

AG 3: Syntactic variation and emerging genres

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Modern genre theory emphasizes the importance of genres as typified utterances that share a set of communicative purposes, emerging and developing through repeated use in similar situations. For some registers a trend towards “genrefication” (Swales 2004) has been observed. Cases in point are the standardization of review processes and other performance assessments in academic and administrative discourse, or the emergence of new patterns of style in newspaper language.

We would like to explore in this workshop the question of how syntactic variation is linked to the context of genre and, more specifically, how such variation can be studied with view to contexts of constantly changing and emerging genres. How and when do new genres emerge, and how does syntactic variation reflect that process? In corpus studies of linguistic variation (e.g., Conrad/ Biber (eds.) 2001) this link is usually presupposed rather than explored. External forces that work on the emergence of genres include rhetorical shifts, such as the tendency in academic discourse to present the results of empirical work as being “constructed” rather than having been “discovered”. Other relevant developments come from the domain of technology, with the emergence of new genres like web forums, blogs, and chatrooms, and, in the case of English, from the spread of English as a global language, with the increased access of non-native speakers to the shaping of genres.

Studies that fall into the scope of this proposal include sociolinguistic studies of different registers, corpus studies of emerging genres or constructions, and studies focusing on the link between syntax and pragmatics. We primarily invite empirical work, but there should also be space for discussing more theoretical issues, in particular of how to incorporate variation according to genre into theories of grammar. We hope to bring together insights from different approaches to syntactic variation (corpus linguistics, construction grammar, historical and synchronic pragmatics, genre theory), unified by the connection they make between linguistic form and communicative purpose.

References:

- Conrad, Susan & Douglas Biber (eds.) (2001). *Variation in English. Multi-Dimensional Studies*. London: Longman.
- Swales, John (2004). *Research Genres. Explorations and Applications*. Cambridge: CUP.