RHETORICAL GENRE STUDIES (RGS) AND EFL READING AND WRITING

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Why Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS)?

• There are three, or four, theories of genre that have been applied in various ways to the teaching of literacies (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2012; Hyon, 1996; Johns, 2002).

• You are probably familiar with two: “The Sydney School” and English for Specific Purposes theories and practices.
RGS: Most “foreign”

• However, you may not be as familiar with the North American RGS theories which are the most contextual---and the most controversial in terms of teaching applications.
My Purposes

• To define rhetoric and genre from an RGS view.
• To discuss how RGS relates to “activity theory.”
• To suggest implications for teaching.
Rhetoric: A definition

- Using language, oral, written, or visual, in a **specific context** to get something done. Accepted tools (e.g., “genres”) are mobilized to take one or more actions:
  - To persuade an audience to act or think differently.
  - To explain a phenomenon, a process, or...
  - To respond to a situation, an experience, a person.
  - To pass an examination, that is, to convince examiners of your competence.
  - Or…..

From the SDSU RWS description.
What are genres (in RGS)?

• “...forms of **cultural knowledge** that conceptually frame and mediate how we understand and typically **take action** within **specific situations**. [Genres are] organizing and generating kinds of texts as social actions.”

• (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010, p. 4)
RGS grounding: Socio-cultural Theory

“Sociocultural theory argues that [actions are] situated in concrete interactions that are simultaneously improvised locally [as well as] mediated by prefabricated, historically-provided tools and practices, e.g., machines and technology, semiotic means (e.g., language and genres), institutions, and individuals” (with influence).

Educational Framing of Genres

• As elsewhere, educational genres are conceptually framed by local factors as well as “prefabricated” tools and practices. (Group work.)

✔ What types of examinations do your students take? What is stressed?

✔ In what genres do students have to read and write?

✔ What do examiners value when they grade student texts?

✔ What do your answers tell us about local educational cultures and “historically-provided tools.” That is, what is locally determined and what is determined by historical or international factors?
What influences local examinations?

Local, cultural and institutional factors

Prefabricated, historical tools and practices
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Some socio-cultural factors influencing texts</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ecology</td>
<td>Forces in the context beyond the text production that influenced it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>How is the text produced? Is the text written? Spoken? Online?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representation</td>
<td>What initiated the text? How was the text planned by the “writer(s)”?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>What practices were involved in producing the text? What was the process?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution</td>
<td>To what audiences was the text addressed? Where was it distributed?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reception</td>
<td>How was the text received or interpreted by various audiences?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialization</td>
<td>How has it been used, if at all, by others?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Let’s look at how this works.
In a writing class context.

Sample text: Appendix B
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term in the Social Context</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ecology</td>
<td>Student enrolled in a “remedial” class, determined by one exam (when he had a broken arm). Class based on argumentation using sources—specified by the department.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>This was a written text, an “essay” assigned by the instructor.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representation</td>
<td>Initiated by the instructor from a prompt. Prompt type and text features mandated by the department.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>The process was complicated, involving studying, charting and summarizing texts, drafting, peer review, revising, correcting, presenting.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution</td>
<td>Examined closely by his instructor. Reflected upon by the student and entered into an assessment portfolio consisting of a number of writings.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reception</td>
<td>His instructor (me) thought is was outstanding. Graders were less enthusiastic.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialization</td>
<td>Has been shown and discussed by the instructor in teacher training, particularly in the secondary schools.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What do we see in this student text?

Improvised Locally: A response to a prompt

Prefabricated Tools and Practices
IMPLICATIONS FOR EFL READING AND WRITING
Questions for readers:
Appendices C and D
QUESTIONS FOR WRITERS

Appendix E
YOUR QUESTIONS
AND COMMENTS

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