

8 Observations on other research-process genres

As the length of Chapter 8 demonstrates, I have given in this book a lion's share of the available space to the research article. I believe this decision can be justified in a number of ways. In many scholarly or research-driven discourse communities, the RA is the key genre both quantitatively and qualitatively. There is also little doubt that, even in a state of considerable ignorance, we know much more about the RA than other research-process genres. Further, one of the aims of this book has been to show how the actual process of genre analysis might be undertaken and I have not been able to see how this aim can be achieved by simply summarizing results. An initial stage of this process involves the presenting of textual extracts. While this need soon runs up against space constraints, it has been possible to satisfy it in a small number of selected genres, of which the RA has been one and the reprint request will be another.

There is a final reason, however, for giving prominence to the RA: the RA has a dynamic relationship with all the other *public* research-process genres. Even when we leave aside private and semi-private communicative activities connected with the RA (cover letters, reviewer's reports, reprint requests, etc.), the RA still remains at the center of a spider's web (Figure 17).

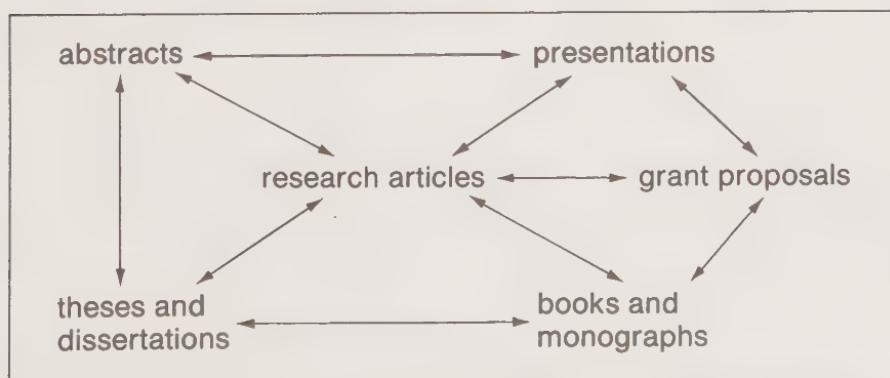


Figure 17 The RA and other research-process genres

These inter-relationships are, I believe, well enough known not to need much commentary. Most RAs these days are prefaced by homotopic abstracts, which are required by journal policy. The abstracts are, on the basis of widely-reported anecdotal evidence, written last. After publication, an abstract of the RA may appear in an abstracting journal; this abstract may be the original homotopic one, it may be specially written by an abstracter, or it may be some compromise between the two as in the *Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts*' 'modified author abstract'. The appearance of the abstract in the abstracting journal is, of course, designed to lead others back to the original RA.

Presentations at conferences (or elsewhere) and research articles are also typically in some state of dynamic tension. The presentation may report on work in progress or offer a preliminary trial of new ideas. It may be a version (from little to extensively modified to suit an oral audience) of a RA not yet published; it may even be based on an already published RA, although some academics confess to feeling uneasy about this latter scenario. A presentation may also be prepared with an eye to its appearing in the conference proceedings. Even though these possible permutations of the relationship between presentations and RAs are numerous, it is generally conceded that the effort involved in getting a presentation together typically enhances the likelihood of the presenter eventually coming up with an acceptable RA. Indeed, I am sure I am not alone in knowing people who deliberately offer to make presentations on what are for them comparatively new topics as a means of driving themselves towards published status in those topic areas.

The symbiotic relationship between RAs and successful grant applications is well known and is one of the most commonly cited instances of Merton's (1968) *Matthew effect* ('For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.' (Matthew 25:29)). Published RAs increase the chances of follow-up research grants and research grants increase the chances of publishable RAs. Books and monographs may, to a lesser or greater extent, build upon or consolidate previously completed shorter and more partial studies, as indeed this particular book has done. Conversely, further technical articles may derive from the somewhat more generalist treatment generally expected of books. Chapters of theses and dissertations may already have appeared as RAs, and it is almost *de rigueur* for academic conversations with those who have just completed dissertations to turn at some stage to the new graduate's plans for article publication.

The remainder of this chapter will briefly discuss in turn five of these research-process genres: (a) abstracts, (b) research presentations, (c) grant proposals, (d) theses and dissertations and (e) reprint requests.

8.1 Abstracts

Although there exists much sound general advice on abstract writing in the leading native-speaker handbooks (e.g. O'Connor and Woodford, 1976; Day, 1979) and in the specialist literature (Cremmins, 1982), I am not aware of any published work that offers specific help for the NNS researcher and writer. One explanation for this state of affairs may be the belief that if a NNS author can write a RA he or she should have little trouble with the accompanying abstract. However, it can be the case that the abstract is the *only* piece of published writing done in English. Bloor (1984) in her Needs Analysis carried out at the University of Cordoba, southern Spain, found that Spanish academics typically wrote their RAs in Spanish but were also required to furnish the journals with abstracts in English. Many felt unequal to this task and resorted to translation services available in the city, while continuing to express anxiety about both the linguistic and substantive accuracy of these translations.

Title and abstract in published papers are at the same time both front matter and summary matter. The front matter or 'news value' element (Huckin, 1987) occurs because readers of RAs are extremely fickle: of those who will read the title, only some will read the abstract, and of those who read the abstract only some will read the article itself. Thus, abstracts function as independent discourses (Van Dijk, 1980) as well as being advance indicators of the content and structure of the following text. Bazerman (1984b) sees this detached status as a representation: 'The article's abstract serves as one further step in turning the article into an object, for the abstract considers the article as a whole and then makes a representation of it' (1984b:58).

However we might want to characterize the relationship between an abstract and what it is an abstract of, the essence of the genre is one of distillation. Essentially, it is this distilled quality that gives abstracts their particular character and makes them easy to recognize. Graetz (1985) has this to say about the language of abstracts:

The abstract is characterized by the use of past tense, third person, passive, and the non-use of negatives. It avoids subordinate clauses, uses phrases instead of clauses, words instead of phrases. It avoids abbreviation, jargon, symbols and other language shortcuts which might lead to confusion. It is written in tightly worded sentences, which avoid repetition, meaningless expressions, superlatives, adjectives, illustrations, preliminaries, descriptive details, examples, footnotes. In short it eliminates the redundancy which the skilled reader counts on finding in written language and which usually facilitates comprehension.

(Graetz, 1985:125)

Although Graetz's corpus consisted of 87 abstracts drawn from a variety of fields, her use of the generic definite article is perhaps a little bold. Even so, many of her conclusions would appear to be supportable. The observation about the absence of negatives is particularly interesting, and informal surveys do indeed suggest that the restricted length of the abstract rarely permits the luxury of including statements of what has not been done either by the authors or by other researchers. The point about the elimination of redundancy can be tied in with the shortage of 'given' information and the restricted use of anaphora that we encountered in Method sections in areas of 'established science'.

On the other hand, there are many abstracts – especially in abstracting journals – that do not fit the picture. Abbreviations can be common:

Anglo-Australian (N=48) & Greek-Australian (N=48) M & F
high school students made personality evaluations of Standard
Australian English & Greek-Australian-accented Eng.

(Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts 8503043, sentence 1)

Complete sentences may not be used:

A report on an ongoing project concerned with a cross-cultural
investigation of speech act realization patterns.

(LLBA 8503640, 'sentence' 1)

Active verbs, sometimes subjectless, may be a preferred style. *Marketing and Distribution Abstracts*, for instance, consistently adopts this usage:

Summarizes research which claims ... ; suggests that this
theory ...

Additionally, there may be constructions that are unlikely to occur in other research-process genres. One that occurs with some frequency in LLBA is the placing of the passive participle in initial position:

Examined are ways in which class regulation of power ...
(8503638)

Discussed are rituals & vocabulary associated with ... (8503645)

The most egregious of Graetz's claims is that abstracts are characterized by the use of Past tense. As the immediately preceding examples show, over a broader canvas than Graetz examined, the Present tense has considerable popularity. The Present is likely to occur in the frequent references to what may be found in the full text (Malcolm, 1987), for example, 'Details of the techniques used are given'. It will tend to occur in commentary rather than in narrative of what was done (Heslot, 1982). We can also detect pressure on abstractors, especially if they are the original authors, to opt for the Present tense because it intimates that the

research reported is *alive* (cf. 'the results show' v. 'the results showed') or because it reflects wider knowledge-claims. On the other hand, we can detect pressure to retreat to the Past tense whenever the 'one-off' nature of the work needs emphasizing or whenever a cautious approach to applications and extensions seems warranted (James, 1984b).

In view of Graetz's conclusions, it comes as something of a surprise to see that Rounds (1982) uncovers a considerable amount of hedging in her study of 14 abstracts from the journal *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences*. Although her texts do have phrases like 'attempt to arrive at some conclusions', 'appear to be under the influence of' and 'appears to underlie', space constraints seem in general to restrict the kind of modulation that is likely to be found in the research article itself.

Graetz claims that the most common structure for an abstract is a four-part arrangement consisting of Problem–Method–Results–Conclusions. However, review of her classification of 'introductory lines' suggests that 38 out of her 87 abstracts opened with what, in RA terms, has been called an 'establishing a territory' Move 1, while 24 more opened with a purposive or restrictive Move 3. Although further research is needed, it seems to be the case that most abstracts reflect the IMRD pattern of the RA itself, allotting a sentence or two for each section. Certainly, there is little evidence for the advice in Cremmins' *The Art of Abstracting* to place findings early in the topic sentence. On the other hand, Gopnik (1972) does provide strong and rationalized support for another recommendation to place general statements last.

Abstracts continue to remain a neglected field among discourse analysts. This is unfortunate as they are texts particularly suited to genre investigation. Moreover, study of certain types of abstracts can potentially be highly revealing of disciplinary discourse communities, particularly when the abstracts comprise the evidence on which gate-keeping decisions are made – as in the refereeing of conference abstracts. The only study I know in the area is Huckin (1988) in which he was able to show a growing devaluation of straightforward pedagogy-oriented abstracts at the Convention on College Composition and Communication.

Another under-researched aspect of abstracts is their role in the process of RA construction. Earlier I had suggested, on wide anecdotal evidence, that abstracts are *ex post facto*. However, Bazerman (1984b) in the only detailed case study of abstract–RA relationships that I know of – and that based on archival manuscripts – suggests that it may be otherwise. According to Bazerman, the famous physicist Compton in 1925 wrote a draft of the abstract (or much of it) about two-thirds of the way through the main RA draft:

... in order to articulate his sense of the whole and keep the parts logically and structurally consistent ... If the abstract did get

written in stages co-ordinated with the writing of the main texts, that correlation would further emphasize the interaction between the gradual creation of the text and the growing perception and command of the text as an object.

(Bazerman, 1984b:58–9)

It is precisely that interaction which requires further study.

8.2 Research presentations

Research into the actual characteristics of research presentations at conferences, as distinct from hortatory chapters in numerous textbooks and manuals, is, as far as I have been able to determine, extremely sparse. There is, however, one exception – and a splendid and very significant one. Throughout the eighties, Dubois in a long series of papers reported on many facets of short biomedical presentations (see below for references). The combination of scholarly treatment and pragmatic insight manifest in these studies is of a quality not found elsewhere and I have therefore decided to build this short section around Dubois' work.

For reasons connected with her involvement in US federal programs designed to assist minorities pursue graduate biomedical research careers, Dubois has for over a decade been somewhat more than a participant observer in the biomedical research community. This particular discourse community, like many others, is somewhat special with regard to its disciplinary traditions and its ensuing rhetorical opportunities and restraints. Therefore, the commentary that follows is offered as a community-specific paradigm against which conference presentations in other discourse communities need to be seen, in particular respects, either to adhere or diverge.

Dubois' main corpus consists of around 50 tape-recorded presentations made at the annual meeting of the Federation of American Societies in Experimental Biology (FASEB) in 1979. These oral accounts have a number of distinct characteristics: they are short, only 12 minutes being allowed for the presentation itself; they are typically accompanied by slides; and, as the name of the umbrella organization implies, they are largely concerned with reporting on laboratory studies.

The genre of (biomedical) presentations given at professional meetings is somewhat different to that of the research article. In the FASEB case, both the time constraint and the oral nature of the proceedings give rise to a product that has a more preliminary quality and is, in most cases, somewhat differently organized (Dubois, 1980a). There is also greater variation, as we usually expect in the spoken genre (Dubois, 1981b). While some of the speakers recorded by Dubois offered a presentation

with many of the characteristics of written text, most did not. The major group 'presented more a chronicle of what happened in the laboratory than a carefully edited version such as might appear in print' (1980a:66). Presenters confess to problems, doubts and dead ends: they discuss in front of their peers unexpected results and near disasters: 'It started off normally, and then it chopped off ... I almost threw the data out, but you see it's not an artifact at all' (1980a:144). The strongly narrative character of the genre gives rise to much greater use of Past tense than in journal articles; indeed the narrative Past tense was often commonly used for stating hypotheses ('we were interested in seeing whether ...'), as well as for summary and conclusion.

In addition, there was considerable style-shifting within a presentation. A not atypical pattern is for formally written – and written out – openings and closings, more informal commentary on the slides with an occasional highly colloquial aside or supporting anecdote.

Dubois has proposed the following maximal structure for the genre she has analyzed.

- I. Introduction
 - A) Listener orientation
 - B) Content orientation
- II. Body (one or more episodes)
 - A) Situation
 - B) Event
 - C) Commentary
- III. Termination
 - A) Content orientation
 - B) Listener orientation

The *listener orientations*, which provide the outer frame, are a consequence of the real-time face-to-face character of the genre. They include such elements as acknowledging the chair's introduction, calling the audience to attention ('Ladies and Gentlemen') and signaling that the presentation is over and questions can be taken. The *content orientation* sets up the intellectual stage for the body of the presentation and seems to be broadly similar to RA introductions (although Dubois uses a different categorial system). The *body* consists of a background situating element – typically something about the animals – which can often serve for any further episodes. *Event-commentary cycles* then follow: what was done, then what was found. The *termination* typically offers a summary of the major results reported a few minutes previously and draws a number of conclusions (more or less tentative) from them. Although 8% of Dubois' sample ended at this juncture, allowing silence to signal that they had finished, the great majority concluded their presentations with 'thank you' or one of its variants.

Dubois (1980b) investigates the important structuring role of the slides in FASEB presentations. Indeed, she is able to show that, in some cases at least, presenters may choose their slides *first* and, on the basis of that selection, then decide what it is that they are going to say at the conference. The extent to which this type of process might be true of other discourse communities is a fascinating question. Would it be true of art, or architecture? What about geology, or botany? Conversations with colleagues in ESL suggest that documentary data can occasionally determine the shaping of the presentation, especially when video clips are involved, but it is more likely that the quality of the data principally affects the *topic* that a would-be presenter chooses to offer. Additionally Dubois (1982b) shows how language regulating the use of the slides in the presentation itself can also serve as an organizational device: when the speaker says 'And the last slide please' the audience knows where the speaker is without any need for further comment.

In a more recent paper, Dubois (1987) has addressed an aspect of research presentations that I believe to have been hitherto ignored. She investigates both the occurrence and rhetorical use of imprecise numerical expressions in her biomedical slide talk data. She finds that various kinds of imprecision are quite common: numbers are rounded up or down, approximate fractions may replace precise decimals, hedges such as 'about' recur and information is given in ranges ('from 6 to 7 grams'). Sometimes these devices are used in conjunction with each other, as in 'something on the order of about 40 to 44 beats per minute'.

As Dubois observes, a major reason for the use of approximate numerical expressions in oral presentations is that they avoid overloading the listeners with data. Precise figures, especially those involving decimal places, would create severe problems in aural processing, especially when several presentations are given each hour and the sessions may run for several hours. However, Dubois has been able to chart some very interesting strategic choices within the general processing constraints. As we might expect, background information, historical, geographic or meteorological, is usually expressed in very imprecise terms (e.g. 'about 20 years ago'). Less obvious is the finding that there were many instances of researchers using imprecision in describing their less significant results and reserving precision for what they believed to be the more significant findings. An imprecise background thus allows a precise number to become foregrounded. A final use of imprecise numbers that Dubois found was in discussion of the work of others that the presenter believed to be incorrect. For example, in one case, the presenter describes a putatively erroneous prediction as 'about 15', whilst his own counter-evidence comes in at two decimal places, 'nine point two seven' (1987:538).

The FASEB proceedings also reveal a particular rhetorical problem

restricted to those discourse communities which inflict suffering on animals in the cause of improving human health care and of advancing human knowledge. Dubois (1981a) characterizes this dilemma as 'the management of pity' and is able to show that in her sample pity is regulated through a series of lexical and syntactic preferences. In a fair number of the FASEB studies, animals are put through some experimental procedure, killed and then examined. However, the verb *kill* was unattested, the preferred alternative being *sacrifice*. As Dubois points out, everyday euphemisms such as *put down* or *put to sleep* also did not occur, perhaps because they imply a concern for the comfort of the individual animal, which would go against an ethos of using animals as an unfortunately necessary means to some greater end – an ethos, of course, perfectly represented by the concept of *sacrifice*.

These kinds of lexical choice (and there are others such as dogs being *allowed* to run on treadmills and so on) are part of our general folklore on the world of biological laboratory research. The syntactic choices are less apparent. Dubois shows that a number of syntactic changes are likely to occur when the speakers reach points in their descriptions where the experimental animals are likely to be experiencing pain and suffering. She suggests, for example, that there may be moves down the following options:

- a) ... we sacrificed the animals.
- b) The animals were sacrificed.
- c) The sacrifice of the animals ...
- d) The sacrificed animals ...
- e) After sacrifice ...

(Dubois, 1981a:252)

A sentence-initial subordinated nominalization like *after sacrifice* attracts much less attention to itself than would choices (a) or (b). In addition, the experimental subjects may disappear from the script being replaced by process or instrumental nouns ('ventilation was achieved by'; 'A catheter was placed'). Finally, pity is managed by switching to a higher order of term when describing violent or painful steps. For example *dogs* (as man's best friends) suddenly became *animals*.

In the preceding few pages I have attempted to provide some sort of account of Dubois' explorations into an important research-process genre. These explorations are restricted to a particular discourse community meeting at one time and place in a particular country. Clearly, generalized conclusions are inadvisable. However, the impressions that we can carry away in our efforts to understand research discourse communities which may concern us more are of an established genre separate to that of the research article. The communicative purpose is different: progress report rather than finished product. The situation is

different: speech rather than writing. The main mode of discourse is different: narration rather than exposition. The constraints are different: occasional humor is here permitted but extensive use of precise numbers is dispreferred. The role of the addresser is different: the presenter is much more of a person, indeed one who can tell tales against him- or herself often to good rhetorical effect, while the writer is much more of an abstracted, calculated persona. However, it is the same discourse community that operates both genres, as it does others such as poster presentations (Dubois, 1985), abstracts, dissertations, reviews, grant proposals. These genres will share content in common, as they will ethical and technical expectations and intellectual traditions and concerns. The differences are rhetorical, but not reduced to insignificance as a consequence.

8.3 Grant proposals

Proposals that request funds in order to carry out specific research projects have become imbued with very considerable individual departmental and institutional significance in many disciplinary areas. My own university, like many others with a commitment to research, recognizes the importance of the genre in tangible terms. It has a special centrally-funded unit, one of whose main missions is to help researchers write up good fundable proposals. It joins many other groups in producing materials designed to help proposal writers. These groups include the funding agencies and foundations themselves, professional writers and successful practitioners of the art of grantmanship (Lauffer, 1983; Locke et al., 1987). Given this visibility of the genre, I shall restrict discussion to significant differences with the research article.

The typical parts of a research proposal are:

1. *Front Matter*
 - a) Title or cover page
 - b) Abstract
 - c) Table of contents (for longer proposals)
2. *Introduction*
3. *Background* (typically a literature survey)
4. *Description of proposed research* (including methods, approaches, and evaluation instruments)
5. *Back matter*
 - a) Description of relevant institutional resources
 - b) References

- c) Personnel
- d) Budget

If we leave aside the formulation of the title, the first real rhetorical test is the one-page abstract. Indeed, it may represent the biggest hurdle of all: 'the abstract that is submitted with the full proposal bears a disproportionate share of responsibility for success or failure' (Locke et al., 1987:121). Unlike a RA abstract, it is promissory and it need not so obviously reflect proportionately the content of the full proposal. One reason for the latter freedom is that the abstract is likely to be read by a wider group than the specialists asked to evaluate the longer document. Since it needs to be written for a wider mix of discourse communities, heavy presumptions of specialized knowledge (and the associated technical vocabulary) tend to be avoided. The abstract also needs to come quickly to the proposed endeavor rather than engage in the kind of space-creating rationale that is typical of RA abstracts (which are typically straightforward condensations of the full version). As a result, abstracts to grant proposals usually begin with the objective or purpose of the study, move on to methodology (procedures and design) and close with a modest but precise statement of the project's significance.

Just as abstracts to research proposals are 'fronted', so are their introductions (Huckin and Olsen, 1983). If an extensive description of the relevant previous literature is thought to be necessary, it is usually placed in a subsequent section. Like the abstract, the introduction will often be written in such a way that administrative and program officers can easily obtain a general idea of what the proposal is about; and again like the abstract, the introduction will also typically begin with a purpose section. It is only in parts 3 (Background) and 4 (Description of proposed research) that the writers tend to assume that the reader-evaluators will be members of their discourse community.

8.4 Theses and dissertations

The thesis or dissertation – terminology does not travel easily across the oceans – can either be a *rite de passage* into the targeted discourse community, or an exit qualification that enables the holder to leave the university world and enter another one. The exigencies for meeting the requirement even in situations where the document is typically written in English vary quite widely from one country to another. The nature of 'the document' is also diversifying. In areas where books are rarely written, as in the physical sciences, there is growing challenge to requiring a student to produce a long, single and comprehensive discourse rather than an anthology of research articles (Reid, 1978; Richards, 1988). As Halstead

(1988) argues, it is the latter that certifies *relevant* practice, training and experience in today's world.

Even if we restrict discussion to the traditional culminatory text, we are still faced with the fact that nearly all of the relevant literature consists of handbooks and guides (e.g. Sternberg, 1981; Davis and Parker, 1979; Madsen, 1982). Up until now it is an area that discourse analysts have largely avoided, at least partly because of the daunting size of the typical text. However, Dudley-Evans (1986) and Hopkins and Dudley-Evans (1988) have examined the comparatively short and straightforward M.Sc. dissertations in biology from a British university. They show, in their introductions, a stronger preference for cyclic patterns which discuss various elements germane to the main topic in turn – at least in comparison to the RA. On the other hand, the discussions utilize, again cyclically, many of the moves reported for research articles.

My own preliminary findings, based on a close reading of six dissertations from The University of Michigan, suggests that the key differentiating aspect of dissertation writing is a much greater use of *metadiscourse*, or writing about the evolving text rather than referring to the subject matter (Williams, 1985). On the metadiscoursal level, we writers 'do not add propositional material but help our readers organize, classify, interpret, evaluate, and react to such material' (Vande Kopple, 1985:83). The author intrudes in order to direct the readers in some way rather than to inform them (Crismore and Farnsworth, 1988).

Although the concept of metadiscourse is easy enough to accept in principle, it is much more difficult to establish its boundaries. There is doubt, for example, as to whether sentence connectives such as *therefore* or whether lexical familiarizations or word glosses (Bramki and Williams, 1984) belong in the system as Vande Kopple and others have argued. There is less doubt that overt commentary on the text in the text is indeed metadiscoursal. Such commentary can range from Advance Labeling ('we shall need to discuss this issue in other terms in the next section') and recapitulation ('we have now discussed ...') (Tadros, 1985) to purpose statements, advice to readers ('readers might wish to read the last section first') and various enunciations of authorial stance ('It is unfortunate that we still do not have a way of ...').

All of these types of commentary (with one exception) are frequently used by the American authors of the six dissertations I have examined, and incidentally are somewhat less frequent in most dissertations written by non-native speakers. There is much signaling of where the authors are going, where precisely they have got to, and what they achieved so far. The one exception is obvious enough: dissertation authors never give advice to their readers since their primary and pre-designated audience is a very small group of specialists in their field who act as counsel in the process and judge of the finished product. Incorporating that kind of

gentle reader steering is just *one* of the revisions that need to be done if a dissertation is to be changed into a scholarly book. And, as a Parthian shot at this topic, let me indulge myself in the higher-order meta-discoursal comment that there is a considerable amount of metadiscourse in this volume. Metadiscourse goes with extensive textual territory.

8.5 Reprint requests

Another genre related to the research article is the reprint request. A reprint request (RR) is a request for a copy, reprint or offprint of a research article mailed by a researcher (or occasionally librarian) to the author or authors of that publication. Figure 18 provides an example.

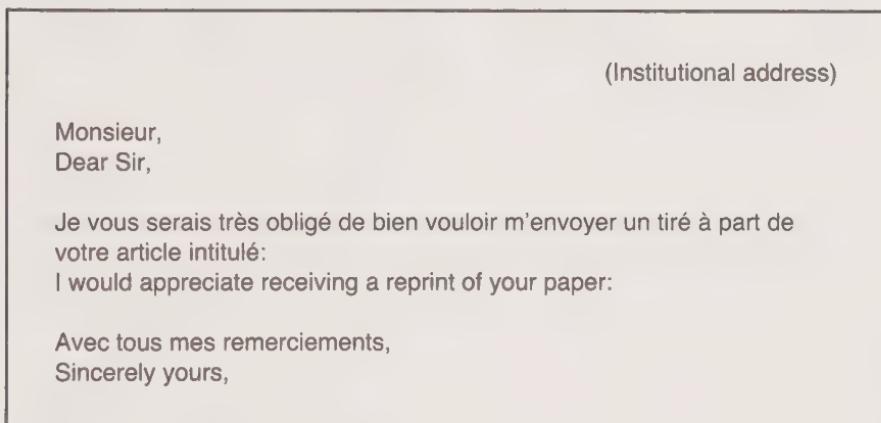


Figure 18 A typical reprint request

Aspects of text role and environment

As Onuigbo observes:

There is no doubt that preprinted request cards are part and parcel of the information traffic occurring in science today. Indeed they dominate the scene. For instance, so great is their predominance that I received only nine *letters*, in contrast to 1,014 *cards* from the United States.

(Onuigbo, 1984:95)

The fact that Wilson I. Onuigbo, a medical researcher in Nigeria, has received more than 1000 cards from the United States suggests that the RR may be a comparatively large genre. Available evidence (Onuigbo, 1985; Swales, 1988a) suggests that at least 10 million RRs are dis-

patched each year. Thus, the genre may be relatively simple in format, but it is certainly not small.

Nor is the genre without its consequences. Whilst some authors may throw away many or most of the RRs they receive, other authors are extremely responsive. My main informant, Dr Robert Fogel (an American biologist) is happy to respond to RRs, and is not averse to including in his return package 'papers on related topics' if asked to do so and when supplies are available. Additionally, in his two main areas, Fungal Ecology and Systematics, Dr Fogel maintains mailing lists; by early 1987, the mailing list for the former consisted of 113 names and addresses. It is not surprising, therefore, that Dr Fogel may order up to 300 reprints for his ecology papers. Dr Fogel believes that responding to RRs is 'good advertising' and is therefore worth the time, trouble and cost that is incurred. More specifically, he believes that if fellow researchers have reprints of his papers to hand, they are more likely to cite them than would be the case if they had to look up his publications in a library.

In Swales (1986b) I described the results of a questionnaire sent to people who asked for a reprint of a paper I had published in 1985. Although only 12 of the 35 questionnaires were returned, (a response rate of 34%), 11 of the 12 said that they received at least 50% of the papers they had requested. Even if the actual response rate found in a more representative sample is only 25%, this percentage would nevertheless indicate that several million reprints are mailed out each year as a result of reprint requests. And of course this estimate excludes those mailings instigated by authors themselves.

Many (perhaps even a majority) of the RRs may finish up virtually unread or cursorily dismissed. This is because the available evidence seems to suggest that a reprint request is most often initiated by the simple scanning of authors' names, titles and/or key words. It was presumably some such scanning that led an institute concerned with rubber research to request a reprint of a paper on cohesion written by a discourse analyst colleague.

In this triggering process the role of *Current Contents* seems central. A neat illustration of its importance as a source of RRs is provided by Onuigbo (1982). In two of Onuigbo's articles indexed in *Current Contents* there occurred a printing error; in one instance a proper name was misspelled and in the other a preposition was deleted. Onuigbo found that in 26 cases there was insufficient title to indicate the source for the RR, in 52 cases the printing error was repeated (thus indicating a *Current Contents* source) and in only nine cases was the correct original title preserved (thus indicating a primary rather than secondary source). While it is not surprising that reliance on minimal information in secondary sources can lead to many disappointments, an initial and impersonal RR may have repercussions effects; it may lead to the

reciprocal return of papers, a growth of correspondence, arrangements to meet at conferences and, in a few instances, to that most satisfactory outcome – collaborative research. On occasion, 'tall oaks from little acorns grow'.

The reprint request is at the same time both institutionalized and yet restricted to certain sectors of the academic world. Convincing evidence for the former claim lies in the fact that the great majority of RRs are printed by departments (and other types of research units) for the use of their members. For instance, in only six of the 127 printed RRs in the sample to be discussed below was the name of the researcher also *printed* at the top of the return address; much more typically the name of the requester is handwritten, typed or rubber-stamped. With few exceptions, therefore, RRs are produced by institutional organizations and not by individuals. On the other hand, RRs are currently restricted to certain fields, typically medicine, the life and physical sciences and engineering, with perhaps growing use in the 'harder' social sciences such as psychology. In the humanities, methods of contact and exchange tend to be much more individual and personal; in my own area I know of only one colleague who regularly uses RRs – and inevitably enough his anomalous position has required him to print his *own* cards.

The main corpus consists of 127 printed RRs generated as a result of the publication of three papers, whilst the subsidiary corpus consists of 12 further requests of a different form (four ISI Request-A-Prints and eight more personal requests). The three papers are:

1. Swales, J. M. 1985. English Language Papers and Authors' First Language: Preliminary Explorations. *Scientometrics* 8: 91–101.
2. Fogel, R. & Trappe, J. M. 1978. Fungus consumption (mycrography) by small animals. *Northwest Science* 52: 1–31.
3. Fogel, R. 1983. Root turnover and productivity of coniferous forests. *Plant and Soil* 71: 75–85.

The first journal, *Scientometrics* is published by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and printed by a major Dutch academic publishing house. It has an international editorship and editorial board. *Scientometrics*, as its name implies, is mainly concerned with quantitative aspects of the distribution of scientific information and with the use of quantitative methods to assess and trace the impact of certain researchers, certain research fronts and certain research institutions. The journal seems to appeal to information scientists themselves and to quite a number of other researchers who have interests in the evaluation of research and in quantitative aspects of its growth and development. The fact that I have received three times more RRs from readers of this journal than from any other suggests that by publishing in *Scientometrics* I had entered another discourse community.

Of the 33 printed RRs that I received as a result of the *Scientometrics* paper, 25 apparently emanated from those working in institutes or departments that were concerned with the medical or biological sciences, six from those in other sciences or branches of engineering, one from agriculture and one from psychology. The unexpected origins of the requests led me to poll the requesters about their RR habits and motivations. A further reason for distributing a questionnaire was my guess that only three of the 33 were native speakers of English. Nine of the 12 respondents mentioned that they selectively sent RRs for *Scientometric* articles, thus corroborating the impression given by their place of work that they have a *minor* interest in scientometric matters. Eight checked an interest in international scientific communication and a somewhat different eight checked an interest in the communication problems of non-native speakers of English. Indeed, half referred to the 'political' or 'psychological' implications of being a NNS in the anglophone world of international research, one expressing his interest in reading the paper in the following gloomy terms: 'to further define my handicaps'.

The 1978 Fogel paper was published in *Northwest Science*, which, as its name implies, is an interdisciplinary regional journal. The 1983 paper was published in a specialized international journal produced in Britain.

The profile of requesters for the two Fogel papers was, as we might expect, more predictable. The majority worked in university departments concerned with pure or applied life sciences, whilst a minority were sent by national or regional research institutions outside the university network. The 1978 paper ('Fungus consumption by small animals') drew in a number of requests from Health Institutes, and departments such as anthropology and psychology, and one from a zoo. The 1983 paper ('Root turnover and productivity of coniferous forests') naturally enough attracted many more requests from institutions concerned in some way with forestry, range science or agriculture.

The differences between the role and location of the three journals could be expected to have some effect on the provenance of the requests. Although this is undoubtedly the case with regard to Swales v. Fogel, it is much less obviously true with regard to Fogel 1978 v. Fogel 1983. The main origin of requests for the *Scientometrics* paper is clearly Europe (26 out of 36), perhaps because the journal is edited in Eastern Europe and distributed from Western Europe. However, the pattern of provenance for the two Fogel papers is perhaps less different than we might expect. North American provenance clearly predominates in both cases. Although European requests do rise in the case of the *Plant and Soil* paper, they still only amount to 13 (in contrast to 37 from North America). In the corpus as a whole, only 10 out of the 139 exemplars originated in the Third World.

The reasons for the massive quantity of RR traffic in the world today – much of it international – remain somewhat obscure. My informant Dr Fogel has explained why he responds positively to RRs, but he also knows of colleagues who are considerably less accommodating. Certainly, the system has its critics: 'I am not alone in not sending reprints to North America' (Essex-Lopresti, 1981). The final question in my questionnaire asked those who sent RRs to comment on the advantages of the RR system to them. The most common types of stated advantage were access to papers that would otherwise be difficult to get hold of (i.e. journals not carried by the institutional library etc.) and the fact that the reprints were immediately available and to hand. The latter observation, of course, gives substance to Dr Fogel's premise that if papers are to hand, they are more likely to be cited. A number of respondents also mentioned the time element (quick in contrast to inter-library loan; time needed to travel to the library; time lost by xeroxing). The Polish respondent referred to the scarcity of photocopiers. There were, in addition, a number of more individual advantages. One person emphasized the much better quality of photographs in reprints rather than photocopies, another the fact that he often lent the reprints to his students, and a third referred to 'the personal contact with colleagues' that the RR system engendered – this last an indication of the system's disguised potential for networking.

Language choice in reprint requests

An intriguing aspect of printed RRs is the language or languages chosen to express the request. If a multilingual format is chosen, the *order* of languages remains consistent in all RRs so far examined; in other words if French is the top language for the opening salutation, then it will remain the first language throughout (as can be seen in Table 7). In the following table this order is represented by 1L to 4L.

Table 7 indicates that English was used on all the RRs, and was the

TABLE 7. LANGUAGE USE PATTERNS IN THE MAIN CORPUS (n=127)

	Monolingual	Multilingual				Total
		1L	2L	3L	4L	
English	102	4	18	3	0	127
German	0	10	3	6	0	19
French	0	8	1	5	3	17
Russian	0	2	3	0	1	6
Spanish	0	1	0	0	1	2
Total	102	25	25	14	5	

only language found on monolingual cards. In fact, overall, 80% of all the RRs were monolingual English, although there was some difference between the three sub-samples (Swales 55%; Fogel 1978 90% and Fogel 1983 85%). The table also shows that four other languages occurred in addition to the ubiquitous English. These multilingual cards originated principally in Western and Eastern Europe; and, as might be expected, the francophones tended to place French first, while German speakers did the same for German. The Scandinavian cards were typically monolingual English. The six cards that carried a Russian-language request all came from Russia and Eastern Europe. Only one of the 10 cards emanating from Hispano-Portuguese speaking areas employed Spanish, suggesting that Spanish has very marginal status as a reprint request language (the other Spanish card came from a French university). Obviously enough, other potential RR languages, such as Japanese, Arabic, Italian or Chinese, did not occur.

Language choice in reprint requests is also worth examining because it provides *unusual* information about patterns of language use in international research. At present, much of the available evidence we have reflects high-order decision-making, such as the language policies adopted by journals, international associations, major conferences and abstracting and indexing services. In addition, as we have seen, there are a few studies of individual decision-making and coping strategies. However, the RR is typically produced by a *local* unit, such as a department or institute, for the convenience of its members, and thus reflects *that unit's* perceptions of the viable research languages in its field. Although the actual results in the present small corpus in fact quite closely corroborate what we know of the macro-picture, this does not mean to say that such corroboration from a different source is not useful, nor that a different kind of sample might not be instructive. For instance, a study of which languages are used on RRs produced by different departments within a single major research institution would contribute usefully to the 'linguistic scientometrics' literature, particularly if the institution were situated in a geographical area where academic language choices are complex.

A final result from this study is the disappointingly low level of RRs from the Third World, especially since the RR system is relatively low cost. If we also recognize, following Bloor (1984), that many non-native speakers, even with high-level English writing abilities, find it difficult for cultural reasons to *initiate* academic correspondence with potential colleagues in other parts of the world, then we can anticipate some advantage in encouraging more LDC researchers to adopt the system.

The structure of the reprint request

In the previous subsection I have tried to indicate something of the institutional environment within which the RR operates, and to say something about the choice of RR language in relation to international and regional scientific communication. It is, I think, clear that the reprint request has already met most of the criteria for genre status. It has a recognized name within the relevant discourse communities. Members of those communities recognize the RR as being an identifiable communicative act. Those members share an understanding of what the public purpose of a RR is, and respond to that purpose with a limited set of behaviors. The reprint request functions as a standard and typical response-type; in certain disciplines, evidence from both total numbers and from relative percentages strongly suggests that a RR is a *normal* way of obtaining a copy of a potentially interesting article. The remaining issue, therefore, is whether a RR is a sufficiently structured and standardized communicative event (with consequent constraints on allowable contributions in terms of purpose, positioning and form) to constitute a genre.

The central element of the reprint request can be expected to be the request itself (plus adequate information to indicate where the request should be sent). As we shall see, this central element is typically bounded by opening and closing salutations of types that occur throughout the range of formal correspondence genres. Given the central purpose of making a request, it also is not surprising to find that the request element is often followed by an anticipatory expression of thanks. This statement would seem to be motivated by two considerations. On the one hand, requesters may feel that a grateful acknowledgement of compliance will enhance the chances of a positive response. Secondly, the 'thanks' statement occurs on reprint requests because of the essentially 'one-shot' nature of the communicative event. *Under normal circumstances*, neither requester nor responder expects that the receipt of the requested article will call forth a simple 'thank-you' note or letter.

The data for the corpus are given in Table 8.

TABLE 8. THE STRUCTURE OF THE REPRINT REQUEST

	No. of occurrences	%	Corpus
1. Opening salutation	104	82	127
2. Request statement	127	100	127
3. Expression of thanks	89	70	127
4. Closing salutation	94	74	127

Table 8 shows that element 2 is *obligatory* (obviously enough since it carries the communicative purpose), while the three other elements are *conventional* (i.e. they occur in a majority of cases). What the table does not directly show is that the *order* of the four elements is fixed; no variations in the sequence were found. It will be remembered that the corpus consists of 127 reprint requests drawn from three sub-samples: these were responses to *Swales, Fogel I* (1978) and *Fogel II* (1983). Preliminary separate analyses of the three groups of RRs generated by the three papers suggested that variations among the groups tended to be relatively minor. I have therefore usually consolidated the results, although at times I have highlighted possibly interesting differences among the three. The analysis that follows largely concentrates on the English-language data – as might be expected in a book of this kind.

1. OPENING SALUTATIONS

Out of the 127 RRs, 23 had no opening salutation. Of the remaining 104, 53 carried a stem-salutation inviting completion of the addressee's name and/or title. The two common forms here were 'Dear' and 'Dear Dr'. Of the full salutations 'Dear Sir' (33 instances) and 'Dear Colleague' (11) reached double figures. There was only one instance of 'Dear Sir/Madam'. The fact that as many as 25% of the RRs used 'Dear Sir' gives cause for contemplation. At present, it doesn't seem possible to hazard whether this usage more closely reflects the extreme power of convention, (chauvinistic) expectations of the gender of the recipient, or the fact that English does not possess any obvious gender-neutral term of address that does not assume status (i.e. Dr). Dones (1989) in a follow-up study of this striking characteristic found in a larger and later corpus of RRs that even in 1987 'Dear Sir' was occurring 17% of the time and was widely distributed around the world. Equally interesting are the relatively low figures for 'Dear Colleague'. After all, this term of address is both collegial and gender-neutral (at least in English); it is also the term used on the widely-used commercial *Request-A-Print* cards produced by the Institute for Scientific Information. Finally, two requesters in *Fogel II* (although none elsewhere) have crossed out *Dr* and *Sir*, one writing in 'Bob' and the other writing 'Hi Bob! Send me your new loot', thus suggesting that the RR also serves as a channel of communication between known colleagues.

2. THE REQUEST (IN ENGLISH)

The actual requests varied in length from six words to 41 words. The typical opening was the request itself, and in the corpus examined here, there is striking evidence for a *major* structure (107 instances) and a number of *minor* structures (a total of 20 instances). Of the 20 examples

of the minor structures, 14 involved the lexical item *send*. The more common variants were:

(Would you) please send me/us ... (6 cases)

I would be very grateful if you could
send me/us ... (4 cases)

However, the much preferred approach in the RR is not to request that a reprint *be sent*, but rather to express appreciation for a reprint *to be received*. It may not be too fanciful to speculate that the dynamic *send* is thought likely to conjure up images of work in the recipient's mind (finding, addressing, dispatching, etc.) which the static *receive* seductively and successfully avoids. The linguistic regularity in the first part of the request itself can be seen in Table 9 (letters in brackets indicate optional elements).

TABLE 9. ENGLISH REQUEST FORM: MAJOR STRUCTURE
(n = 107; 0 = missing)

A	+	B	+	[C]	+	D	+	[E]
I 102		would 99		greatly 55		appreciate 107		receiving 52
we 5		should 8		0				0 51
				40				(others) 4
				(very much) 12				

The three necessary elements in the request form (A, B and D) exhibit a remarkable convergence in linguistic realization (and the very strong preference for 'I' reinforces the view that RRs are designed for individual use even though printed by units). As Column C shows, the possibility of using an intensifying adverb at C has been adapted in over 60% of the cases, by far the most popular adverbial being *greatly*. The selection of a verbal complement after *appreciate* occurs in about half the cases (+50% in Fogel I and below 50% in Swales and Fogel II).

The continuation of the request statement specifies the item being requested. The second half of the request statement consists of an obligatory element and three optional elements. The obligatory element F is realized by either *reprint* (81%), *a copy* (17%) or *the following* (2%). The request is then highly likely to be amplified by some printed statement of the document-type – with a clear preference for a personal format *of your article* or *of your paper*. At this juncture many of the printed request statements terminate, although there remain two further

immediate possibilities. One is to include *entitled* (only 19%) and the other is to break up the blank spaces with an *aide-mémoire* such as *which appeared in*.

The variations on a theme that have so far been discussed are largely matters of style and specificity of information. We now need to consider four further possibilities that may add to or detract from the rhetorical effectiveness of the RR. Even though these options vary from very rare to fairly uncommon, they are, nevertheless, worth some discussion.

The first is to make the request ostensibly conditional on availability (perhaps as a device for obviating the unpleasant surprise of being charged). There were just seven of these, all from North America and all in the Fogel corpus. This option is the only sub-element in the entire corpus that exhibited positional variability, five preceding the request and two succeeding it:

- Pre-request:* If available for distribution ...
- If available for free distribution ...
- If the following publication is available for distribution ...
- If a reprint is available ...
- If copies are available ...

- Post-request:* ... if available.
- ... if copies are available for distribution.

Next, the corpus produced but four instances (all from the US) of printed statements that referred to the uses to which the RR would be put:

- ... for current reference and permanent files. (2)
- ... for use in my research program.
- ... for use in my teaching and research.

Third, there is one instance of a RR that attempts to both justify response and yet empathize with the recipient of the RR. The card (from the Swales corpus) is unique in the amount of 'rhetorical work' it essays and for this reason the long and complex central element is worth quoting in full:

As an institution responsible for providing scientists and oncologists throughout the German Democratic Republic with medical literature we would be exceedingly grateful if you could send us a reprint, or if it should not be available, a photocopy of your article.

Knowing that such requests can become burdensome we wish to assure you, (sic) that your assistance will be most appreciated.

These optional additions are rare enough to suggest that most producers of RRs probably believe that such embellishments have little effect on response rate. However, where they are found they are clearly designed to increase goodwill.

Any such goodwill may, of course, be diminished by requests that are

considered unnecessarily onerous. It is for this reason that tagged-on requests for *other* papers present a potential problem for RR designers. Out of the 127 cards, 29 (23%) had these tagged requests, 20 of them coming from outside the US suggesting that in the USA such tags are seen as either unnecessary or unwarranted or self-defeating. Seventeen of the tags were attached to the request sentence, while 12 were following independent sentences. Most of the 17 had forms similar to one of the following:

- ... and reprints of related papers.
- ... and any other reprints on similar topics.
- ... as well as other related publications.

The use of a sentence boundary can perhaps be seen as creating a separating or distancing effect between the two requests, the use of two sentences being very common among the US cards. Even more interestingly, nine of the 12 independent sentences showed a switch into the passive, probably reinforcing by this means the separation of the requests into two classes. Typical examples are:

Copies of other papers on this and similar subjects would be appreciated.
(3)

Copies of related articles would also be appreciated. (2)

Finally, only one of the cards made any reference to a mailing list, but this was one of the few individually-duplicated cards ('Please place me on your mailing list'). Clearly, institutionally-produced cards do not want to engage their senders in such a commitment.

3. EXPRESSION OF THANKS

In 89 out of 127 cases (70%) the request was followed by an expression of thanks. In about half the instances gratitude was expressed by a short 'thank you' statement, whereas in the other half, gratitude was somewhat more elaborated. The results are given below.

TABLE IO. FORMULATIONS OF GRATITUDE (n = 127)

<i>Short</i> (45)		<i>Elaborated</i> (44)	
Thank you (very much)	32	Thank you for your courtesy	22
With (many) thanks	11	Thank you for this courtesy	6
(others)	2	Thank(ing) you in advance	6
		Thank you for your kindness	3
		Thank you for your consideration	3
		Thank(ing) you in anticipation	2
		(others)	2

The percentages of gratitude statements in Swales and Fogel I and II were almost identical (69–71%), but the European-dominated Swales sub-corpus showed a very different distribution of *short* versus *elaborated* to the two Fogel samples (with their preponderance of requests from North America). The figures are as follows (Table 11).

TABLE 11. DISTRIBUTION OF SHORT AND ELABORATED FORMS

	<i>Short</i>	<i>Elaborated</i>	<i>Total</i>
Fogel 1978	18	9	27
Fogel 1983	23	16	39
Swales 1985	4	19	23

Thus, assumed differences in level of formality between the US and Europe are also manifest in the language of reprint requests.

4. FORMS OF CLOSING SALUTATION (IN ENGLISH)

There was a printed closing salutation in 94 of the cards, but not in the other 33. The 94 break down as follows (Table 12).

TABLE 12. FORMS OF CLOSING SALUTATION (n = 127)

Sincerely yours	46
Yours (very) sincerely	19
Sincerely	17
Yours (very) truly	9
Yours faithfully	3

As can be expected, the greater predominance of American forms (*Sincerely yours*; *sincerely*) as opposed to British forms (*Yours sincerely*) primarily reflects the strong US provenance of the corpus and secondarily and less certainly, reflects the career experience of the individual non-native speaker researcher. The three 'yours faithfully' cards all came from Australia.

Apart from information about the return address (and very uncommon instructions such as 'cut and use stub for address') the printed RRs in the corpus essentially end at this point. Only four in fact carry additional elements. In two cases, there is reference to costs:

Please advise charges.

If costs are involved, please let me know before mailing.

The other two are designed to handle the contingency of non-availability:

If reprints are not available please return this card.

If reprints are not available please check here – and return card.

The paucity of such requests⁶ for actions other than the simple dispatch of the reprint reinforces the claim that the RR is a ‘one-shot’ interaction. And this is further confirmed by the existence in the corpus of three repeated cards from the same three individuals, the moral of the story being that if requesters do not succeed at first, they should send a second identical card.