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# TEACHING GENRES TO ADVANCED LEARNERS

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**Abstract.** The paper reflects recent thinking and research on what genre is, what the purposes of teaching genres are, and how genres should be taught. The paper argues a case for the application of prototype theory to teaching genres, especially with a view of teaching genres to advanced learners. To align its method with the objective specified, the paper presents perception-based data from questionnaire responses provided by a study group of 100 University students. Results from a test on both the receptive and productive skills of the respondents in the group are discussed. Final Test results of the experimental group and a control group are contrasted. The general method applied is a quantitative one as it coheres with the basic postulates of Rosch's experimental prototype theory. The research method applied is experiment. The conclusions drawn from the study's data corroborate strongly the applicability of the notion of prototypes to genre teaching.

**Key words:** genres, genre teaching, prototypes, perception-based study, persuasive power

## INTRODUCTION

The fact that the notion of genre has been around ever since ancient Greek literary times is generally accepted as one beyond contention (see e.g. Allen, 1989; Kennedy, 1998; Bawarshi and Reif, 2010). However, there is also little denying that the very term of *genre*, like so many humanities' terms, has not yet found its conclusive definition (see de Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981; Hogan, 2003; Herman, 2009; Hyvärinen, 2012). Truly, *genre* is something most educated people are familiar with, i.e. have a working notion of. That, however, far from suffices in an academic effort to determine how the concept actually functions cognitively. Moreover, it far from suffices when the related issue of how to teach genres is concerned.

The present inquiry aims to combine the two investigative deficits into a single effort. The study presented here will, first, try and verify the assumption that genres are indeed perceived as functioning in accordance with the principles of Prototype theory. If that proves to be the case, the next step envisaged is to test whether teaching genres as prototypes could lead to better academic results for advanced students.

Consequently, the major research questions here will be:

1. From a perceptual viewpoint, do really University students see genres as functioning around prototypes, or is the prototype-centered perspective of genres only a theoretical analysts' academic-friendly abstraction?

2. Is a prototype-based approach really applicable to teaching genres, or are its possible advantages merely hypothesized?

The general method applied throughout the study reported here is a quantitative one as it coheres well with the basic postulates of Rosch's experimental Prototype theory. The research method applied is experiment.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 1 THE NOTION OF GENRE

There can be generalized to exist two major types of approaches to *genre*, and, consequently, two types of definitions of *genre*. The first could be called 'conventional' due to their representing the kind of reasoning about genres which prevailed for centuries up until not so long ago (for a discussion see Allen, 1989). This first type focuses almost exclusively on the interconnection between text content/theme/topic on the one hand and text structure on the other. The second, more up-to-date kind of definitions are the 'broader' definitions which place heavy emphasis on the social aspect of genres and on the interpersonal function(s) genres perform. Martin, for example, argues that a genre is 'a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture' (1984: 25). Swales, similarly, suggests a genre is 'a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes which are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community' (1990: 58). From a viewpoint not far removed from those two, Devitt maintains that genres are 'typical rhetorical ways of acting in different situations' (2009: 58). All prominent examples of this, second type, interpret genres as social actions and as artefacts by drawing connecting lines between social and rhetorical conventions (e.g. Miller, 1984/1994; Biber, 1989; Bawarshi, 2000).

However, placing genre more firmly and, at the same time, more broadly within its environment does not go without consequences. One of those consequences is the realization that, as society evolves, so must genres (Buckingham, 1993; Abercrombie, 1996). That evolution is forced by and takes place through the 'constant process of negotiation and change' enacted by discourse participants (Buckingham, 1993: 137). As a result, genre boundaries become blurred and genre cross-overs happen more easily (Abercrombie, 1996: 45).

Modern times especially have been placing more and more demands on people's general understanding of genre evolution, as that evolution happens more quickly and in more unguided ways than it has ever done before. At present, as Palmquist forcibly argues, '[w]riters are living, in the fullest sense of the ancient Chinese proverb, in interesting times. Not since the fifteenth century, when Gutenberg perfected a workable system of movable type, has there been such a change in how information and ideas are exchanged' (2005: 219).

Furthermore, 'the Internet, and in particular the World Wide Web, has had what appears to be a similar effect on the means through which we communicate with each other' (ibid.). As Palmquist then generalizes,

> the rules of writing have changed. Publication is no longer assumed to be linked to a printing press. Nor is it necessarily linked to *well-defined* print *genres*. As the Web has grown to encompass literally billions of sites and, despite the best efforts of Google and Yahoo! countless billions of pages, the range of expression has grown as well. (ibid.; emphasis mine)

Corroborating the extensive malleability of genres in modern times, Edwards and McKee (2005) also maintain that it would be highly unproductive to ignore the all-pervasive influence of the WWWeb – an influence which 'muddles' genre boundaries and which, practically, redefines what genres are. Abercrombie also expresses a form of this view on genre shifting and genre evolution, although his analyses are concerned with modern television, which he believes to be engaged in 'a steady dismantling of genre' (1995: 45). Despite this abundance of agreement among scholars, the questions of how exactly genres come to be 'dismantled', how they evolve and into what exactly they evolve, how the newly-devised genres relate to the previously-existing ones have not been answered in the literature so far.

From the perspective adopted here, the problem with all such investigations is that they tend to steer away from the notion of prototypes. A typical example would be Devitt's proposal that genres be analysed as sets of interactive types. A 'genre set', to her mind, will include all types of texts produced by a person in a particular work occupation (1991: 339). Bazerman likewise suggests members of a community employ a 'complex web of interrelated genres where each participant makes a recognizable act or move in some recognizable genre, which then may be followed by a certain range of appropriate generic responses by others" (1994: 96). That web is termed by him 'a genre system', which he defines as a system of 'interrelated genres that interact with each other in specific settings' (ibid.: 97). Spinuzzi, similarly, speaks of 'genre repertoires', which change over time due to the fact that newly-emergent genres rely on improvisation (2004: 4). What is left unanswered in such studies is how those sets, systems and repertoires operate cognitively. Can those sets, systems, repertoires, etc., not be internally arranged (as none of the approaches cited focuses strongly on internal organization)? Could those sets, systems, repertoires of genres really exist without any – internal or external – arrangement or organization? As everything human-conception-related is inevitably organized in a hierarchical manner (Пенчева, 1996, 1998), the question remains of how those sets, systems, repertoires of genres are really arranged. The answer, to me, lies in the Theory of prototypes, or Prototypology, which emerged in the works of Eleanor Rosch (1973, 1975), and to which the next section here is dedicated.

## 2 GENRES AND PROTOTYPES

A principle widely supported throughout the literature (see e.g. Berlin et al. 1973; Coleman and Kay, 1981; Lakoff, 1982; Feldman, 2006; Taylor, 2015) is the crucial importance of categorization to any study of linguistic phenomena. The reason for that importance is, probably, best summarized in Labov's claim that '[i]f linguistics can be said to be any one thing it is the study of categories: that is, the study of how language translates meaning into sound through the categorization of reality into discrete units and sets of units' (1973: 342). How to understand categorization, however, is not an issue enjoying similar universal agreement.

For thousands of years, category formation and the relationships between categories used to be considered in connection to either Dichotomy or Classical typology (for a discussion see, e.g. Taylor, 1995; Ungerer and Schmid, 1996; Tincheva, 2015). According to both approaches, every category member either unambiguously fits within clear-cut category boundaries or it does not. A man, as the textbook example goes, is either a bachelor, or he is not – a view which, nevertheless, could not account for the ambiguous status of the Pope (Rosch and Mervis, 1975; Ungerer and Schmid, 1996).

A second principle of Dichotomy and Classical typology associates with the fact that the two theories postulate every category as lying unambiguously disparate from others. In other words, a text would and should classify as belonging to and exemplifying features of one genre only. Transposed to the notion of genres, that would also mean that, for instance, a sermon and a lecture would never have anything in common. According to those two pre-Prototypology theories, on one's attending for the very first time a Steve Jobs' 'presentation', one is expected to recognize it immediately as belonging to the presentation genre, and not as having anything in common with a lecture or a sermon. Furthermore, both Dichotomy and Classical typology state that all classification should happen instantly and should display no perceptual specificities such as, for instance, hesitation pauses. In other words, one should immediately recognize every presentation as belonging to the genre and there would never be a presentation which would take a text receiver longer to classify.

In contrast to the Classical typology and Dichotomy theories, Prototypology rejects all the above principles. It follows Wittgenstein's (1953) break-through notions of blurred edges and family resemblances. It emphatically rejects the existence of clear-cut boundaries between categories (i.e. boundaries without border-line cases or fuzziness), shared properties (i.e. obligatory conditions for category membership), 'checklist' precepts, uniformity among all members of the category, inflexibility of category boundaries, objective conditions for category membership, etc. Instead, even the earliest experiments conducted by Rosch were designed to draw exclusively on perceptual statistical data obtained from real language users. Those experiments prove the decisive role of perception in determining category boundaries and internal category structure. Mental imagery, bodily experiences and socio-cultural factors, her studies reveal (1973, 1975),

is what actually controls human categorization. And it should be duly noted here that although the Theory originated in analysis of category formation and operation, it has now proven extremely operational in a multitude of spheres in the humanities. It has gradually broadened to include various linguistic phenomena, grammar and narrative included (Hyvärinen, 2012; Taylor, 2015).

Hence a crucial role in Prototype theory is played by the assumption that there exists culturally-conditioned and, consequently, statistically verifiable agreement among the members of a culture about what counts as the best example of a category, i.e. as a prototype. A prototype, consequently, is seen here as a very high frequency, socially and conventionally testable instantiation. The study reported follows closely these experimental, perception-defined principles. Its aim is to test statistically whether the respondents' understanding of genres operates in accordance with Classical typology or in accordance with Prototypology.

As far as the issue of genres and their connection to prototypes specifically is concerned, it needs to be acknowledged that applying prototypological principles to genre analysis is not exactly a new idea. The connection has been either explicitly formulated (see e.g. Herman, 2009; Hogan, 2011; Hyvärinen, 2012) or implied (e.g. Virtanen, 1992; Toledo, 2005) throughout a range of research. Swales, for instance, speaks directly of genres as 'fuzzy' categories (1990: 52) and Fowler argues that genres display prototype effects (1989: 215). Medway, too, discusses 'fuzzy genres' as, he hypothesizes, 'there are degrees of genreness' (2002: 141).

However, any literature review will also reveal there is a stark contrast between one of the most fundamental of premises of Prototype theory (the one stating that there needs to be perceptually-based and, therefore, statistically-verifiable confirmation for any analysts' conceptual claims) and Swales' and Medway's theoretical assumption that genres indeed operate prototypically. That assumption can be claimed to have remained within the boundaries of common-sense researchers' beliefs only, as it is extremely rarely (if ever) perceptually tested. As Buckingham summarizes, 'there has hardly been any empirical research on the ways in which real audiences might understand genre' (1993: 137). Hogan also supports the fact that, in thinking and talking about genres, 'our theorizations can diverge quite significantly from our tacit conceptual formations' (2011: 191). Thus, the first objective of the study presented here is for it to supply perceptual quantitative data on whether prototypes indeed are seen as the cognitive constructs (term as in Tincheva, 2012; 2015) controlling conceptualizations of genre differences.

## 3 TEACHING GENRES AND PROTOTYPOLOGY

The last point to clarify before moving on to reporting the actual data from the study is connected with those aspects of genres which relate to the perspective and purposes of teaching them.

Generally, ever since Hyon's influential 1996 publication, three main approaches to how (and if) genres should be taught have been consistently

delineated (see also Swales, 2012). Those approaches include: (a) the Australian Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) school (e.g. Martin, 1984; Hagan, 1994; Martin and Rose, 2008), which draws heavily on Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, (b) the English for specific purposes one (ESP), among whose main proponents are, e.g. Swales (1990) and Hyland (2007, 2009), and (c) the North American New Rhetoric Studies (NRS), supported in the works of, e.g. Hyon (1996) and Johns (2002, 2008, 2013). What is of relevance here is not the dividing lines between the schools. The objective here is not to argue against weak points of any of the three. The aim is to select strong points which could be applied in a constructive manner to enhance the genre awareness (I use the term "genre awareness" as in Millar, 2011) of advanced (University) learners.

Generally, the questions which all three main schools focus on have to do with the issues of: (a) why there is a need to teach genres; (b) what the particular purpose of teaching genres is; (c) what the possible ways of teaching genres are. As far as (a) is concerned, the prevailing theoretical position is the one that seems to be least contended by any of the three schools. As that position has it, it is socio-cultural contextual factors which require specific text-related skills be acquired by future professionals or, generally, by members of a culture. In this respect, pedagogy-oriented research tends to rely on the 'broader' theories of genres which interpret them as social actions and artefacts (as already suggested in 1 above, for discussions see Miller, 1984/1994; Biber, 1989; Bawarshi, 2000). Thus, all of the three schools of teaching genres can safely be seen as striving to place genre production and reception within a contextually well-tuned environment.

That broader and broadening contextualization of genre, however, leads to pedagogic problems, or, at least, it is argued to do so by the proponents of NRS. In other words, not all three schools on genres agree genres should be part of classroom activities at all. Researchers from the NRS maintain genres cannot be taught for being too changeable and context-dependent. Johns (2008), for example, argues that any attempt to teach a genre outside its natural context is, practically, beyond reason. The present investigation adheres closely to the opposite claim – the one made by SFL and ESP proponents. The underlying rationale here is that if social needs do exist and social conventions could ever be discussed as separate categories, then teaching them would always be feasible. It is my deep conviction that perfect results may not be obtainable but students' imagination and ability for generalization will always play a crucial role in any learning environment, be it a classroom one or a real-life situation.

On the question of (b), there can be traced two major kinds of purposes in teaching genres. The first would see successful analysis of genre as an end in itself; this approach can also associate closely with writing purposes. The second kind would see teaching genre as part and parcel of ESL curricula. The present study, quite dissimilarly to that second kind, sees genre teaching as related to students' needs for philological professional qualification. In other words, the approach proposed here tries to enhance text production skills from a socio-cultural

perspective and not from the slightly narrower perspective of second language acquisition. That is not to suggest the two perspectives should be interpreted as mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they can parallel each other to a variety of benefits. But precisely due to the two perspectives' functioning as the two sides of the same coin, there is always the necessity of giving one preference over the other. In line with that kind of reasoning, the angle chosen here can be said to harmonize with the learner needs of the University students participating in the study. As they almost exclusively aim to/are expected to become journalists, writers, editors, etc., genre awareness and genre-related skills (both productive and receptive) are not only of special significance here; by necessity, they draw the present investigation closer to the principles of teaching genre for writing purposes rather than to ESL principles only.

As far as consideration (c) is in question, a second major general objection to the very notion of teaching genres is the belief that it can only happen prescriptively and through reinforcing a formulaic view on them. However, as Devitt herself convincingly argues, genre teaching

> …can indeed be formulaic and constraining, if genres are taught as forms without social or cultural meaning. Genre teaching can also be enlightening and freeing, if genres are taught as part of a larger critical awareness. I argue […] for a genre pedagogy that recognizes the limitations of explicit genre teaching and exploits the ideological nature of genre to enable students' critical understanding. Genres will impact students as they read, write, and move about their worlds. Teaching critical genre awareness will help students perceive that impact and make deliberate generic choices. (2009: 337)

The present viewpoint also combines a belief in a degree of explicit genre teaching with some implicit techniques. It follows Freedman (1999) in assuming that effective genre, and especially effective writing instruction, should combine exposure to authentic texts with immersion in real-life contexts. Generally, the present viewpoint may be seen as lying closest to ESP methods, teaching activities and techniques.

How (and if ever) genre teaching resorts to the achievements of research in Prototypology is another issue that calls for comment. Even the briefest survey will show that a connection between the two is extremely rarely sought (see e.g. Martin, 1984; Biber, 1989; Paltridge, 1996, 2013). Kettemann and Marko (2002) and Montgomery et al. (2000) would be, perhaps, the most notable exceptions. What is more, for the last two decades, the interconnection between the notions of genre and cognition could be summarized to have taken a predominantly literary turn, as most evident in the research of the Cognitive Poetics School (Gavins, 2007; Herman, 2009; Semino, 2010; Giovanalli, 2013). In other words, Applied Linguistics has steered considerably away from the realm of prototypological investigations. The study reported here aims to provide a step in the direction of remedying that discrepancy.

# THE STUDY

## 1 BASIC CHARACTERISTICS

In the Study, the pool of respondents represented no significant differences in terms of age, educational status, learning achievement, or previous professional experience of the participants. That pool consisted of 100 third-year Bachelor's degree students at the Department of British and American Studies at Sofia University. Out of the pool of respondents, two groups were formed – one experimental group and one control group. Each group consisted of 50 students. The members of the groups were chosen at random out of the larger body of students; no parameters such as, e.g. academic achievement, age, nationality, previous professional experience, etc. were taken into consideration, when the groups were formed.

In terms of experiment procedures, the experimental group followed all the steps envisaged for the study, namely:

1. Filling a questionnaire,
2. Participating in subsequent in-class discussions of the (results obtained from the) questionnaire, and
3. Taking a Final Test.

The students in the control group participated only in the final stage – the Final Test. They did not take the questionnaire in stage 1 and they did not participate in the subsequent discussions, i.e. stage 2.

Filling in the questionnaire, the respondents from the experimental group were asked to evaluate a set of genres. In doing that, they were expected to:

1. Identify themselves with the text producer,
2. Provide evaluations in terms of their personal preferences,
3. Provide information based only on their immediate responses, and
4. Not supply information on what they might perceive as 'general', or 'universal', 'objective' evaluations.

The genre alternatives offered as possible responses to the questions in the questionnaire were selected on the basis of their appearing with highest frequency throughout research on genre (e.g. Swales, 1980, 2001; Gamson, 1992; Ochs, 1997; van Dijk, 1997; Obeng, 1997; Eggins and Martin, 1997). The list was also meant to cohere well with Hyland's (2003) 'core set of general school genres, or macro-genres' and with John's 'key genres', which are argued to be highly efficient as 'beginning, stepping stones for preparedness' (2008: 245).

The interpersonal functions chosen as parameters in the questions were selected following Trosborg's theory of text functions. According to that theory, all texts should be seen as multifunctional. The theory, however, also assumes that normally one function will be identifiable as dominant for each text (1997: 16).

That claim is also echoed by Werlich (1976), Virtanen (1992), and Hatim and Mason (1990). Such an approach to text function is also preferred for the present study as, although it does not overtly incorporate the term 'prototype', it is highly compatible with the basic principles of Prototypology.

## 2 STAGE 1: THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The first task in the questionnaire required the respondents to specify:

> 1a) which genre they would use, if they needed to (1) inform (2) one person (3) on a general issue;

and then to broaden their answers to addressing:

> 1b) which genre they would choose, if they needed to (1) inform (2) a considerable number of people simultaneously (3) on a general issue.

The resulting responds fan out as follows (the numbers presented are in terms of net total of answers):

> 1a)
> speech – 32; dialogue/dispute – 8; poem – 3; advertisement/commercial – 2; novel – 0; interview – 0; newscast – 0; undecided – 5
> 1b)
> newscast – 22; speech – 20; advertisement/commercial – 4; dialogue/dispute – 2; poem – 1; interview – 1; novel – 0; undecided – 0

Two points in the responses call for attention even as early as this point. The first, and crucial one, is that the results prove that no unanimous agreement as to genres and their utilization exists. In other words, as there is not one single, 'correct' answer around which all respondents unite, even preliminary results as the ones here can be argued to prove Classical Typology (as discussed in (2) above) does not hold when genres are concerned. In contrast, prototypes prove to exist as the answers reveal significant density as to two central members (i.e. speech in (1a) and newscast in (1b)) and a periphery (i.e. low-percentage uses such as dialogue and poem in (1a), and advertisement/ commercial and dispute in (1b)).

Additionally, genres prove to operate more potently in cases when no face-to-face or one-to-one interaction is necessarily required. In other words, the need to inform one person only has encouraged a total of 5 respondents to stand undecided, while the requirement for informing a multitude triggers no such undecidedness. Moreover, it should be noted that the answers concerning informing many people vary significantly more than the ones concerning persuading one person only: in (1b), newscast and speech stand on almost equal footing. Both facts (the number of the undecided and the more 'scattered' decisions as to (1b)) prove that persuading many people simultaneously allows for greater flexibility as to genre choices.

Furthermore, as would be expected, in the answers to Question 1a, monologic types rank better than dialogic ones – an assumption confirmed by the highest percentage of the speech genre. However, the novel and the newscast rank lowest and do that along the interview, the latter being the only 'natural' low for its being dialogic in form. As both expected and later confirmed in an in-class discussion, the newscast was dis-preferred because of specificities of the parameter of 'audience' – the newscast is perceived as normally employed to inform a number of people instead of one person. The novel, in its turn, was dis-preferred for two reasons: first, because of its length, and, second, for achieving its communicative goal through artistic means, or, in the students' words, for being 'more artistic rather than informative'.

The option of the dispute, on the other hand, turns out to be systematically related to the 'truth factor'. One of the students perceived herself as gradually reaching a clarification of her own opinion by arguing. The second one reported to have chosen this genre as 'bringing out the best' in him, since a dispute would allow him to present the information he has topically and in a well-structured manner. The poem was chosen as a suitable means of informing one's love of his/her feelings. The form of an advertisement/ commercial was intended to be imitated in recommending somebody something, for example a book.

Therefore, it can be argued that the prototypical genre to use in informing one person (or a small number of people) on a general issue is (a) monological, and (b) of medium length. The closest instantiation of the prototype in communicative situations defined by the above parameters is the speech.

In the answers to Question 1b, the percentage of the newscast, if compared to (1a), displays a radical increase, displaying the highest figures as to this genre across all the questions. This proves that newscasts, contrary to investigations in modern research on discourse (e.g. van Dijk, 1997, 2009, 2014) and in Critical Discourse Analysis (e.g. Fairclough, 1995, 2003, 2006; van Dijk, 2008), are thought to be strictly informative and not persuasive – they are not considered to present a personal point of view but objective reports (the popular misconception of newscasts belies their manipulative power).

The answers to Question 1b also display one of the two lowest numbers as to the speech, although it is again a top preference in comparison to the other genres. Text length is the possible decisive factor here – in a speech, there is more time to expound one's information fully; in a newscast, this possibility is more restricted. In the subsequent discussion, some students argued a newscast does not allow for explanations but simply states facts, which, they thought, often 'cripples' the information itself. This opinion actually contradicts what the students gave as reasons for their choice – speeches were ranked as a top informative genre, at the same time, they were chosen for their 'explanatory' potential. Additionally, and this is an important observation as to the speech genre in general, a speech is used for seemingly informative purposes but, in actuality, it proves to present a personal viewpoint manipulatively concealed as

reporting. Basically, the respondents tend to view speeches as a genre explaining an objective situation, which is a contradiction in itself.

Finally, it should be noted that one student a-typically preferred the poem genre. It was the same student as in Question 1a; the choice was again probably dictated by personal preferences and strong general interest in the genre. Alternatively, it was dictated by current-context bound factors.

Therefore, it can be argued that the prototypical genre to use in informing a number of people on a general issue is (a) monological, and (b) of medium or short length. The closest instantiation of the prototype in communicative situations defined by the above parameters is again the speech.

The second task in the questionnaire required the respondents to answer which genre they would use, if they:

> 2a) had to (1) persuade (2) one person (3) on a general issue, and
> 2b) had to (1) persuade (2) a considerable number of people simultaneously (3) on a general issue.

The same response alternatives as in the first task were offered.

The respondents' answers fan out as follows:

> 2a)
> speech – 24; dialogue/dispute – 21; advertisement/commercial – 3; poem – 2; novel – 0; interview – 0; newscast – 0; undecided – 0
> 2b)
> speech – 32; advertisement/commercial – 14; dialogue/dispute – 2; novel – 2; poem – 0; interview – 0; newscast – 0; undecided – 0

In the answers to 2a, the percentage of the speech rose again as the critical change in requirement parameter is the one from 'inform' to 'persuade'. The newscast numbers fell again, most likely for the same reason – newscasts are not believed to be a persuasive but an informative genre.

The genre whose numbers rose in correspondence to the change of the parameter in the question this time was the dialogue/ dispute. However, the speech again ranked highest, suggesting that when people try to persuade somebody, they treat objections on the opposite communicative end as running contrary to their overall communicative goal. Persuasion, prototypically, proves not to equal overthrowing others' objections and clearing differences in opinion. It proves to be seen as listeners' accepting the speakers' point of view without modifying it. That is why dialogic forms are taken to reflect disagreement, unlike monologic ones.

The poem again was preferred by a small number of students. The reasons are the same as discussed above. The novel and the other dialogic genres were ranked as in the answers to Questions 1a and 1b.

Therefore, it can be argued that the prototypical genre to use in persuading one person (or a small number of people) on a general issue is (a) monological,

and (b) of medium length. The closest instantiation of the prototype in communicative situations defined by the above parameters is again the speech.

In the answers to Question 2b, the speech was again preferred overwhelmingly. The advertisement/commercial also ranks high. As the students commented later, advertisements/ commercials often result in change of people's behavior and thus seem more forcefully persuasive. The newscast fell to 0%, again due to being perceived as objective reporting.

Therefore, it can be argued that the prototypical genre to use in persuading a number of people on a general issue is (a) monological, and (b) of medium length. The closest instantiation of the prototype in communicative situations defined by the above parameters is again the speech.

In task number 3, another parameter was tested. The parameter relates to the experimental niche of providing data on if the social sphere in which a genre is produced plays significant part in genre perception. The type of discourse chosen (randomly) was 'political discourse'. The respondents were asked to answer which genre they would use, if they:

> 3a) had to (1) persuade (2) into action (3) a number of people simultaneously.
> Here, the same response alternatives as in the first question were offered; and
> 3b) had to (1) persuade (2) into action (3) a number of people simultaneously.
> Here, the response alternatives offered belonged to political discourse only.

The responses fan out as follows:

> 3a)
> speech – 24; dialogue/dispute – 18; advertisement/commercial – 3; poem – 2; newscast – 1; novel – 0; interview – 0; undecided – 2
> 3b)
> political speech – 34; political advertisement/commercial – 8; political dialogue/dispute – 4; political poem – 2; political newscast – 1; political novel – 0; political interview – 0; undecided – 2

The answers as to 3a do not differ significantly from those in 2b. In other words, persuading a multitude of people and persuading a multitude of people into proactive behavior are not seen as crucially diverging activities.

Therefore, it can be argued that the prototypical genre to use in persuading into action a number of people is (a) monological, and (b) of medium length. The closest instantiation of the prototype in communicative situations defined by the above parameters is again the speech.

The answers as to 3b, however, do provide some significant differences. First, they reveal that specifying the social context as political allows for more genres to be employed than the domain of general communication does. No other question

has triggered such a variety of genre choices. Second, political discourse proves to be perceived as prototypically more monological than general discourses. In other words, in political genres, the speaker is expected to tell the listener(s) what they should do and, critically, that social perception is accepted as normal.

Therefore, it can be argued that, within political discourse, the prototypical genre to use in persuading into action a number of people is (a) monological, and (b) of medium length. The closest instantiation of the prototype in communicative situations defined by the above parameters is the political speech.

In sum, on account of the fact that no single answer to the questionnaire proves to attract 100 per cent/all choices, the results from stage 1 of the study reported here can be claimed to demonstrate the relevance of a prototype-based approach to perceptions of genre and discourse. Moreover, the questionnaire also demonstrates how the notion of prototypes opens up a possibility for introducing social function and social and individual cognitive psychology into foreign language teaching. Further support for both those claims, and especially for the latter one, comes from the next stage in the study: the one dedicated to discussions with the students.

## 3 STAGE 2: IN-CLASS AND OUT-OF-CLASS ACTIVITIES

Subsequent discussions with the participants in the experimental group confirm the hypothesis that teaching genres as prototypes is not only feasible but it can be also a powerful means of enhancing the active role of the learner(s).

The discussions associated with stage 2 of the study repeatedly point to the fact that explicitly working with and within any conceptual category (e.g. a genre) does allow students to engage more actively in learning activities. Importantly, the discussions with the members of the experimental group confirm applying a prototypical approach indeed frees students' performance from the pressure of sanctioning linguistic choices as 'right' or 'wrong'. Instead, it helps them evaluate their own as well as their fellow-students' performances along a scale of 'better' and 'worse' strategic communicative choices. In addition, consciously dealing with prototypes and gradience techniques, students more easily come to terms with related issues such as context, register, appropriacy, etc.

In actuality, the first step in the discussion stage was an exploration of students' general knowledge of the social sphere in which the particular type of discourse functions. After having thus outlined the relevant common beliefs and stereotypes, the next step was to communicate and systematize peculiarities of individual students' perceptions. That step emerged as especially fruitful as it not only allowed for the advancement of students' oral skills (related to the particular social area); the prototype-based discussion on the particular genres raised students' awareness of their own personal specificities and helped them improve their negotiating skills in competition with those of their peers.

Next, building on the results from the questionnaire from the previous stage, in which the participants in the experimental group were asked to pick only

one genre out of the list, now the respondents were asked to rank all the genres from the list in accordance with each question. Aside from yielding valuable experimental data, performing this activity acted as a set-up for the next task, which was to isolate individual genres' features and to differentiate between better and worse examples of the same genre.

The next step – step 3 – was a discussion of the results from the previous exercise. The group established a statistically-based, shared understanding of the prototype and arranged all political discourse genres according to their proximity and distance from the core of the prototype category. This step also aimed to help develop students' oral skills in the particular social area and to aid their pinpointing personal perception differences, their negotiating those and their understanding the relationship between language use and statistical frequencies. The step also provides valuable data on individual features of genres. Importantly, it facilitates all later exercises on discriminating between better and worse examples of a genre.

Since the series of discussions relied on prototypology as their basis, teaching genres also seemed to need to follow a line of progression from prototypical to non-prototypical genres. This served to establish a continuation between genres and motivated the overall course progression. It also made it more palatable for students in learning 'difficult', non-prototypical genres which, as reported by the participants in the experimental group, are often 'incomprehensible' to them. Most students, the discussions in this stage affirm, when faced with such incomprehensibility, do not aim at achieving productive skills but set their goals as low as simply learning how to cope in the role of text receivers. Progressing from prototypically central genres to peripheral ones, on the contrary, allows students a sense of achievement even in the early stages of the course and motivates them to cope with more difficult, non-prototypical uses.

## 4 STAGE 3: FINAL TEST

The applicability of the prototype approach to genres established, now let us turn to the issue of whether the approach is indeed efficient in teaching genres. To resolve that issue, instead of following the experimental group through those stages, a control group was simultaneously taught genres the classical prescriptive way – through clear-cut genre categories, structural rules and requirements (as discussed in 1 and 3 above). The group did not study theoretically prototype theory, nor did it employ it in any in-class activities. It proceeded directly to the final stage 3 of the study.

That final stage consisted in a test, which, in its turn, consisted of two tasks. The first task required skills in text comprehension of the genres listed in the questionnaire, the second required skills in the text production of the same genres. The specific texts and topics chosen for both tasks were identical for the two groups of respondents. All tasks required both knowledge of contexts and knowledge of text structure.

The first task in stage 3 was further subdivided into evaluating comparatively (a) two political speeches and (b) two political campaign advertisements. The respondents were asked to evaluate the speeches in accordance with the following set of requirements:

1. Achievement of the current communicative purpose
2. Mastery of discursive practices
3. Command of genre structure
4. Use of genre-specific vocabulary

The evaluations were supposed to employ a marking scale from 2.00 (i.e. 'poor', or a 'fail', grade) to 6.00 (i.e. an 'excellent' grade).

Next, the respondents' evaluations were themselves evaluated by the lecturers. The responses were again graded in accordance with the marking scale from 2.00 (i.e. 'poor', or a 'fail', grade) to 6.00 (i.e. an 'excellent' grade). Both the experimental group and the control group were given grades as those would serve as data for comparing the final results.

The first sub-task was to evaluate two actually delivered speeches. The texts the students had to analyze were:

1) President Reagan's 1964 speech '*A Time for Choosing*' which appears in all major compilations and analysis of the genre as '*The Speech*', and
2) John Major's Farewell Address of 1997.

The first was selected due to its being generally seen as being of extremely good quality (i.e. present in almost all anthologies of political speeches); the second was chosen randomly. The respondents were expected to be able to make a clear distinction between the quality of the two. The results are systematized as follows:

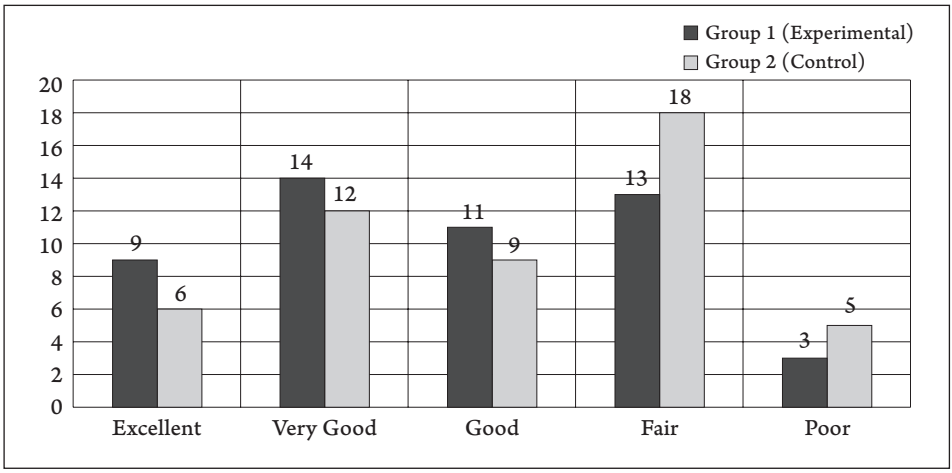


*Figure 1* **Task 1a results**

The second sub-task was to evaluate which political campaign advertisement out of the two actually used ones is more persuasive. The two texts the students had to analyze were:

1) *'In a Box'* from the 2014 campaign of Darius Foster (a Republican running for the Alabama State House), and
2) '*Emergency Response*' from the 2014 campaign of Arkansas Sen. Mark Pryor.

The two genre samples were selected as they were voted on the Internet as an extremely good one (i.e. persuasive as to contents and form) and an extremely bad one (i.e. not persuasive due to poor quality of contents and form). The results are systematized as follows:

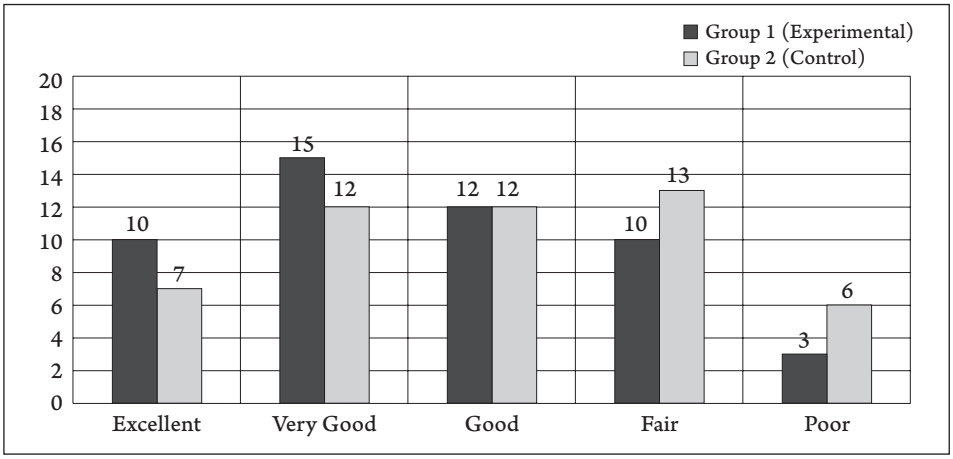


*Figure 2* **Task 1b results**

The second task in stage 2 was writing a political speech on a selected topic. The topic given to the students was the one of 'Global Warming', which was chosen as it is both one of (relatively) general knowledge and could also be employed for political speech purposes. The students were provided with a data file on the topic of climate deterioration, so those of them who chose could include those data in their speech. The control group and the experimental one were given the same data files. The speeches produced were later assessed (each by two independent evaluators) on the basis of overall persuasive power, content and text structure. The results are systematized as follows:

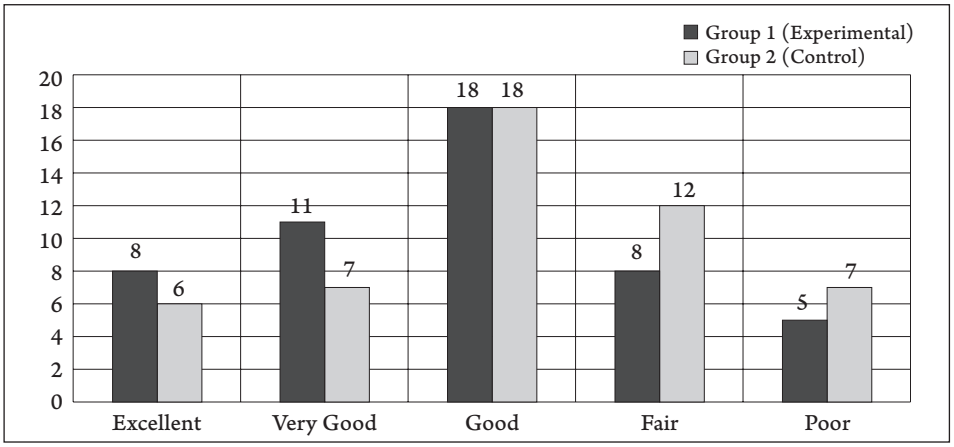


*Figure 3* **Task 2 results**

Finally, Figure 4 presented below displays comparatively the average grade results of the experimental and the control groups from each task:

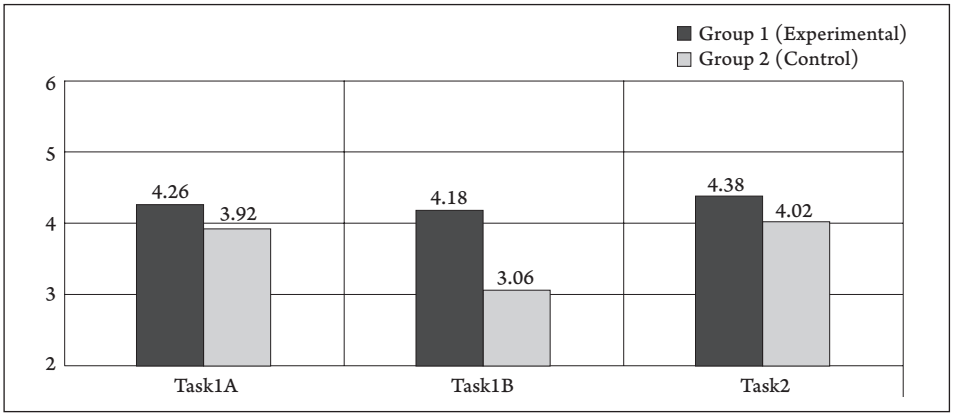


*Figure 4* **Average grades of the two groups according to Test tasks completion**

As all the data included in all the tables above without an exception confirm that the experimental group provided consistently better test results, it seems safe to conclude that teaching Prototypology and employing in-class activities based on the notion of prototypes indeed proves to enhance students' ability to produce better-quality texts pertaining to a genre.

## CONCLUSION

By way of a conclusion, let us return to the major research questions formulated at the beginning. As the inquiry presented here argues, and confirms, the prototype-centered perspective of genres is not only a theoretical analysts' academic-friendly abstraction. Data unambiguously prove it is highly operational in actual language-users' perspectives.

Next, a prototype-based approach can safely be claimed to be not only applicable but also efficient in teaching genres. As the test result data reported here demonstrate conclusively, the advantages of employing prototypes to teaching genres is far from simply a hypothesis. A prototype approach, for instance, can serve better the purpose of developing students' productive skills (e.g. text production in accordance with genres) which should ultimately be the goal of all (professional) University education.

The pedagogical implications drawn from the findings of the study are in line with the assumption that prototype-based knowledge of genre can work as a powerful pedagogical tool. Raising students' awareness of genres as prototypes develops students' clarity about discursive practices and communicative purposes. More specifically, through a prototype-based teaching perspective, learners achieve better awareness of text receiver expectations. Their raised awareness of genre also helps students to be clear about text structure. Overall, it can be argued that a prototype-based approach to teaching genre develops advanced learners' holistic view of textual practices.

However, it should all the same be noted that a study relying on a random selection of a somewhat narrow-profile group of students (i.e. one of considerable homogeneity) should not be generalized too broadly. The results presented here may be perfectly valid, if not conclusive; nevertheless, they were meant only as preliminary data on which future research could step and rely. Future efforts in the direction of studying the efficiency of teaching genre through prototypology, it seems safe to argue, would need to provide more varied tasks presented to more varied experiment groups.

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