

COMMORG
TOPIC OF GENRES
LITERATURE REVIEW

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION TO GENRES [BY M.A. BOUDOURIDES]	2
1.1. FROM STATIC CLASSIFICATION TO DYNAMIC SITUATEDNESS.....	2
1.2. DISCOURSE GENRE AND REGISTER	5
1.3. DIGITAL GENRES	9
2. MUTATION OF GENRE REPERTOIRES [BY S. PETICCA].....	15
2.1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.....	15
2.2. GENRES AND THEIR REPERTOIRES.....	16
2.2.1. <i>Genre Repertoires</i>	17
2.2.2. <i>Genre Systems</i>	19
2.2.3. <i>Genres and Organizations</i>	20
2.3. MUTATION OF GENRES	20
2.3.1. <i>Genres and Giddens' Structuration Theory</i>	22
2.3.2. <i>Metastructuring Genres</i>	23
2.3.3. <i>Genre Taxonomy</i>	24
2.4. GENRES IN CMC	26
2.4.1. <i>Linguistic Aspects of E-Mail</i>	26
2.4.2. <i>From Memo to E-Mail</i>	29
2.4.3. <i>Genres in the Design of Media</i>	30
2.4.4. <i>Genres in the World-Wide Web</i>	31
2.5. SOME CONCLUSIONS AND RELEVANCE TO COMMORG	32
3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	34
4. KEY ISSUES	35
5. THEORETICAL APPROACHES	36
REFERENCES	37

1. INTRODUCTION TO GENRES [by M.A. Boudourides]

1.1. From Static Classification to Dynamic Situatedness

The term *genre* comes from the Latin *genus*, a fundamental concept in Aristotle's logic and his system of classification of entities (mostly biological ones), in which the principles of classification are based on real relations between things in nature. In fact, in an effort to oppose Plato's attraction to the realm of *ideas*, Aristotle (Balme, 1972) conceives a *species* (Gk. *ειδος*), that is a group of entities having some common characteristics, as the individual perceptible thing, which is real and has some *essence* (Gk. *ουσια*). In particular, Aristotle defines a species by giving its *genus* (Gk. *γενος*), which is the most general kind under which the species falls, and its differences or *differentia* in Latin (Gk. *διαφορα*), which constitute the special features characterizing the species within its genus.

Thus, drawing its origin from the sphere of classification developed in classical philosophy, a genre is commonly understood as a particular class or category or type or kind or style of a communicative practice, which is described, classified and recognized to belong to its group in accordance to some characteristic and distinctive features of its form, content or employed technique in its development. Usually, the communicative practices of a genre refer to the sphere of art, music, literature or, in general, some communication media. For instance, a detective story, a novel, a diary or a newspaper article are all different genres of text and a thriller, a musical, a horror, a western, a SF film or a comedy, a drama etc. are all different genres of movies.

In this sense, a "genre is a classifying statement" (Rosmarin, 1985). Nevertheless, the fact is that in this traditional meaning the term genre is conceived as a static structure, which serves only classificatory and descriptive purposes of certain artistic, literary or communicative manifestations. But, as Fortanet, Palmer & Posteguillo (1999) remark, many theorists have been reluctant to incorporate such a restrictive term in their investigations, especially when their aim was to explore the more volatile and transformative aspects of communicative practices. For instance, as we are going to see in the next section, linguists possess more dynamic terminology, which can better embrace the pragmatic aspects of context and action than the categorizing-taxonomical version of genre does (Levinson, 1983).

Therefore, some relatively new trends in different theories in linguistic, literary, rhetorical and social disciplines have come to re-define the concept of genre by enriching the traditional static formalistic-structuralist concept with certain dynamic situational-functional facets of communicative practices. This conceptual re-orientation of the meaning of genre is most often traced to a number of scholars, including Miller (1984), Bazerman (1988), Swales (1990), Berkenkotter & Huckin (1995) and Yates & Orlikowski (1992) (with the latter authors to be reviewed in subsequent sections).

Carolyn Miller (1984) has been inspired from ideas of the American 'New Rhetoric' (Brown & Enos, 1993), a rhetorical approach, which was not content just to examine what a rhetor communicates, but it aimed to include how information is communicated and what the social aspects of communication are. Miller rejects the

notion of genre as a recurrent pattern of forms used for simple classifications, something easily leading to reductionism and formalism. For her, a classification should contribute to an understanding of how discourse works by reflecting the experience of the people who create and interpret it. Genre as action must take into account the context of the situation and the motives, the intention and the effect.

Charles Bazerman (1988) has extended this argument from production of texts to their interpretation and has become well known for his study of the development of single types of texts through repeated use in similar situations: “These regularities encompass when and how one would approach a test tube or a colleague, how one would go about reading a text, as well as how one would draw a diagram or frame an argument” (p. 314). In his book *Shaping Written Knowledge* (1988), he described the evolution of the scientific article from 1665 to 1800, from uncontested reports of observations and events, to arguments over results, to accounts of claims and experimental proofs. For Bazerman, genres are sets of shared expectations among both readers and writers. By reading formal cues, readers come to know what to expect from a given text, what situation it is likely a response to, and, thus, engage certain strategies of reading and not others.

Building on the work of Bazerman, Paré & Smart (1994) have elaborated a model, which we will briefly describe because it appears to be easily transposed to a digital setting (and, thus, becomes relevant to our discussion on digital genres in a subsequent section). They define a genre as a distinctive profile of regularities across the following four dimensions:

- A set of texts referring to form aspects, like document structure, style and formatting.
- The composing processes involved in creating these texts. These processes cover a wide range of activities, starting with the initiating event, such as information gathering and analysis, individual writing and the technique of text production.
- The reading practices used to interpret them. These practices refer to the way a reader approaches a text, how he negotiates his way through the text, how he constructs knowledge from it and how he uses this.
- The social roles performed by writers and readers determining what can and cannot be done by particular individuals and regards responsibilities, division of labor, and rights of access to information.

John Swales (1990) defines genres as social or communicative events on the basis of functional criteria, i.e., the communicative purposes: “A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style” (p. 58). For Swales, it is the communicative purpose of a genre that which provides it with an internal structure: “Communicative purpose is both privileged criterion and one that operates to keep the scope of a genre as here conceived narrowly focused on comparable rhetorical action. In addition to purpose, exemplars of a genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience” (p. 58). Thus, he connects genre to a discourse

community, which is characterized by a broadly agreed set of common goals, patterns of intercommunication among its members and other social mechanisms that regulate membership. To further its aims, a discourse community maintains discursual expectations, which are created by the genres that articulate the operations of the community (p. 26).

At his point, we need to comment upon the term ‘community,’ which we have just seen to be connected to genres (here by Swales and elsewhere by Yates & Orlikowski, as we are going to discuss in subsequent sections). While community has a vast number of definitions, according to Thomas Erickson (1997), it commonly suggests the following:

- *Membership*: Communities range from being open to anyone who shares particular ideas or interests to communities accessible only to those who meet certain criteria of geography, ethnicity, gender etc.
- *Relationships*: Community members form personal relationships with one another (e.g., from casual acquaintance, to friendships, to deep emotional bonds). Thus, a community is best viewed as partially overlapping networks of relationships.
- *Commitment and generalized reciprocity*: Community implies a sense of mutual commitment to the community: one member may help another simply because they belong to the same community, not because of a personal relationship.
- *Shared values and practices*: Community members may share a common set of concerns, values, goals, practices, procedures and symbols.
- *Collective goods*: Communities participate in the creation, control and distribution of various collective goods.
- *Duration*: Community as a collectivity has a long existence.

Coming back to our previous discussion on the modern genre theory, an important question is how far the generic evolution can advance. Berkenkotter & Huckin (1995) stress the significance of both form and content in the definition of genres. For them form and content influence the development of a genre in various ways: epistemologically, in terms of the audience’s background knowledge, the newness of the genre and the *kairos* or “rhetorical timing.” The wider the background knowledge of a discourse community is in relation to an emerging genre, the more that genre may evolve and depart from its original forms and contents. Furthermore, Berkenkotter & Huckin (1995) have formulated an interesting framework that summarizes the prevalent aspects of this modern concept of genre (p. 4):

- *Dynamism*: Genres are dynamic rhetorical forms that are developed from actors’ responses to recurrent situations and that serve to stabilize experience and give its coherence and meaning. Genres change over time in response to their users’ sociocognitive needs.
- *Situatedness*: Genres are derived from and embedded in our participation in the communicative activities of daily and professional life. As such, genre knowledge is a form of ‘situated cognition’ that continues to develop as we participate in the activities of the ambient culture.
- *Form and content*: Genre knowledge embraces both form and content, including a sense of what content is appropriate to a particular purpose in a particular situation at a particular point of time.

- *Duality of structure*: As we draw on genre rules to engage in various activities, we *constitute* social structures (in professional, institutional, and organizational contexts) and simultaneously *reproduce* these structures.
- *Community ownership*: Genres signal a community's norms, epistemology, ideology and social ontology.

Synthesizing various aspects of the above modern theory of situated genre, Thomas Erickson has given the following definition: "A genre is a patterning of communication created by a combination of the individual (cognitive), social, and technical forces implicit in a recurring communicative situation. A genre structures communication by creating shared expectations about the form and content of the interaction, thus easing the burden of production and interpretation" (Erickson, 1999, p. 3). Therefore, Erickson argues, analyzing an instance of a communicative practice as a genre means understanding:

- the communicative goals it supports,
- its conventions (of both form and content),
- the underlying situation (in both its technical and social guises) in which the genre is employed,
- the relationship between the underlying situation and the genre's conventions,
- the discourse community of those who enact the genre.

As an example, Erickson (1999, p. 3) considers the résumé as a genre. First, the communicative goal of a résumé is to present information that will enable its author to get a job. Résumés follow many conventions of form and content: they tend to be short, highly structured, and they contain job-related and contact information. Many of the résumé's conventions emerge from situations in which it is used. For instance, its highly structured form enables it to be scanned quickly by managers reading through stacks of résumés. Its form is also influenced by technical factors - for example, the use of desktop publishing to produce printed résumés has probably increased the use of structural features such as bold and italic text. It is also conceivable that, as résumés are increasingly circulated via e-mail, they will revert to simpler textual formats that can survive the lowest common denominator of e-mail transmission. Thus, technical and social forces combine in shaping the conventions of the résumé genre. Finally, the discourse community consists of those who produce and consume résumés, as well as the business segment devoted to assisting in the creation of effective résumés.

1.2. Discourse Genre and Register

In this section, we are going to examine genres from the linguistic point of view. In order to fix some first terminology, we will start by describing Fairclough's framework of critical discourse analysis. Then we will refer to Bakhtin's speech genres, a theory which has given some early insights into the view of the social role of language. A similar but yet distinct concept of register has been developed by Halliday (and co-workers) within the systemic functional school of language.

Furthermore, we will refer to a number of theoretical approaches trying to comprehend the relations between genre and register.

In his own view of critical discourse analysis, Norman Fairclough develops an interesting analytical framework. For him (1993, p. 138), *discourse* is “language use conceived as social practice” and a *discursive event* is an “instance of language use, analysed as text, discursive practice, social practice.” He attributes three dimensions to each discursive event: text, discursive practice and social practice.

- *Text* is the “written or spoken language produced in a discursive event.” Later Fairclough emphasizes the multi-semiotic character of text and adds to it visual images and sound, such as in the television language (1995, p. 4). The two aspects of a text are content and form/texture, which Fairclough conceives to be inseparable: contents are realized by particular forms while different contents imply different forms and vice versa.
- *Discursive practice* mediates the connection between text and social practice and it is related to the socio-cognitive aspects of text production and interpretation. Thus, on the one hand, text production and interpretation are shaped by (and help shape) social practice and, on the other hand, text production shapes and leaves ‘traces’ in the text so that interpretation might take place on the basis of these textual elements (‘cues’). Therefore, the analysis of discursive practice includes not only a precise explanation of how participants produce and interpret texts but also the relationships of discursive events to orders of discourse and the understanding of which discursive practices are being drawn upon and in what combinations. The latter is a matter of *interdiscursivity*, by which Fairclough highlights the normal heterogeneity of texts in being constituted by combinations of diverse genres and discourses” (1993, p. 137). Fairclough’s concept of interdiscursivity is closely related to Julia Kristeva’s (1980) *intertextuality* in the sense that it also incorporates historical and social facts.
- *Social practice* relates to the different levels of social organization, such as the situation, the institutional context and the social context. In this respect, questions of power are of central interest, as power and ideologies may have an effect on all contextual levels. Fairclough’s analysis tries to combine a theory of power based on Gramsci’s (1971) concept of *hegemony* with a theory of discourse practice based on his notion of interdiscursivity. In fact, Fairclough views the control over discursive practices as a struggle for dominance over orders of discourse.

Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1986) starting premise is that all human activity involves the use of language. Language is realized through concrete (oral and written) utterances, which possess their own content, linguistic style and compositional structure. Although utterances might be individualized in a variety of ways, Bakhtin was accepting that “each sphere in which language is used develops its own relatively stable types of these utterances” and these were what he called *speech genres* (p. 60). Bakhtin was careful not to conflate these genres with forms of language: while the latter are normative for the speaker, the former are more flexible and can be manipulated to suit the situation or the speaker’s purposes (p. 80).

Bakhtin’s major contribution was the broadening of the genre concept in order to encompass both everyday speech genres as well as literary ones. In fact, he was distinguishing genres according to their degree of complexity and he was talking

about primary and secondary genres. *Primary genres* are simple in the sense that they consist of just one kind of practice of verbal communication in everyday life. Examples of primary genres are pieces of everyday dialogue, expository prose, poetry, persuasive rhetoric, jokes, assertions, questions etc. *Secondary genres* combine two or more primary ones. For instance, literary genres, such as novels and dramas, but also genres related to public communication, scientific research and commentary, such as public lectures, sermons, debates, scientific articles etc., are secondary genres because they are complex blends of more simple primary genres.

Another dimension along which genres differ is the criteria according to which an instance of the genre counts as complete or incomplete. Bakhtin called this phenomenon “*finalization*” (1986, p. 76; 1985, p. 130). In fact, finalization is not merely related to whether there is an end or a final part of the genre. Instead, it concerns the presence in the discursive practice of whatever elements are considered to be the requisite of the genre. For instance, in a legal setting, finalization of an oath requires a Bible and a human witness.

Beyond finalization, there are two other broad dimensions, which distinguish various genres of communicative practice (Hanks, 1996, pp. 244-5): adaptation (or regularization) and officialization. *Adaptation* of the genre to dominant structures is often a necessary move that agents have to follow in order to adapt their communications to the expectations and standards of acceptability of other agents in the field they engage. Examples are a worker who pledges alliance to the values of the boss or a bilingual merchant who switches languages according to the preferences of customers. In Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977, p. 22) terminology, these agents “*regularize*” their discourse by fitting them to the field of their current practices. Closely related to regularization is the process of *officialization*, through which speakers signal the authentic, authoritative grounds on which they speak. For instance, to introduce oneself using a professional title or to wear a uniform related to one’s occupation are examples of moves intended to build the authority of the speaker by association with dominant structures.

Now, coming back to transformations of the notion of genre, which were performed in discourse analysis following Bakhtin’s first definitions, we are going to discuss certain approaches belonging to the field of Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL). Influenced by British anthropology and linguistics (Malinowski, Firth), SFL distinguishes between the ‘context of situation’ and the broader ‘context of culture,’ which is seen as being related at a higher level to the system of language. Moreover, SFL seeks to establish a pragmatic relationship between text and context by viewing language in a social semiotic way as a resource people use to accomplish their purposes while at the same time they express meanings in context.

This fundamental in SFL idea of the relationship between context and text was first formalized in the concept of register. Michael Halliday defined *register* as “a variety according to use in the sense that each speaker has a range of varieties and chooses between them at different times” (Halliday *et al.*, 1964, p. 77). However, register should not be conflated with dialect, since the latter is a variety according to speaker. Although a speaker has only one dialect and uses it continuously, she might have more than one register and use them according to situation. This description of register clearly reminds Bakhtin’s speech genres as used in different communicative

practices. Similarly, registers are used in different linguistic contexts because “when we observe language activity in the various contexts in which it takes place, we find differences in the type of language selected as appropriate to different types of situation” (p. 87).

In particular, context is realized in a register in terms of three situational features or variables: the field, the tenor and the mode of the text’s context of situation.

- *Field* refers to the topics and actions which language is used to express. It manifests the way “registers are classified according to the nature of the whole event of which the language activity forms a part” (p. 90).
- *Tenor* refers to the relations among the participants, as far as these relations affect and determine features of the language, or in Gregory & Carroll’s definition, the “relationship the user has with his audience” (1978, p. 8). In other words, tenor concerns those elements that vary according to the social interactions taking place, such as degrees of formality, roles played by participants and focus of activity.
- *Mode* refers to the physical medium of communication, along with the choices this provides, and the limitations it imposes. Halliday & Hasan (1976) include here “both the channel taken by the language – spoken or written, extempore or prepared – and its genre or rhetoric mode, as narrative, didactic, persuasive, ‘phatic communion’ and so on” (p. 22).

These three elements that realize context, field, tenor and mode, correspond to the following three metafunctions of language in the Hallidayan model: ideational, interpersonal and textual, respectively. Thus, the ideational metafunction is realized through the field, the interpersonal one through the tenor and the textual one through the mode (Halliday *et. al.*, 1964; Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Halliday, 1978).

In what concerns the relationship between register and genre, there is a whole gamut of different configurations ranging from Eggins & Martin’s lumping of the two into the ‘register and genre theory’ (Eggins & Martin, 1997) and Hasan’s identification of register with genre (Hasan, 1977) to their total separation, with genre one level above register (Ventola, 1987). Somewhere in between, one finds the application of either type of analysis according to the text type or length (Leckie-Tarry, 1995).

Suzanne Eggins and James Martin (1997) try to incorporate both genre and register into a common theory, which they call “Register and Genre Theory” (R>). This approach “seek(s) to explain linguistic variation by reference to variation in context: that is, explicit links are made between features of the discourse and critical variables of the social and cultural context in which the discourse is enacted. Register and genre are the technical concepts employed to explain the meaning and function of variation between texts” (p. 234). In R> the relationship of register to genre is that of layering: “two layers of context are needed – with a new level of genre posited above and beyond the field, mode and tenor register variables” (p. 243). In this way, genre occupies the external and higher layer of the context of culture, while register occupies the internal layer of the context of situation.

Elsewhere in their paper (p. 235), Eggins & Martin rearrange the relationship between genre and register by inserting a third category, cohesion, as a device for creating meaning. In this alternative configuration, any given text realizes its semantic

potential in the three independent categories, register, cohesion and generic structure, in such a way that each of them is expressed through different linguistic devices. Thus, now, register is no longer a subspecification below genre but it stands at the same level with it.

Ruqaiya Hasan (1977) offers a different view, according to which “the concept of register is a ready-made link between context and generic structure, since for most material purposes register and genre are synonymous” (p. 230). For her, texts have texture (i.e., cohesion) and structure, which is determined by the text’s genre. Although she conceptualizes different realizations for them (genre being realized in generic structure and register being realized in values of field, tenor and mode), Hasan equates the two notions of genre and register “for most material purposes.”

Eija Ventola (1987) treats genre as a semiotic organization being realised by register and, so, she poses it at a higher level than register in accordance with the first Eggins & Martin’s representation of their relationship. Ventola considers that each structural element within the genre (each episode, transaction or act) may allow for different register choices of field, tenor and mode throughout the interaction. That is, there is a continuity of register within each structural element but discontinuities are possible across element boundaries.

Helen Leckie-Tarry (1995) argues that register should be associated only with primary genres and especially with sections of texts (p. 12). Within a generic structure, she also distinguishes a level of genre that represents those events, which have been culturally recognized. Registers, then, “are free to mediate in any communicative event, socially identified or informal, complete or incomplete” (p. 15). She sees register as explaining the social semiotics of texts together with their lexicogrammatical characteristics, while she leaves genre to a more socially oriented analysis.

1.3. Digital Genres

The idea of applying the genre concepts and theory to information systems and digital communication has been broadly adopted and promoted by the annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS), especially through a minitrack called “Genre[s] in Digital Documents,” which has started in 1997 and it is constantly in the agenda since then. As Nunberg (1997) has stated in the genres inaugural presentation: “It has become increasingly clear that the successful use of digital media depends on the emergence of new or transformed genres of digital communication ... And since genre is a crucial ingredient in document use and interpretation, these considerations play a part in virtually all aspects of the design and implementation of systems involving the use of documents” (p. 2).

Leen Breure (2001) remarks that, in the current literature of digital genres, the following global themes emerge:

- *Function* in different shades of meaning, such as:
 - o social and organizational functions of genres, i.e. the their *purpose* and role within a discourse community, in genre repertoire and in a genre system);

- o function in the sense of *functionality* of the document's user interface.
- *Evolution* in the sense of the tendency of new genres to mimic old ones, in combination with the flexibility of electronic media, which induces change, focused attention on the relation of digital genres to paper based counterparts and on their further evolution.

Päivärinta (1999) reports that, in the period 1997-1999, the papers of the minitrack of genres in digital documents have covered the following topics (Sprague, 1997, 1998, 1999):

- Novel genres emerging along with new technologies in digital media, mostly in the web or groupware, and their theoretical implications (Erickson, 1997, 1999; Watters & Shepherd, 1997b; Crowston & Williams, 1997; Schultze & Boland, 1997; Yates, Orlikowski & Rennecker, 1997; de Saint-Georges, 1998; Roberts, 1998; Fortanet, Palmer & Posteguillo, 1998; Panko & Panko, 1998; Boguraev, Bellamy & Kennedy, 1999).
- Evolution of widely understood traditional genres in digital media (Fox, McMillan & Eaton, 1999; Rieffel, 1999).
- Design of particular tools for digital media (Smoliar & Baker, 1997; Karlgren & Straszheim, 1997; Morin, 1998; Vasudevan & Palmer, 1999).
- Theoretical aspects of genre features in digital media versus non-digital media (Yates & Sumner, 1997; Shepherd & Watters, 1998, 1999; Crowston & Williams, 1999; Toms & Campbell, 1999).
- Transforming organizational document genres to digital media (Tallberg, 1997; von Westarp *et al.*, 1999; Tyrväinen & Päivärinta, 1999).
- Use of organizational document genres at work (Bergquist & Ljungberg, 1999).

In particular, applications of genre theory to forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC) and computer-supported collaborative work (CSCW) include studies of:

- e-mail (Bergquist & Ljungberg, 1999; Yates & Orlikowski, 1992),
- discussion databases (Schultze & Boland, 1997; Yates, Orlikowski & Rennecker, 1997),
- virtual communities (Erickson, 1997, 1999, 2000),
- publishing on the web (Crowston & Williams, 1997, 1999; Fortanet, Palmer & Posteguillo, 1998, 1999; Dillon & Gushrowski, 2000),
- user interface design (Watters & Shepherd, 1997a, 1997b, Shepherd & Watters, 1999; Toms & Campbell, 1999; Dillon & Gushrowski, 2000) and
- corporate electronic documents management systems (Tyrväinen & Päivärinta, 1999; Karjalainen *et al.*, 2000).

In what concerns e-mail, Orlikowski & Yates (1994a) and Yates, Orlikowski & Okamura (1999a, b) used the following coding scheme of genres in e-mails based on the two dimensions constituting the definition of genres (purpose and form):

<i>Examples of purpose of e-mails:</i>	<i>Examples of form of e-mails:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-work-related • Work-related • Technical • Administrative • Question • Response • Solicitation • Proposal • Meta-comment • Apology • Report • Announcement • Recreational 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening/greeting • Aside to an individual (personal) • Completed subject line • Embedded message • Embedded files (codes etc.) • Graphical elements (emoticons) • Headings and subheadings • Word/phrase emphasis • List/specifications • Set-apart information • Ellipsis (...) • Signature • P.S. • Informal/colloquial • Language/dialect used

The following are examples of genres, defined through the above codings:

<i>Genre</i>	<i>Coding definition</i>
Memo	Purpose = not response Form = not greeting, no embedded message, no informal body, no embedded files, no headings, no dialect
Dialogue	Purpose = response Form = embedded message, subject line
Proposal	Purpose = proposal Form = embedded files
Announcement	Purpose = announcement, not response, work-related, administrative Form = no embedded message
Team report	Purpose = work-related, technical, report, not response Form = list or specifications

Crowston & Williams (1997, 1999) focused on the web as an excellent place to study the development of genres, because of easy access and its inherent capabilities of experimentation, freedom of structuring and interactions between many communities. In their survey (1997), by a random sampling of 1000 web pages, they identified the following 48 genres (distinguishing them on their purpose and not on form):

Archive item	Filmography	Problem set
Article	Geneology	Product information
Book	Government program description	Product reviews
Box score	Guide	Publication list
Chronicle	Home page	Ratings
Column	Hot list	Regulation or rule
Computer documentation	Index	Report
Concert review	Library acquisition list	Script
Demographic data	List of research projects	Server statistics
Directory	Meeting minutes	Source code

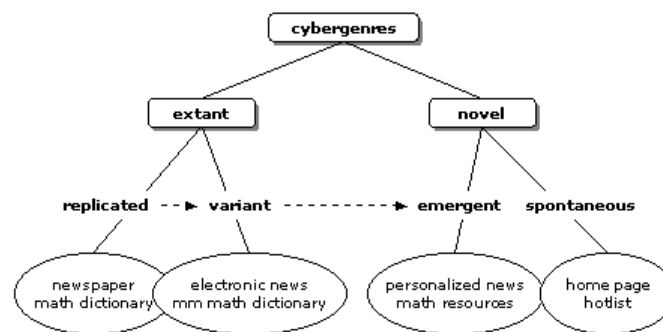
Discography	Memorial	Submission instruction
E-mail directory listing	Newsletter	Table of contents
Essay	News wire article	Testimonial
Faculty information	Order form	Univ. course listing
FAQ	Pamphlet	Users' manual
File directory listing	Political party platform	Vitae

Their findings of genres are summarized in the following table:

Type of genre	Count	%
Familiar genres	507	60.6
New, but adapted genres	239	28.6
Novel genres	44	5.3
Unclassifiable	47	5.6

The familiar (or reproduced) web genres included such web pages as FAQs, meeting minutes and course descriptions. Adaptation was mostly due to outgoing links; as linking can enable a single web page to serve multiple purposes, these web genres – as most of the Internet genres (Fortanet *et al.*, 1999) – are examples of Bakhtin's secondary genres. Among novel web genres, they rated home pages, hotlists, topical hotlists (i.e., hotlists including some additional information concerning the links), pages about web servers (like “non existing web page” or “the web site has moved” or file directories), forms and pages that provided access to other applications (like multimedia displays).

Shepherd & Watters (1998), who have coined the term *cybergenre* to denote digital genres, have divided them into two classes of subgenres: extant and novel.



- *Extant* subgenres are based on genres existing already in other media, such as paper and video, and have been casted in a digital form. When an existing genre migrates to a computer environment, it will be initially faithfully *replicated*, not fully exploiting the capabilities of the new medium. Typical examples are digitized documents. At a later stage in the evolution, *variant* genres are created, a process driven by the technical capabilities of the new medium (such as by the addition of multimedia features and interactivity).
- *Novel* subgenres depend on the new medium. They may originate from extant genres through replication and variants (*emergent cybergenres*), e.g., providing

news through agents and personalized interfaces, or may not have any counterpart in other media (*spontaneous cybergenres*). Examples of the latter category are hotlists and FAQs.

Shepherd & Watters (1999) conducted a survey (similar to Crowston & Williams', 1997), in which 96 web pages were randomly selected. On the basis of content, form and function of the web pages, they found only the following six genres:

- Home page
- Brochure
- Resource
- Catalogue
- Search engine
- Game

These web genres were characterized as follows:

Cybergenre	Content	Form	Functionality
Home page	information about person/company	introduction hierarchical images animated images	browsing e-mail
Brochure	products and services	shallow hierarchy high-impact visual	browsing e-mail
Resource	subject-specific information	hierarchical images video audio	browsing e-mail search discussion interaction
Catalogue	products and services	hierarchical images	browsing e-mail ordering & inquiry search on-line ordering on-line enquire
Search engine	categories of sites URLs	query box list of sites virtual document	browse search
Game	challenge to user scenarios rules	animation audio video scenes	high level of interactivity collaborative computing

As their results were notably different from those of Crowston & Williams, Shepherd & Watters concluded with some reservation that the web might have changed considerably in the period of two years time between the surveys. Moreover, they made the following observations:

- the classes of cybergenre are relatively few on the web;
- about half of the web site samples are business related;

- functionality is an integral characteristic of cybergenre;
- functionality in cybergenre is evolving (e.g., in games which get sophisticated multimedia features and in e-commerce);
- consistency of functionality within a specific cybergenre deserves the same care as content and form.

As a matter of fact, new technologies may alter and mutate genres of older media. For instance, Ferrara *et al.* (1991) have argued that technology produces what they have called *blurred genres*. Nevertheless, these transformations can be long-term processes, in which technological innovation plays a very important role. In any case, as digital media are far more malleable and ‘fluid’ than traditional media, a certain amount of fluidity migrates to digital genres. For instance, a digital document is far more malleable than a paper document: it can be changed (e.g., re-formatted, ‘morphed,’ etc.) without a trace and reproduced and distributed for almost no cost. This has been demonstrated by Simeon Yates and Tamara Sumner (1997) for documents produced in software design. The novel capabilities of design tools made changes in genres more likely to occur. Accordingly, as S. Yates & Sumner have argued, this fluidity, driven by digital technological innovations, is shifting the ‘burden of fixity’ from the technological to the institutional realm.

2. MUTATION OF GENRE REPERTOIRES [by S. Peticca]

2.1. Introductory Remarks

Joanne Yates and Wanda Orlikowski gave to the topic of genres of organizational communication the greater and most significant contribution. The remarkable idea they develop is that genres, through which information is communicated, shaped and shared for particular purposes, are not just an aspect of organizational work; they are the organizational work in itself. In organizations, groups and professional communities, each genre repertoire “defines a different set of interaction norms and work practices, and each serves to define a different kind of community” (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994b, p. 5). It is genre repertoire that defines an organization’s nature, its communicative interactions, its rules and work practices.

Because of this, the topics of genres, their repertoires and their mutation are deeply linked with those of organizational identity and trust, in the sense that, using the same genre repertoire creates a common and shared system of expectations that reinforce the feeling of identification and increase trust in people who believe in the same shared values. Moreover, sharing the same values helps organization’s members to participate in organizational activities and in decision-making processes. With regards to consequences of e-mail introduction and adoption, the formation of trust and identity in labour relationships and, consequently, the possibility to facilitate members’ participation, is a perspective to follow in order to make organizations more efficient in their work and businesses.

Regarding their formation and characteristics, genres are considered “as socially recognized types of communicative actions – such as memos, meetings, expense forms, and training seminars - that are habitually enacted by members of a community to realize particular social purposes” (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994a, p. 542). A genre may be identified by its socially recognized purpose and shared characteristics of form. The purpose of a genre is not the individual’s private motive for communicating, but a purpose constructed and recognized by the relevant organizational community, whether small or large. Form refers to the observable aspects of the communication, such as communication medium (e.g., pen and paper, telephone, or face to face), structural features (e.g., text formatting devices such as lists and structured fields) and linguistic features (e.g., level of formality, specialized vocabulary, or graphic devices).

The goal of this section is to demonstrate that the concepts of genre and genre repertoire are central in organizations’ life, because organizations cannot exist without communication. Through genre, organizations’ members express their actions and believes and shape communicative interactions. In addition to this, both the concepts of genre and genre repertoire are analytical research tools for examining communicative processes and may be especially useful for looking at the introduction, adoption, use and influence of new media in organizations. Individuals, according to Giddens’ structuration theory, interact with institutions, react to time constrictions, project deadlines and media capabilities. As a consequence, over time, they may change the original genre repertoire, as a group’s activities change and as people’s experiences in the group and with the available media grow. Genre evolves over time

in continuing interaction between human communicative actions and institutionalized communicative practices of groups, organizations and society. It emerges within a particular sociohistorical context and it is reinforced over time as a situation recurs. Changes to the social, economic and technological context imply changes in genre and in genre repertoire within individuals' communicative actions.

The advent of computers and the demand for faster communication and access to information let people communicate through 'electronic mail,' the new electronic medium of organizational communication. E-mail let organizations' members communicate in situations in which it was impossible to communicate directly, situations too complicated to be managed through previous media. Computer-mediated communication technology is expected to enable organizational members to work more flexibly, to span contexts and boundaries and to collaborate more effectively.

2.2. Genres and their Repertoires

Scholars agree about the fact that a genre is characterized by similar substance and form. Substance refers to the social motives, themes and topics being expressed in the communication (e.g., the positive or negative recommendation and the supporting characteristics of the recommendee; the proposing of the project including its rationale and design). Form refers to the observable physical and linguistic features of the communication (e.g., inside address and salutation of a letter; standard section of a proposal).

In addition to this, genre presents a "level of abstraction." According to Miller (1984, p. 162), "genre may be defined at different levels in different cultures and at different times, depending on our sense of recurrence of rhetorical situation." The relationship between genres on different level of abstraction is very interesting in order to analyse the nature of genre itself. With regards to this, Yates & Orlikowski (1992, p. 303) consider the notion of subgenres within genres. For example, the meeting genre is conceptually at a more general level than a Senate Judiciary Committee meeting, which has a much more specific purpose and form. In this case, it is possible recognize the latter as a subgenre of the former. According to Yates & Orlikowski, the concept of subgenre is a relative concept, which should be situated in time and context. Related to the concept of abstraction is the concept of *normative scope* (p. 304). The normative scope indicates the set of shared social norms of a recurrent situation that, along with characteristic subject and formal features, can quantify a recurrent communicative situation as a genre: only genres with a broad normative scope have a high level of abstraction.

Regarding the formation and characteristics of a genre repertoire, genres are considered as "as socially recognized types of communicative actions – such as memos, meetings, expense forms, and training seminars - that are habitually enacted by members of a community to realize particular social purposes. A genre may be identified by its socially recognized purpose and shared characteristics of form. The purpose of a genre is not the individual's private motive for communicating, but a purpose constructed and recognized by the relevant organizational community, whether small or large. Form refers to observable aspects of the communication, such

as communication medium (e.g., pen and paper, telephone, or face to face), structural features (e.g., text formatting devices such as lists and structured fields) and linguistic features (e.g., level of formality, specialized vocabulary, or graphic devices). “A genre established within a particular community serves as an institutionalized template for social interaction - an organizing structure - that shapes the ongoing communicative actions of community members through their use of” (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994a, p. 542). Despite the stabilizing influence of institutionalized genres, genre can and do change over time and with changing circumstances. A community’s genre repertoire reflects the common knowledge, expectations, and norms (derived from the organizational and broader cultural context) that members of a specific community share about communication (Yates, Orlikowski & Okamura, 1999b, p. 84).

Genres are recognizable within a community by either one or both of the characteristics of purpose and form. Some genres have such a distinctive form that they are clearly recognizable by reference to such formal features and may be fairly general in purpose (e.g., meeting, memo and resume). Other genres may take a variety of forms but still be recognizable by their purpose (e.g., proposals may have a very specific form, as in the NSF proposal, or take the form of a simple statement such as: “I propose that we do the following”

Genres of organizational communication are defined as types of communicative action that may be known socially within a group - i.e., memos, meetings - and that are routinely performed by members of that group in order to realize certain social functions (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). As said before, members of groups seldom rely on a single genre. Instead, they incorporate multiple, different and interacting genres into their activities over periods of time. The communicative practices of a group of people also supply facts about a community’s operations. A detailed look into these communicative practices will pass on some clues as to the underpinning mechanisms governing how tasks are structured and carried out.

Miller (1984) holds that genres exist on different hierarchical planes, thus, subsisting on different levels and, therefore, giving rise to different kinds of genres. Swales (1990) holds an opposing view in that an indication of purpose must be inherent for a form to be accepted as a genre, particularly how a genre is named. Swales refers to a “pre-genre” as a genre including form but not purpose. When communication takes on a complex form, Bakhtin (1986) calls these “secondary genres” and considers them to be made up of “primary genres.”

2.2.1. Genre Repertoires

Genre repertoire is “the set of genres enacted by groups, organizations, or communities to accomplish and express their work” (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994b, p. 1). Defining so genre repertoire, Orlikowski & Yates echo Bazerman & Paradis’ (1991, p. 7) belief, because they observe that communities establish themselves as distinctive through their discourse practices. As Devitt (1991, p. 340), they argue that, in examining the genre set of a community, one is exploring the community’s situations, its recurring activities and relationships, because the genre set accomplishes its work. With regard to the concept of genre repertoire as constituting work community, Orlikowski & Yates, also, re-propose Brown & Duguid’s (1991)

ideas about the fact that when members of a community draw on the community's genre repertoire, they constitute the nature of that community while also reaffirming their status as community members.

Moreover, Orlikowski and Yates (1994a, 1994b) have defined two aspects of a community's genre repertoire: its composition and its use. Composition is the set of genres that make up the repertoire. Use refers to the frequency certain genres are used by members of the group over time. The repertoire's composition reveals the kind of communicative practices that community members engage. The use of a repertoire indicates the nature and interactive rhythms of a community. If a community has repertoires that include daily meetings and infrequent memos, it is more interactive and informal than the community with frequent memos and annual meetings. The set of genres that are regularly performed within a community by its members over time is referred to as that community's 'genre repertoire.' The use of genres within a community establishes them as part of that group's genre repertoire, as well as enforcing its usefulness.

Orlikowski & Yates (1994a), in their study of the mailing list of the community working on the LISP language, focus on three aspects of a community's genre repertoire:

- (1) Nature: what can be learned about the communicative practices of a group by examining the genres making up its genre repertoire?
- (2) Establishment: how do members of the group perform a certain set of genres at first and why?
- (3) Change: how does the repertoire of established genres change over time and why?

By examining the aspects of composition and use of a community's genre repertoire, more can be learned about the community itself along with its communication practices and organizing process. The initial establishment of a genre repertoire may come about in various ways. One commonly conceived method is for members to simply begin performing genres they have previously used as members of other communities; they draw on past experience. Establishment of the genre repertoire is also strongly influenced by expectations of members of how communication practices will take place within the community. There is a strong support for calling upon familiar practices when confronted with new circumstances in cognitive sociology (Goffman, 1974) and organizational studies (Weick, 1979; van Maanen, 1984).

According to Clark and Staunton (1989, p. 188), the make-up of repertoires may be diverse due to different mechanisms: 'custom' and 'reflective agency.' Custom refers to changes that are made unintentionally in the course of regular structuring. Reflective agency, on the other hand, refers to intentional changes made to routine actions. When employing reflective agency, members may be reacting to time constrictions, project deadlines and media capabilities. These changes, either to create something new or modify an existing genre, are actively chosen by members either through trial and error (Levitt & March, 1988), learning from others (Bandura, 1986), or consciously seeking out and changing to other methods (Louis & Sutton, 1991). Genres may be modified or done away with altogether. A genre may also become 'dormant' when it has not been enacted for a significant amount of time, but without specific acknowledgement of the change by members of the community. A dormant

genre may go on to be eliminated, but only when it is no longer socially recognisable or clearly rejected by members of the group.

Genre and genre repertoire also make it possible to carry out comparative analysis across communities by bringing to light similarities and differences in genre repertoires and why these differences and similarities exist. Moreover, the notion of genre repertoire is a useful device in order to understand how a community begins to use a new communication medium. In some social circumstances, a genre repertoire may be required, while in others a genre may be part of a set of sequential genres.

2.2.2. Genre Systems

Multiple genres often act in conjunction with one-another to create a more complex communicative process. There are two types of interactions between genres: genre overlap and genre interdependence. Overlap occurs when a specific communicative act involves the enactment of more than one genre. Interdependence is best summed up with Bazerman's (1994) idea of a 'genre system' that he defines as a "complex web of interrelated genres where each participant makes a recognisable act or move in some recognisable genre, which then may be followed by a certain range of appropriate generic responses by others." A good example of this genre system is the series of opening and closing remarks by opposing counsel in a court trial. Although genres may overlap, they are identifiable as distinct from one-another.

Orlikowski & Yates (1998) define genre systems as sequences of interrelated communicative actions individuals engage and they suggest that teams may use these genre systems to organize their partnership. Orlikowski and Yates use data collected from three groups using a collaborative technology called 'Team Room,' to illustrate that genre systems facilitate the organizing six points of communicative interaction: purpose (why), content (what), form (how), participants (who/m), time (when) and place (where). Genres applied to organizations are defined according to them as "socially recognized types of communicative actions habitually enacted by organizational members to realize particular communicative and collaborative purposes" (1998, p. 2). A genre's purpose is socially created by and familiar to the appropriate organizational community and is used by members of the community in typical situations. A genre's form, "refers observable aspects of the communication such as medium ..., structural features ..., and linguistic features ..." (*ibid.*). Once a genre is formed in a particular community, it becomes "an institutionalized template for social interaction" (*ibid.*). Through its use, it helps to shape (but does not determine) the communicative practices of participants.

Some genre systems are connected in ways that make up a more corresponding communicative action such as the motions one goes through to search for and locate a job. These systems are made up of co-ordinated and interconnected genres, often carried out in a specific sequence. By exploring these genre systems in organizational settings, it is possible to appreciate a deeper understanding of collaboration, in general, and of distributed, computer-supported collaboration, in particular.

The organizing six points of communicative interaction are all closely related:

- purpose (why): this genre system serves as a guide for expectations about its, “socially recognized purpose and those of the genres that compose it” (1998, p. 3);
- content (what): serves as a guide for the expectations about the composition of the genre systems as a whole, in addition to the order and make-up of its constituent genres;
- form (how): gives an idea as to what to expect from the form of the genre system, “including expectations about media, structuring devices, and linguistic elements” (p. 4);
- participants (who/m): serves as a guide for the expectations about the participants carrying out a communicative contact;
- time (when): this refers to time constraints, such as deadlines, imposed by the participants in a genre system;
- place (where): gives an idea as to the location expectations for the genre system and particular genres within the system.

2.2.3. Genres and Organizations

Genre affects organization’s nature. When members of a work community introduce new genre into the repertoire or deviate from the established genres, they change the nature of the community’s interactions and work practices.

E-mail genres, for example, promote a communicative action based on an oral mode, in which the tone of expressions is less formal and less hierarchical than in a business letter. Over time, the nature of an organization can change (it becomes less hierarchical) due to the mutation of the genre repertoire. In this case, the introduction and adoption of e-mail genres in communicative actions influence participation because it encourages work interaction between members using the same written mode, thus, having a positive effect on decision-making processes. From this perspective, genre repertoires influence both organization participation and processes of e-mail substitution and diffusion. This occurs because e-mail genre is an intermediate form between written and oral communication (i.e., it is expressed in the form of conversation, typical of oral use of language in face-to face communication).

With regard to this last concept, Orlikowski & Yates (1994b) have noted that, in general, the nature of language in computer-mediated communication is deeply influenced by oral mode: “This suggests that electronic media may provide an opportunity for members of a community relying largely on written communication for interaction to recapture some of the conversational nature of speech through the enactment of written genres such as dialogue” (p. 17). Besides more participation, this could also facilitate new forms of flexibility in work practices.

2.3. Mutation of Genres

Orlikowski & Yates (1994a) suggest that members of new-formed groups share background, experiences and assumptions and import genres, they have used in the past, implicitly and without reflection. These observations correspond to Bettenhausen

& Murnighan's (1985, 1991) analyses: "members of a new group import norms they held as members of different groups in similar previous situation" (1991, p. 20) and to Gersick & Hackman's studies (1990): "when members have a common previous task experiences, or share a common set of subcultural norms, they may simply proceed to do what everyone knows should be done, and a pattern of habitual behaviour may be established without any explicit thought." Also van Maanen (1984, p. 238) has noted that "given a degree of similarity between an old and a new activity, the new will be approached in the much the same way as the old."

According to Orlikowski & Hofman (1997), the changes that go along with implementing a technology make up a continual process, rather than a one-time event, after which the environment will go back to being in a fairly steady state. However, the technological and organizational changes that will be made during the ongoing process cannot, by definition, be predicted. Given these suppositions, according to Orlikowski & Hofman (1997), there are three types of changes: *anticipated*, *emergent* and *opportunity-based*. *Anticipated* changes are planned ahead of time and are intentional. *Emergent* changes come about unexpectedly from a local feature and are not originally planned. *Opportunity-based* changes are again not foreseen, but are implemented purposefully during the changing process, brought on by an unexpected opportunity or event.

An important determinant of the successfulness of any change process in an organization is the interdependent relationship between three things: the technology, the organizational context and the change model used. Compatibility among the three elements is ideal, but at the very least, there should be no conflicts. When the technology to be used is new, open-ended and customizable, a model, which allows for improvisation, is appropriate and it affords flexibility for an organization in order to adapt to the technology and learn it through use. Similarly, a change model that is non-rigid is suitable for the informal and co-operative environment. Finally, the association between organizational context and technology plays a significant role in the adaptation of technology.

It is interesting to examine participants' interpretive schemes about genres. That is, to analyse what assumptions, expectations and knowledge participants have about the genres they enact within their community and how these genres influence their use of a new technology. Yates, Orlikowski & Okamura (1999a) have found that people beginning to use new technologies are influenced by their knowledge of genres they are using within their community. Once they have experienced a new medium, their knowledge of it and how it can be used reshapes their assumptions and expectations of which genres may be used and how they may be adapted to take advantage of the features of the new medium. Different groups within an organization may have different interpretive schemes about a particular technology and about culture expectations. This is the result of different roles, experiences and knowledge among organization's members. Where differences exist, members have difficulties to enact within their community; the different expectations and assumptions of participants, with the absence of compelling motivations among them, make it difficult for a new technology to establish itself as new in the organization and to operate a change in the genre use. Moreover, a genre repertoire is often established implicitly when members of a community start enacting genres they have used previously as members of other communities, invoking familiarity to cope with the new (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994a).

Yates, Orlikowski & Okamura (1999a, 1999b) examined data from NAGA (Network Administration Group for Acorn, a project to support data exchange and communication.). At the same time that NAGA “was shaping project-wide communication norms in the news-system, genre norms emerged more implicitly within each team’s local newsgroup, resulting in local genre repertoires that varied in composition and use” (1999b, p. 29). Implicit structuring does not involve any reflection or articulation of what usage norms are appropriate for or intended within the new medium; explicit structuring, however, involves considerations and reflection.

From the developers’ perspective, their findings of explicit and implicit structuring suggest opportunities for supporting both the explicit use of genres within a new medium and the implicit emergence of genres through use. From the users’ perspective, the distinction between implicit and explicit structuring of usage norms, as well as the distinction between planned and opportunistic varieties of explicit structuring, may be useful in helping groups and organizations define practices for use of new electronic media. The implicit structuring of genres by a community of users occurs in the absence of explicit guidance on how to communicate within the community. Where the community of users do not share well-established norms for using a new medium and no deliberation about such usage occurs, genre ambiguity and unaligned communication expectations may easily result. For example, the emergence of flaming in some settings (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986) may reflect, in part, the lack of an explicit discussion and shared understanding by the user community of what norms are appropriate in the new medium. Where the community of users shares well-established genre norms, users will simply transfer existing norms and established habits from familiar media to a new medium. This pattern of usage has the advantage of allowing users to begin to use a new medium quickly and without much intimidation. Genres are created, re-created and modified by structuring (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). A specific instance of a genre does not necessarily need to follow all the rules making it up as long as it remains recognizable (e.g., business letters sent via fax).

Through usage, genres may be modified both deliberately and inadvertently. When alterations to recognized genres are repeatedly performed, enough to become widely accepted within a group, genre variants or new genres are formed. These altered or new genres are used either in conjunction with the existing genres or in place of the old ones. A genre is recognized as new by members of a community when a new combination of form and purpose becomes distinguishable from the old genre. An altered genre still retains recognizable examples of the old genre.

2.3.1. Genres and Giddens’ Structuration Theory

According to Weick (1979, 1987), the nature and the role of communication in organizations are always evolving as individual actors interact with social institutions over time. This ongoing interaction between individuals and institutions can be considered as an instance of Giddens’ (1979, 1984) *structuration theory*. In the words of Yates and Orlikowski, this theory involves the production, reproduction, and transformation of social institutions, which are enacted through individuals’ use of social rules. These rules shape action taken by individuals in organizations. At the

same time, by regularly drawing on the rules, individuals reaffirm or modify the social institutions in an ongoing, recursive interaction.

Genre evolves over time in a continuing interaction between human communicative action and the institutionalized communicative practices of groups, organizations and society. It emerges within a particular sociohistorical context and is reinforced over time as a situation recurs. Changes to the social, economic and technological context imply changes in genre rules within individuals' communicative actions. Drawing on Barley & Tolbert's theory (1997; Barley, 1986), Yates & Orlikowski (1992) believe that genres are by-products of a history of negotiations between social actors that results in shared typifications, which gradually acquire the moral and ontological status of taken-for-granted events. Human agents continually enact genres and during such enactment they have the opportunity to challenge and change these genres. Barley & Tolbert have recognized three modes of enacting already-established social institutions - maintenance, elaboration and modification - which can also be used to understand the production and reproduction of genres. When individuals enact the genres by using the rules of substance and form without alteration, they are maintaining the existing genres. When they consistently but slightly adapt genre rules to reflect new conditions – such as a new medium or a new locale – without substantially departing from those genre rules, they are elaborating the existing genres. When individuals depart significantly and persistently from the rules of existing genre, they are modifying the existing genres.

Drawing on Giddens' notion of social rules, Yates & Orlikowski posit that genres are enacted through rules that associate appropriate elements of form and substance within a certain recurrent situation. The recurrent situation includes the history and the nature of established practices, social relations and communication media within organizations; thus, according to Yates & Orlikowski (1992, p. 301), a genre of organizational communication is a “typified communicative action invoked in response to a recurrent situation.” The invoked rules are called, by Yates & Orlikowski, “genre rules.” For example, in the case of the business letter, the genre rules for substance specify that the letter pertains to a business interaction with an external part. The genre rules for form specify an inside address, salutation, complimentary close and correct relatively formal language.

2.3.2. Metastructuring Genres

Orlikowski, Yates, Okamura & Fujimoto (1995) argue that the use of electronic communication technologies in changing organizational forms can be facilitated by the ongoing adaptation of those technologies to changing contexts of use. In a study about the Network Administration Group for the project Acorn (NAGA), they have identified a set of activities – *technology-use mediation* – that help to adapt a new communication technology to its context. The metastructuring perspective means that individuals deliberately adapt computer-mediated communication technologies and their use to a particular context and change those contexts to accommodate the use of technology. This mediation can be viewed from the framework of structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) in terms of how technologies are structured by users in their contexts of use.

Unlike research on technology structuring that focuses above all on activities of users who shape their technology as they use it in particular contexts, Orlikowski, Yates, Okamura & Fujimoto (1995) have focused on another set of structuring activities that are not activities of use. Rather they involve the shaping of other users' activities of use, a process they designate as *metastructuring*. The notion of metastructuring allows them to see that interventions in users' use of technology occur frequently over time, in a variety of ways, and are often very influential. They believe that the process of metastructuring like the process of structuring is always happening. In particular they stress the fact that technology-use mediation may be seen to involve four type of activities with which technologies and their uses are contextualized over time: establishment, reinforcement, adjustment and episodic change. During establishment of a technology, mediators set up the technology, its physical parameters, features etc. During reinforcement, they promote the usage, the structure and the rules of the new system. During the adjustment, they enhance the new system and its use. Finally, the episodic change is the last type of mediation activity: "episodic change involves a significant reassessment and restructuring of the technology and its routines of use" (1995, p. 441). Unlike adjustments, episodic changes are "proactive attempts to create major improvements in the coherence and performance of a technology, its use, users' understanding and the institutional context of use" (*ibid.*). According to Orlikowski, Yates, Okamura & Fujimoto, metastructuring draws attention to the fact that there may be multiple levels of action and interaction in organizations and that a process of technology structuring at one level may itself be structured at another level. Metastructuring may be a significant element in organization adaptation to change.

2.3.3. Genre Taxonomy

Yoshioka & Herman (1999) have proposed genre taxonomy as a knowledge repository of communicative structures or typified actions enacted by organizational members. The genre taxonomy goal is to help people to make sense of diverse types of communicative actions. To do this, genre taxonomy has three features. First, it represents "the elements of both genres and genre systems in terms of purpose, contents, participants, timing of use, place of communicative action, and form including media, structuring devices and linguistic elements" (p. 1). Second, genre taxonomy represents, according to them, both widely recognized genres and specific genres. Third, it represents use and evolution of genres over time to help people understand how a genre is relevant to a community where the genre is enacted and changed. Drawing on Orlikowski & Yates' ideas, Yoshioka & Herman employ the concept of genre repertoire (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994a) in order to "analyse variation in composition of a genre repertoire and shifts in the genre repertoire use because it allows the recognition and tracking of changes over time and gives researchers a chance to compare similarities and differences across communities" (p. 3).

Yoshioka & Herman argue that it is very useful to consider, also, the Bazerman's notion of a genre system as composed of sequences of interrelated communicative actions (Bazerman, 1994). (The notion of a genre system has been considered by Orlikowski & Yates too.) As the latter have claimed (Orlikowski & Yates, 1998), examining the genre system in a community helps to understand the context of communication and the coordination mechanisms that are used in interactions, since a genre system provides expectations about purpose, participants, content, form, time

and place of communicative interactions. Some genres, especially generally recognized genres, such as the memo, have multiple purposes. Thus, “the genre taxonomy differentiates primary purposes and secondary purposes to help understand how to prioritise genre use in social contexts. It is worth noting that a genre system usually has a different purpose than its constituent genres, because a genre system itself provides expectations about its socially recognized purposes to coordinate the collaborative activities with its constituent genres” (Yoshioka & Herman, 1999, pp. 4-5). Regarding the content of a genre or a genre system (what), genres provide expectations about it. Sometimes genres are linked to each other and constitute a genre system that coordinates communicative actions. Regarding the participants in a genre or a genre system, Yoshioka & Herman suggest that a genre is enacted by participants who communicate within a community, whose size ranges from very small, such as a department, to very large, such as a number of countries.

Regarding the timing of a genre or a genre system use, since a genre is invoked in a recurrent situation, it relates to a timing or opportunity (Yates & Orlikowski, 1998). A genre system may have expectations about the sequences of its constituents. Thus, Yoshioka & Herman propose that the constituent genres or the genre system are related by a relative timing within a genre system. Regarding the place of communicative action, a genre reflects a culture that “the participants in a community share, because they identify the recurrent situation or socially defined need from the history and nature of established practices, social relations, and communication media within organizations. For electronic communication over the Internet the physical spaces of communicative actions are becoming less meaningful because of the borderless characteristic of cyberspace. However, because a virtual space addresses expectations of ‘where’ in an Internet community, the genre taxonomy also may have virtual space categories different from those of physical space” (Yoshioka & Herman, 1999, p. 7).

Moreover, Yoshioka & Herman suggest that a genre is typically characterized by its form. The form refers to observable features, which include structural features, medium and linguistic features. The genre taxonomy represents these features used for identifying a genre. Following Yates & Orlikowski (1998), they consider genre evolution over time. From the organizational point of view, “genre is used in a process cycle that consist of enacting a genre and observing genre use. Participants are included in a common observed genre use, and, during this process, they identify a recurrent situation and changes in a situation based on which they feel a necessity to change” (Yoshioka & Herman, 1999, p. 8). At the same time the genre influences them. In enacting a genre process, participants identify genre rules from their genre experiences and select a proper genre. They usually reproduce a genre, but sometimes elaborate, replace or undercut it either inadvertently or deliberately in order to adapt to a change of situation. A sender of communication usually chooses or modifies a genre from his or her experience; recipients invoke a similar recurrent situation and identify the genre or genre variant and finally enact it in a community. A genre can evolve from another one because participants can elaborate or replace a genre during the enactment of a genre process. A memorandum, for example, was elaborated from the informal business letter genre and the electronic memo genre was elaborated from the memorandum genre.

Yoshioka & Herman stress the fact that human communication is central to organization activity; thus, they propose a genre taxonomy that represents the elements of genres and the social context of genre use. Drawing on Yates & Orlikowski's (1992) studies, they consider a genre as a type of communication recognized and enacted by organizational members (such as a report or a meeting). While the concept of genre has been examined in rhetorical and literary analysis, only recent studies are using it to refer to a typified social action (Brown, 1994; Bazerman, 1988; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Miller, 1984). Furthermore, it is only with Yates & Orlikowski (1992) that the notion of genre has been applied to organizational communication.

As for Yates & Orlikowski, also Yoshioka & Herman are convinced that the purpose of a genre "is not an individual's private motive for communication, but a purpose which senders and recipients of communication in a community socially recognize and invoke in a typical situation, such as proposing a project, informing and directing in an official announcement, and deciding how to resolve a problem. Form refers to three aspects of observable communication: medium, such as pen and paper and electronic mail; structural features, such as document format, and linguistic features, such as informality, humour and technical language" (Yoshioka & Herman, 1999, p. 3). Moreover, it is useful to consider genre as a structure that shows what Giddens has called the 'duality of structure' (Giddens, 1984), because it is situated in a stream of social practices that shape and are shaped by it.

According to Yoshioka & Herman, understanding the duality of the genre's structure helps people to understand the reason why genre changes are occurring over time. The genre taxonomy has benefits as a knowledge repository. It can help members of organizations learn communication methods and apply methods to their situation because the genre taxonomy provides diverse social contexts of communicative actions. The genre taxonomy also might be employed to give organizations' members "a source for new ideas in order to design new communication methods, redesign existing communication methods or resolve problems relating to communicative actions. It may also be possible to anticipate possible changes in a genre by examining any evolutionary histories of similar genres" (Yoshioka & Herman, 1999, p. 23). According to Yoshioka & Herman, the set of genres is open; it never can be finished or completed. The more knowledge is stored in it, the more benefits the genre taxonomy can provide.

2.4. Genres in CMC

2.4.1. Linguistic Aspects of E-Mail

According to Bergquist & Ljungberg (1999), genres are constantly negotiated, especially in an organizational communication context. They have used a conversation referring to a genre to establish a "context of meaning" for participants, because in such a conversation it was a common practice to discuss and negotiate which genres were appropriate to use in different situations. Moreover, unlike Yates & Orlikowski's believes, they do not accept that e-mail conversation is a genre. If a genre is to be defined as a conversation with a goal, the goal could not be

conversation in itself. The shared purpose is the result of the conversation, which is the goal that the activity of conversation is a part of. This may be looked at from the perspective of how genres are expressed via e-mail.

Thus, researchers in this area are looking to find what characteristics online interaction (like e-mail etc.) draws from conventional genres (like letters etc.) and where new forms are defined, which could otherwise not be sustained without the mediation of an electronic medium. For instance, Collot & Belmore (1996) examine the possibility of grammatical differences between computer-mediated communication and other kinds of spoken and written language. 'Electronic language' has several peculiar features: e-mail messages are neither 'written' nor 'spoken,' therefore, placing electronic language somewhere in between the two. Because its situational features are different than other types of communication, Collot & Belmore assert that it is reasonable to assume that electronic language is comprised of a particular set of linguistic characteristics as well. It resembles the genres of public interviews and letters, which are both personal and professional.

Gruber (2000) addresses the question of whether the different types of computer-mediated communication (CMC) are genres by themselves or if the genres are instead distinguished by the different kinds of CMC. S.J. Yates (1996) found that CMC cannot be seen as a single genre but should be separated into explicit forms of communication. Cho's study (1996) discovered indications that although there are some linguistic features common to e-mail messages, there are also differences between these messages within the same category of CMC. Cho explains this variance by the fact that genre expectations have yet to be established by e-mail users.

S.J. Yates' study sheds light on some interesting linguistic features of computer-mediated communication. She recounts the results of a corpus-based comparison between communication carried out by speech, writing and CMC. S.J. Yates uses Halliday's model of language use (1978) that stresses the textual, interpersonal and ideational components of spoken, written and computer-mediated communication. The use of CMC can refer to a number of different possibilities: electronic mail, bulletin-board postings, computer conferencing etc. Each form of communication has its own restrictions.

It is a commonly noted belief in the literature that e-mail falls somewhere between spoken and written discourse (Bregman & Haythornthwaite, 2001; Collot & Belmore, 1996; Gruber, 2000). In line with Chafe & Danielewicz's (1987) findings, e-mail cannot be looked at and categorized by only spoken or written language. S.J. Yates (1996) and Cho (1996) suggest that asynchronous communication, such as e-mail, yields messages with features that distinguish it from other forms of spoken and written language. Spoken and written language are thought to differ in the modes of production and consumption. That is, spoken language is made up in an impromptu fashion as one speaks and it "is intended to be consumed, heard, in the same rapid and dynamic manner" (S.J. Yates, 1996, p. 33). Written language, on the other hand, is stationary, made up at the pace chosen by the author and consumed at the speed selected by the reader. The consequences of these variations in production possibly create differences in the language used. Chafe & Danielewicz (1987) comment on how this involves vocabulary use: "as a consequence of these differences, speakers tend to operate with a narrower range of lexical choices than writers" (p. 88).

Speakers cannot afford to stop every so often and flip through a thesaurus in order to choose the perfect word; rather, they are often obligated to use the first word that comes to mind. Writers have the luxury to choose and re-phrase when engaging in their way of discourse.

Chafe & Danielewicz (1987) refer to the number of different words (*types*) divided by the total number of words (*tokens*) as the *type/token ratio*. There is also the issue of *lexical density*. This is a term used by Halliday (1994 [1985]) and is defined as, “a ratio or percentage of the number of lexical items to the number of total items within an utterance.” According to Halliday, a more crude way of referring to lexical density is to speak of “a measure of the information density within a text.” If a text has a greater lexical density, then it requires more cognitive effort by an individual to process it. Certain genres have their own particular make-up and vocabulary, thus, resulting in a repetition of lexical items. This in turn creates expectations of recurrence of lexical items, therefore, making processing easier. Halliday suggests that the more repeated lexical items be given a half score, making them ‘less’ than the others. It is not clear, however, when a word is considered common enough to be reduced, nor it is apparent whether Halliday is speaking of commonality in the text itself, in the genre or in the language.

S.J. Yates (1996) suggests that CMC users use language in ways that more closely resemble written than spoken communication. S.J. Yates refers to Zuboff’s (1988) remark of the “textualization of sociality”: “users of CMC systems may be bringing their literate production practices to an interactive, social and orally-oriented interaction” (S.J. Yates, 1996, p. 39). S.J. Yates examines the difference between speech and writing. One central difference, he says, is “reference to the self and other” (p. 40). Chafe (1982) outlines the levels of involvement and detachment accounting for the variations, “[I]t is typically the case that a speaker has face to face contact with the person to whom he or she is speaking. [This] means that the speaker can monitor the effect of what he or she is saying on the listener, and that the listener is able to signal the understanding and ask for clarification” (Chafe, 1982, p. 45). Fowler & Kress (1979) address these issues in terms of conventional social practices instead of consequences of the chosen medium, through examination of pronoun use. In reference to the impersonal tone found in newspaper articles, textbooks and scientific articles, Fowler & Kress put forth the notion that the detached tone of such publications is due to the social customs that go along with them and not the medium of writing. With respect to the frequency of first and second person reference, CMC stays far from resembling either speech or writing, although it is closer to speech in overall use (S.J. Yates, 1996, p. 40-41). Hodge & Kress (1988) look into the *modality system of language*, i.e., methods of encoding attitude towards a statement or the content of an utterance. This can mean saying a statement emphatically or ironically. S.J. Yates found that CMC uses significantly more modals than do either speech or writing (1996, p. 43).

Halliday’s work (1978) supports the notion that a critical difference between genres and modes of communication is found in the *semiotic field*, where the communicative interaction occurs. This field is outlined “by the situation, as a social structure and as a physical location with discursively available material objects” (S.J. Yates, 1996, p. 45). When CMC takes place, no such field exists beyond the focus of the communication. The text of the CMC communication is in fact the field. This may

provide some explanation for the elevated levels of modality within CMC interaction. The text is in the position of supporting not only the social circumstances but also “the participants’ relationship to the situation, their perception of the relationships between the knowledge and objects under discussion” (p. 46). S.J. Yates’ study concludes that while CMC resembles writing in its textual aspects (e.g., type/token ration and lexical density), it strays from similarities to written discourse in pronoun and modal auxiliary use.

2.4.2. From Memo to E-Mail

It is generally accepted that electronic language is shaped by the historical background in which computer-mediated communication is situated. According to Joanne Yates (1989a, 1989b) and Yates & Orlikowski (1992), the complexity of the digital genre concept and its linguistic features need a multilateral approach beginning with a sociohistorical illustration of reasons that caused the emergence of computer-mediated communication within organizations. Yates & Orlikowski (1992, pp. 311-318) argue that e-mail messages were deeply influenced by the “memorandum,” a particular genre of internal organizational communication used in 1870-1920 American firms. During this period, because of the great firm growth, managers needed documentation also for internal correspondence. Before the introduction of the memorandum, internal correspondence was based on orality, nothing was documented and the result was chaos, loss of control by owners and managers and diseconomies of scale. Practical reasons forced managers to introduce the new genre “memorandum” or “memo” in order to have written communication for internal coordination and control (as business letter documented business with another part). Written documentation was always preferred to oral exchanges and not only to bridge physical distances when one party was not available for face-to-face discussion, because documents could be stored for later consultation and analysis. A new genre emerged. While the business letter used a very polite and formal genre, the memorandum adopted a language less formal and official even if – like the business letter – it was used for later consultation and analysis.

The communication medium of the memo was the typewriter, which really influenced the emergence of the memo genre. Clarity was the fundamental aim of this new genre. Structural features like underlining and use of capital letters were adopted to distinguish the most important parts; tab stops were added to make lists easier to type; new forms of headings appeared (such as the familiar to, from, subject and date) and they evolved in order to simplify the addressing conventions for internal documents and to put all the pieces of information relevant to identifying and storing. With the advent of computers and the demand for faster communication and access to information, “electronic mail” was created as a new electronic medium of organizational communication. The memorandum genre influenced e-mail messages although the e-mail medium differs from paper in its capabilities: it allows high speeds in asynchronous exchanges both because it is transmitted so rapidly and because intermediaries such as secretaries are usually bypassed.

Sometimes the rules of the e-mail genre are similar to a letter or an informal note because they contain author-added headers and sign-off like: “Hi, Chris” or more formal expressions like “Dear Chris”, “Regards, Jane.” Language is more informal

and colloquial than that generally used in memo and spelling and grammatical errors considered inappropriate in memorandum tend to be tolerated in this medium. These deviations may, in part, reflect the typical rapidity of the communicative action exchange, the lack of secretarial mediation, as well as its weaker editing facilities and the lack of typing skills among many e-mail users.

E-mail is used to convey messages that would not be handled through memos and that require no documentation (e.g., two-line invitation to meet for lunch or one-word response to a question). Moreover, the possibility of rapid but nonintrusive exchanges encourage individuals to use e-mail for messages that are too incomplete to stand alone (some e-mail messages resemble voice-mail messages or informal notes), unlike the memo and the business letter, which are intended for future reference and, hence, are more comprehensive.

According to Markus (1994), e-mail messages are “mosaic messages” because they result from the appending of responses to received messages to create continuity and conversational context. Often individuals do not put opening salutations and closing sign-off. This practice which could be seen as impersonal in comparison to a letter or a note, may be attributed to the depersonalizing influence of electronic media and the necessity to avoid redundancy with the system header and, thus, to work more efficiently.

According to Siegel, Dubrovsky, Kiesler & McGuire (1986) and Sproull & Kiesler (1986), language used in media of electronic communication is less inhibited than that used in face-to-face communication. Often it is a “flaming” genre because it includes emotional outbursts, name-calling, exaggerated emphasis, inappropriate innuendos and sarcasm. It avoids complimentary closes and polite and formal language. This happens because the absence of salutation and sign-off in the memo genre caused the absence of openings and closings in e-mail messages too. Another reason is because, as a new genre is influenced by an old and it is a communicative action invoked in recurrent situations with similar substance and form, the absence of salutation and sign-off in memos affected their absence in e-mail too.

Nowadays, e-mail let organization members communicate in situations in which it was impossible for them to communicate. It allows individuals to communicate when communicative action is too complicated to be managed through previous non-electronic media. Computer-mediated communication technology is expected to enable organizational members to work more flexibly, to span contexts and boundaries and to collaborate more effectively. As Orlikowski, Yates, Okamura & Fujimoto (1995) point out, the Acorn project managed among NAGA firm members demonstrates how computer-mediated communication technologies are general purpose tools that help individuals communicate, share information and make decision in a broad range of settings.

2.4.3. Genres in the Design of Media

Agre (1998) has stressed that it is imperative for designers of new media to have a good understanding of who are using the media, how they are using it and how the media fit into the whole picture of a society’s way of life. Agre has suggested that the

primary object of design is the genre. Looking at the ‘physiology of communities collective cognition,’ he has made seven points about genres:

- Each genre suggests a type of target audience and a type of activity (Bazerman, 1988).
- Each genre also suggests a relationship between the producer(s) and consumer(s).
- Genres imply an entire stream of documents, not a single one.
- Genres, however, do not constrain the ways in which they may be used.
- Any given way of life will include the routine use of many genres.
- Genres change through history (Yates, 1989a, 1989b).
- A genre must fit with all aspects of an activity.

Media, however, must not be confused with genres. “A genre is a fairly stable, expectable form of communication” (Agre, 1998, p. 83). It is meant to be useful to different communities, without spreading itself too thinly and ending up having no use at all. A genre should give a boost to activities already carried out in a community. The community should be open to the possibility that a new genre should ideally do more for the members than the existing one.

2.4.4. Genres in the World-Wide Web

Crowston & Williams (1997, 1999) have described how genres of communication might evolve given the capability of the World-Wide Web (referred from now on as the ‘web’) to create links between pages. Communicative genres are influenced by a type of communication sharing, a common form, content or purpose. The employed medium influences the possible form of documents (i.e., an e-mail memo has a different form from that of a paper memo). Crowston & Williams have examined how web linking affects form, creating new genres. They have studied genres drawing on similar form, topic or purpose.

Crowston & Williams refer to Yates & Orlikowski’s (1992) suggestion that communications in new media will become adapted and modified versions of existing communicative genres as well as producing new genres. The same genre may be used with different media: for example, a letter may be sent via post or by fax. Some genres are determined mainly in terms of their purpose, others in terms of the physical form. It is more common, however, for genres to be defined through a combination of purpose and form. Moreover, genres form a hierarchy: a medical paper is a more specific instance of the more general research paper genre, which is itself a type of paper. A paper about a heart disease is a more specific instance of a medical paper. All of these genres are alike in some ways, like the title, but differ in others, like the type of arguments used.

Genres may also be connected in order to create a more involved type of communication. Communications themselves may be carried out in such a way that a recognizable pattern is formed. Bazerman (1995) refers to this pattern as a ‘genre system.’ Orlikowski & Yates (1994a) speak of the idea of a genre repertoire, defined as the set of genres used within a community by its members. Different communities have different genre repertoires, and these genres are being maintained, updated,

modified and deleted through use (or lack of) over periods of time. This point is summed up as, “the genre repertoire is both a product of and a shaper of the communicative practices of a community” (Crowston & Williams, 1997, p .4). The acceptance of genres may vary from group to group.

In their studies, Crowston & Williams (1997, 1999) have looked at genres on the web for a variety of reasons. First, new media are presenting new possibilities that will most likely result in the development of new genres of communication. Second, finding examples of web communication is fairly easy and data are readily available. Web site developers use genres to choose how to display information for a specific group. Finally, different communities use the web for distinct purposes. This creates the experience of varied genres being used to achieve goals. Although a genre may be targeted at a certain group of people, sometimes the audience cannot be known ahead of time. This may result in the emerging genre repertoire being a mix of interactions and may also cause confusion in relation to the genres. The studies of Crowston & Williams have also located genres embedded in other genres. Each level had created a new genre without entirely erasing the properties of the previous one.

2.5. Some Conclusions and Relevance to COMMORG

Most of the literature on genres and genre repertoires regards the effect genres and genre repertoires have on organizations’ members’ values, expectations and actions. Thus, genre repertoire is not a conservative concept but it is constantly negotiated and changed. From the structuration theory view, genre repertoire evolves over time in reciprocal interaction between institutionalized practices and individual human actions. In particular, Orlikowski and Yates (1994a) develop the concept of genre repertoire to designate the set of genres enacted by groups, organizations or communities to accomplish their work.

Moreover, its structure is influenced by social context. Genre repertoire is considered as a socially recognized type of communicative action. According to Yates & Orlikowski (1994a), a genre established within a particular community, serves as an “institutionalized template for social interaction-an organizing structure that shapes the ongoing communicative action of members through their use of it for social interaction within community.”

As proposed above, genre repertoires are strongly linked with technology–use mediators. In the words of Yates, Orlikowski & Okamura (1999a, p. 83), the use of a new medium within a community is strongly influenced not just by users but also by those individuals who implement the technology, provide training and propose usage guidelines.

As it is pointed out in the COMMORG Project, computer-mediated communication, especially in the form of e-mail, represents the most diffused form of advanced information technologies, aiding for group decision-making and for social communication in organizations. In giving genre repertoire mutation a crucial role in the interplay between technology and organization, one witnesses the belief, introduced by Yates and Orlikowski, which is common in the present literature

review, that genres, through which information is shaped and shared, are not just an aspect of organization but they are the organization work in itself.

3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Modern trends in different theories in linguistic, literary, rhetorical and social disciplines have come to re-define the concept of genre by enriching the traditional static formalistic-structuralist concept with certain dynamic situational-functional facets of communicative practices. This conceptual re-orientation of the meaning of genre is most often traced to a number of scholars, including Miller (1984), Bazerman (1988), Swales (1990), Berkenkotter & Huckin (1995) and Yates & Orlikowski (1992). Previously, Bakhtin's (1986) speech genres have given some early insights into the view of the social role of discourse genres. Note also that a similar to genre but yet distinct concept of register has been already developed by Halliday (1978) within the theory of systemic-functional linguistics.

Joanne Yates and Wanda Orlikowski gave to the topic of genres of organizational communication the greater and most significant contribution. They define a genre as a socially recognized type of a communicative action (such as memos, reports, meetings, proposals, recommendation letters, expense forms, training seminars etc), which is habitually invoked in response to a recurrent situation (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). Furthermore, a genre is identified by its socially recognized purpose and shared characteristics of form. According to Yates & Orlikowski, genres, through which information is communicated, shaped and shared for particular purposes, are not just an aspect of organizational work; they are the organizational work in itself.

Thus, a genre established within a particular community serves as an institutionalized template for social action – an organizing structure – that shapes the ongoing communicative actions of community members through their use of it. In organizations, groups and professional communities, each genre repertoire “defines a different set of interaction norms and work practices, and each serves to define a different kind of community” (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994b, p. 5). Now, the set of genres that are routinely enacted by members of a community constitute a genre repertoire. It is genre repertoire that defines an organization's nature, its communicative interactions, its rules and work practices.

When a community is using a new communication medium, such as e-mail or other forms of computer-mediated communication, a specific (to this new medium) genre repertoire is emerging. In fact, people produce, reproduce and change genres through a process of structuring (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). Through genre, organizations' members express their actions and beliefs and shape communicative interactions. As a consequence, over time, they may change the original genre repertoire, as a group's activities change and as people's experiences in the group and with the available media grow.

Yates, Orlikowski & Okamura (1999a) distinguished two contrasting patterns of use of community-wide communication genres, one sustaining an explicit structuring of genres and another one sustaining an implicit structuring of genres. Explicit structuring is deliberately shaped by the action of a small, sanctioned group of technology-use mediators; it includes the planned replication, planned modification and opportunistic modification of existing genres. Implicit structuring is locally and tacitly shaped by community members within their own research teams; it includes the migration and variation of existing genres.

4. KEY ISSUES

- Genres in organizational communication: In organizational analysis *genres* are defined as socially recognized types of communicative actions (such as memos, reports, meetings, proposals, recommendation letters, expense forms, training seminars etc), which are habitually invoked in response to a recurrent situation (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992).
- Purpose and form of genres: A genre is identified by its socially recognized *purpose* (or *substance*) and shared characteristics of *form*. The purpose (or substance) of a genre refers to the social motives, themes and topics, which are constructed and recognized in the communication (and not to the individual's private motives for communication). Form refers to observable aspects of the communication, such as *communication medium* (e.g., pen and paper, telephone, CMC or FTF), *structural features* (e.g., text formatting devices such as lists and structured fields) and *linguistic features* (e.g., level of formality, specialized vocabulary or technical or legal jargon) (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992).
- Genres and social action: A genre established within a particular community serves as an institutionalized template for social action – an organizing structure – that shapes the ongoing communicative actions of community members through their use of it. When members of a community draw on existing genres to take some communicative action, they reinforce those genres (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994a).
- Genre repertoires: The set of genres that are routinely enacted by members of a community constitute a *genre repertoire*. Thus, a genre repertoire reflects the common knowledge, expectations and norms (derived from the organizational and broader cultural context) that members of the community share about communication (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994a).
- Mutation of genres: When a community is using a new communication medium, a specific (to this new medium) genre repertoire is emerging. This means that, in general, genres (and forms of social interaction) are changed, while certain of them may be reinforced and others may be abandoned. In fact, people produce, reproduce and change genres through a process of structuring (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992).
- Mutation of genre repertoires: Variation in genre repertoire composition may occur through both custom (inadvertent variation) and reflective agency (deliberate variation). Similarly, shifts in the frequency with which genres constituting the repertoire are used may be unintended (inadvertent shifts) or intended (deliberate shifts) (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994a).
- Explicit and implicit structuring of genres: In a study of how an R&D group in a Japanese firm adopted and used a new electronic medium, Yates, Orlikowski & Okamura (1999a) distinguished two contrasting patterns of use of community-wide communication genres, one sustaining an *explicit structuring* of genres and another one sustaining an *implicit structuring* of genres. Explicit structuring was deliberately shaped by the action of a small, sanctioned group of *technology-use mediators*; it included the planned replication, planned modification and opportunistic modification of existing genres. Implicit structuring was locally and tacitly shaped by community members within their own research teams; it included the migration and variation of existing genres.

5. THEORETICAL APPROACHES

- Structuration Theory: By ‘structuration,’ Anthony Giddens (1979, 1984) means the processes of reproduction of a social system or “the conditions governing system reproduction” (1981, p. 172). “To study the structuration of a social system is to study the ways in which that system ... is produced and reproduced in interaction ... [so structuration refers to] the conditions governing the continuity or transformation of structures and therefore the reproduction of systems” (1979, p. 66). Thus, to talk of structuration means that (i) social systems are structured via the application of generative rules and resources “in and through their continual reproduction in day-to-day social life” and (ii) social agency, i.e., “the capability/knowledgeability of social actors is always *bounded* ... [by] the *unintended consequences* of action” (1979, p. 172).
- Critical Discourse Analysis: According to Norman Fairclough (1993, p. 138), *discourse* is “language use conceived as social practice” and a *discursive event* is an “instance of language use, analysed as text, discursive practice, social practice.” Fairclough attributes three dimensions to each discursive event: text, discursive practice and social practice. Text is the “written or spoken language produced in a discursive event.” The two aspects of a text are content and form/texture. Discursive practice mediates the connection between text and social practice and it is related to the socio-cognitive aspects of text production and interpretation. The analysis of discursive practice also includes an understanding of which discursive practices are being drawn upon and in what combinations. This is what Fairclough calls interdiscursivity and it is closely related to Julia Kristeva’s (1980) intertextuality. Social practice relates to the different levels of social organization, such as the situation, the institutional context and the social context. In this respect, questions of power are of central interest, as power and ideologies may have an effect on all contextual levels.
- Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL): Influenced by British anthropology and linguistics (Malinowski, Firth), SFL distinguishes between the ‘context of situation’ and the broader ‘context of culture,’ which is seen as being related at a higher level to the system of language. Moreover, SFL seeks to establish a pragmatic relationship between text and context by viewing language in a social semiotic way as a resource people use to accomplish their purposes while at the same time they express meanings in context. According to Michael Halliday, SFL “is a theory of meaning as choice, by which a language, or any other semiotic system, is interpreted as networks of interlocking options: ‘either this, or that, or the other’, ... and so on” (1994, p. xiv). A central notion in SFL is ‘stratification,’ such that language is analysed in terms of four strata: Context, Semantics, Lexico-Grammar and Phonology-Graphology. Context concerns the Field (what is going on), Tenor (the social roles and relationships between the participants) and the Mode (aspects of the channel of communication). Systemic semantics includes what is usually called ‘pragmatics.’ Semantics is divided into three components: Ideational Semantics (the propositional content); Interpersonal Semantics (concerned with speech-function, exchange structure, expression of attitude, etc.); Textual Semantics (how the text is structured as a message, e.g., theme-structure, given/new, rhetorical structure etc.).

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