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**Educational Genres in Eastern Europe: A Comparison of the Genres in the Humanities Departments of three Countries**

* March 2015

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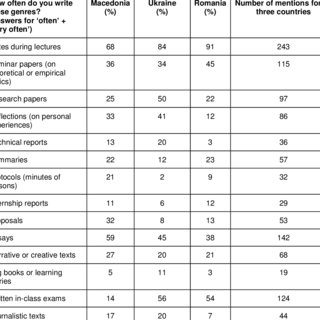
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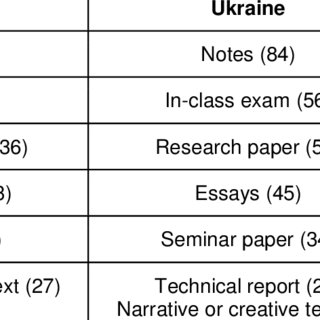
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The intercultural study of genres provides an opportunity not only to gain an understanding of the differences in writing cultures but also to sharpen the view on what is particular for each learning context. As little previous research has undertaken systematic comparisons of genre systems at European universities, we collected data on educational genres used in writing from the Humanities departments of two universities in Eastern European countries (Romania and Ukraine) and one in a Southeastern European country (Republic of Macedonia). A questionnaire with listed genre names was distributed at the three universities to assess the importance and the perceptions of academic genres in the respective cultures. Open questions were used to validate the results and gather hypotheses on the meaning of the mentioned genres. Results show differences in the frequencies of genre use, which, however, do not allow typifying differences in the learning/writing cultures. Genres are labelled differently and emerge from different traditions but seem to resemble a similar pool of genres in each of the studied countries. URL: http://e-learning.coventry.ac.uk/ojs/index.php/joaw

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Journal of Academic Writing

Vol. 5 No 1 Spring 2015, pages 119-132

Educational Genres in Eastern Europe 119

Educational Genres in Eastern Europe: A

Comparison of the Genres in the Humanities

Departments of three Countries

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Abstract

The intercultural study of genres provides an opportunity not only to gain an understanding of the

differences in writing cultures but also to sharpen the view on what is particular for each learning

context. As little previous research has undertaken systematic comparisons of genre systems at

European universities, we collected data on educational genres used in writing from the Humanities

departments of two universities in Eastern European countries (Romania and Ukraine) and one in a

Southeastern European country (Republic of Macedonia). A questionnaire with listed genre names

was distributed at the three universities to assess the importance and the perceptions of academic

genres in the respective cultures. Open questions were used to validate the results and gather

hypotheses on the meaning of the mentioned genres. Results show differences in the frequencies of

genre use, which, however, do not allow typifying differences in the learning/writing cultures. Genres

are labelled differently and emerge from different traditions but seem to resemble a similar pool of

genres in each of the studied countries.

Introduction

In academic contexts, genres are structuring learning situations in which reading and writing is

involved. Genres like the essay, the seminar paper or the doctoral thesis are important elements of

academic cultures or writing cultures (Chitez and Kruse 2012), which may persist over long periods of

time and define mutual expectations in learning contexts. While it may be assumed that a few

1

The research was undertaken within the SCOPES project No. IZ74Z0\_137428 Literacy Development

in the Humanities: Creating Competence Centres for the Enhancement of Reading and Writing Skills

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Vol. 5 No 1 Spring 2015, pages 119-132

Educational Genres in Eastern Europe 120

nationally important genres characterize a certain writing culture, new studies demonstrate that there

are rather hundreds of genres in use (Nesi and Gardner 2012 and Kruse and Chitez 2012), which fulfil

different purposes for teaching and learning.

Most studies analysing educational genres focus on genres or genre systems in particular countries

like, for instance, Nesi and Gardner (2012) for the UK, Donahue (2002, 2008) for France, Gruber et

al. (2006) and Steinhoff (2007) for the German-speaking countries. There are almost no studies

comparing educational genres and genre use and practice across national education systems. Kruse

and Chitez (2012) used a genre mapping approach to study genres used at teacher education

universities of the three language regions of Switzerland (French, Italian, German) and found more

similarities across the three languages than differences. Considering the roughly 50 countries with as

many major languages in Europe, we wonder whether we find the same genres in higher education or

locally determined preferences across cultures and languages. In this study, we examine genres in

three countries from Eastern Europe in which little or no genre research has been done so far. We

feel that there is no right order in which to proceed with intercultural research but that we need

practical models to start with.

The aim of the study is to compare repertoires of educational genres in three countries in Eastern and

South-Eastern Europe. By using a questionnaire designed for intercultural studies of writing, we

gathered data in the Humanities departments of the universities in the Republic of Macedonia, in

Romania and Ukraine. The study responds to the growing need for a better understanding of the

writing and textual practices in different European countries, which is triggered, among other reasons,

by the increasing international educational mobility and Europe’s attempts to create a Shared

European Higher Education Area (see for instance EUA 1999 and Sursock and Smidt 2010). Learning

mobility makes it necessary to prepare students for writing in different contexts and in different

languages. Students cannot assume that the kind of papers they are acquainted with, for instance, in

Ukrainian higher education will allow them to write successfully at a university in France or Germany -

even if they can submit their papers in English. We hope, therefore, (1) to raise awareness and initiate

a debate on the intercultural aspects of genre use at (South)Eastern European universities, and (2)

help the participating universities and other universities of the region to learn more about their own

writing cultures. Our research questions are: (1) Do the Humanities departments of the three

universities rely on a comparable pool of educational genres? (2) Are there differences in the quantity

of certain, internationally renowned genres between the universities? (3) Are there genres specific to

some of the universities and how can we interpret such genres?

Theoretical Framework

Two lines of theory connect in our study. One is genre theory, the other intercultural research on

writing. We will shortly sketch both before we look at their intersection. Wherever language is used,

genres are structuring verbal interaction, both oral and written, and some understanding of genres is a

prerequisite for actively or passively (receptively) participating in a culture. Genre theory has generally

recognized the socially constructed and community-related nature of genres, even if it has been

developed in different contexts and with different terminologies, as Hyon (1996) summarizes.

Each of the three most prominent approaches to genre stresses its slightly different features. While

the US-based rhetorical approach emphasizes the social context of genre and its inclusion in action

systems (Bazerman 1994, Miller 1984 and Russell 1997), the ESP approach stresses the

communicative purpose of genres to which the rhetorical and linguistic structure of the genre is

related (Swales 1990, 2004 and Hyland 2003). The approach from Systemic Functional Linguistics

sees genre as ‘a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of

our culture’ (Martin 1984: 25) and underscores the importance of text purposes as well as of generic

text types, such as, for example, narration (Martin and Rose 2008). Though seemingly different in

emphasis, all the three approaches converge in the idea that genres cannot be explained by simply

classifying texts, but that they are to be studied within their social, professional, educational and

cultural contexts.

Journal of Academic Writing

Vol. 5 No 1 Spring 2015, pages 119-132

Educational Genres in Eastern Europe 121

Understanding the challenges university students and their teachers might encounter in learning and

teaching writing, literacy scholars have been examining the genre-based pedagogy and explored the

need for educators to apply the concept of genre to writing instruction. A genre-based approach is

seen as a way to support the academic literacy development of both L1 writers (e.g., Devitt 2004 and

Johns 2008) and L2 writers (e.g., Gebhard and Harman 2011, Hyland 2003, 2007 and Tardy 2006).

In the field of intercultural (former contrastive) rhetoric (Connor 1996, 2002, 2011 and Leki 1991) it is

also emphasized that writing in universities is strongly influenced by genres and, therefore,

comparisons should be carried out for certain genres, not for writing in general. While initially

contrastive rhetoric focused on English texts written by writers from different cultures, today such

studies compare L1 texts from different cultures and/or of different languages by multilingual corpora

(see Leki 1991, Siepmann 2006, for reviews).

An approach to studying educational genres can possibly be based on the understanding of the

differences in national traditions of organizing education, as acknowledged by Russell and Foster

(2002). Much more than by a particular language, writing is determined by matters including the

effects of educational ideologies and traditions, the type of control a country exerts on the educational

system, conceptions of literacy development, the involvement of students into disciplinary

conversation, the assessment procedures, language policy and the degree of explicitness of teaching

writing. With the Bologna process, intended to reduce the traditional diversity of European

universities, the national education systems are under heavy pressure to meet these requirements of

standardization and unification of degree programs, graduation requirements, academic value

systems, selection criteria for careers, learning procedures, curricula, and connections to professional

fields. All of this may influence the repertoire of genres used for teaching at universities.

There is little knowledge about genres in an intercultural perspective. It is implicitly assumed that

genres are fairly stable across cultures and that universities in different cultures use similar sets of

genres for teaching. Most studies analysing genres in higher education have focused on single

cultures; for example, Nesi and Gardner (2012) have conducted the most systematic study of genre

mapping so far by collecting and analysing a corpus of 2761 student papers from English universities,

which they first reduced to 90 different genres and then to 13 genre families. We do not know,

unfortunately, how much their results apply to other cultures and whether we have to expect similar or

completely different genre systems there. We have to be aware not only of ‘false friends’ in genre

terminologies (Donahue 2008) but also of completely different genres or genres that are missing.

Context

The three countries we studied are similar in that they were in the communist sphere of influence,

although Soviet influence was less strong in former Yugoslavia to which Macedonia belonged than in

Romania and Ukraine (the latter, in fact, was part of the Soviet Union until 1991). The three

universities of Skopje, Timișoara and L’viv are all multi-disciplinary universities with a similar profile of

disciplines and degree structures offering BA/MA programs and doctoral studies. At the time when the

data were gathered, all three countries had roughly 20 years of independent development and all of

them are currently re-organizing their higher education systems according to the values of the

European Higher Education Area, i.e. the Bologna Process. The transformation processes in all three

countries are equally limited by tight budgets, high numbers of students and the high teaching load of

faculty.

The Republic of Macedonia, which gained independence from former Yugoslavia in 1991, is still a

country in the process of transition and democratization, with a firm direction towards EU accession,

which means coming closer to the European standards, not only in the areas of economy and law, but

in education as well. In Macedonia, if we compare the foreign language instruction in the late 1970s

with the instruction in 2000s, data suggest that French was the most widely taught foreign language

40 years ago. English is currently the most dominant foreign language both in school and in the

business sphere. Academic writing practices have been changed and are oriented towards the Anglo-

Saxon writing styles preferred in prestigious journals, most of which follow APA or MLA standards of

presenting academic research. Dimova (2005) explored the ‘penetration of English,’ which substituted

... Staff disciplinary alignment was an important intervening contextual factor in the present study although, in this respect, limitations of the study findings should be acknowledged here, as faculty attitudes and beliefs might be conditioned by their discipline-specific practices. In fact, different attitudes towards English-mediated practices for research and teaching purposes have been reported in communities of scholars in the humanities and the social sciences (Bekar et al., 2015;Burgess, 2014;Burgess et al., 2014). Correlations of attitudes with disciplinary orientation and with individual factors such as seniority, writing/publishing expertise or teaching expertise were not considered either, and thus need further examination in future research. ...

... Discipline-specific genres in the field of earth sciences (field notes, field reports), as well as common genres across disciplinary fields (journal articles, abstracts, conference presentations, grant applications, project proposals) should be illustrated and analyzed in both input-and output-based activities. The same applies to educational genres, as argued previously (Bekar et al., 2015;Cheng, 2016). Also, following Long (1991), noticing should be prompted through tasks that involve comparison of linguistic features in L2 written/spoken input with linguistic features of academic L1 written/spoken production. ...

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... Data were collected in selected study programs of the humanities departments, were statistically processed, and results were presented at the EATAW 2013 conference in Budapest. Results were published in the Journal of Academic Writing (Bekar et al. 2015). In the chapters "Academic Writing in a Russian University Setting: Challenges and Perspectives" and "Perceptions About 'Good Writing' and 'Writing Competences' in Romanian Academic Writing Practices: A Questionnaire Study" of this volume, results of the implementation of EUWRIT in different contexts are presented. ...

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Today, regional hygiene product makers already have a substantial market share in several countries of Eastern Europe. However by not wanting to join the European Union (EU) list, several countries such as Russia, Ukraine and Belarus could find themselves behind a new Iron Curtain. The Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU) forecasts that between now and 2010, Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) will grow ... [Show full abstract]

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