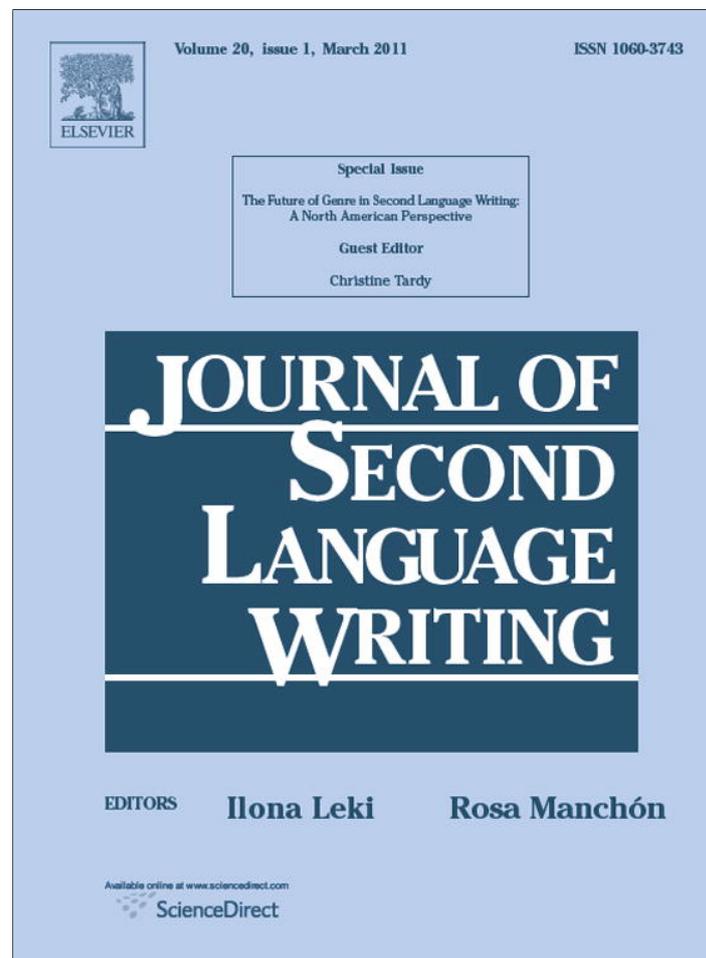


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Reconsidering genre theory in K-12 schools: A response to school reforms in the United States

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Abstract

Education reforms in the United States have placed new demands on English language learners (ELLs) and their teachers in K-12 public schools. In response, many teachers, teacher educators, and literacy scholars are reexamining genre theory and genre-based pedagogy as a way of supporting the academic literacy development of the growing number of ELLs attending primary and secondary schools in the United States. In this article, we briefly describe the impact of federal reforms such as *No Child Left Behind* legislation on L2 literacy practices in K-12 schools. Next, we outline some core epistemological and methodological assumptions informing different perspectives of genre and genre-based pedagogy and how these concepts and methods have relevance for supporting L2 academic literacy development in K-12 contexts. We conclude by outlining the components of a research agenda aimed at supporting K-12 teachers in critically using genre-based pedagogy to support the academic literacy development of ELLs over time.

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The problem

A number of leading educational researchers have analyzed the impact of current school reforms on the education of the growing number of English language learners (ELLs) attending elementary and secondary schools in the United States (Abedi, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Hillocks, 2002; Lucas, 2010; McCarthy, 2008; Zeichner, 2005). Darling-Hammond (2006), for example, writes that reforms such as *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) have focused much needed attention on the academic achievement of low-income students and students of color, including ELLs, who have traditionally been poorly served by public schools. She adds that this spotlight focuses attention on inequities not only in cities but also in suburban and rural communities, where deeply entrenched institutional practices have relegated ELLs to classrooms where they “often receive less challenging and lower quality instruction from less qualified teachers” (p. 646). As Gutiérrez and her colleagues (2002) make clear, these institutional practices and pedagogies make it “professionally and, in some cases legally, risky for educators to implement what they know about teaching in an effective and culturally responsible way” (Gutiérrez, Asato, Santos, & Gotanda, 2002, pp. 345–346).

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In studies of how institutional practices and pedagogies influence L2 literacy development, Harklau (1994a, 1994b) describes how “low-track” classes in high schools are typically poor language learning environments because they provide students with exposure to truncated, inauthentic reading material and little practice in composing extended texts beyond the word or sentence level. Drawing on Harklau’s research, Gebhard (2004, 2005) describes a similar set of institutional practices at work in elementary schools and argues that these practices contribute to what Lankshear and Lawler (1987) refer to as the social construction of illiteracy. As Darling-Hammond’s (2006) analysis of current school reforms makes clear, school-based constructions of illiteracy have dire consequences for ELLs and their teachers in the context of *NCLB*’s accountability system, which tests students’ content knowledge and proficiency in a wide range of academic disciplines at regular intervals across their elementary and high school careers. Schools that fail to show adequate yearly progress (AYP) on these high-stakes exams receive labels such as “underperforming” that are announced in the local media, and they are forced to adopt particular curricular programs to be eligible for much needed additional federal funding (e.g., phonics-based approaches to teaching reading). Schools that continue to fail in meeting AYP goals are then subject to restructuring, which can include the reassignment or firing of teachers and administrators. Consequently, Darling-Hammond (2006) writes that *NCLB*’s accountability systems have “perversely” created counterincentives to supporting student achievement and a “diversity penalty” for schools attended by large numbers of ELLs (p. 656). She explains that because *NCLB* requires the inappropriate testing of ELLs in a language they are just beginning to use for academic purposes, “the most expedient option for schools to increase their scores is to allow or even encourage such students to leave” (p. 659). In sum, Darling-Hammond’s balanced critique of *NCLB* is that it has focused much needed attention on the failure of schools to support ELLs and other non-dominant students in acquiring content-knowledge and associated academic literacies. On the other hand, it has also created testing regimes that are pushing these very same students out of school in higher numbers.

While influential policy analysts, such as Darling-Hammond (2006), work to support the development of more valid and equitable assessment practices and funding formulas for under-resourced schools, many applied linguists and educational researchers are turning their attention to genre theory and genre-based pedagogies as a way of addressing the widening achievement gap between speakers of dominant and non-dominant varieties of English¹ (e.g., Achugar, Schleppegrell, & Oteiza, 2007; Brisk & Zisselsberger, 2010; de Oliveira, 2010; Dean, 2008; Fang, 2006, 2008; Gebhard, Harman, & Seger, 2007; Schleppegrell & de Oliveira, 2006). This interest in genre theory, while perhaps provoked by *NCLB*, extends beyond supporting ELLs in trying to pass state exams. As Gebhard et al. (2007) make clear, practicing test-taking genres is not likely to close the achievement gap between speakers of dominant and non-dominant varieties of English, especially ELLs. They recommend that teachers learn to critically unpack how academic language works in the genres they routinely ask their students to read and write in school; expand the range of linguistic choices available to students in communicating for particular purposes and audiences; and support ELLs in using academic language to accomplish social, academic, and political work that matters to them. Admittedly, this is a tall order for teachers, principals, teacher educators, literacy researchers, and policymakers. It is one that requires more robust conceptions of learning, stronger forms of teacher professional development, and sustained political will and leadership at the school, university, state, and federal levels to effect change. In an effort to contribute to such an agenda, as L2 literacy researchers and teacher educators, we briefly outline core epistemological assumptions informing different genre theories and review critiques of these perspectives as they relate to how genre pedagogies have been overlooked, taken up, or resisted in K-12 literacy research in the United States. We conclude by outlining the components of a research agenda aimed at supporting K-12 teachers in critically using genre-based pedagogy to support the academic literacy development of ELLs over time.

Genre theory: Core constructs in K-12 contexts

Johns (2002) maintains that “genre” is one of the “most important and influential concepts in language education” (p. 3), signifying a major paradigm shift in literacy studies and teaching (see also Hyland, 2004; Hyon, 1996). This

¹ The labels ELL and L2 are problematic given the diversity of students who struggle with academic literacies in K-12 schools (e.g., ELLs, generation 1.5 students, and speakers of varieties of English including African American English). Therefore, we use the terms dominant and non-dominant to capture not only the differences, but also the relations of power associated with those differences.

paradigm shift centers on epistemological conceptions regarding the relationship between text and context and pedagogical issues regarding how best to apprentice newcomers to disciplinary ways of knowing and using language and other multimodal representations, such as formulas, graphs, charts, tables, and illustrations in formal and informal settings. In general, what unites most genre theories is a rejection of purely behavioral and psycholinguistic conceptions of language and language teaching (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000; Hyland, 2004). In classroom practice, behavioral perspectives center on drill and practice in language forms with a curricular progression that typically focuses on mastering sound, word, sentence, paragraph, and textual patterns, in that order. In U.S. K-12 contexts, the influence of this perspective is reflected in current federally approved literacy programs that attend almost exclusively to important aspects of phonemic awareness, but at the exclusion of other equally important aspects of print such as fluency and comprehension (see National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000, for a review of the recommendations of the National Reading Panel; see Cummins, Brown, & Sayers, 2007, for a critique of the National Reading Panel).

In contrast, many influential psycholinguistic conceptions of L2 literacy at work in K-12 contexts are built on Krashen's (1989) framework that suggests that learning to read and write is a predictable sequence of development through exposure and interaction with academic discourses (e.g., Krashen, 1989, 2003). While Krashen's framework is a corrective to more behavioral conceptions of language teaching, it is a perspective that has been translated into reductive and deskilling teacher training workshops that maintain that learning to read and write is simply a matter of reading and writing and that explicit attention to language and knowledge about language is detrimental to the natural order in which language learning, including reading and writing, develops (Krashen, 1989, 2003). A cursory review of ESL teacher licensing exams in states such as Massachusetts and California reveals that this conception of language development has been institutionalized, and it is one we confront routinely in our work as teacher educators in public schools.

In contrast to psycholinguistic orientations, most genre theories and genre-based pedagogies are based on sociocultural conceptions of language and learning. Broadly defined, these theories are based on the work of Bahktin, Halliday, and Vygotsky, all of whom have developed complementary conceptual frames for theorizing the dynamic relationship among text, context, and the learning of academic discourses (Byrnes, 2006; Hanada & Wells, 2000; Wells, 1999). The starting proposition of sociocultural theory is that the origins and structure of individual ways of knowing, being, and using oral, written, and multimodal texts are anchored in the day-to-day social and cultural activities in which people participate and that these mediating micro textual practices are shaped by broader macro ideologies, structures, and textual practices associated with informal and formal education (Barton et al., 2000; Fairclough, 1992; Gebhard, 1999, 2004, 2005; Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996; Janks, 2000, 2010). Applied to genre theory, these epistemological assumptions inform the New London Group's (1996) comprehensive definition of genres:

Genres are forms of text or textual organization that arise out of particular social configurations or the particular relationships of the participants in an interaction. They reflect the purposes of the participants in a specific interaction. (p. 75)

The group also states that characterizing genre “should start from the social context, the institutional location, the social relations of texts, and the social practices within which they are embedded” (p. 78). Different aspects of this definition are privileged by genre theorists depending on how they view the nature of texts and what it means to participate in literacy practices. These perspectives include “English for Specific Purposes” (ESP), “Systemic Functional Linguistics” (SFL), and “New Literacy Studies” (NLS) (Hyland, 2004, p. 9).² As described in Hyland (2004), ESP has roots in Swalesian concepts of text and context dynamics (p. 50). Its purpose is to conduct detailed linguistic analyses of the types of texts graduate students and professionals need to be able to read and produce to do their work. In contrast, SFL has roots in Hallidayan conceptions of the dynamics between text and context. SFL has

² The perspectives typically outlined in reviews of the literature regarding genre studies are English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), and New Rhetoric Studies (NRS) (see Hyland, 2004; Hyon, 1996). In this discussion of the implications of genre studies for L2 literacy in K-12 schools, we will refer to New Literacies Studies (NLS) instead of New Rhetoric Studies. NRS and NLS are conceptually aligned with post-structural perspectives of language and share a skepticism of genre-based pedagogy. They differ, however, in that NLS approaches are more apt to involve conducting investigations related to the literacy practices of K-12 students in and out of school, especially in regard to how youth use emergent digital means of communication (e.g., gaming, blogging, texting). In addition, NLS approaches are not apt to involve conducting analyses of lexico-grammatical forms and rhetorical patterns of discourse.

been used in primary and secondary schools and in immigrant education programs in Australia and elsewhere to support L2 learners in reading and writing the types of texts they will encounter within specific disciplines in school. Last, NLS has its roots in Bakhtin, post-structural conceptions of language, and the work of linguistic anthropologists such as Heath. NLS has made contributions to L2 literacy studies by providing in-depth analyses of L2 literacy practices in and out of schools in ways that draw attention to the sophistication of non-academic literacy practices and to issues of identity and power in institutional contexts.

As depicted by Flowerdew (2002), each of these perspectives can be placed on a continuum regarding the degree to which it attends more or less to the linguistic features of textual products as opposed to the institutional contexts in which texts are produced and interpreted. In addition, these three perspectives are not equally explicit about articulating and advocating for a particular theory of learning as it relates to literacy development and theorizing the role of literacy practices in discussions of social change. We maintain that these differences have influenced how genre studies have been taken up by K-12 literacy scholars in the United States.

ESP

ESP scholars have developed analytic tools and curricular materials to apprentice graduate students and professionals to the textual practices of the discourse communities to which they wish to belong (e.g., Bhatia, 2004; Paltridge, 2002; Swales, 1990; Swales & Feak, 2004). For example, Swales (1990) uses both linguistic and sociological concepts to illustrate how published authors make specific moves in the introductions of their articles to create a research space that establishes both the purpose and value of their work to the field. This focus on the linguistic analysis of the types of texts students and professionals need to know how to use has led Swales (1990) to describe ESP's agenda as concerned with "helping non-native and native speakers to develop their academic communicative competence" (p. 9). He adds that these students, even L2 students, tend to come to their graduate studies with high levels of content knowledge and academic communicative competence, but all need support in developing communicative competence specific to their profession (e.g., conference abstracts, grant proposals, personal statements). In addition, relative to SFL and NLS, the ESP tradition relies more on the research methods of applied linguistics to analyze relatively stable disciplinary-specific text structures within more locally defined contexts as opposed to research methods associated with sociocultural theory, anthropology, and sociology to make strong claims about how genre knowledge develops and how the ability to use a greater variety of genres with more expertise influences students' academic and professional trajectories over time (see Tardy, 2009, for a counterexample).

Because many K-12 educational researchers are interested in analyzing the literacy development of emergent bilingual readers and writers who struggle with print, they tend not to reference ESP research. K-12 educational researchers therefore often overlook ESP scholarship despite its potential to support non-dominant students in participating in college preparatory classes, particularly those who have historically been excluded from higher education in ways that parallel race, class, and gender lines. For example, an ESP approach to teaching high school biology might entail an ESL teacher working with a biology teacher to inventory the types of texts biology students are required to read and produce (e.g., class notes, reading logs, illustrations of biological structures, diagrams of biological processes, lab reports, and textbooks). The ESL teacher might then work with L2 students to support them in understanding how these genres are structured to help them participate more successfully in mainstream classes. The ESP perspective of genre pedagogy, while hardly prevalent in K-12 contexts, has been critiqued by critical literacy scholars. For example, Benesch (2001) argues that ESP's pragmatic tradition has contributed to an accommodationist stance that too easily asks L2 teachers to fit students into mainstream practices that are marginalizing and themselves into subordinate roles rather than to examine the rights and needs of their students and their rights and needs as professionals. As a result, Benesch (2001) calls for greater attention to issues of race, class, gender, and power relations in the teaching of genres in institutional contexts such as community colleges and universities. Her critique also reflects the perspective of researchers who analyze how institutional structures and issues of power negatively impact the work of K-12 teachers and the academic achievement of their students, particularly at the secondary level (e.g., Oakes, 1986; Olsen, 1997).

SFL

While ESP and SFL perspectives of genre and genre-based pedagogy share a number of commonalities, SFL scholars, particularly in Australia, have focused their research agendas on supporting the academic literacies of non-

dominant students in elementary and secondary schools (e.g., Christie & Derewianka, 2008; Christie & Martin, 2007; Coffin, 2006; Hammond & Macken-Horarik, 1999; Martin, 2000; Martin & Rose, 2003, 2008; Mohan, Leung, & Davison, 2001; Schleppegrell & Colombi, 2002; Unsworth, 2000; Whittaker, O'Donnell, & McCabe, 2006). From an SFL perspective, teaching academic literacies involves apprenticing ELLs to using school-based genres and registers. Martin (1998, p. 412) defines genres as “staged, goal oriented social processes” (p. 505). In functional terms, he and David Rose (2008) add that genres are recurrent configurations of meaning and that these recurrent configurations of meaning enact the social practices of a given culture (p. 6). In defining genres in this way, Martin reglosses Halliday's use of the constructs of context of culture and context of situation³ to capture how the language of schooling reflects and constructs cultural semiotic practices that are both material and infused with ideology (Martin & Rose, 2008). For example, while canonical narratives in English have patterned genre moves (e.g., orientation, complication, resolution), they vary depending on the local context of situation. This variation is reflected in the grammar depending on the purpose of the telling, the audience, and the channel through which the narrative unfolds. To analyze register variations of this sort, Martin and Rose (2008) uses Halliday's concepts of field, tenor, and mode (p. 11). In genre-based pedagogies informed by SFL, students are apprenticed into reading and writing academic texts by exploring how (1) field constructs ideas (e.g., everyday versus disciplinary conceptions of phenomena and events); (2) tenor enacts relationships (e.g., differences of familiarity and status); and (3) mode manages and organizes the flow of information depending on whether interactions take place orally, in writing, or through computer-mediated modes.

These three metafunctions, which Halliday (1994) calls *ideational*, *textual*, and *interpersonal*, operate simultaneously and offer teachers and students a contextual basis for analyzing how language varies in relation to who is communicating with whom, what they are communicating about, and the modes through which they are interacting (see also Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). In addition, SFL focuses on the range of linguistic choices available to students when they attempt to read and write genres they are likely to encounter only in school (e.g., reading and writing reports, explanations, and discussions, in English, History, Math, and Science; see Christie & Derewianka, 2008).

In operationalizing SFL into practice, SFL scholars have coupled Halliday's trinocular perspectives of the three functions of language with Vygotskian concepts of learning. This synthesis, developed in collaboration with K-12 teachers and teacher educators, produced the *teaching-learning cycle* (Feez, 1998; Gibbons, 2002; Macken-Horarik, 2002; Rothery, 1996; see also The New London Group's (1996) discussion of *available design*, p. 65). The goal of this cycle is to expand students' meaning-making repertoires by providing them with models, explicit instruction, and critical analyses of authors' and their own semiotic choices as they learn to interpret and produce academic texts in school. As articulated by Feez (1998, p. 28), this cycle consists of five phases. During the first phase, teachers and students discuss a genre's purpose and the context in which a genre is typically used as a way of building both content and genre knowledge and of constructing a shared context for learning. The second phase, called the text model and deconstruction phase, involves analyzing the genre features of model texts and further discussing the context of culture in which these sample texts are used. This phase also includes attending to the clause level register features of selected texts as a way of further exploring the subject matter (field), an author's stance (tenor), and how the author manages the flow of the text (mode) to support his or her purposes in specific contexts of situation. During the third stage, called the joint construction phase, teachers draw on insights gleaned from phases one and two to co-construct a new text with students in the same genre as a way of making genre knowledge and the process of critically making semiotic choices visible to all students. Stage four is the independent construction stage. During this phase, teachers support students in using model texts and their analyses of these texts in drafting, revising, and editing their own texts and attending to how genre and register choices construct subject matter and maintain text coherence. During stage five, students and teachers compare what they have learned by making connections to other texts.

In the United States, a number of scholars have taken up SFL and SFL-based pedagogies to support ELLs and their teachers in responding to the demands of *NCLB* (Achugar, 2009; Achugar et al., 2007; Aguirre-Muñoz, Park, Amabisca, & Boscardin, 2008; Brisk & Zisselsberger, 2010; Fang, Schleppegrell, & Cox, 2006; Gebhard et al., 2007;

³ The terms context of culture and context of situation come from Malinowski (1935), a renowned ethnographer. In regard to discussions of genre patterns and register variables, Halliday refers only to the constructs of field, tenor, and mode and does not use the term genre. For Halliday (1994), context of culture and context of situation instantiate the overall meaning potential of the semiotic system in a particular instance. See also Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004.

Gebhard, Willett, Jimenez, & Piedra, 2010; Schleppegrell & de Oliveira, 2006; Wollman-Bonilla, 2000). Informing these scholars is the research of Mary Schleppegrell and her colleagues who developed the California History Project (CHP). This project introduced mainstream and ESL secondary teachers to using SFL tools to deconstruct the meaning of history textbook passages and primary source documents. Achugar et al. (2007) report that CHP teachers who used an SFL approach in planning their lessons were able to facilitate more in-depth discussions of history. In summarizing their findings, they write that students whose teachers participated in CHP made significantly greater gains on the state exams than students whose teachers had not participated in the workshops, and ELLs were among those who showed the greatest benefits.

While the emerging lines of SFL inquiry in teacher professional development programs in the United States are promising and have extended beyond the History Project in California to include attention to other disciplines and the work of teachers in other states, they are likely to provoke critiques similar to those directed at SFL scholars working in Sydney's public schools in the 1980s. In summarizing these earlier critiques, Bawarshi and Reiff (2010) cite concerns about the "degree of formalism" and lack of creativity exhibited by an approach to teaching in which genres are "classified and then modeled to students as though they were given" (p. 35). Johns (2008, p. 245) echoes this concern by describing how novices need to acquire genre schemas as stepping stones to more expert textual practices, but also need to be able to revise these schemas to meet the demands of a specific situation given that genres are evolving and must be reformulated for shifting situations.

Other critics have focused on the potential reproductive and hegemonic aspect of SFL-based pedagogy. Scholars invested in critical pedagogy and critical literacy raise concerns that SFL-based pedagogies are designed to reproduce school-based genres and associated disciplinary knowledge, as opposed to critically framing and transforming what counts as knowing in school, especially in an increasingly globalized and computer-mediated social and political world. As argued by the New London Group (1996) and others (e.g., Kress, 2009; Luke, 1996), the teaching-learning cycle, which entails situated practice in disciplinary genres and overt instruction in the linguistic features of these genres, will not necessarily support the redistribution of economic and social status that theoretically accompanies the discourses of power. They maintain that a redistribution of power also involves students and teachers exploring the historical, political, and ideological aspects of the texts they encounter in school as a way of critiquing these texts, innovating future work, and transforming existing discursive practice. The New London Group (1996) writes:

Neither immersion in situated practices within communities of learners, nor overt instruction of the sort Vygotsky (1987) discussed, necessarily gives rise to critical understanding or cultural understanding. In fact, both immersion and many sorts of overt instruction are notorious as socializing agents that can render learners quite uncritical and unconscious of the cultural locatedness of meanings and practices. (p. 85)

In recent years, SFL applied linguists have responded to these critiques by advocating that teachers attend to both genre patterns and register variables in dynamic ways to support students in analyzing how contexts of culture and contexts of situation map onto one another in reading and writing activities in school (Hood, 2010; Martin, 2000; Martin & Rose, 2008; see also Schleppegrell, 2004). Aware of these critiques of SFL and the lack of progress that SFL-based pedagogies have made in supporting students and teachers in shunting between genre and register features to support critical understandings of how academic texts work in and across contexts, Martin (2000) writes:

Clearly, the next phase of intervention will have to address the problem of constructing functional grammar, discourse analysis, and register analysis as tools for teachers and students to use when relating language to the social, whether as part of literacy programs, or as subject-specific learning across the curriculum. (p. 120)

NLS

In contrast to ESP and SFL's more text-based conceptions of genre, NLS tends to define genre more broadly as social action (Freedman & Medway, 1994; Miller, 1984) and literacies as situated social practices shaped by power dynamics within and across institutions (Barton et al., 2000; Gee et al., 1996; Ivanic, 1998; Lea & Street, 2006). For example, Lea and Street (2006) describe New Literacy Studies as:

paying particular attention to the relationships of power, authority, meaning making, and identity that are implicit in the use of literacy practices within specific institutional settings. It does not view literacy practices as

residing entirely in disciplinary and subject-based communities, but examines how literacy practices from other institutions (e.g., government, business, university bureaucracy) are implicated in what students need to learn and do. (p. 370)

In addition to being more explicit about relations of power in text/context dynamics, NLS is distinguishable from ESP and SFL in three other fundamental ways. First, NLS researchers tend to use ethnographic methods to explore how issues of power and identity are implicated in the ways students use texts in and out of school. These methods have epistemological and methodological roots in Heath's (1983) classic study *Ways with Words*. Using tools from linguistic anthropology, Heath spent ten years exploring the differences among home, school, and community literacy practices in three different communities: a working class Black community, a working class White community, and an integrated middle class community. She concluded that language practices, not universal aspects of human development or biology, constructed both individual and community identities. For example, she documented how differences in the ways texts were used in homes resulted in difficulties working class students encountered in schools. Specifically, students who were well versed in the middle class practice of the "bedtime story routine" came to school with cultural conceptions of print that matched their middle class teachers' teaching practices. In contrast, students who were not versed in this seemingly universal practice had greater difficulty in participating in expected ways and were constructed as remedial as a result (see also Michaels, 1981).

Heath's study speaks to the necessity of attempting to ground an understanding of how participants interpret a text or participate in textual practices from participants' cultural and linguistic frames of reference, not the researchers' and not in appeals to an idealized universal language user. In Kamberelis and Dimitriadis' (2005) analysis of different approaches to literacy research, echoing the perspective of NLS, they emphasize the importance of developing long-term relationships with participants as a way of developing both an etic and emic interpretive lens on text production and interpretation practices, as well as the importance of formally and informally interviewing participants as a way of gaining additional insights into participants' norms of text production and interpretation. Recent scholarship in linguistic ethnography and anthropology calls for a similar focus (e.g., Creese, 2008; Wortham & Rymes, 2003). These methods stand in contrast to methods used by researchers in both the ESP and SFL traditions that tend to rely on the coupling of text analysis with case-study methods situated in school or university settings.

A second difference that separates NLS from ESP and SFL is that NLS scholars tend to draw on Bakhtinian post-structural conceptions of language. For example, in *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin (1981) characterizes language as "not neutral" or the sole property of the author. Rather, he writes that genres are "populated—over populated—with the intentions of others" (p. 294). He adds that "expropriating" language and "forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process" (p. 294). This perspective of genre and genre teaching as a site of social struggle and as inherently multivoiced and hybrid makes some NLS scholars highly skeptical about the merits and even feasibility of teaching genres to students as if they were fixed and stable. This skepticism is especially strong for scholars interested in how L2 learners use emergent, multimodal, and digital forms of communicating, such as texting, blogging, and gaming (e.g., Gee, 2004; Lankshear & Knoble, 2003).

Third, NLS has provided astute analyses of the sophisticated ways in which people, including very young children, intertextually weave and remix print, talk, images, music, and other semiotic means to strategically position and reposition themselves in a wide variety of discursive fields, including classrooms, out-of-school contexts, and in online networks (e.g., Alvermann, 2008; Dyson, 1993, 2003; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Leander & McKim, 2003). As a consequence, many NLS investigations have pushed the boundaries of sociocultural theory in productive conceptual and methodological ways.

However, with few exceptions, NLS studies have not attended explicitly to the academic literacy development of non-dominant students with the same level of fine-grained textual analyses employed in ESP and SFL studies (notable exceptions include Dyson, 1993, 2003). In remarking on the dearth of longitudinal ethnographic studies of L2 learning, Ortega and Iberri-Shea (2005) call for greater attention to analyzing L2 language development over time as a way of addressing this gap in the literature (see also August & Shanahan, 2006; Ortega & Byrnes, 2008; Leki, Cumming, & Silva, 2008). In response, we argue that the purposes of L2 literacy studies should not be narrowed to only researching teaching and learning, especially given the multiplicity of purposes and audiences for NLS scholarship, which extend beyond the field of language teaching and learning, and into the disciplines of cultural studies, anthropology, and sociology. However, we do share Ortega and Iberri-Shea's concern that very little L2 research has focused on the academic literacy development of language minority students, and its relationship to

classroom practices. These issues are especially concerning at the middle and high school levels, where the differences between everyday and disciplinary language become greater and greater, and the ability to bridge this divide becomes more and more consequential for students and their families, particularly in the context of high-stakes school reforms. This critique of NLS parallels critiques of New Rhetoric scholarship at the tertiary level. For example, Hyland (2004, p. 38) writes that the New Rhetoric approach has provided teachers with important questions to consider, such as why do some genres have prestige while other are denigrated, and whose interests are served by the uses of particular genres? These questions are important for K-12 teachers of academic literacies to explore with students and to use as they plan and implement instruction. However, we suggest that exploring these questions alone will not provide teachers with the pedagogical tools necessary for critically apprenticing students to knowing how to read and write disciplinary texts, including texts that are designed to draw on non-dominant students' linguistic and cultural funds of knowledge (e.g., the critical use of multicultural children's and adolescent literature in K-12 contexts, see Botelho & Rudman, 2009). Therefore, the pressing questions we pose for NLS researchers engaged in K-12 contexts and interested in informing educational practices more directly are: What would a critical instantiation of genre theory and pedagogies informed by the combination of critical ethnographic methods and genre analysis look like in school-based research? Is such a synthesis conceptually possible? Is it methodologically feasible? Is it pedagogically practical? A satisfactory exploration of these questions requires a robust research agenda regarding the academic literacy development of ELLs in school. We conclude by outlining the potential components of such an agenda.

Conclusion

In this article we outlined three perspectives of genre theory and discussed how these perspectives have been taken up (or not) in L2 literacy research in K-12 schools. We have argued that all three perspectives are grounded in analyzing text/context dynamics in service of an equity agenda as defined by each orientation. However, each perspective differs in how it conceptualizes and attends to aspects of language, learning, and social change. Each perspective also differs in the research methods it uses to trace text/context dynamics in students' writing and the kinds of recommendations it makes for classroom practice. Based on our critique of each perspective and our work as ethnographers in urban classrooms, we advocate for a research agenda that draws on the strengths of all three traditions to critically analyze and support the academic literacy practices of the growing number of ELLs attending public schools. Our proposal has three components. First, we feel there is a need for more fine-grained linguistic analyses of ELLs' academic literacy practices using a Hallidayan conceptual framework. This perspective is referenced, albeit to varying degrees, in all three orientations to genre theory (e.g., Ivanic, 1998; Martin & Rose, 2008; Swales, 1990). Therefore, we suggest that Halliday provides a theoretically commensurable base regarding a conceptual definition of language on which to build a more robust research agenda regarding L2 academic literacy practices in K-12 schools.

Second, we call for the coupling of ESP and SFL analyses of students' textual products with longitudinal analyses of ELLs' textual practices over time to examine more closely aspects of genre knowledge development in schools. This pairing has the potential to support teachers and researchers alike in exploring questions such as: when is the imitation of a textual practice an important first step in learning? (See Lantolf, 2000, pp. 17–18, for discussion of the differences between imitation, mediation, and transformation within a Vygotskian perspective of learning.) When is imitation a conscious act of identity motivated by a desire to belong to a community of practice rather than an uncritical act of language socialization? (See Gee's 1990, p. 190, notion of "mushfaking.") And when is it an instance of students simply copying or the result of teachers over scaffolding? In our experiences as SFL researchers, ethnographers, and teacher educators, these are questions both teachers and researchers have about genre theory and pedagogy, and it is important they are explored empirically and in context before claims may be made regarding the inherent hegemonic or emancipatory consequences of genre pedagogy.

Third, drawing on the work of NLS and institutional ethnographers such as Smith (2005), we advocate for action-oriented research methods that include the participation of local participants in data collection and analysis as a form of sustained professional development. As defined by Smith (2005), institutional ethnographies begin with a microanalysis of everyday practices and then make connections to macropolitical forces; rely on long-term observations, ethnographic field notes, interviews, and institutional documents; use methods that explore how power is textually mediated within and across institutional boundaries; and attempt to merge research and practice in service of an equity agenda (see Gebhard, *in press*). Applied to an investigation of genre-based pedagogy and its ability to support ELLs in using academic literacies to accomplish work that is meaningful to them and their communities, these

approaches to data collection and analysis have the potential to support teachers and researchers in linguistically tracing text/context dynamics over time to determine when students get stuck in only being able to control everyday discourses and when they do not receive the support they need to develop the meaning-making resources required for reading and writing in secondary school, college, the new economy, and in managing their personal affairs (e.g., the health care system). The goal of this proposal, in sum, is to support ELLs in strategically appropriating academic discourses to position and re-position themselves to their advantage within and across home, school, and work boundaries. The goal of this approach is also to provide teachers, administrators, teacher educators, and researchers with grounded classroom data on student learning that can challenge high-stakes testing practices that too often are implicated in provoking resistance and pushing students out of school.

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