Working with undergraduate students of Translation with a genre-based approach

Paula Tavares Pinto PAIVA
UNESP/FCLAr
paulapaiva@fclar.unesp.br

Abstract

Research articles in national and international journals provide abstracts usually written in English. This paper discusses the importance of working with this sub-genre with future researchers and translators during their university years. Two concepts of genre are presented (SWALES, 1990; BATHIA, 1993), as well as an approach on how to introduce academic genre to undergraduate students. After applying this approach to a mini-course about academic writing, we have noted that translation students have been more attentive to the way they deal with texts based on communicative purposes, tasks, target readers and language.

Keywords: genre; scientific abstracts; undergraduate Translation students.

Resumo

Artigos científicos publicados em revistas nacionais e internacionais apresentam resumos geralmente escritos em língua inglesa. Este artigo discute a importância de se ensinar este subgênero a futuros pesquisadores e tradutores durante seus anos na universidade. Dois conceitos de gênero são apresentados (BATHIA, 1993, SWALES, 1990), assim como uma abordagem sobre a introdução de gênero a alunos universitários. Após utilizarmos essa abordagem durante um minicurso sobre escrita acadêmica, notamos que os alunos do curso de Tradução têm prestado mais atenção na maneira com que lidam com estes textos com base em seus propósitos comunicativos, tarefas, leitores-alvo e língua.

Palavras-chave: gênero; resumos científicos; estudantes universitários de Tradução.

1. Introduction

Regarding scientific texts, it is already known that if a researcher wants to have his work recognized worldwide, he must submit articles to, not only national, but also international scientific journals that will decide whether his work is relevant enough to be published. These researchers often lead groups composed of graduate and undergraduate students who, as a team, write articles to be submitted to journals. When these researchers do not write their articles themselves, they turn to professional translators or undergraduate students of translation courses so as to have their texts rendered into another language. In these cases, it is important to learn how to write appropriate texts for specific readers so that the information will reach its target audience successfully. Scientific journals, read by researchers around the world, have become the most required means of divulging new discoveries since, as pointed out by Coracini (2001), these publications are directed to specialists who must be persuaded of the validity and scientific rigor of the research described. Therefore, the information must be presented in an acceptable structure.

It should be added that, not only it is crucial for researchers to publish their articles in scientific journals, but it is also essential that, at least, their abstracts be written in English as stated by Swales and Feak (2009):

> The increasing number of people in today´s Anglophone research world who do not have English as their first language has meant that the traditional distinction between native speakers and non-native speakers (NNS) of English is collapsing. Today, the more valid and valuable distinctions are between senior researchers and junior researchers, on the one hand, and between those who have a broad proficiency in research English across the four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking and those with a narrow proficiency largely restricted to the written mode, on the other hand (SWALES; FEAK, 2009, p. xi).

Based on the statements above, the aim of this article is to

show a way of introducing academic genre to undergraduate students of English based on the works of Bathia (1993) , Swales (1990; 1992) and Swales and Feak (2009) . In order to do so, we have divided this article into five parts: (1) Defining genre; (2) The importance of publishing scientific papers in English; (3) The role of abstracts in scientific papers; (4) A class report; and, (5) Discussion and conclusions.

2. Defining genre

Whenever interpreting or producing a text, the genre involved should be taken into consideration and this conception has been extensively discussed by several scholars in the area of Literature. The definition of genre presented by Swales (1990) has been widely used in studies of the kind and is presented as:

> Genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style. Communicative purpose is both a privileged criterion and one that operates to keep the scope of a genre as here conceived narrowly focused on comparable rhetorical action. In addition to purpose, exemplars of a genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience (SWALES, 1990, p.58).

Swales (1990) enumerates some items that could be taken as guidelines when producing an academic text. This author identifies properties and concepts of a genre-based approach and, by doing so, he describes the value of considering discourse communities[1] and communicative purposes when writing or analyzing texts. Discussing

---

[1] *Discourse community* mean a community in which the members share communicative purposes and work towards sets of common goals (ARANHA, 2002).

academic discourse, Swales emphasizes the importance of teaching genre to students. He lists the following items to be considered when dealing with genre: (a) a genre is a class of communicative events; (b) these events must share a set of communicative purposes; (c) a genre is recognized by members of parent discourse communities since they know what to expect in a text and are used to the constraints of choice of content and style; (d) genre is transferrable and recurrent; e) the use of a discourse community's nomenclature is very important.

When discussing language competence, Canale (1983) mentions the role of genre within a communicative approach which, according to him, should respond to the needs and interests of learners. In this case, the needs of researchers and translators would be to write academic texts and to publish them in renowned journals. The author highlights the relevance of mastering discursive competence which he defines in the following way:

> This type of competence concerns mastery of how to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different genres. By genre is meant the type of text: for example, oral and business letter, and a set of instructions each represent a different genre. (CANALE, 1983, p. 9).

As highlighted by Canale, it is crucial that, when writing a text of a certain genre, one be aware of the kind of task he is performing. We believe that those characteristics of academic writing should be pointed out to or perceived by researchers and translators during their time at university. We can say that these individuals, in their future professional careers, should know not only the language they are dealing with when writing academic texts, but also the communicative and linguistic mechanisms of the specific genre involved.

In his 1993 study , Bathia discusses the contextual configuration of research article abstracts and introductions based on genre. According to the author, although abstracts and introductions seem to have the same purpose, i.e., to introduce a research study, "the two seemingly similar genres are very different in their communicative purposes, and, hence, are instances of different genres" (BATHIA, 1993, p. 76). While the introduction describes the research proposed in

a more elaborate way, the abstract includes some indication of the conclusions. Both sub-genres, according to the author, have "very different communicative purposes, and should, therefore, display different cognitive structuring, so that they remain distinct as genres" (BATHIA, 1993, p. 77).

Having introduced the statements and concepts above,, we will present the view of other authors who point out the importance of publishing scientific papers in English and teaching genre to (future) researchers and (future) translators at university level.

3. The importance of publishing scientific papers in English

According to Volpato (2003), people only learn how to write texts for renowned scientific journals through practice and proper guidance during the process. Volpato (2003) also highlights the importance of having research work submitted to international journals since they will then compete with scientific work developed by specialists all over the world. Regarding this aspect, the author points out that a researcher will often look for someone who is proficient in English, such as a teacher or someone who has lived in an English-speaking country for many years in order to translate or proofread his text. However, although these individuals often know the language well, they may be unaware of some important characteristics related to scientific language. This lack of awareness is also underlined in a study carried out by Aranha (2002, p. 112), in which the author states that even translators "may not be aware of genre constraints of the scientific language and of the expectations of specific scientific communities". She adds that if the individual is not part of a certain discourse community, he will lack "background knowledge" which would help him understand a paper from a specific area. Thus, the author's work presents some evidence of translation flaws due to specificities of genre, register and syntax.

Nowadays, in different research areas, we can see that when it comes to scientific publications, it is common knowledge that if a researcher wants to make his work widely known, he should publish it in journals which, almost always, will require the whole paper or, at

least, the abstract to be published in English. According to Nida (1992), ninety percent of scientific publications are in English. The author states that:

> Journals are multiplying at an enormous rate throughout the scholarly world. And as one can readily see from journal articles, there is a rapidly growing academic jargon in each of the sub-disciplines. Specialized activities and ideas inevitably give rise to a proliferation of in-group dialects, as symbols of belonging and as means of internal communication. (NIDA, 1992, p. 484).

Although in some countries, e.g. Brazil, there is still a policy on publishing original articles in the country's native language, certain areas, especially those related to Biological sciences have increasingly encouraged researchers to submit their articles in English and have their own professional translators to review these articles. In this case, it is important for (future) translators to be aware of the text constraints which are related to the academic style, terminology and genre. One aspect is certain when dealing with scientific papers. Most of them will have abstracts that comply with the specificities of this sub-genre. This considered, the next section of this paper will state some characteristics of this short text (abstract),which can be presented and dealt with in university courses.

4. The role of abstracts in scientific papers

In his study, Nida (1992) also points out the significance of abstracts within academic publications. These short texts provide details of the research presented in the scientific journal and so by looking at them readers can quickly decide whether a certain article interests them or not. For this reason, Nida (1992, p. 483) adds that "summaries [abstracts] should not only indicate what an article is about, but they should also say something about the relevance of what is being discussed."

For the reasons previously stated, we believe that abstracts

written in English should be carefully studied by future researchers and students of translation who will eventually work with this academic sub-genre. In the case of Brazilian researchers and translators this issue is mandatory given the results of a study carried out by Johns (1991), from the University of Birmingham, who found that, although Brazilian scholars have been engaged in important research, many English-speaking individuals in the scientific community have not been able to understand their studies from the abstracts. After analyzing 100 abstracts written by Brazilian researchers and translated into English in the fields of Biology, Medicine, Engineering and Social Studies, he noted that most did not communicate well the kind of work that had been done in the research. He observed that, although the subject of the studies aroused interest among British researchers, they could not clearly understand the kind of work that had been carried out by the Brazilians. This could be the reason for some of the Brazilian abstracts being rejected by international journals.

Based on the same opinion, we add the ideas of Kay and Duddley-Evans (1998, *apud* Aranha, 2004) for whom teaching genre will help us know what kinds of discourses students should be producing and the social contexts and purposes involved.

Several studies have been carried out on the characteristics of abstracts in different areas. Below is the definition provided by Bathia (1993, p. 78):

> An abstract, as commonly understood, is a description or factual summary of the much longer report, and is meant to give the reader an exact and concise knowledge of the full article. It contains information on the following aspects of the research that it describes: what the author did; how the author did it; what the author found; what the author concluded.

According to this author, an abstract should provide four moves: (a) an introduction of the topic; (b) a description of the methodology; (c) a summary of the results; and (d) a presentation of the conclusions.

When *introducing the topic*, the author's article should indicate his thesis or hypothesis and must include goals or objectives of the

research or the problem he is to discuss.

In *describing methodology*, the author should include information on data, procedures or methods used in his work.

The next move is called *summarizing results* and is considered important as the author must mention his observations and findings, as well as suggest solutions for the problems stated in his work.

The last move is called *presenting conclusions* and should provide an interpretation of the results and include some indications of the author's findings.

Since we are going to discuss a mini-course which was given to students of Translation based on medical texts, we have selected an abstract in the field of Orthopedics to show the four moves presented by Bathia (Fig. 1):

In the abstract in Figure 1, the four moves proposed by Bhatia (1993) have been included between brackets. In (1), the author introduces the purpose of his study (move 1: introducing the purpose); in (2) he describes the procedures adopted (move 2: describing methodology); following this, in (3), the author summarizes the results of his study (move 3: summarizing results); and then, in (4), he provides the conclusions (move 4: presenting conclusions).

The following subsection of this article will present a mini-course whose main purpose was to discuss different text types, genre and terminology related to the Medical area.

[MOVE 1] The authors present a prospective intraoperative evaluation of the articular wear pattern of the first metatarsal, tibial and fibular sesamoids, and base of the proximal phalanx of 166 feet undergoing hallux valgus surgery. [MOVE 2] The collected data were compared with various clinical parameters and radiographic measurements to determine if any of these variables can predict the incidence and location of articular erosion. [MOVE 3] The incidence and predictability of the location of the articular erosion increased significantly as the patient's age ($P = .000$), intermetatarsal angle 1–2 ($P = .004$), hallux abductus angle ($P = .000$), tibial sesamoid position ($P = .016$), and proximal articular set angle ($P = .02$) increased. The association of foot type (i.e., digital length pattern), metatarsal protrusion distance, metatarsal head shape, and hallux abductus interphalangeus was not significant. [MOVE 4] Therefore, preoperative

---

clinical parameters (i.e., age) and radiographic measurements (ie, intermetatarsal angle 1–2, hallux abductus angle, tibial sesamoid position, and proximal articular set angle) can directly define the incidence and location of articular erosion and are helpful in the preoperative assessment of the hallux valgus deformity. In addition, nearly every first metatarsophalangeal joint evaluated had some degree of articular erosion and, in certain circumstances (i.e., advanced age and increased proximal articular set angle), it was universal and extensive.

Figure 1. Abstract of an Orthopedics study
showing the four moves proposed by Bathia (1993)

5. A class report

This section presents a report on a mini-course on academic genre taught at a private Brazilian university to students of Translation and Interpretation. It is important to mention that this course was offered because there is a Medical university in the same city and so medical students frequently require (future) translators to translate their abstracts into English.

The mini-course consisted of six classes of 50 minutes each, held over two days. First, students were divided into groups of four and given different texts, without titles, but all related to Cardiology. They were then asked to identify the texts according to their purposes. After having read the texts and discussed their characteristics, such as language used, layout and content, they were able to identify the communicative purpose of each one and, therefore, recognized them as: (1) an advertisement; (2) a prescription for patients with cardiac problems, (3) part of the history of Cardiology in Brazil; (4) the conclusion of an article; and (5) an abstract. By doing this exercise, students had the chance to discuss register, discourse community and communicative purpose without any prior instruction.

After that, an abstract in Portuguese and another in English were given to the students in order to introduce the four moves proposed by Bathia (1993). They were asked to work individually and indicate whether the moves could be identified in both texts and where they were found in each abstract.

Students were also asked to discuss which characteristics found in scientific texts could make them difficult to translate into another language. Among all the characteristics suggested, those presented by Nida (1992) were mentioned in one way or another. Some of these characteristics were: unusual collocations[2] (in this case, in both languages); single series of prepositional phrases; redundancy; use of adverbs that do not signal quantities, qualities, or degree; semantically complex sentences; many abbreviations; abstracts with no relevant information as well as mathematic-like formulae and overuse of statistics. These characteristics were discussed when students were asked to translate sentences containing bilingual terms and bilingual collocations taken from two glossaries compiled by Castanho (2004) and Paiva (2006). When students had to translate complex terms, which are composed of two or more terms, they were in doubt as to whether the terms would add elements in English and in which order they would be placed. One of these examples is the use of the term *hipertensão* (hypertension), which can add elements, as in Table 1:

Table 1. The term "hypertension" in Portuguese
and in English (PAIVA, 2006)

Portuguese	English
hipertensão	hypertension
hipertensão arterial	arterial hypertension
hipertensão arterial sistêmica	systemic hypertension
hipertensão arterial sustentada	sustained arterial hypertension
hipertensão arterial pulmonar	pulmonary arterial hypertension
hipertensão arterial transitória	transient arterial hypertension

After having translated sentences containing complex terms, students became aware of the importance of consulting renowned dictionaries, glossaries and specialized literature before proposing an equivalent in another language.

Similarly, the use of collocations — a conventional way of combining two or more words in different languages — aroused

---

[2] The term *collocations* means "an expression consisting of two or more words that correspond to some conventional way of saying things" (MANNING; SCHÜTZE 1999, p. 141, apud CASTANHO, 2004, p. 2).

students' interest. Below we can see that in medical language, some combinations of verbs and nouns are different in Portuguese and in English while some are not. If translators do not choose the right combination in a language, their text may sound unnatural to the reader. This would be the case of using "provoke hypertension" instead of "cause hypertension" in English, since a common usage in Portuguese is *provocar hipertensão*, as illustrated in Table 2:

Table 2. Collocations with "hypertension"
in Portuguese and in English (CASTANHO, 2004)

Portuguese	English
Atenuar hipertensão	Ameliorate hypertension
Desenvolver hipertensão	Develop hypertension
Provocar hipertensão	Cause hypertension
Reverter hipertensão	Reverse hypertension

Abbreviations in medical abstracts also called students' attention. When they noticed the number of abbreviations used in both languages, they were doubtful about how to deal with them when translating. After a discussion they decided that the best way would be, first, to check how the terms were written in full according to reliable sources such as specialized dictionaries, and use them in full with the abbreviation in parenthesis, common practice in writing articles. After that, they would refer to the term just by using the abbreviation. One aspect they noticed after researching articles in medical sites is that several of them simplified their own table with the abbreviations used. This would be another solution for dealing with abbreviations in medical journals.

Another characteristic that surprised some students was that, even having previously studied numbers in English, they sometimes forgot to change the punctuation used with numbers from one language into another such as the use of commas and dots in numbers in Portuguese (e.g. 62,5%) and in English (e.g. 62.5%).

6. Discussion and conclusion

This paper has aimed to show how important it is that future researchers and, more specifically, future translators study academic genre. We have shown the relevance of having scientific papers published in internationally renowned journals and the importance of knowing how to recognize this specific genre within academic texts. We have presented a way of making students aware of different genres in their own language based on Swales (1990), and also presented the concept of scientific abstract provided by Bathia (1993). Based on the latter, we have worked with abstracts during a mini-course for undergraduate students by identifying the four moves found in abstracts which are: introducing the topic, describing methodology, summarizing results and presenting conclusions.

After having worked with genre this way, we have observed that students of translation who took part in this course have been more attentive to the way they deal with texts based on communicative purpose, task, target readers and language.

References

ARANHA, Solange. The importance of genre for Translation: how much should a translator know? In: *Translating Science, Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Specialized Translation.* Universidade Pompeu e Fabra, Barcelona, 2002.

ARANHA, Solange. *Contribuições lingüísticas para a argumentação da introdução acadêmica*. 2004. 172f. Tese (Doutorado em Letras) – Universidade Estadual Paulista, Faculdade de Ciências e Letras, Araraquara, 2004.

BATHIA, Vijay. K. *Analysing genre:* language use in professional settings. London: Longman, 1993.

CANALE, Michael. From communicative competence to communicative language pedagogy. In: RICHARDS, Jack;

SCHIMIDT, Richard (Eds.). *Language and communication*. London: Longman. 1983. pg 2-27.

CASTANHO, Rosa. *Proposta para a elaboração de um glossário de colocações na área médica: subárea hipertensão arterial.* 2004. 92f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Estudos Lingüísticos e Literários em Inglês) — Departamento de Letras Modernas da Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2004.

CORACINI, Maria. José R. *Um fazer persuasivo*: o discurso subjetivo da ciência. São Paulo: Pontes, 1991.

JOHNS, T. It is presented initially: linear dislocation and interlanguage strategies in Brazilian academic abstracts in English and Portuguese. *Ilha do Desterro*. v.27, p. 9-32, Florianópolis: Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, 1992.

KÖCHE, José. Carlos. *Fundamentos de metodologia científica:* teoria da ciência e iniciação à pesquisa. Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes, 1997.

NIDA, Eugene. A. Sociolinguistic implications of academic writing. *Language in Society*, v. 21, n. 3, p. 477-485, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

PAIVA, Paula. T. P. *Estudo baseado em corpora de traduções e três glossários bilíngües nas subáreas de anestesiologia, cardiologia e ortopedia.* 2006. 223f. Dissertação (Mestrado) – Universidade Estadual Paulista, Instituto de Biociências, Letras e Ciências Exatas, São José do Rio Preto, 2006.

SWALES, John. *Genre analysis*: English in academic and research settings. Cambridge: CUP. 1990.

SWALES, John. M.; Christine. B. FEAK. *Abstracts and the writing of abstracts*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2009.

VOLPATO, Gilson. L. *Publicação científica.* 2. ed. Botucatu: Editora Tipomic, 2003.

Título: Trabalhando com alunos de Tradução a partir de uma proposta baseada em gênero