

Progress and Trends of Genre Analysis in Business Context—a Review of SSCI Papers in the Past Decade

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Abstract

As appropriate, innovative and diverse business discourse becomes the key to promoting business exchanges between countries and industries, the importance of business genre analysis has also been growing. This paper thus reviews the articles related to "Genre Analysis in Business Context" in SSCI journals from 2012 to 2022, locates the key areas and methods of research in the past decade, with the hope of finding the future path of this academic field.

Keywords: genre analysis, business discourse, SSCI, review.

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1. INTRODUCTION

With the rapid development of economic globalization and the increasingly close ties between countries around the world, people of all countries have witnessed increasingly frequent business exchanges. Under this background, appropriate, innovative and diverse business discourse has become the key to promoting business exchanges between countries and industries. Some scholars have pointed out: "Business discourse refers to the oral and written communication that people carry out in business activities to complete their own work, and it is regarded as social behavior in the business context" (Bargiela-Chiappini *et al.*, 2007:1). This definition also shows the social nature of business discourse and its fundamental role in promoting business development and social progress. Scholars have therefore launched a series of studies on business discourse using multi-perspective, multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary approaches. Among them, genre analysis is widely adopted because it can effectively identify the composition of business discourse at linguistic level and beyond.

The concepts of genre and genre analysis were introduced by Swales into the research field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in the 1980s. He pointed out that genre is "a communication event with identical communicative purposes of its participants" (Swales 1990:58). Genre analysis developed on this basis is a common and important method in discourse research, which can be used to interpret texts of various genres in terms of structure, language and content. There have

been three schools of genre analysis, namely the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) school represented by Swales and Bhatia, the Sydney School or Australian School represented by Martin, and the New Rhetoric School. Genre intertextuality is an important concept in genre analysis (Bhatia 2010). Bhatia pointed out that the current intermingling of industry activities has led to the emergence of mixed genres. For example, commercial advertisements often exploit the discourse features of industry activities such as news, entertainment, and academic research, while other themes will also be mixed with business, publicity, and sales genres.

In light of this, this paper aims to review the articles related to "Genre Analysis in Business Context" in SSCI journals from 2012 to 2022, locate the key areas and methods of research in the past decade, with the hope of finding the future direction path of this academic field.

2. Development of genre analysis in business context in the past decade

2.1 Data Sources

The author searched in the SSCI database with the subject of "business genre analysis", confined the screening condition to the Web of Science Core Database, and set the retrieval time as 2012-2022 (from January 1st, 2012 to September 30th, 2022). 150 papers that may be related to the genre analysis of business discourse were obtained, screened manually according to the abstract content, and 93 SSCI journal documents

related to genre analysis in the business context were obtained. The bibliographic information in the text format was then exported.

2.2 Research tools

This paper uses VOSviewer software for the visual analysis of literature. The software was developed by Van Eck and Waltman of the Leiden University in the Netherlands. It is a free Java-based literature visualization analysis software that can perform visual analysis based on the keywords, most cited, article authors, and published journals. It is easy to use with a simple interface, provides presentational

include cluster view, diachronic view and density view, etc. This study mainly focuses on the visual analysis of high-frequency subject terms and their co-occurrence in the literature in the past ten years.

2.3 Quantitative analysis

First, the author imports the bibliographic information into VOSViewer, and the software automatically generates a key word list, displaying the words that appear frequently in the literature. The subject words with occurrence frequency greater than 10 are extracted as follows:

Table 1: Keywords with frequency above 10

Selected	Term	Occurrences	Relevance ▼
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	analysis	80	2.05
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	genre	74	1.76
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	attention	17	1.44
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	study	64	1.30
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	china	10	1.30
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	student	12	1.28
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	pattern	19	1.25
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	business	34	1.17
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	company	21	1.14
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	article	17	1.02
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	paper	36	1.02
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	corpus	22	0.94
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	case	13	0.93
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	genre analysis	14	0.86
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	text	24	0.83
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	area	13	0.72
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	language	21	0.71
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	order	12	0.68
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	discourse	23	0.67
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	research	23	0.63
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	english	27	0.59
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	use	26	0.46
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	practice	21	0.26

In the list, it can be found that in addition to words closely related to the research topic such as genre and analysis, “China” has a high correlation, which shows that Chinese scholars and their publications have entered the international field of vision. The high correlation of the word “Student” shows that the genre analysis research in the business context has penetrated into the pedagogical field. In addition, the frequent use of “Corpus” shows that corpus has also become a common method of genre analysis research in the business context in the past ten years.

Some of the high-frequency words which are not very relevant to the analysis, such as paper, study, research, respect, etc., are manually removed by the author. Some words have the same meaning but have been repeated, such as “CSR, corporate social responsibility and CSR Report”, and they are manually combined by the author. After selection, the author set the number of co-occurrences to 6 or more times, and obtained a cluster view and a diachronic view as follows:

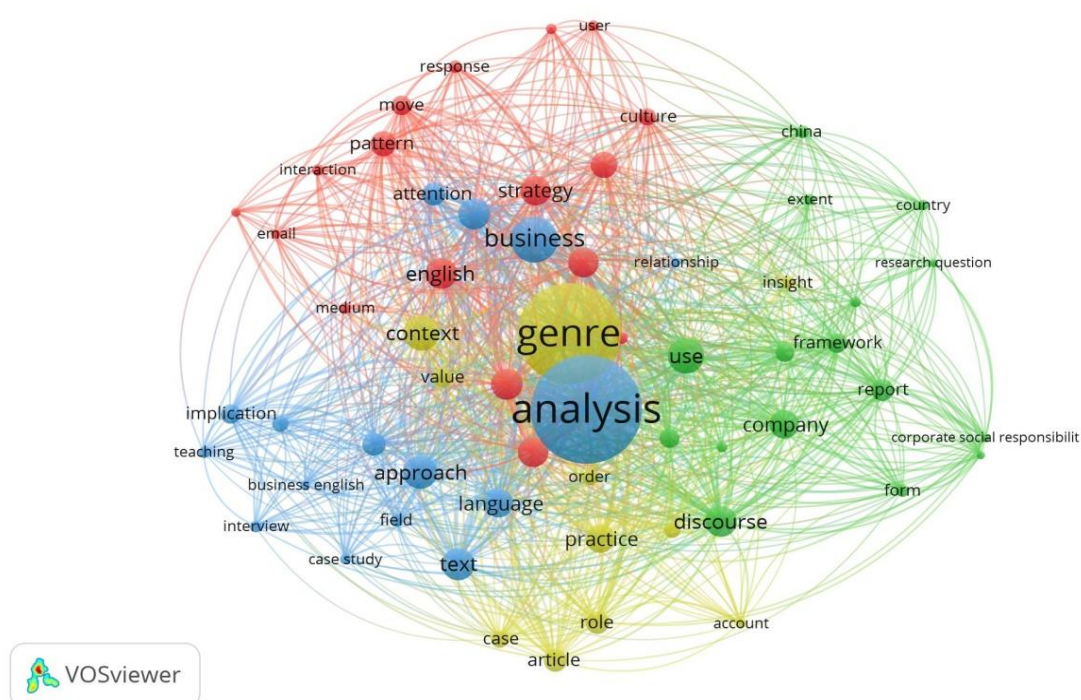


Figure 1: Cluster view

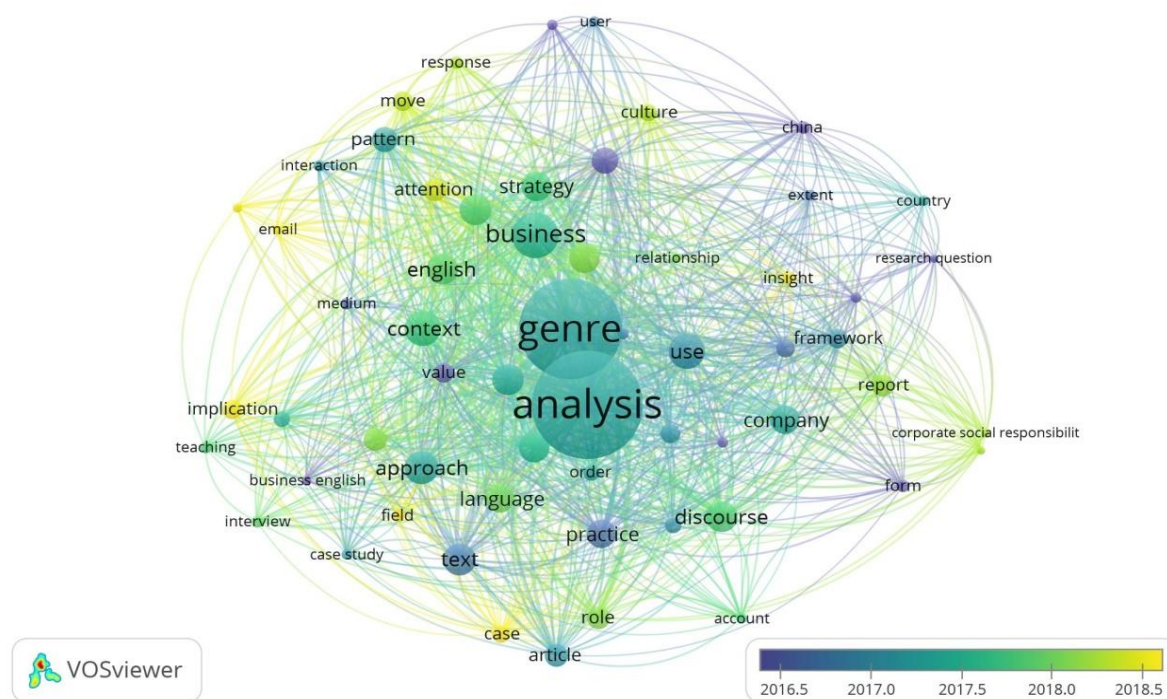


Figure 2: Diachronic view

It can be seen from the cluster view that the traditional move analysis, language patterns, etc. are closely connected with genre analysis in the center (shown by the red cluster line), indicating that the mode of genre analysis has strong internal stability. Words such as “Company” and “CSR” are closely connected with the central genre analysis (shown by the green cluster line), showing that corporate social

responsibility has become a research topic that researchers pay close attention to. Vocabularies such as “Business English” and “Teaching” are closely connected with “genre analysis” in the center (shown by the blue cluster line), which shows that research in this field has made an impact on business English teaching.

It can be seen from the diachronic view that the colors in the figure represent different years of publication. Darker blue indicates earlier publication, and light yellow means later publication. It can be seen from the observation that words such as “CSR” appeared relatively late and found its place in the emerging research topics; words such as “China” appeared earlier, indicating that Chinese researchers had published articles in international journals earlier, and genre analysis related to China's business field also entered into international domain in an early stage.

3. KEY ANALYSIS

3.1 Major Analysis Frameworks

The author found that Swales and Bhatia's move analysis is still the core framework adopted in business discourse genre analysis articles (1993; 2010). Researchers either use this analytical framework as the main framework to construct the full text (Zhang and Vasquez 2014, Maria and Rut 2013), or use it as the basis and supplemented it with other perspectives (Nathan 2013). This also reflects the enduring vitality of the genre analysis methods. For example, a researcher collected 50 responses from companies to online negative reviews, sorted out the language structure reflected in the responses, and at the same time analyzed the effectiveness of the language structure in the responses by investigating consumers' acceptance of the responses, thus achieving a balance between the stability and variability of genre steps (Wang 2021). Another example is that some researchers have borrowed Swales' obligatory and optional move structure to analyze the academic writing mode of business case reports from the perspective of teaching (Nathan 2013).

Critical genre analysis and interdiscursivity, as the core theoretical framework and conceptual perspective of genre analysis, are often chosen by scholars. Bhatia (2012), who first mentioned genre intertextuality, combined the theoretical framework of critical discourse analysis and genre analysis, discussed the corporate social responsibility reports of three Chinese companies and three American companies, and found that marketing discourse, caring discourse and self-change discourse blend with each other. Qian (2020) collected 118 corporate annual reports, and from the perspective of critical discourse analysis, analyzed the implementation of professional discourse in the text of "management discussion and analysis" in annual reports.

Multimodal genre analysis has also been adopted by some scholars to analyze business discourse using multimedia tools, such as oral reports in a business context (Valeiras -Jurado 2019). Other interdisciplinary analysis frameworks and tools, such as cognitive discourse analysis and other linguistic theories, have also been adopted. For example, scholars such as Sun (2018) also selected the Sino-US corporate

social responsibility report and analyzed the cognitive metaphors contained in the report, adding a linguistic perspective to genre analysis.

3.2 Major research methods

From the perspective of research methods, in the past ten years, genre analysis articles in the business context have been dominated by qualitative research, gradually combining quantitative research methods, and shifting to the direction of comprehensive use of qualitative and quantitative methods.

In the process of transforming from qualitative methods to quantitative methods, the research method of corpus linguistics has been widely adopted by scholars, especially after 2015, it has gradually become a mainstream research method. Due to the large amount of data, the corpus method could get rid of the weaknesses of small amount of data and insufficient representation in traditional qualitative research, making the research conclusions more convincing. For example, two researchers (Cho and Yoon 2013) used the tools of the corpus to conduct a comparative genre analysis of earnings conference calls between Korean and English native speakers, and pointed out that Korean speakers reflected weaker genres awareness in earnings conference calls, which lead to misunderstanding by native English speakers. In addition, in the article, Bruce (2020) used the three methods of theme analysis, genre analysis and corpus analysis more comprehensively, examined 12 reports from New Zealand neoliberal think tanks, and found that the reports reflected the move structure of business case report and has played a shaping role in public education.

With the in-depth development of interdisciplinary research paradigms, researchers in the field of genre analysis have also begun to draw on research methods and research methods from other disciplines, and draw more scientific conclusions through comprehensive analysis of data. Among them, the cross-cultural research paradigm has always had a significant impact on genre analysis articles. For example, through the analysis of a genre-based business German course, the analysis process is infiltrated with the introduction of German business culture. Questionnaires, interviews and other research methods have also been borrowed, freeing genre analysis from the limitations of traditional content analysis, and the data are mutually verified, making it more scientific and effective (Cunningham 2019).

3.3 Main corpus source

In the past ten years, the research on genre analysis in the business context has shown the remarkable characteristics of rich scenes and diverse corpus. Researchers are no longer limited to traditional business documents, but conform to the development of the times, focus on new business scenarios and the new

business genres that follow, and expand the breadth of the research corpus. From the perspective of business genres in the traditional sense, business faxes, business/strategic plans, business cases, corporate social responsibility reports, and corporate press conferences are areas that scholars have been focusing on (Zhu 2013, Navarro 2015, Nathan 2016, Sun et al. 2018, De Cock and Granger 2021), in addition, the technological revolution brought about by modern means of communication has also affected the business field, and the new business genre embodied in business models such as e-commerce has also attracted the attention of researchers. For example, some scholars (Zhang and Vasquez 2014) discussed how hotels deal with customers' dissatisfaction in online reviews, and pointed out 10 move structures in response letters; The analysis serves as a framework for analyzing English emails in response to customer dissatisfaction in a B2C context, focusing on the integration of interpersonal and transactional strategies presented in the emails through rhetorical and linguistic patterns.

It is worth pointing out that international publications of Chinese scholars in this field are also becoming more and more prominent, so the corpus with Chinese characteristics has also been introduced into the international perspective. For example, some scholars (Yao *et al.*, 2021) comparatively analyzed the face-threatening behavior in Chinese and Japanese e-commerce emails through the structure of move steps, and also integrated the research perspective of pragmatics in the traditional genre analysis method. Another example is that some scholars (Liu and Zhang 2021) innovatively borrowed the perspective of "meta-discourse" on the basis of the corpus, and proposed how Chinese companies can improve their persuasiveness in the genre of press conferences.

3.4 Major academic contribution

Slightly different from other academically oriented research on discourse analysis, research on genre analysis in a business context has strong practical significance. Whether it is a traditional business genre or a new business genre realized with the help of the Internet in the era of new media, scholars either analyze the language level such as the structure of moves and rhetorical means, or combine social and cultural contexts to find the reasons behind the interaction of genre forms. Suggestions have been put forward for enterprises to improve persuasiveness, avoid commercial risks, and effectively communicate (such as: Sun *et al.*, 2021; Zhu, Ma & Jiang, 2019), and the guiding role of discourse for business practice has become increasingly prominent. In addition to guiding the practice of enterprises, the researchers also investigated business English teaching (Parketal., 2021; Shi & Wan, 2022), instructing students how to write in a business genre with a standardized step structure, and providing preparation for students to enter the workplace through teaching.

4. SUMMARY

Through bibliometrics and topic analysis, we can see that genre discourse analysis in the business context has maintained a good momentum of development in the past ten years. From the perspective of analytical framework, research methods, and corpus selection, we can see that genre analysis has a relatively classic traditional research paradigm — the analysis of move structure and interdiscursivity has been enduring for a long time, and it can also be seen that this traditional discipline is open to integration of cross-cultural perspectives, and quantitative methods such as corpora have been widely used.

However, publications over the past decade still reflect some of the limitations of the discipline. For example, most of the selected articles are written from the perspective of enterprises, and few articles discuss the impact of genres on consumers and related improvement measures. In addition, there is still room for researchers to broaden their research horizons. Many studies are still limited to a specific business field in the country. The samples of qualitative research analysis are small. Genre analysis of cross-cultural comparison is also relatively scarce. In view of the limitations reflected in the current research, future research in this field can consider the integration of multiple stakeholders (enterprises, consumers, and third-party audiences) in the business context, and at the same time, conduct research on the same type of text diachronically.

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