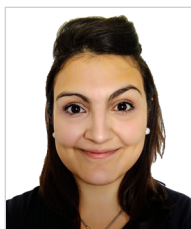# Professional genres in disciplinary training: the case of the Bachelor of Communication Degree

Géneros profesionales en la formación disciplinar: el caso de la licenciatura en Comunicación

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Abstract:

The research project we present aims to contribute to a gap in professional genre studies. It focuses on those genres used in professional performance within the sphere of Communication Sciences to create teaching programmes according to the requirements of this specific field of work.

Keywords:

Professional genres; communication; specialized literacy.

Resumen:

El proyecto de investigación que presentamos se propone aportar a un área no investigada en los estudios sobre géneros profesionales, centrando su atención en aquellos empleados en el desempeño profesional dentro del ámbito de la comunicación, a fin de generar propuestas de enseñanza acordes a las exigencias del campo laboral.

Palabras clave:

Géneros profesionales; comunicación; alfabetización especializada.

1. Presentation and objectives of the project

There is a long tradition of addressing genres in the academic sphere, both internationally and locally. Professional genres, which is the study of similar genres in Spanish speaking countries, have been studied extensively at a local level in recent decades. In this context, most of these studies have analysed the specific professional genres in areas such as Medicine, Engineering, Economics, and Management, as well as Arts and History, among others. However, they have not focused on communication as a specific professional field.

The bibliographic review shows that there are works that describe and analyze some of the genres communicators use; however, these works mainly come from the field of Journalism. Therefore they do not examine the wide variety of written and oral texts, which are typically produced by communication graduate professionals.

The project we present is carried out in the University Salesiana (UNISAL), which is based in Bahía Blanca (Argentina), and it is the only institution in the city that has a Degree in Communication. The project is currently funded by the University's Research Secretariat (RES. CS. N°04/2019).

As Social Communication research such as Intriago Macías' and Quevedo Arnaiz's (2016) show, in recent decades, education models –although not always formally based on their curricula– have focused on promoting the development of different skills in the professional field. These skills go beyond the contents acquired throughout education; reading, writing, and speaking are some of the skills we can find among them. In this sense, the guiding purpose of this research is to address the problem of professional genres in the Bachelor of Arts in Communication to design a representative corpus of oral and written texts that graduates will have to understand and produce throughout their professional career.

This is relevant because it is precisely the mastery of a discursive community's texts, which allows students to become a part of it (Cassany, 2010). We focus on the texts that have not yet been studied or those that have been considered less, which also form part of a communication worker's daily professional tasks because texts, according to Bazerman and Paradis (1991), maintain professions' organisation, power, and activity. This is the case of verbal modality genres produced interprofessionally and among professionals and non-expert members of the community.

Professionals are required to have an effective command of the discourses generated by their activities as society is becoming increasingly specialized; therefore, these forms of communication must be examined (López Ferrero, 2002: 196). To be able to consolidate these competencies and train professionals that are prepared for their work in the field, it is essential to gain detailed knowledge of the material produced both at university and in a professional's daily working life (Parodi, 2015: 77).

Parodi emphasizes the need for research "based on a corpus of broad, ecological and diversified texts" (Parodi and Burdiles, 2015: 32) in the study of academic and professional genres. Only then will it be possible to form a solid empirical basis for specialized literacy (Parodi, 2015), which is the ultimate goal of this research.

The objective of this project is to contribute to strengthening professional writing and oral skills in the Bachelor of Communication.

Among the specific aims are the following: To create a representative corpus of the standard genres in a communication graduate's professional field and to promote the creation of teaching and evaluation tools by the different chairs according to the work demands and the profile of communicators trained at UNISAL.

2. Background

The studies on academic and professional genres have primarily focused on the written texts from various disciplines. The first investigations were carried out in the Anglo-Saxon sphere by Swales (1990), Bazerman and Paradis (1991), Bathia

(2013), and Trosborg (2000). In Spain, we note López Ferrero's (2002) and Cassany and López Ferrero's (2010) contributions concerning professional literacy practices and the need for university preparation to promote resources and skills that allow students to master professional practices effectively. In South America, particularly in Chile, we highlight the research carried out by Parodi (2008, 2010) and Parodi and Burdiles (2015) regarding the genre manual and other disciplinary texts in diverse areas. In Argentina, Ciapuscio's (1994) contributions concerning text types and the definition, characterisation, and classification of specialized texts must be highlighted, as well as those of Cubo de Severino (2005) and her research group's, which is internationally renowned for its studies on the academic and scientific discourse genres. The project directed by Bosio at the National University of Cuyo follows this line, in which verbal communication events framed within the academic sphere have been incorporated into the university's corpus. On the other hand, Navarro has produced numerous works in which he addresses teaching professional genres at university in Economics and Management (2010, 2018) as well as the problem of addressing professional discourses (2012) and disciplinary literacy (2017). Finally, we highlight Vallejos' (2000 and 2004) and Castro Fox's and Vallejos' (2013) studies on the scientific-educational discourse in Bahía.

Professional genres have also been examined within the research on communication in the workplace and institutional discourse. Among them, we highlight the authors Mumby and Clair (2001) and Gunnarson (2001). From a sociolinguistic analysis perspective, Holmes and Stubbe (2003) analyze various courtesy strategies within work communication, while Arminen (2005), Heritage and Clayman (2010), Pickering, Frinigal and Staples (2016) address professional interaction in various domains. Within the framework of the studies carried out in Latin America, Rebeil Corella and Ruiz Sandoval Reséndiz (1998) deal with different aspects related to communication in companies. Regarding the Spanish from Buenos Aires, which is our dialectical variety, we highlight Julián's work (2015, among others). Her work addresses the manifestations of (dis)courtesy in public attention posts in institutions in the city of Bahia Blanca.

Moreover, some professional genres are analysed within the framework of Spanish as a specialist language. In this sense, Gómez de Enterría Sánchez's (2009) contributions concerning written and verbal communication in companies are significant. Finally, we are interested in Amado's study (2010) about the press, regarding communication management in organizations and information generation. However, there are no works that specifically address discipline genre problems within the field of Communication.

The professional facet of the communicator's work has been studied. On the one hand, Intriago Macías' and Quevedo Arnaiz's (2016) and Juárez's (2017) works address the communicator's professional identity, on the other hand, Vásquez Donoso's, Marroquin Velásquez's and Ángel Botero's (2018) and Zarowsky's and Justo von Lurzer's (2018) works outline the main lines of research in communication in Latin America, specifically in Argentina.

This summary shows that the research carried out thus far has focused on the professionally written genres and that there is to the best of our knowledge –no proposal like ours–, which addresses the design of a corpus of texts (verbal and written) in the Bachelor of Communication.

3. Theoretical Framework

The conceptual context of this study and its methodological framework is flexible given that new unforeseen situations connected to the subject of study may arise. This may result in changes to the hypotheses and aims, as well as other data collection and processing techniques (Vasilachis, 2006: 67).

The research is carried out from a pragmatic-sociocognitive approach (Heinemann and Vieghweger, 1991; Bathia, 2014; Parodi, 2010, 2015; Parodi and Burdiles, 2015). It proposes a multilevel approach to professional genres, since a classification that considers only one criterion does not allow us to account for the complexity and dynamism of the features that characterize the genres.

Regarding genres, we adhere to the guidelines proposed by Bathia (2013, 2014), Cassany (2006), Parodi (2015), and Navarro (2012). In this sense, we understand genres as cognitive constructs that are articulated integrally in three dimensions: cognitive, social, and linguistic. These constitute constellations of potentialities for discursive conventions, supported by speakers' and listeners' previous knowledge based on constrictions and contextual, social, and cognitive parameters (Parodi, 2015: 26). They are varieties of a language that operate through sets of linguistic-textual features systematically co-occurring through the plots of a text. They are linguistically circumscribed according to different factors such as communicative purposes, participants involved, fields of use, electronic devices, and media, among others (*ibíd*).

In this context, Parodi places professional genres within specialized discourse along with academic genres, both form a continuum that allows for the articulation of learning combined with specific professional practice. Likewise, we share Navarro's (2012) conception of this subject even though he prefers the term "professional discourse," we consider professional genres to be "the set of discursive genres that carry out the organisation's specific objectives, where they circulate. These constitute discursive practices that are standardised and institutionally regulated" (2012: 1297-1298).

On the other hand, the interactional dimension will be one of the main points of analysis since, as Gómez de Enterría Sánchez highlights, this "will contribute powerfully to facilitating all the extralinguistic meanings that are put into practice during the communicative exchange, as well as all the symbolism that arises from the relationship between language and culture within each specialization field" (2009: 130); especially given the nature of the production and circulation contexts of the genres studied, in particular verbal modality.

In this sense, we adhere to the Interactional Sociolinguistics' (Gumperz, 1982 y 2001; Tannen, 2004), and the Sociocultural Pragmatics' (Bravo and Briz, 2004) guidelines and we incorporate theoretical notions corresponding to the Analysis of Institutional Discourse (Prego Vázquez, 1998; Drew and Sorjonen, 2001; Benwell and Stokoe, 2006; Heritage and Clayman, 2010).

4. Methodological considerations

López Ferrero states that in order "to account for the complexity of the construction and interpretation of the genres produced in professional contexts, it is necessary to build bridges between different methodologies" (2002: 195). Thus, following the theoretical framework above, we work with the methodological guidelines for the multilevel models

previously mentioned, as well as collection and data processing techniques from the field of interactional Sociolinguistics and Sociocultural Pragmatics.

A combination of data collection techniques is used to build the corpus of analysis:

- The observer participants technique in various fields where communication professionals work: companies, state and administrative organizations, commercial institutions, media, development companies, youth groups, etc.
- Semi-structured interviews with professionals who have communication roles within the framework of the domains mentioned above.
- Source analysis: texts by professionals aimed both at others from different disciplines and members of the community at large (both within and outside the institutions); manuals created by consulting firms, etc.

It is essential to highlight, as Navarro also argues (2012), that we aspire to work together with researchers and writers in the professional community addressed. The texts collected during fieldwork are intended to make up a sample of the original language, and for this reason, they are neither manipulated or adapted.

The integration of essential tools from the area of Corpus Linguistics (Wynne, 2004; O'Keeffe y McCarthy, 2010) for data processing and subsequent design of the corpus with its respective classifications and the guidelines proposed in this sense for the analysis of specialized discourses by Parodi (2007) are also needed. Likewise, contributions are incorporated from the proposals outlined in Bosio and Sacerdote (2018) and Bosio, Castro, and Cubo (2018).

The data collection and the corpus processing and design parameters include the internal characteristics of the texts and the extra linguistic context in which they are produced and circulate. They are presented below in a tentative list, subject to future revisions, and are based on the results of the fieldwork.

- Contextual and situational aspects: (macro)communicative purpose or function, the scope of circulation (media, company, administrative, commercial, state); spatial-temporal coordinates (deferred, mediated or face-to-face communication); medium**;** participants involved (social characteristics –age, gender, birthplace, mother tongue–; the level of expertise-layman or not); position held-director, manager, employee-; social roles-symmetrical/asymmetrical, near/far-); the history of the genre.
- Discursive aspects: information contained and development; organization of the information; intensification or weighting, attenuation; modality; specific communication maxims.
- Lexical-grammatical elements: use of particular terminology; syntactic structures that characterize it; appropriate use of punctuation; potential change of code or method of lexical loans.

Regarding the strategies for access to different institutions where the fieldwork is carried out, respective authorizations for personal interviews and formal requests are requested from the directors and people in charge. A signature of informed consent from the professionals who decide to participate in the research is also required. In all cases, different anonymisation techniques are used to preserve their anonymity (Sampson, 2000; De- Matteis, 2014; Cantamutto and Vela Delfa, 2015).

The main contribution of the proposal is the incorporation of genres that are not well explored, either because their context of production has not been of interest in the investigations –as may be the case of genres produced within the framework of neighborhood associations–, due to difficulties in access (as may be the case regarding texts produced within some companies) or because this type of approach has mainly been linked to the written field, thus relegating verbal genres.

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