extranjera.

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I. INTRODUCTION

It gives a sense of security if you can list and classify what you know. That is probably the reason why text typologies have been the concern of man for a long time. We can trace text typologies as far back as Aristotle. A review of types in English reveals names, evoking different proponents, and serving different purposes at different ages. The need for text typologies has endured through the times. In a workshop on The Burning Issues of Discourse held in Italy in 1993 a few participants expressed the importance of typologies as a theoretical concern in the area of discourse (Kathleen Dahlgren, Elizabeth Maier, Patrizia Violi, Michael Zock) even if the issue was not directly elicited.

Hatim and Mason (1990:138) present the problem of typologies in a rather concise argument. “Some text types have been defined in such a broad way (as scientific, religious, journalistic) that they risk all possibilities of retaining any predictive value. When attempts are made at narrowing the focus of description, we might end up with virtually as many text types as there are texts.” This situation calls for a pragmatic view on typologies. Typologies should lend themselves to be adapted to each reality in particular. There may be no one good typology, but different kinds of good typologies serving different kinds of purposes.

It is my point of view that to even aim at reaching an only typology that might win a consensus and be accepted or useful to all areas is nonsense; nevertheless, it is worthwhile to devise one that may be valid even if it is for a limited purpose. As we trace a stumbling walk in defining terminology, the reader realizes what is at stake in the theory of typologies and discloses a way of defining an appropriate typology for LSP classes. The perspective in this paper is based on experience in designing and teaching LSP courses of business communication in English and Portuguese for areas such as secretarial, public relations, and international relations.

II. DEFINITION OF TYPES

For practical purposes in the field of LSP teaching and translation, types seem to be useful as working tools both for discourse analysis and for pedagogical purposes. The Rhetoric of Aristotle has been cherished for its scientific, philosophical, and pedagogical value. Aristotle classifies speech into three kinds: deliberative, forensic and epideictic. In turn, deliberative speech can be subdivided

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into exhortation or dissuasion; the elements of forensic speech can be accusation or defence; epideictic speech is either intended to praise or blame. Deliberative speech is said to concern the future, forensic speech concerns the past, and epideictic speech belongs to the present. The ends of each kind of speech are also distinct. Deliberative speech aims at advantage or injury. Forensic speech aims at justice or injustice. The aim of those who praise or blame concerns honor or dishonor (Cooper, 1960: 17-8). Aristotle’s typology is certainly well-founded and encompassing. It brings to mind much more recent typologies.

One of the most far-reaching aspects of Alexander Bain’s work is said to be his typology of discourse. Bain separated discourse into different forms: description, narration, exposition, argument, and later poetry. Bain’s forms of discourse were expounded in his book English Composition and Rhetoric intended for the student of rhetoric, which he taught at Aberdeen. This typology has persisted in composition textbooks (Horner, 1983: 146) and was recovered by Edward Corbett in a review of typologies addressed to the composition teacher. Corbett called his types modes, but they were basically Bain’s forms revisited. Jakobson (1960) established a typology of language functions based on research by Malinowski. According to Jakobson, communication happens if a ‘sender’ delivers a message to an ‘addressee’ in a certain ‘context,’ using a certain common ‘code’ if a physical and psychological ‘contact’ can be established. Depending on the focus of the message in relation to these five elements of communication, glossed in the text, five functions of language can occur. Messages focussing on the writer or speaker are emotive; messages focussing on the reader are called conative; the message primarily focussed on the context is referential; the one having to do with the nature of the contact is phatic; the metalinguistic message pertains the code; the message focussed on itself is poetic. Jakobson’s theory was applied to writing by Corbett and to reading by Jasper Neals alike as it has met the interest of many linguists.

Kinneavy explains his four aims of discourse as follows: «Language is like a window-pane. I may throw bricks at it to vent my feelings about something; I may use a chunk of it to chase away an intruder; I may use it to mirror and explore reality; and I may use a stained-glass window to call attention to itself as an object of beauty. Windows, like language, can be used expressively, persuasively, referentially and esthetically» (Kinneavy, 1981: 97). The overflowing aggressiveness in the passage unveils the purpose of his typology. The author is addressing a readership of composition teachers used to motivate students to let feelings out in
writing. In Kinneavy's review of typologies, he mentions another term for type, Hayakawa's *uses* of discourse, which are equivalent to Kinneavy's aims.

Longacre favours the term *type*. He is presenting a theoretical analysis of discourse in his book *An Anatomy of Speech Notions*. His typology neatly classifies discourse according to a set of distinctive *features* which are branded minus or plus. Longacre precludes a deep structure and a surface structure in discourse. Four deep structure types are apparent depending on the value of *features* such as time, orientation, person, and type of linkage. His four deep structure types are narrative, procedural, expository, and hortatory (Longacre, 1976: 200). Longacre proceeds with a set of surface structure types. The whole idea of postulating a deep and a surface structure analysis is linguistically elegant, without a doubt. Longacre's surface structure is, however, far too deep to be accessible to the real student we encounter in our language courses, and that is why I shall return to this point further down.

Types are now viewed in the field of linguistics as two main entities: *registers* and *genres*. Halliday defines *register* in precise terms. He presents *register* as a semantic concept, defined as a configuration of meanings that are typically associated with a particular situational configuration of field, mode, and tenor. Besides, a *register* includes the expressions, the lexico-grammatical and phonological features, that realize its meanings. Hasan expounds on *genre*, which she defines by the set of obligatory elements of each *genre* (Halliday and Hasan: 1989).

Swales (1991) manages to 'disentangle' the concept of *register* from *genre* on the basis of different levels of analysis. He establishes the position of *genre* in linguistic studies, and he asserts the value of *genre* as fundamental to the realization of goals (Hatim and Mason, 1990: 41). Swales and Martin have done a great deal in showing the importance of *genre* both as a linguistic device and as a pedagogical tool. A few *genres have been* thoroughly studied such as the research paper (Dudley-Evans and Henderson 1993; Anna Mauranne 1993), and the doctor's appointment (Ainsworth-Vaughan 1993).

*Genres have been* applied to translation studies. Carl James in his article «Genre analysis and translation» explores the intertextual relations of *genres* in the *source* language and cross-linguistically. He establishes the importance of what he calls 'genre translation.' Hatim and Mason are interested in types as guides to translation in a very practical sense. They state that texts are usually hybrid in nature. Then they go deep into seeking the essence of texts. They contend that texts should be defined as *units* which are variable in nature with a certain dominance of

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a given purpose or contextual focus. They advocate that for the purpose of translation it is not enough to stop at genre typology. They argue: although we recognize multifunctionality as an important property of texts, we submit that only one predominant rhetorical purpose can be served at one time in a given text. This is the text contextual focus (1990:146). With Hatim and Mason, we visualize a supernova in text typology. For translation purposes, the authors invite the translator to question himself or herself at the outset of each text unit how features compare in the two languages, overriding the text unit. Vis-a-vis the long texts translators encounter, several authors sustain that each text will be composed of set obligatory and optional elements in a certain sequence. Longer texts can often be analyzed into shorter subtexts, which can be abstracted to a cannon. Take the company financial report: the reader can easily identify a structure of subtexts such as introduction, balance sheet, income statement, profit and loss accounts, auditor’s report, and board of directors report (Costa: 1992 a). The notice of a meeting is also an interesting case. It is a specific kind of text and displays a certain configuration of features. The notice of a meeting published in a newspaper looks different from the one sent directly to the people entitled to attend the meeting, but the two kinds have so much in common that they can be perceived as two subtypes of the same type. Each type is defined as a shallow structure. Examples of shallow types are minutes of meetings, company annual reports, research papers. Some types, such as the letter, encroach an innumerable set of subtypes. Some types such as the report comprise several types of subtexts. The shallow types, however, have to be generalizable in order to retain a predictive value. Only a condition of generalizability ensures the usefulness of types as a pedagogic instrument. That is what makes the difference between a text-type and a text-model. If instructors do not ensure the condition of generalizability to the types, they will merely bring rigid text-models to class.

III. TYPOLOGIES AND ORALITY

The whole issue of typologies seems to be particularly unsettling when it concerns oral language. The frames and plans in conversation are not as formalized as in writing. It is the issue of planned and unplanned discourse. In informal conversation which is sometimes where most is at stake, existing typologies seem sometimes pointless. Swales (1990: 58-60) settles the issue for a while by assigning to conversation a pre-generic status. Conversation is supposed to be a sort of emanating source where all genres originated, a sort of black hole. Distinction

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between two types of language, the unplanned and planned discourse seems to me a valid way out. A kind of shade/ light contrast. Whereas for unplanned discourse the scope is unlimited, a sort of limbo; for planned discourse there is a set number of options which may or will be realized as specific genres. For each specific purpose there will be a specific typology.

IV. APPLICATIONS OF TYPOLOGIES

I have been using a genre-based approach in my L.S.P. classes of business English and business Portuguese for some time. Genres are amenable to class management through the various stages of presentation, production, follow-up and evaluation. Costa (1992b) shows how the teaching of genres can be managed in the classroom and the advantages derived from the genre approach in terms of learners autonomy. The question remains of how the processing and memory works in relation to curricula designed on the basis of a genre-approach. In a secretarial course I taught a couple of years ago, I conducted a study to test the value of genres in curriculum design. I devised a syllabus composed of two kinds of units: text types and language problems (see appendix). I presented the units in an equivalent way integrating the use of the different skills in all classes. At the end of the course, I had students with 75% attendance or more report on the memorable content of the course. Students were not allowed to use their class notes. Most text types were recalled in the reports. The language problem units were mostly forgotten.

According to De Beaugrande and Dressler the mind operates in terms of networks. It seems that text types helped students to learn the material and to recall its frames more easily. When I presented a text type as focus of my presentation, I was helping students to learn. These results point to the importance of defining shallow text types. It seems that the different terms for text types are relatively close in meaning theoretically speaking. For practical purposes, for each ESP audience the relevant types will have to be defined. The matter of who defines the relevant text types to each course depends on the degree of responsibility the instructor can expect from the students.

Some ESP instructors in England have advocated teacher teams. If you have to design a curriculum for ESP intended for students in economics, the language teacher and the teachers responsible for courses in economics should get together to discuss the content of the language course. The problem, however, is that in the area of economics you have subjects such as macroeconomics, microeconomics, and

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maybe statistics, maths, accounting and so forth. At the beginning years at university, students in English universities will have to write research papers for the various courses they are taking at the university. That is why the research paper is certainly one of the most important genres in their curriculum. The English course will help students to succeed in their academic work. Nevertheless, when time comes, these students will have to perform their professional role: to go to international congresses, to write letters to colleagues in different countries using the English language as a medium, send e-mail messages around the world and be prepared to write reports on commissioned work on their own professional area. Then we should ask what the alternative is in terms of who defines the curriculum. The curricula for the courses in different areas are designed in such a way that students should know what they will be expected to do with the language and the text types they are interested in producing. The language teacher can pull up the curriculum for LSP courses by starting with work on needs analysis with students. Students and instructor can get to a contract that binds both parties.

V. CONCLUSION

The survey of text types discloses a panoply of names for the sorts of text that different perspectives entail: kinds, forms, modes, functions, aims, uses, types, registers and genres. By choice, the term type is used as a generic in this paper although Longacre develops a generative theory on text types. Longacre is the most theoretical and elegant approach to the issue of text typology. All the other classifications have been spurted by practical concerns. The genre approach has successfully been applied to detailed distinctions between texts, and, therefore, it lends itself easily to practical purposes like translation and language learning. From the study conducted on genres, it has been found that genre distinctions are useful in learning English for specific purposes. Each area of study defines its core genres in the English curriculum on the basis of a contract between students and instructor. As long as terms mean the same to both, it should be the best bridge available.

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APPENDIX

Unit 1: Introduction
Unit 2: Memo-writing
Unit 3: Using Sources
Unit 4: Parties Galore: language for socializing
Unit 5: The Book Report
Unit 6: English Word Formation
Unit 7: English for International Meetings: Cross-cultural aspects
Unit 8: Notice of meeting: Portuguese and English in Contrast
Unit 9: Minute of Meetings: Portuguese and English in Contrast
Unit 10: Travel Itineraries and References
Unit 11: Paragraph Structure in English and Portuguese
Unit 12: Style in Business Communication
Unit 13: Tricky Sentence Patterns
Unit 14: Spelling Tricks: Review
Unit 15: Word Order: Review of Syntax
Unit 16: Address Writing
Unit 17: Signs and Symbols for Business: Portuguese and English in Contrast
Unit 18: Messages and Channels: Telexes, E-mail messages, Faxes and Telegrams
Unit 19: Invitations: Writing invitations and responding to Invitations
Unit 20: Report Writing: -Analysing a Project Report
-Numbers and Figures: Contrasts in English and Portuguese
-Graphs and Tables
-Project and chronology
-Proposal
-Transmittal
-Outline/Table of Contents/ Index
Unit 21: Oral Presentation
Unit 22: Punctuation: English and Portuguese in Contrast

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