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A Universe of Meaning—
How Many Practices?

J. R. Martin
University of Sydney, Australia

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WHAT IS GENRE?

To begin, I'd better declare what I mean by *genre*, which is a term I use to name configurations of meaning that are recurrently phased together to enact social practices[1] (Martin, 1992, 1997a). As a linguist, I've worked mainly on verbal configurations of meanings in spoken or written discourse; but in multimodal texts, other semiotic systems make an important contribution as well (image, music, action and others; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996; Lemke, 1998; Van Leeuwen, 1992).

In these terms, Grabe seems to be suggesting that we can generalize across these recurrent configurations of meanings and recognize two large families of genres, narrative and exposition, which he refers to as macro-genres.[2] I'm not sure whether Grabe agrees with James and Bruner, whose remarks he quotes at the beginning of the chapter and who suggest that there are these two macro-genres (narrative and exposition) and no others. But I can't resist commenting on this strong and remarkably plausible claim.

WHAT'S A FAMILY?

Genre is a term for grouping texts together; for Grabe, macro-genre is a term for grouping genres. This raises the issue of how we group things together. Basically,

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[1] Note that I am not distinguishing genre from text-type here, inasmuch as genre, as I use the term, fits into a global model of language in relation to social context informed by systemic functional linguistics (Martin, 1997a, 2000).

[2] I should clarify at this point that in my own work, I have used the term "macro-genre" to refer structurally to texts comprised of more than one "elemental" genre (Martin, 1995, 1997a), not to refer systemically to families of genres.

there are two alternatives. One has to do with classification—the formation of taxonomies on the basis of criteria differentiating one grouping from another. The other has to do with family resemblance—the development of parameters that position groups along a scale of similarity and difference. Technically, we can refer to the first grouping principle as *typological*, and the second as *topological* (Martin, 1997a; Martin & Matthiessen, 1991). Grabe's macro-genres appear to be based on the second principle: "The family of narrative discourse structures represent text types that are *typically* episodic in nature and include a set of identifying criteria that bear *family resemblances* with one another" (italics added). This topological perspective allows for the possibility of fuzzy borders, a notion that is probably critical to the plausibility of narrative and exposition as encompassing macro-genres.

For example, Grabe characterizes narratives as involving sequences of events, some events being out of the ordinary and requiring explanation, typically presented as a causal chaining of events. These parameters would appear to push a number of genres to the borders of the macro-genre. *Personal recounts*, for example, tend to deal with ordinary experience not requiring explanation (Martin, 1985b; Rothery, 1994); *Western news stories* deal with extraordinary experience, but tend not to relate this experience chronologically (Iedema, 1997a; White, 1997); *observation* (Rothery, 1994) and *gossip* (Eggins & Slade, 1997) refer to events in general terms without spelling out the sequences involved. What ties these genres to the narrative family is not so much their sequencing, but the fact that like other narratives (Martin, 1997b; Martin & Plum, 1997), they make their point by evaluating experience (a narrative parameter not specifically mentioned by Grabe but considered central in the work previously cited, as inspired[3] by Labov & Waletzky, 1967).

This is not, of course, to challenge Grabe's macro-genre, but simply to clarify that the notion of family resemblance is critical. If we pursue the complementary typological perspective, then we are forced to establish a set of specific criteria that all members of the narrative macro-genre share, and make decisions at the borders as to whether things are in or out. If sequencing events in time is crucial, then the 19th-century news story will be in (as a kind of recount), but during the 20th century, the Western news will fall out (since chronology fades away); if out-of-the-ordinary events are criterial, then anecdotes and examples (Martin & Plum, 1997) will be in as they deal with remarkable events, but recounts of everyday experience will be out (since they are too flat, too ordinary). If we want a big family, we'll need the elasticity a topological perspective on grouping provides.

FRONTIERS

Even with elasticity, I wonder to what extent the distinction between narrative and expository macro-genres can be secured. Let's explore this through some genres

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[3]For a comprehensive overview of Labov and Waletzky's legacy, see the *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 7, pp. 1–4 (a special issue edited by Michael Bamberg).

from secondary school history (Coffin, 1996, 1997; Martin, 1997a; Veel & Coffin, 1996). An outline of the genres in question is presented as Table 15.1. They have been arranged from top to bottom along a learner-oriented pathway, bridging from the common sense experience of naive apprentices through to mature construals of history informed by contemporary critical theory. This pathway highlights major steps in learning given the new kinds of semiotic resources that need to be drawn on to construct the genre. For reasons of space, it is not possible to exemplify or discuss this pathway in any detail here (see Feez & Joyce, 1998a, for an accessible introduction).

Table 15.1
An Ontogenetic Topology (Learner Pathway)
for Some Secondary-School History Genres

GENRE	INFORMAL DESCRIPTION	KEY LINGUISTIC FEATURES
personal recount [Orientation^Record]	agnate to story genres; what happened to me	sequence in time; 1st person; specific participants
autobiographical recount [Orientation^Record]	borderline - agnate to story & factual genres; story of my life [oral history]	setting in time; 1st person; specific participants
biographical recount [Orientation^Record]	story of someone else's life	setting in time; 3rd person (specific); other specific & generic participants
historical recount; [Background^Record]	establishing the time line of the grand narrative	setting in time; 3rd person; mainly generic participants (but specific great 'men')
historical account; [Background^Account]	naturalizing linearization rendering the grand narrative inevitable	incongruent external causal unfolding; 3rd person; mainly generic participants; prosodic judgment
factorial explanation [Outcome^Factors]	complexifying notion of what leads on to/from what	internal organization of factors; factors externally linked to outcome; 3rd person; mainly generic participants
consequential explanation [Input^Consequences]	complexifying notion of what leads on to/from what; hypothetical variant - if x, then these	internal organization of factors; consequences externally linked to input; 3rd person; mainly generic outcomes participants

exposition - one-sided; promote [Thesis^Arguments]	problematic interpretation that needs justifying	internal conjunction keying on thesis
challenge - one-sided; rebut [Position^Rebuttal]	someone else's problematic interpretation that needs demolishing	internal conjunction keying on thesis
discussion - multi-sided; adjudicate [Issue^Sides^Resolution]	more than one interpretation considered	internal conjunction keying on thesis; + internal organization of points of view
deconstruction [Foucault; cf. Ian Hunter]	avoiding reductive temporal & causal linearization into grand narrative, effacing voices of the 'other'...	replace naturalizing time/cause explanation with 'spatial' discursive formation realizing episteme

(Halliday, 1994; Martin, 1992)

Basically, what we have here is a cline of apprenticeship that moves from recounts of personal experience to deconstructive critique, arguably from narrative to exposition in Grabe's terms. The border area involves three key genres— historical recount, historical account, and factorial explanation. *Historical recounts* unfold chronologically, enacting "grand narratives;" *historical accounts* unfold causally, explaining how one event leads to another; *factorial explanations* deal with a complex of factors simultaneously affecting outcomes.

Historical Recount (Setting in Time; Long Time Scale)

... BY THE MID TWENTIES, big changes took place to meet the needs of the fishing industry and government fisheries managers. The Board began to employ full-time scientific staff, and Technological Stations were established in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and Prince Rupert, British Columbia. The staff quickly became multidisciplinary. At the Biological Stations, physics and chemistry were added to zoology in recognition of the importance of understanding fish habitat. At the Technological Stations, zoologists did some initial work on refrigeration of fish, but chemists, bacteriologists, and engineers soon took over responsibility for industrial research and development.

DURING THE DEPRESSION YEARS, the fisheries research and development program was maintained despite constrained budgets. Facilities for volunteer investigators could only be provided to those with independent financing, and the small permanent staff endured a 10% reduction of salaries. DURING THE WORLD WAR II YEARS THAT FOLLOWED, there was the additional setback of loss of some staff to war service ... [Martin, W. R., 1991, p. 37]

Historical Account (Cause and Effect; "Explaining")

Man has been making animals rare and even extinct for thousands of years, and one of

the main ways man has achieved this is BY THE DESTRUCTION of their habitat. The destruction of a habitat MEANS THAT the vital balance between an animal and its environment is disturbed. In ancient times the destruction of habitat and the extinction of animals was quite small. Since then it has rapidly increased. People began to make more use of machines and industrialization occurred, bringing with it changes which would destroy the face of the earth's environment forever. As the demands grew, wood and later coal, supplied the resources needed; this in turn RESULTED IN THE DESTRUCTION of forests and habitats. At the same time that industrialization was taking place, humans were settling in new parts of the world. Whenever they settled, nests were cut down and farms established. This destroyed the habitat of many animals.

THE EFFECTS OF INDUSTRIALIZATION and the need of more land DUE TO THE GROWTH OF POPULATION seriously AFFECTED WILDLIFE and still is today. Already half the world's tropical rainforests have already been destroyed or irreversibly damaged. This reckless ravaging of some of the most amazing habitats on earth MEANS THAT by the year 2000 the destruction will be complete and the world will be without these areas.

Factorial Explanation (Explaining Outcomes in Relation to Multiple Factors)

WHY Did the Long March Succeed?

This question has often been raised by historians, and a NUMBER OF FACTORS have been suggested to EXPLAIN the success of the Long March.
1. One of these is the leadership of Mao Zedong. The success of his guerrilla tactics after Zunyi revived the confidence of a demoralised army at a crucial stage.
2. He also had the benefit of the brilliant army commanders such as Zhu De and Peng Duhai, who were able to implement his guerrilla strategies.
3. The courage and toughness of the young members of the Red Army, many of whom were teenagers, also contributed to its success.
4. The discipline of the Red Army, which won the confidence and support of the peasant population, contrasted with the disunity of the enemy. For example the warlord of Yunnan province, Long Yun, was more concerned about Chiang Kai-shek taking over his province than he was about smashing the Communists. [Buggy, 1998]

Of these genres, historical recounts are the most arguably narrative, factorial explanations the more arguably exposition; in between, historical accounts share chaining of events with narrative, and causal explanation with exposition. So the borders[4] of narrative and exposition seem genuinely blurred. This is perhaps predictable once we adopt a topological perspective on genre relations. More troubling is the relatively seamless trajectory through narrative to exposition once we ground ourselves in a discipline (in this case secondary school history). History

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[4]For discussion of related "border" issues, see Unsworth, 1997, 1998, and Veel, 1997 on sequential, causal, theoretical and factorial explanations in science; and Iedema, 1994b, 1997a, and White, 1997, on event oriented versus political news stories.

in a sense constructs its own macro-generic assembly, in the service of its discourse-specific goals. I'm not sure the assembly is any less coherent as far as configurations of meaning are concerned than Grabe's macro-genres, once the diversity of narrative and expository texts is considered.

Two points here: (a) the frontiers of narrative and exposition may be more heavily populated than we might predict, and (b) the coherence of a macro-genre depends on our reading position, which raises a question as to whether Grabe's purchase on families of genres is as institutionally neutral as an observer-stance pretends. For further discussion of the family of history genres alluded to here, see Coffin, 1996, 1997; Feez & Joyce, 1998a; Martin, 1997a; Martin, in press. For related work on geography genres, see Humphrey, 1996; Martin, 2000; for English genres, see Rothery, 1994; Martin & Plum, 1997; for science genres, see Veel 1997, 1998; Martin & Veel, 1998.

OTHER FAMILIES

Just two macro-genres? Any other contenders? I'll suggest a few. One group I'm not sure how Grabe would deal with is the *service encounter family* (Hasan, 1985; Ventola, 1987), whereby goods and services are exchanged. Variations include door-to-door sales, market stalls, small shop transactions, purchases in larger stores, buying major items (including bargaining for, say, a house or car), auctions, mail orders, shopping on the Internet, and so on. Another group we might refer to as the *appointment family* (Hasan, 1978), with variations including family scheduling, making a date with friends, party invitations, leave applications, conference announcements, program scheduling, institutional timetabling, medium and long-term planning, and so on. As another group we might consider is *interviewing*, including interrogation, cross examination, talk-back radio, student consultations, oral examinations, counseling, thesis supervision, chat shows, job or promotion interviews, expert panels, in-depth interview with celebrity/expert, and so on. I'm not trying to be exhaustive here, just flagging the possibility of additional macro-genres.

Another family that has been studied in some detail (Iedema, 1995, 1997b; Rose, 1997, 1998; and Rose, McInnes, & Korner, 1992) deals with *control*, including procedures (instructions, recipes, manuals, etc.), giving directions, protocol, directives, and possibly duty statements and hortatory expositions. Rose (e.g., 1998) has studied procedural discourse in the workplace in some detail, and introduces the relevant genres as follows:

> At the top of the industrial ladder, enabling texts are not framed as commands at all, they
> are simply statements about the manufacturing technology and the roles of workers, i.e.,
> *duty statements*. At the bottom, however, the commanding function is foregrounded, it
> is realised directly and less negotiably as a series of imperatives—*a simple procedure*.
> In between, workers at the next level need to make choices about what actions to take.

These decision-making functions are realized in *conditional procedures*. At this level workers also need to know how the technology operates in order to "select and use appropriate techniques and equipment required to perform tasks of some complexity"—to borrow the National Training Board's terminology. These descriptions of the workings of the technology are realised as *topographic procedures*. Many tasks involve multiple participants, including operators and technicians so the procedure must foreground the identity of the worker to carry out each step in the task. We have called this type a *co-operative procedure*.

Each of these procedures are concerned with operating technology—the field is technological and more or less specialised. They may also involve some knowledge of scientific measurement, but generally limited knowledge of scientific theory. The next level of procedure involves scientific laboratory work—testing products and materials. While this work also involves operating technology, it is generally highly technical and demands significant knowledge of scientific theory—the field is scientific and technical. We have called this genre *technical procedures*. (Rose, McInnes, & Korner, 1992, p. 139)

The genres are outlined by Rose as Fig. 15.1, and arranged in a cline associating
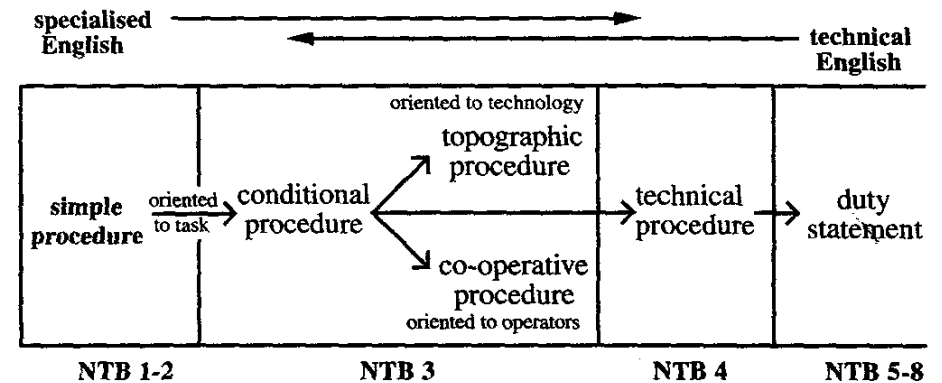

Fig. 15.1: Procedural genres in relation to National Training Board (NTB) levels in science-based industry

control of the genre with Australian National Training Board levels. Note that even if the procedures are collapsed into the narrative family on grounds of event chaining, we still have the problem of a cline including duty statements that do not feature chronological organization. Obviously not included here are the protocol (rules and regulations) genres that circumscribe behavior (Martin, in press) and directive genres that demand changes (Iedema, 1995, 1997b; Martin, 1998a); the way in which directives deploy rationale to motivate change brings them very close in organization to hortatory exposition, the genre that presents arguments in favor of proposals about how the world should be (Martin, 1985a; Martin & Peters, 1985)—blurring perhaps the border between exposition and the procedural family posited here.

The point here then is that there are arguably a number of macro-genres that appear to lie outside the scope of Grabe's proposals, unless his category of exposition is a great deal more elastic than I take it to be (too elastic,[5] perhaps, to function as an abstract label for recurrent configurations of meaning). Of note is the fact that for the most part these families (service encounter, appointment making, interview and procedure) lie outside of Academe—which raises once again the question of Grabe's reading position in relation to his macro-generic claims.

GENRE RELATIONS

I judge from Halliday (1994) and Matthiessen (1995) that the grammar of English is a combinatorial powerhouse whose potential to construe genres has barely been tapped. Our universe of meaning, in other words, is very sparsely populated (much like our physical universe)—how many stars can we find, arranged into how many galaxies, using what technology, from whose point of view? How many genres, arranged in how many macro-genres, using what criteria, from whose reading position? Grabe discusses two galaxies; I suggested a few more, noting as I went the problem of fuzzy borders and the possibility of seeing the genres Grabe considers as grouped differently from alternative perspectives (i.e. secondary school history, science based industry). What Grabe and I share is an interest in grouping genres into large galaxies of meaning, alongside the task of assigning texts to genres (identifying the solar systems out of which the galaxies are composed).

Like Grabe, my interest in macro-genres has been driven by educational concerns—early on to make a place for exposition in the primary school curriculum (Martin, 1985b); later to promote writing for learning across the curriculum in secondary school (Martin, 1993b). In this work, we grouped genres by discipline (English, history, science and so on) and within disciplines we worked on learner pathways that realigned genres as the basis for a spiral curriculum that could start with what students know and guide them into specialized discourse (without always having to start from scratch, term after term, year after year, since nothing could be assumed). In this kind of work genre relations are critical—to understand both the

[5]The use of the cover term "explanation" by Ogburn, Kress, Martins, & McGillicuddy, 1996, illustrates the more than generous elasticity that gives me pause here.

work that is done recontextualizing a discipline for school, and the work done apprenticing students into its discourse. In such interventions, galaxies of genres do matter.

From the perspective of education, one might well argue that narrative and exposition are the heart of the matter (our Milky Way as it were). The texts attracting evaluation in education (Bernstein, 1975, 1990) are largely ones that are *written* rather than spoken, that construct *academic* rather than domestic or workplace discourses, and that make statements about the world rather than proposals for action. From this reading position, the service encounter, appointment making, interrogation, and control macro-genres suggested earlier are far from central—presenting themselves perhaps as single stars stranded here and there in an expanding universe. Upon closer examination, however, as seen perhaps from another world, that's not how they look at all. As naive poststructuralists, we might even begin to question the utility of having any categories at all.

Like Grabe, however, I think that categories do matter (unfashionable neostructuralists that we are). Nothing confirms this more strongly for me that the so-called "mixed genres"[6] often presented in evidence against the utility of classifying genres. Some narratives do the work of scientific explanations, for example, as in the paragraph below, reflecting perhaps the excesses of progressive education and its obsession with the authenticity of story genre. (Chouliarki, 1998; Martin 1985b, 1998b).

> O.K. boys, on the count of three. One, two, three .... Oh no, the ear flaps have caught my vibrations. NOT AGAIN. I shoot through the auditory canal at very high speeds, going along bumps and ridges, through every nook and cranny. Then SMASH. I hit the ear drum, jarring my whole body and making my head spin like a merry-go-round. Then without any rest, I collide with three other bones, all pushing into one another. On again of again here I go. This time to a roundabout which I must add has some greenish-grey, gooey fluid. Oh gross.

There are procedures doing the work of expository challenge, as in the "Terra Nullius Pie" recipe below:

> [5.] INGREDIENTS . . .[7]
> 1 * "Empty" continent (a wide brown one will do nicely)
> 10 * Point Plan, OR

[6]The term "mixed genre" has always seemed a contradictory misnomer to me, confusing genres with the *texts that instantiate one or more of them*; in addition, it unhelpfully groups together radically different kinds of "mixture" —for discussion see Martin, in press.

[7]*Terra nullius* is the doctrine justifying British occupation of Australia on the grounds that no one was living there; the *10 Point Plan* refers to Liberal Prime Minister John Howard's 1997 plan for adjudicating Land Rights; *Sorry Tears* refers to the issue of the stolen generations of Aboriginal children taken from their families by government officials and the grass-roots swelling of remorse in opposition to Howard's ongoing refusal to offer an official government apology. I am grateful to Miriam Corris for drawing this text to my attention.

100 Litres "Sorry Tears"
Some live Cultures
Plenty of re-written history to garnish

METHOD
Take the land and thoroughly clean of any people. Remove as much of the forest and
minerals as you can. Next liberally pour wastes into waterways until nicely blue-green.
At this point you'll be tempted to carve the pie up into 10 big slices, but this may cause
heartburn or even armed insurrection later!
ALTERNATIVELY, sprinkle well with sorry tears and leave to reconcile for a while.
When cool, share it out—if no one is too greedy there'll be plenty to go round... [pulp
student magazine of Southern Cross University, 1998]

My point is that if we find the notion of texts drawing on more than one genre useful,
then we have to acknowledge the distinctive recurrent configurations of meaning
that are being drawn upon—the distinctive genres. The notion of "mixed genres"
depends on having distinct ingredients to mix. And this leaves us with distinguish
ing these ingredients (the genres) as an important task.[8]

As we compile a list of genres, it does seem important to ask questions about
how these genres are related to each other—into how many and what kinds of
macro-genre. Early in the 1980s, my colleagues and I revised traditional Hallidayan
approaches to modeling social context (field, mode, and tenor) by introducing an
additional level of analysis, called genre, to pursue just this work (see Martin, 1992,
2000, and in press for discussion). Our plan was to begin mapping our culture as a
network of social practices, one set of genres in relation to another. It's encouraging
to have an opportunity to respond to some empathetic research from across the
Pacific. Cheers from what you call the "Sydney School"—a term in need of fuzzy
borders if family differences be told!

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[8]In a similar way, recognition of distinct genres underpins our interpretation of generic change, as the
meaning potential of our culture evolves. For discussion see Lemke, 1995, and Martin, 2000.