

Genre Analysis in Applied Linguistics: A Critical Review and Integrative Perspective

Bashar Abdulkareem Alali 

Lecturer, Maaref University of Applied Sciences, Syria

Corresponding Author: e-mail: bashar.alali@mas.edu.sy

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Abstract— This article examines three traditions that have shaped genre analysis in applied linguistics: Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS), and the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approach. SFL treats genre as a staged social process realized through language choices. RGS treats it as social action situated inside a discourse community. ESP treats it as a communicative event built from recognizable rhetorical moves. Rather than cataloguing these three views side by side, as earlier reviews have tended to do, this article traces where recent scholarship has pushed the traditions closer together: corpus assisted genre analysis, multimodal and video genres, the politics of who gets to publish in English, and the arrival of generative AI as a genre producing tool have forced the three camps to borrow from one another whether they intended to or not. Building on that comparative work, the article proposes and operationalizes an integrative framework that treats genre simultaneously as a linguistic pattern, a rhetorical strategy, and a social action, and it names the empirical weaknesses each tradition still carries into that synthesis. It closes with implications for research and for the genre classroom.

Keywords— genre analysis, English for Specific Purposes, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Rhetorical Genre Studies, discourse communities, move analysis, generative AI, academic publishing.

Introduction

Genre analysis has long occupied a central place in ESP research and pedagogy. Over four decades, three traditions have developed around the concept (SFL, RGS, and ESP), each with its own vocabulary for what a genre is, what function it serves, and how it is learned. Hyland (2022) has described genre analysis as almost the most essential item in the ESP toolbox. What has changed, and changed rapidly, is the range of material genre analysts now confront. Research articles remain central, and Swales's move based description of them is still a staple of graduate methods training. But so are video abstracts, professional social media posts, science communication talks, peer review response letters, and a category of text that had no settled name a decade ago: writing that is partly human authored and partly machine generated, blended in ways not always visible to the reader. Most existing comparisons of the "three traditions", beginning with Hyon's (1996) influential account, were written before the objects genre analysts study had changed this much. A review from 2015 could

reasonably treat the research article as the paradigm case genre theory needed to explain. That is no longer a safe assumption. Video abstracts are now a standard submission requirement at a growing number of journals. Doctoral students are expected to produce genres that did not exist as recognizable, nameable genres when Swales wrote his original account of the research article. And a meaningful share of student and professional writing now passes through, or is partly generated by, a large language model before a human reader ever sees it.

1.1 Scope and Approach

The present article is a critical, integrative review. The review goes through close reading and synthesis of foundational texts in each tradition (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1985; Miller, 1984; Swales, 1990) supplemented by recent scholarship (2020–2026) identified through targeted search of the venues in which each tradition principally publishes: *English for Specific Purposes*, *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *Applied Linguistics*, *TESOL Quarterly*, and

the major rhetoric-and-composition and corpus-linguistics outlets, together with citation tracing from those sources. The selection is deliberately weighted toward post-2020 work, consistent with the review's central claim that the post-2020 landscape of multimodal genres, corpus-scale methods, and generative AI has outrun the earlier comparative literature. That weighting is a

stated methodological choice rather than an incidental gap, and it means the review should be read as an argument developed through illustrative cases rather than as an exhaustive survey of the period's genre scholarship. Table 1 situates the present review relative to prior "three traditions" syntheses, substantiating rather than merely asserting its claim to originality.

Table 1. This review compared with prior "three traditions" reviews

Prior Review	Primary Focus	Limitation This Review Addresses	This Review's Contribution
Hyon (1996)	Establishing SFL, RGS, and ESP as distinct traditions	Framed for a pre-digital, pre-AI genre landscape	Tracks where the traditions have since converged rather than treating them as permanently separate
Paltridge (2012)	Restates the three-traditions comparison for an ESP encyclopedia audience	Descriptive overview, not built to address multimodal or AI-mediated genres	Extends the comparison into video, multimodal, and AI-assisted genres with case-level detail
Devitt (2004)	Deepens RGS theory on its own terms	Does not engage SFL or ESP methods directly	Puts RGS in direct dialogue with SFL's linguistic detail and ESP's pedagogical method

The article is organized around eight main sections. Section 2 lays out the theoretical foundations of SFL, RGS, and ESP, and closes each subsection with an assessment of where that tradition's own empirical base is thin. Section 3 does the same for characteristic methods. Section 4 addresses the politics of who gets to write a genre "correctly" in a world where English

medium publishing dominates global scholarship. Section 5 turns to generative AI. Section 6 compares the three traditions directly, including a summary table. Section 7 operationalizes an integrative framework as a step by step analytical procedure rather than a mission statement. Section 8 closes with implications for research and pedagogy.

2. Theoretical Foundations of the Three Traditions

2.1 Systemic Functional Linguistics

SFL, developed by Michael Halliday and extended substantially by the Sydney School, treats genre as a staged, goal-oriented social process realized through language (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1985; Martin & Rose, 2008). Genre is located at the level of context of culture, distinct from register, which operates at the level of context of situation. Although this distinction appears settled in introductory accounts, it has generated sustained disagreement within the SFL literature. Alyousef and Alyahya's (2018) review of the SFL genre literature directly addressed this tension: Halliday links genre to mode, treating it as one of three register variables, whereas Martin coordinates all three variables with social purpose, effectively promoting genre to a stratum above register. The disagreement is consequential rather than terminological, since it determines what an analyst attends to first: register configuration, or the schematic stages through which a text moves toward its social purpose.

Three commitments hold the tradition together anyway. First, the metafunctional hypothesis: language simultaneously construes experience, enacts social relationships, and organizes discourse into a

coherent whole, so a genre is never just information delivery. Second, schematic structure: genres unfold through obligatory and optional stages. Third, a strong pedagogical commitment that grew out of work with Australian school students who had less informal exposure to academic registers than their peers; the tradition has never fully separated itself from that origin. A recent systematic review of genre-based pedagogy in EFL writing instruction traces this lineage and organizes it around the Teaching-Learning Cycle (Damayanti et al., 2023). Its own conclusion pushes back on a long-standing criticism (that teaching schematic structure explicitly turns writing instruction into a fill-in-the-stages exercise) by finding genre-based pedagogy consistently described in recent studies as flexible rather than prescriptive.

SFL has also moved into corpus territory, partly out of necessity: hand-coding a handful of texts for schematic stages does not scale, and it never gave analysts much purchase on frequency or typicality. Flowerdew's (2024) account of corpus-assisted discourse studies and corpus-based genre analysis shows these two corpus traditions sharing more analytical ground than either camp has usually acknowledged, which gives SFL analysts a way to check whether a schematic stage identified impressionistically actually recurs across a corpus.

2.1.1 Limitations of the SFL

The unresolved question of where genre sits relative to register carries practical consequences: two SFL-trained analysts examining the same text can disagree about the primary unit of analysis, and the tradition has not converged on a resolution across several decades of debate. Schematic-structure analysis was developed for comparatively short, linear written genres, and it is strained by long, recursive, or multi-threaded texts (for instance, a sustained scholarly exchange conducted asynchronously, or a genre that returns to earlier stages rather than proceeding sequentially). The multimodal extension of the method (Section 3.1) has made genuine progress, but it has also multiplied the number of interpretive judgments an analyst must make, a development not yet matched by comparable progress on inter-analyst reliability for those judgments.

2.2 Rhetorical Genre Studies

RGS grew out of North American composition and rhetoric scholarship and treats genres as typified rhetorical actions that respond to recurring situations (Devitt, 2004; Miller, 1984). Miller's (1984) essay "Genre as Social Action" still organizes how RGS scholars talk about genre forty years later: a genre is not a container filled with different content each time, but a form of social action a community does together by recognizing a recurring situation and responding to it conventionally.

The discourse community is central to this tradition, though the term itself is usually credited to Swales rather than to any core RGS theorist. Swales (1990) lays out a few defining criteria: shared goals, ways for newcomers to participate, one or more genres, and some threshold of expertise before you count as a member. RGS scholars build on this to argue that genres aren't neutral containers for information. They gatekeep who gets to contribute to a field, and they shape the identities of people learning to produce them. Bazerman (1994) makes a related point about genre systems: genres exist in networks with other genres, so you can't really understand a peer review report without understanding the manuscript it responds to, the journal guidelines shaping both, and the revision letter that eventually follows.

2.2.1 Limitations of the RGS

RGS's conceptual vocabulary (social action, discourse community, uptake) has proven durable in part because it is broad enough to accommodate almost any genre phenomenon retrospectively, and that same breadth makes the tradition more resistant to falsification than SFL's schematic-structure claims or ESP's move inventories. Much of the empirical RGS

literature is qualitative and ethnographic by design, a methodological choice consistent with the tradition's own account of what genre knowledge is, but one consequence is that RGS studies rarely yield claims a skeptical reader could check against an independent dataset in the way a move-frequency count or a transitivity profile can be checked. The tradition would be strengthened by greater explicitness about what evidence would count against its central claims, rather than treating each new case as further confirmation that genres are socially negotiated.

2.3 The ESP Approach

The ESP approach, developed most prominently by John Swales, focuses on the communicative purposes genres serve and the rhetorical strategies writers use to achieve them. Swales's work on research article introductions, culminating in the Create a Research Space (CARS) model, gave the field a durable method: break a text into functional moves, break each move into steps, and describe the linguistic signals writers use to accomplish each one (Swales, 1990, 2004). Bhatia (1993) extended this into an explicitly pedagogical program, arguing that genre analysis in ESP should feed directly into teaching materials rather than stay purely descriptive.

Move analysis has kept being refined, partly to address a weakness the method has had since Swales first proposed it: move boundaries are not always clean, and different analysts coding the same text do not always agree on where one move ends and the next begins. (Lam & Nnamoko, 2024) propose quantitative metrics (step-n-grams and step length) specifically to reduce that guesswork in biology research article introductions. Rau and Shih's (2021) evaluation of Cohen's kappa and other agreement statistics gives researchers a more defensible way to report how reliable their move annotations actually are, instead of asserting reliability without measuring it.

ESP has also expanded past its original core of research articles. Hyland and Jiang (2021) describe a field consolidated enough now to support increasingly technical, corpus-driven move analysis without losing its classroom orientation. Dong and Lu's (2020) study of discipline-specific genre competence tests that orientation directly: corpus-based genre analysis activities (where students search a discipline's own corpus for how a move is typically realized rather than memorizing generic signal phrases) measurably improved students' ability to write in the target genre.

2.3.1 Limitations of the ESP

Even accounting for the improvements proposed by Lam and Nnamoko (2024) and Rau and Shih (2021), move analysis remains a method whose reliability

depends heavily on how rigorously an individual study reports its coding procedure, and a considerable share of the published literature still does not report inter-rater agreement at all. A further, largely unaddressed pedagogical risk is that a method designed to be teachable can calcify into a checklist in classroom practice, notwithstanding explicit warnings against this outcome from the method's originators; the literature contains considerably more studies demonstrating that move-based instruction is effective than studies examining what students actually do with a genre once they have learned to identify its moves.

3. Methodological Orientations and Analytical Practices

3.1 Textual and Multimodal Analysis in SFL

SFL genre analysis proceeds by identifying a genre's schematic structure and then working down into the lexicogrammar that realizes each stage (transitivity choices, theme-rheme patterning, appraisal resources for stance) (Martin & Rose, 2008). The multimodal turn has stretched this toolkit furthest: contemporary texts draw on more than language, and SFL has had to track meaning distributed across image, layout, gesture, and sound, a harder analytical object because the semiotic resources involved do not share a common grammar. Xia's (2023) study of TED Talk videos as a genre of science popularization treats video as its own semiotic system, with a move structure distributed across speech, gesture, and visual staging. Classroom studies of digital multimodal composition apply software-assisted systemic functional analysis to student-produced videos, treating the multimodal challenge as something students can be taught to navigate rather than something researchers only analyze afterward.

3.2 Ethnographic and Contextual Methods in RGS

RGS methodology relies heavily on ethnography (interviews, observation, and the collection of surrounding artifacts with which a genre circulates) because the tradition treats genre as fully intelligible only within its social context. Textual analysis alone cannot account for why applicants write a grant proposal the way they do; that requires direct engagement with the people who write and review them. Bazerman's (1994) account of genre ecologies has aged well because it anticipated how interconnected genres would become: a manuscript, its reviews, the editor's decision letter, and the author's response-to-reviewers letter function as linked genres within a single system. Macari's (2024) study of doctoral students learning to write responses to reviewers (a working paper whose eventual journal placement could not be independently confirmed for this review) treats exactly this genre (one that exists

only because another genre generated it) as meriting instruction in its own right.

3.3 Move Analysis and Corpus Tools in ESP

Move analysis remains ESP's signature method and its most contested one, since boundary identification and inter-rater reliability have been persistent problems for as long as the method has existed. Corpus methods have complemented the qualitative core of move analysis for some time (Biber et al., 2007), and Khany and Malmir's (2020) move-marker inventory for research article abstracts ties specific, searchable vocabulary to specific rhetorical moves.

The most interesting recent extension is into genres that are not primarily written. Nav and Link (2025) analyzed video abstracts across three formats (graphical, whiteboard-animation, and talking-researcher) and found each realizes the rhetorical structure of an abstract differently depending on which semiotic mode carries the communicative work at a given moment. And then there is the most disruptive extension: move analysis used not to describe existing human writing but to steer machine-generated writing toward genre conventions. Wang (2024) built rhetorical genre analysis directly into ChatGPT prompting techniques for negative business messages and found that genre-informed prompts produced measurably more effective AI-generated output than generic prompts, in a controlled experiment with 85 participants. That is move analysis repurposed as an engineering tool, a use case none of the three traditions anticipated.

3.4 A Note on Disciplinary and Genre Variation

Genres do not sit still across disciplines. A move obligatory in one field can be optional or absent in another, and a schematic stage SFL analysts treat as canonical can shift shape once a genre travels into a new disciplinary home. Paltridge and Starfield (2020) trace this directly in thesis and dissertation writing, documenting the traditional monograph-style thesis giving ground in many fields to the thesis-by-publication, a hybrid genre borrowing its internal organization from the research article. You and You (2025) follow how genre knowledge built in an EAP classroom does or does not transfer once students move into an undergraduate research symposium, a genre borrowing features from both the conference presentation and the academic poster without being reducible to either. Their findings suggest genre knowledge is more situation-specific than a single move template can capture, which argues for treating any move analysis as provisional description rather than a permanent map of "the" genre.

4. Genre, Gatekeeping, and the Politics of Publication

None of the three traditions can be fully understood in practice apart from who gets to use a genre successfully and who gets shut out. This is where RGS's attention to discourse communities, ESP's attention to pedagogy, and a broader concern with linguistic justice converge. English-medium publishing dominates global scholarly communication, and that dominance functions as a genre gatekeeping mechanism whether or not journals intend it that way. A large-scale survey of journal policies in the biological sciences found most journals still fall well short of practices that would make publishing genuinely accessible to non-first-language-English scholars (allowing non-English abstracts, providing translation support at review), despite scientific knowledge being produced in many languages worldwide (Arenas-Castro et al., 2024). The genre conventions ESP and SFL describe so carefully are not neutral technical requirements; they are the terms on which a linguistically uneven system decides whose knowledge counts as publishable. Scholars whose research is methodologically sound can face systematic disadvantage at review because reviewers conflate unconventional phrasing with weak reasoning (a conflation genre theory would predict, since a text that violates a discourse community's rhetorical expectations reads as less credible to that community regardless of content). This is where the pedagogical stakes of genre-based instruction stop being abstract. If move analysis and schematic-structure teaching genuinely help students produce texts a target discourse community will accept, genre pedagogy is one of the more direct interventions available against a publishing system that otherwise penalizes writers for not already knowing conventions nobody explicitly taught them. Genre instruction functions, among other things, as a form of access.

5. Genre in the Age of Generative AI

Generative AI deserves its own section because it does not fit cleanly into any of the three traditions' existing accounts of how genre knowledge is acquired, and because the relevant literature has grown very fast in a short time (fast enough that a fair amount of it is still circulating as preprints, working papers, and web publications rather than peer-reviewed articles, a limitation this section tries to flag rather than paper over). All three traditions assume, in different ways, a human writer socialized into a discourse community: someone who has read enough instances of a genre, been corrected by an editor, or been coached by an advisor. A language model has none of that. It has statistical exposure to enormous numbers of texts but has not been embarrassed by a rejected manuscript. Prakash et al. (2025), analyzing a large set of abstracts

from the Web of Science, report that historical readability gaps between native- and non-native-English-speaking regions have been narrowing, with AI-assisted writing tools identified as one likely contributor alongside improved digital infrastructure. That narrowing is not an unambiguous win for genre theory. A convergence toward more uniform, more readable prose is also a convergence toward a statistically average register that does not map closely onto any single discourse community's locally negotiated norms, even as it reads as fluent on the surface (fluent output is not the same thing as output a specific discourse community will recognize as an authentic instance of its genre).

Wang's (2024) prompting study, discussed above, treats genre knowledge (specifically knowledge of moves and their conventional linguistic realizations) as an input that can be engineered into a prompt, and found that doing so improved output quality on a measurable scale. That is a new role for move analysis: not describing what expert writers already do, but supplying rhetorical knowledge a generation system lacks on its own. The RGS response is more skeptical, and probably needs to be taken just as seriously: if genre competence is inseparable from participation in a community, built through accumulated experience across genres and a career (Tardy, 2009), then no amount of prompt engineering substitutes for that participation, because prompting supplies formal and rhetorical knowledge without supplying judgment about when and how to deviate from convention.

Two established lines of theory outside genre studies proper are useful here and have not been given much space in prior genre reviews. Distributed cognition treats thinking and writing as accomplished across a system of people, tools, and artifacts rather than located entirely inside one mind (Hutchins, 1995); on that view, human-AI co-drafting is not obviously a departure from how writing has always worked, since writers have always distributed cognitive labor across notes, templates, editors, and reference texts. Sociomateriality pushes further, treating the tool itself as an active participant that shapes what gets written and how, not a neutral instrument a human writer simply operates (Orlikowski, 2007). Both frameworks complicate the RGS worry above: if writing has always been distributed and sociomaterial, the question is not whether AI participation counts as illegitimate outsourcing, but how a specific discourse community comes to recognize distributed, AI-assisted production as an acceptable version of its genre (which is an empirical question about community response, not a question that can be settled by theory alone).

What this leaves genre analysts with is an open empirical question rather than a settled position. Does AI-assisted writing represent a new hybrid genre with

its own emerging conventions that discourse communities are still deciding whether to accept? Or does it represent a threat to situated genre knowledge, producing fluent but community-blind text at scale?

The three traditions are likely to keep answering that differently: SFL by tracking how the lexicogrammar of AI-assisted texts differs measurably from human-authored ones, RGS by studying how communities are actually regulating AI-assisted submissions, ESP by asking whether genre-informed prompting can be taught as a skill in its own right. None of those research programs makes sense without the others, and none of them, at present, has produced enough peer-reviewed empirical work to settle the question either way. A further complication warrants attention here: the question of what happens to genre pedagogy once students know that a model can produce a passable instance of the genre they are being asked to learn. Part of the pedagogical case for teaching move structure explicitly has always rested on the argument that genre knowledge is hard-won and worth the effort because it opens doors (access to a discourse community, credibility with reviewers). If a student can get a fluent, move-complete draft from a prompt in seconds, some of that motivational logic weakens, even if the RGS-informed argument above is right that the draft still lacks situated judgment. A genre curriculum that stays honest with students needs to say both things at once: AI tools can already produce competent surface-level instances of many genres, and the harder, more valuable skill (knowing when a genre's conventions should be followed, bent, or broken for a specific audience) is exactly the part current models cannot reliably supply.

All maintain a real pedagogical stake in the outcome. Hyon's (1996) comparison (New Rhetoric, ESP, and the SFL based Sydney School) set the terms of this conversation, and Paltridge and Starfield (2020), writing more recently, arrives at essentially the same

conclusion: the three approaches developed independently but "have much to offer each other" (p. 45). This convergence was not primarily driven by scholars in different camps reading each other's journals and deciding to compromise. It was driven by researchers running into a genre their home tradition's toolkit could not fully explain and reaching, somewhat improvisationally, for concepts from elsewhere. An SFL trained researcher studying a video abstract cannot avoid asking questions about audience uptake and disciplinary reception that sound like RGS questions, even without citing RGS scholarship directly. That is a more durable kind of convergence than a citation driven rapprochement, because it does not depend on scholars choosing to read across traditions (it is forced by the genres themselves).

6. Comparative Analysis: Convergences and Divergences

6.1 Where the Traditions Agree

The three traditions share several commitments despite different starting points. All treat genre as fundamentally social. All care about purpose, whether labeled social action (RGS), a communicative goal achieved through moves (ESP), or a staged social process (SFL).

6.2 Key Differences

The differences remain real. SFL analysts stay close to the linguistic surface, producing a transitivity profile of every clause in a way an ESP move analysis will not attempt. RGS scholars stay close to the social surface, treating ethnographic understanding of a community as at least as important as close reading of any single text it produces. ESP researchers stay close to the pedagogical surface, mapping moves in a way explicitly designed to be teachable, sometimes at the cost of the descriptive detail SFL analysts would consider essential.

Table 2. The three traditions compared

	SFL	RGS	ESP
View of genre	Staged social process realized in language	Typified rhetorical action responding to a recurring situation	Communicative event built from recognizable moves
Primary unit of analysis	Schematic stage; clause-level lexicogrammar	The discourse community and its uptake of a genre	The rhetorical move and its steps
Characteristic method	Textual/multimodal analysis; corpus-assisted register work	Ethnography, interview, artifact collection	Move analysis, increasingly corpus-supported
Chief strength	Fine-grained, checkable linguistic description	Explains why genres change and who they exclude	Directly teachable; adapts quickly to new genres
Chief weakness	Internal disagreement on genre's place relative to register; strains on long or non-linear texts	Broad, hard-to-falsify vocabulary; thin on independently checkable evidence	Move boundaries remain reliability-prone; risk of checklist teaching
Pedagogical implication	Explicit staging gives non-native-register students a way into academic writing	Teach the community's expectations, not just the text's form	Give students a teachable, move-based entry point into a genre

These differences carry through into how each tradition handles genre change, which generative AI has made unavoidable. SFL tends to treat genre change as slow and system-level. RGS treats instability as the interesting part from the start. ESP sits between the two: pragmatic enough to update its move models quickly once a genre visibly changes (as it has for video abstracts and now AI-assisted writing), but still oriented toward giving learners something stable enough to teach in a semester.

7. Toward an Integrative Framework

None of the three traditions, alone, handles a genuinely contemporary hybrid genre well, and that is the strongest practical argument for integration. A video abstract needs SFL's multimodal toolkit to describe how meaning moves across image, speech, and layout; RGS's ethnographic sensibility to understand why researchers make these videos and how disciplinary communities are receiving them; and ESP's move-based method to say something concrete and teachable about their rhetorical structure. The same three-way need shows up for AI-assisted genres: Wang's (2024) finding that genre-informed prompting improves ChatGPT output is itself an argument for combining ESP's move knowledge with RGS's awareness of what a specific discourse community will accept as legitimate, since a move can be technically present and still fail if it reads as foreign to the target community. Rather than leaving that claim at the level of a programmatic statement, the following procedure operationalizes it as an analytical sequence applicable to a new or hybrid genre.

1. **Identify the genre and its home discourse community (RGS).** Before any text is coded, establish who produces and receives this genre, what recurring situation it responds to, and what is at stake for participants if the genre is performed badly. This step supplies the criterion against which later steps get judged: a move or a lexicogrammatical choice only counts as successful if this community would recognize it as such.
2. **Map the schematic structure and its linguistic realization (SFL).** Identify obligatory and optional stages, and for a multimodal genre, extend this mapping across image, speech, and layout rather than text alone. Where the genre is corpus-scale, check impressionistic stage identification against frequency data (Flowerdew, 2024) rather than relying on a handful of hand-coded examples.
3. **Segment the text into moves and steps, and report reliability (ESP).** Apply move analysis at a finer grain than the schematic stages identified in Step 2, using quantitative boundary-checking methods where available (Lam & Nnamoko, 2024) and reporting inter-rater agreement (Rau &

Shih, 2021) rather than asserting it.

4. **Return to the community and check uptake (RGS again).** This is the step most integrative proposals skip. A move that is present and correctly staged can still be rejected by the target community if it is realized in a way that reads as inauthentic; the check has to be empirical, through interview, reviewer comment analysis, or observed community response, not inferred from the text alone.

Translate the findings into teachable material (ESP again). Ask, at every stage, whether what has been described could be taught to someone entering the community for the first time, and if the answer is no, treat that as a finding about the limits of the analysis rather than a problem to paper over.

The value of running the steps in this order, rather than treating the three traditions as options to blend impressionistically, is that each step constrains the next. Step 2's linguistic description is checked against Step 1's community criterion; Step 3's move segmentation is checked against Step 4's uptake evidence; and Step 5 forces the whole analysis back toward the pedagogical question that all three traditions, in their own way, claim to care about.

8. Implications for Research and Pedagogy

8.1 Research Directions

Several directions stand out as genuinely underdeveloped. First, sustained empirical research on genres that resist analysis from a single tradition, following the model of existing multimodal genre work (Nav & Link, 2025; Xia, 2023) but extending outside the STEM fields where most of it has concentrated. Second, continued attention to how AI tools are reshaping genre production, treated as a site of genre change rather than only a threat to academic integrity (Wang's (2024) approach is one useful model, but it needs pairing with empirical study of how discourse communities are actually responding to AI-assisted submissions in practice, not only in policy statements, and ideally published in peer-reviewed venues rather than the working papers and web publications this review has had to rely on for parts of Section 5). Third, continued refinement of move analysis methodology, building on Lam and Nnamoko (2024) and Rau and Shih (2021), so findings across studies become genuinely comparable. Fourth, research that treats genre conventions explicitly as gatekeeping mechanisms and asks what would make academic publishing more linguistically inclusive without abandoning disciplinary genre norms altogether (Arenas-Castro et al. (2024) survey is a useful empirical starting point, but the genre-analysis literature has been slow to connect its own descriptive

findings to the concrete consequences those norms have for who gets published).

8.2 Pedagogical Applications

Genre teaching that stops at "here are the moves" leaves out two things students need: some understanding of why a target community accepts these particular moves and rejects others, and enough exposure to real disciplinary language to see how moves get realized in practice. Hyland's (2024) argument for corpus-based instruction addresses this directly, and Dong and Lu (2020) back it with outcome data rather than argument alone.

But corpora alone will not teach rhetorical flexibility, and flexibility is what students need most as genres keep shifting under them. Following Tardy's (2009) account of gradual, accumulated genre knowledge, students need sustained practice recognizing when a genre's conventions are being followed, bent for effect, or broken in a way the target community will not tolerate. Acar's (2023) account of genre pedagogy as a support for teachers' own assessment literacy points toward one practical route: teachers trained to notice degrees of convention-following, rather than treating a genre as pass-fail, are better positioned to give students feedback that builds real rhetorical judgment. That judgment is going to matter more, not less, as students draft with AI tools whose output looks fluent but may miss what a specific discourse community actually expects.

9. Conclusion

SFL, RGS, and ESP each answer a different question about genre: how meaning gets realized in the details of language, how communities use genre as a form of social action, and how writers achieve communicative purposes through recognizable, teachable moves. The three traditions have not merged over four decades of parallel development, and there is no obvious reason they should merge now. But the genres analysts are actually being asked to explain today do not respect the disciplinary boundaries the three traditions grew up within, and none of the three handles those genres particularly well alone. The five-step procedure proposed in Section 7 is an attempt to make that integration something a researcher can actually run, not just agree with in principle (and, given how much of the AI-related literature reviewed here is still unsettled or not yet peer-reviewed, the procedure is offered as a starting point for testing, not a finished method).

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About the author

Dr. Bashar Abdulkareem Alali holds a PhD in English Language Studies from the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). He is currently the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences at Maaref University of Applied Sciences, Syria, where he also teaches undergraduate students. In addition, he teaches undergraduate students at Idlib University and postgraduate students at the Higher Institute of Languages, Idlib University. With over a decade of experience in English language teaching, teacher training, translation, and higher education, his academic and professional career spans institutions in Syria and Malaysia. His research interests include applied linguistics, genre analysis, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English language teaching (ELT), corpus linguistics, tourism discourse, academic writing, and the integration of generative artificial intelligence in language education. He has published in peer-reviewed journals and international conference proceedings on topics related to genre-based discourse analysis, corpus-assisted language research, tourism promotional texts, and AI-assisted learning.



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