



## Review paper

# Genre repertoire for professional communication in the Oxford for Careers course books: *English for Nursing 1 and 2*

Wioletta Bruzd-Olszewska<sup>1</sup>, Anita Frankowiak<sup>2</sup>, Joanna Wojtkiewicz<sup>3</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Foreign Language Center, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland

<sup>2</sup> Institute of Journalism and Social Communication, Faculty of Humanities, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland

<sup>3</sup> Department of Pathophysiology, School of Medicine, Collegium Medicum, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** The author strongly supports the notion that exposure to various genres and sub-genres in the process of learning and teaching a foreign language, particularly English for Medical Purposes in its nursing variety, can enhance the quality of communication at either every-day, professional or academic levels of students whose major is nursing.

**Aim:** The paper aims at providing the characteristics of various genre types which are present in Oxford for Careers course books: *English for Nursing 1 and 2* and which are particularly useful for teaching and learning communication skills.

**Material and methods:** The textbook is seen as an element that is integrated into the process of education, and it is identified as a genre that functions communicatively as a source of instruction and information about how people do things in society.

**Results and discussion:** The analyzed course books were found to constitute a valuable source of written and visual genres and sub-genres with various communicative purposes including: handling in-group and out-group communication as well as managing academic, professional and every-day communication.

**Conclusions:** The notion of a genre-based approach to English language teaching consists in recognizing and understanding various types of genres to which students are exposed in a classroom setting.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The term ‘genre’ is a multidimensional construct having a wide spectrum of meanings. Many authors have dealt with the concept of genre, giving different definitions and analyzing its diverse aspects.

The word ‘genre’ comes from the French (and originally Latin) word for ‘kind’ or ‘class.’ Any product of man’s artistic creativity or daily communication, whether verbal or not, may be approached in terms of its genre, as the French term ‘genre’ refers in its broadest sense to ‘a type, species or class of composition.’<sup>1</sup> The term is widely used in rhetoric, literary theory, media theory, and more recently linguistics, to refer to a distinctive type of ‘text.’<sup>2</sup>

As far as the literary theory is concerned, genres can be traditionally divided into the epic, drama and lyric, being understood as texts with distinguished features of their composition, topic and form.<sup>3</sup>

The non-linguistically oriented New Rhetoric Studies focus on the social context of genres, ethnographic research and interpretation of the situational context in which the individual texts are used.<sup>4</sup> It was Carolyn R Miller who examined ‘the connection between genre and recurrent situation and the way in which genre can be said to represent typified rhetorical action.’<sup>5</sup>

Swales<sup>6</sup> connects the use of genres with discourse communities which use a repertoire of genres (characteristic of a particular institution) to perform common goals. As regards the notion of discourse, it is a sequence of linguistic signs that are organised according to the rules of a given language and representing what the sender wishes to communicate to the addressee.<sup>7</sup> The members of discourse communities use special lexical terminology not entirely comprehensible to those outside the community (which is limited in size, and needs to instruct their novice members on oral and written communicative skills to perform tasks within an organization).

It is a commonplace statement in the relevant literature on genre that the genealogy of the concept involves clashes between (ultimately prescriptive) approaches which view genre as a static category, and interdisciplinary approaches which view it as a dynamic construct; the latter came into play in the 20th century, and especially during its last quarter, when language pedagogy and (a large part of) linguistic theory shifted its focus from grammatical/sentence structure to text organization, the exploration of language functions, pragmatic aspects of communication and the role of linguistic variation and, consequently, of social, or rather socio-cognitive variables in communication.<sup>8</sup>

The author of the paper supports the notion that a genre is a type of written or spoken discourse used by a particular community for communication. Genre is a universal phenomenon that permeates human lives and determines the ways people use language, read, write and understand texts, and interpret generic actions. Whether conscious or sub-conscious, genre awareness facilitates communication and cultural exchange, and influences the capacity for discourse.

It serves as a ‘template for representing human experience,’ and helps language users organize the material they wish to produce.<sup>9</sup>

The discourse community, which nurses belong to, uses a variety of genres to handle interaction, either in an oral or written manner, for both in-group and out-group communication involving the following:

- providing information and feedback to colleagues,
- providing information and feedback to supervisors,
- providing information and feedback to health care institutions as well as patients and their relatives.

Genre is omnipresent in society in both synchronic and diachronic ways and proves to be ‘a social action.’<sup>10</sup> Miller, who adopts a socio-cultural and rhetorical perspective on genre, notes that the recurrence of social situations and actions is what predominantly determines genre, for genres are ‘an open class with new members evolving, old ones decaying,’ which serves as a ‘key to understanding how to participate in the actions of a community.’<sup>15</sup>

## 2. AIM

The paper aims at identifying various genre types which are present in Oxford for Careers course books: *English for Nursing 1* and *2* (used to teach professional English to the students of Nursing at the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn), and indicating their role in teaching and learning of communication skills. The textbook is seen as an element that is integrated into the process of education, and it is identified as a genre that functions communicatively as a source of instruction and information about how people do things in society.<sup>4</sup>

## 3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

English for Professional Communication is taught at university level to enable future professionals to enter a particular discourse community. The Foreign language syllabus for nurses specifies two course books: the Oxford for Careers: *English for Nursing 1* and *2*, which constitute the basis for teaching and learning English to the students of nursing, at their first and second cycle of study programmes at the Department of Foreign Languages of the University of Warmia and Mazury. Both coursebooks were subjected to the analysis in order to specify types of genres and sub-genres which are typical of the discourse community of nurses in their ordinary, professional and academic environment, and to estimate whether the course books constitute a reliable source of material for teaching and learning English. It is thought that, from the exposure to genres through teaching materials, learners will build knowledge of linguistic features, genre purposes, audience expectations, and discursive practices preferred in discourse communities.<sup>4</sup> All these factors are particularly important for building effective communicative competence. As it was mentioned in previous studies:

‘healthcare professionals encounter difficulties in relations with patients and that many patients are dissatisfied with these relations. Patient dissatisfaction may have a negative impact on the nursing process.’<sup>11</sup> Therefore, it seems to be vital to provide healthcare professionals with valuable tools which can help them effectively handle everyday communication in professional, personal and academic settings.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Written genres

Longrace (1976, 1983) proposed four ‘deep structure genres’ (narrative, procedural, expository and hortatory).<sup>12,13</sup> Werlich (1983) suggested five text types (descriptive, narrative, expository, argumentative and instructive).<sup>7</sup>

Texts, as a variety of written genre, are classified according to the following criteria: the intent of the communicator, their purpose as well as the audiences they are directed at. The analyzed course books contain a number of genres or sub-genres and a representative selection of suitable texts which attend to the learners’ needs for communicating effectively in practice in clinical settings. They comprise the following categories and examples:

- (1) Narrative – telling about a sequence of events such as: descriptions of routines, reports, professional diaries,
- (2) Procedural – giving instructions on how to do something; These involve the following: instructions, procedures, processes, telephone call logs, questionnaires, lists, guidelines for emergency rescue operations, certificates, letters of referral, diagnostic ward notices, record forms and summaries,
- (3) Expository – explaining something: information posters, reflective writing,
- (4) Hortatory – encouraging someone to do something: care plans, prescriptions,
- (5) Descriptive – listing the characteristics of something such as: nursing diagnoses, profiles, health conditions, medical experiments, observation and factual charts, patients’ scales related to various disorders, case histories, notes.

Other types of text such as: e-mails, articles, news articles, quizzes, letters to a magazine, essays, and Internet pages fall into the category of genres which feature multipurpose character.

The analyzed course books contain 15 chapters, all devoted to various topics related to the nursing profession, which are itemized below:

- *English for Nursing 1*: The hospital team; In and around the hospital; Hospital admissions; Accidents and emergencies; Pain; Symptoms; Caring for the elderly; Nutrition and obesity; Blood; Death and dying; Hygiene; Mental health nursing; Monitoring the patient; Medication; Alternative treatments,
- *English for Nursing 2*: Admission by A&E; Admission by referral; Pharmacy; Obstetrics; Ophthalmology; Dermatology; Oncology; Gastroenterology; Neurology; Coronary; Surgery; Infectious disease; Renal unit; Psychiatry; Outpatients.

These themes are executed mostly by means of written texts which constitute the category of specific genres characteristic of the nursing field. They were selected to help nursing students recognize and understand the types of genres typical of their discourse community; therefore, they provide a significant resource for teaching and learning of communication in clinical setting.

The coursebooks’ chapters are constructed using a specific pattern, with some variations on the types of exercises in each section. Not only do they provide learners with exposure to the community specific genres characteristic of healthcare organisations, but they also provide students with a collection of academic and research genres.

Each chapter includes the following:

- (1) scrub up section serving as an introduction to a particular area of expertise and prompting topic related discussion,
- (2) an adapted professional listening task, which constitutes a source of vocabulary and grammar structures used in clinical setting,
- (3) vocabulary section with specialized lexis-oriented exercises,
- (4) language spot with key grammar points explained and grammar exercises with the aim to shape students’ accuracy and fluency in communication at every-day professional and academic levels, and with a section directing students towards Grammar explanatory notes in one of the appendixes,
- (5) speaking section prompted by some case study or a role-play activity, usually executed through either pair-work or group discussion tasks for practicing various speaking competences and creating opportunity to practice various roles to prepare learners for both in-group and out-group communication,
- (6) writing tasks including a model version of a particular type of a written text, and a writing assignment which moves the students away from closed exercises with a model answer, to open-ended activities, which encourage students to use the lexis for handling real life academic or professional situations,
- (7) reading comprehension exercises and a text exploring a particular issue discussed in each unit,
- (8) project section providing guidelines for research techniques,
- (9) self-assessment checklist assessing learners progress in acquiring certain skills and vocabulary,
- (10) keywords section for the language review requiring from a learner to look back through a unit and reflect on the most useful phrases and expressions.

Moreover, in each chapter students can find some cultural and historical notes in the form of few sentences which present: some interesting historical facts, research and survey results, statistics, definitions of some medical terms, comments by patients, medical staff and experts, descriptions of nursing practices in the UK, USA or Australia, some medical tools and treatments, short biographies, even the origin of some medical terms. All of these items

form a repertoire of genres specific for the nursing discourse community.

The middle section of each course book consists of fifteen supplementary texts for reading, with comprehension questions and vocabulary exercises, providing exposure to a variety of academic, professional and research genres which occur in a form of scientific articles, Internet pages, research results, a case history of a patient, magazine articles, telephone call logs, medical forms, nursing diary, prescriptions, nursing manual, laboratory report, diagnostic questionnaire, observation chart, nursing care plan, pre-op documentation, computerized record of care, also interdepartmental e-mails. They all serve the purpose of performing the following communication tasks:

- documenting patient's health status,
- organizing nurses' work practices,
- directing orders to other members of the community,
- collecting and analyzing subjective and objective data about a patient,
- documenting the caretaking process,
- documenting unexpected occurrence of physical or psychological injury,
- ensuring information flow within the clinical setting,
- sharing experience with other members of the nursing discourse community,
- formulating guidelines and rules and directing them to others,
- understanding scientific articles.

The final section in each of the course books contains speaking and communicative activities, grammar reference sections explaining the main grammar points from the course book, listening scripts to the units and a glossary of terms section providing students with both definitions of terms in English and their phonetic representation. These all significantly contribute to the development of communicative competence by focusing on key vocabulary and grammatical structures providing nursing community with a wide range of tools which can be used to effectively communicate due to the fact that they enhance both accuracy and fluency in a target language.

#### 4.2. Multimodality

Apart from primarily written genres and sub-genres, the course books also contain visual genres. This is in line with the idea promoted by Terry Royce<sup>14</sup> that learners need to develop a multimodal communicative competence in order to be enabled to deal with the demands they encounter in the use of English in their professional setting. Since images are predominant in most of our social practice, their presence in course books seems to reflect the image-saturated feature of society. The visuality of Oxford for Careers course books: *English for Nursing 1* and *2* is strongly related to the topic areas covered in particular chapters and significantly supports both the teachers and the learners in exploring particular meanings. The visual genres can serve as either secondary or direct assistance in the teaching and learning process and

they are of utmost importance in enabling learners to become active participants in discourse practices at academic, professional and social levels.

The material to be learned in both course books is arranged and illustrated in a series of sub-genres which include:

- (1) forms which are either adapted or authentic and represent a sample of real documentation,
- (2) images which complement the text,
- (3) pictures which illustrate topics for discussion, complement lexical, structural and speaking exercises,
- (4) photographs depicting abnormal health conditions, illustrating procedures, showing scenes in hospital settings, the purpose of which is to illustrate some facts, prompt discussions, present and introduce medical experts also complement lexical exercises of the course books,
- (5) graphs, pie charts, bar and line diagrams, which are all used to prompt discussions or as a part of writing or listening exercises,
- (6) screenshots prompting writing,
- (7) cross-sections which complement lexical exercises or introduce topics,
- (8) maps which accompany Scrub up sections and aim at introducing topics.

Some of the visuals are adapted and raise awareness of the purposes of particular genres, whereas others provide cultural information and illustrations for texts.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

According to some scholars, genres are taken to be fundamental in our social actions: 'What happens in society in terms of interaction is by means of genres.'<sup>4</sup> In relation to culture, 'it is the place of genre that organizes our social actions and interaction into meaningful wholes.'<sup>4</sup> Genre is a universal phenomenon that permeates human lives and determines the ways people use language, read, write and understand texts, and interpret generic actions. Whether conscious or subconscious, genre awareness facilitates communication and cultural exchange, and influences the capacity for discourse. It serves as a 'template for representing human experience,' and helps language users organize the material they wish to produce.<sup>9</sup> Genres can thus be seen as a kind of shorthand serving to increase the 'efficiency' of communication.<sup>1</sup>

The author of the article strongly supports the notion that exposure to various genres and sub-genres in the process of learning and teaching a foreign language, particularly English for Medical Purposes in its nursing variety, can enhance the quality of communication of students, whose major is Nursing, at either every-day, professional or academic levels.

The paper focused on the recognition and understanding of genre repertoire for professional communication in the Oxford for Careers course books: *English for Nursing 1* and *2*, which were found to contain a representative range of genres characteristic of the nursing community and which

can be used to provide sufficient instruction for teaching and learning of communication to the individuals preparing for a profession in nursing.

The author argues the case for the fact that the course books will certainly help learners (students of the first and second cycle of Nursing) gain genre awareness, which will significantly contribute to development of communication skills in everyday, professional, and academic situations and will eventually constitute a prerequisite for professional and academic success. Teaching nurses should aim at helping them make sense of various types of communicative actions that are typical of the discourse community to which they belong.

However useful the genres are in teaching communication, there are some relevant problems which require further investigation.

One concern which is often voiced about teaching with genres is that classroom materials do not prepare learners for social activity outside the classroom, as for example the composition that is only written to be corrected by the teacher. According to Hemais,<sup>4</sup> classroom exercises have been criticized for not allowing learners to understand the production of genres in social and professional situations. Further research is required to investigate to what extent the English language courses based on the Oxford for Careers course books: *English for Nursing 1* and *2* contribute to development of professional and academic communicative competence of nursing students.

There also arise some of the concerns related to visual genres in relation to English language teaching. Does the treatment of images in genres favor the building of knowledge of language, purpose, expectations and preferred discourse practices? Should we teach images in genres or awareness of the visuality of genres? What is the relation between images and verbal language in course book genres? What do images in course book genres contribute to learning? What do genres contribute to learning?<sup>14</sup>

It could be argued that such questions and concerns in part reflect teacher anxieties vis-à-vis the vicissitudes of tackling an admittedly complex construct such as genre in a pedagogically meaningful way; crucially, though, it is very likely that these questions reflect conflicting and often incompatible approaches to genre and to genre literacy and the terminological and epistemological confusion with regard to notions such as language function, text type, genre, discourse, and the intricate interrelations among these.<sup>15</sup>

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