Rhetorical Invention in Review Sub-genres: Overview and Tutorial

Rodica SUPERCEANU

Abstract. The sub-genre status of overview and tutorial can be validated by evidencing the relation of inclusion between them and the review at all levels of composition. The paper presents the results of an analytical study into the inventional means: the discourse logic and topoi whereby content is created and of a comparative study which has confirmed the abovementioned relation.

Introduction

The overview and the tutorial were established as sub-genres of the review (Superceanu 1996: 66-67) on the basis of the strongest criterial feature distinguishing genres, viz. the communicative purposes. The contrastive pragmatic analysis of the overview and of the review has shown that both article kinds examine the theoretical and practical issues of an area of enquiry, but the overview only describes the topical issues of that area, while the review describes its state-of-the-art and explores future research lines and possible developments. As regards the tutorial, the same kind of analysis has shown that both the tutorial and the review are concerned with the state-of-the-art of an area, but the tutorial sets itself the task of
explaining its elements and their relationships, whereas the review merely describes it. In consequence of these slight differences in the communicative purposes, the overview and the tutorial are not self-contained genres but sub-genres of the review.

The relationship of inclusion between the sub-genres and their parent genre can be evinced at various levels of abstraction. One is the rhetorical level, which itself manifests at two levels: the dispositional and the inventional. Disposition refers to the organization of content in large stretches of text or in the whole text. Typical of this organization is its schematic nature: it consists of structures made up of conventional categories often hierarchically organized, which have a specific function in the genre-texts. The dispositional practices are common to all active members of a discourse community and have resulted in the cognitive structures of genres, i.e. preferred ways of organizing content.

The other level, the inventional, has to do with the nature of the discursive logic and the creation of content from the rhetorical topoi (or "places"), which are headings, e.g. "Passing an exam depends on hard work", or operations, e.g. comparisons. The inventional choices from among the topoi are controlled, on the one hand, by the communicative purposes, and, on the other hand, by the pre-existing genre-specific dispositional structure.

Thus, the analysis of the inventional means and of the cognitive structures of genres and their hypothesized sub-genres is capable of informing about their relatedness. The dispositional analysis was reported somewhere else (Superceanu 1999: 174-196). In what follows, we shall discuss the pragmatic profiles of the overview and of the tutorial as they emerge from the comparison and contrast with that of the review. Then, we shall report the results of a study into the common topoi of the two sub-genres with a view to highlighting their discursive logic and finally, their generic affiliation.

Pragmatic profiles of review sub-genres

Like the review, the overview and the tutorial are authored by recognized experts in an area of enquiry, whose competences cover it both in breadth and in depth. They are also written for a mixed audience of specialists and non-specialists, who do not have the required time or background to examine, evaluate, and summarize the area issues themselves, although they need to keep informed for their current and future work. Also, the discourse communities
in which the overview and the tutorial function include the journal editors as major elements mediating and regulating the communicative process.

These communities expect the authors: a) to add new insights to the readers’ image of the area; b) to organize masses of data, and c) to facilitate the readers’ understanding of the way in which new knowledge has developed (tutorial) and of the way in which it is incorporated into the old knowledge (overview). These expectations, very similar to those of the review (Superceanu 1998: 127, 138), determine the communicative purposes of the overview and of the tutorial, which are also similar to those of the review, but sufficiently different for the articles to qualify as sub-genres.

The comparison of the communicative purposes of reviews and overviews has shown that both article kinds examine topical theoretical and practical issues of an area, but, whereas the review defines the state-of-the-art and explores future lines of development, the overview draws only a comprehensive picture of that area. Both survey application issues, but overviews do not discuss implications of any kind.

In contrast to overviews, tutorials are more closely related to review in terms of content scope, but much more different in terms of approach. The review and the tutorial are concerned with the issues that define the state-of-the-art in an area, but the review describes it, while the tutorial explains it in the light of the area conceptual framework. Both survey the latest applications and both discuss business implications. However, the review is intended to inform, while the tutorial is meant to educate.

Since the authors of overviews and tutorials establish with their audience a relationship based on the same epistemic purpose as that of reviews, the sub-genres will also be actualized in expository texts made up of expository, descriptive, and argumentative passages.

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The second level of the rhetorical analysis of genres is intended to reconstruct the underlying logic of discourse creation achieved through the use of general and special topoi as classes of headings or operations which provide content for specific rhetorical situations. Specifically, it aims at identifying and describing these topoi in terms of form and function.

The general and common topoi, which are rules of inference or principles, are used by all people irrespective of their affiliation to a speech or discourse community, while the
special topoi, which are models of or hypotheses about reality, are specific to particular discourse communities. The study of common topoi reveals the form of connection making in content creation, whereas the study of special topoi shows the matter of the concept association. Both classes can and should be studied, but the analysis of the common topoi provides results which can be readily used for pedagogic purposes.

For the identification of the common topoi we have adopted two classifications, one by E. Eggs (1984: 348), the other by E. Corbett (1971: 110). They both have been used because they include the largest number of common topoi traceable in scientific articles. Of these, we shall mention here only the main classes, which in Egg’s classification are those of “places” expressing logical rules such as modus ponens, modus tollens, inference rules about the relationships between the genera and the species or those between contradictory or contrary terms, linguistic rules and quasilogical rules such as: “more and less”. Corbett’s classification features as main classes Definition, Comparison, Relationship, Circumstance, and Testimony.

The overview

The analysis of the overview and then the comparison of the inventional means employed in the overview with those used in the review have shown remarkable similarities in three respects: a) the discursive logic, b) the kinds of topoi employed in the two genre-texts, and c) the correlation between particular topoi and particular dispositional parts.

Like the review, the logic of the overview is also predominantly inductive. The authors know of a number of facts in the domain, which they generalize. The particulars are implicit when they are recoverable from the literature, but when they are not, they are expressed explicitly. Some generalizations are supported by Example. These generalizations may take several forms: they may be factual, they may be generalizations themselves, or descriptions of technical systems. All the sections contain quite a number of inductive generalizations. However, they abound in Introduction and in the section Applications.

Another topos common to overviews and reviews is Division, but its use differs considerably. In overviews, it serves four rhetorical functions: 1) to highlight the parts of an entity; 2) to designate the species of a genus; 3) to expand a definition; 4) to organize content at the level of paragraph, section, and of the whole text. In the review, Division has fewer functions, but it is the fundamental topos in all parts and sections.
Just like in the review, the topos of Definition is used extensively in the section which treats basic concepts and in the sections which deal with technical methods. The whole array of definitional patterns occurs here: simple (formal, semi-formal) and expanded by stipulation, explanation, division, description or example. The choice of pattern or expansion technique is governed by the nature of the concept or term to be defined.

The topos of Comparison is employed in expanded definitions. Its function there is either to add to the reader’s image of the defined concept or to clarify the image by highlighting points of contrast with a related concept.

In contrast to induction, deduction is sparse. It is used to give explanations about the properties of techniques, which account for their advantages or disadvantages. In such cases, the direction of thought is from Effect to Cause. In other cases, deduction is the basis of an Antecedent-Consequence topos, which advances a claim about the attractiveness of a technical item.

As can be seen, there are more similarities than differences between overviews and reviews in terms of inventional means employed. This can be explained by the slight difference in the communicative purposes of the two article kinds, which is actualized in the scope of the subject-matter addressed and which, in turn, brings about differences in the dispositional patterns, but not in the inventional means and their functions.

The tutorial

Our research into the inventional features of the tutorial has investigated the characteristics that account for the instructive, clarifying purpose of this article kind. The analysis of the corpus has shown that the resulting text is mainly expository, but contains more and longer stretches of argumentation than reviews or overviews. Description and narration are very rarely used and occur only in the sub-sections dealing with technologies.

The underlying textual logic is fairly balanced: partly inductive, partly deductive. Inductive generalizations are not as frequent as in overviews but, here, they are put to more varied uses. They serve communicative purposes such as: to arouse interest in the article subject, to present controversial issues in the area, to refer readers to literature, etc. They also fulfil rhetorical purposes such as to describe examples, to indicate specifics in a definition or as premise for a prediction.
Particulars are expressed implicitly when they belong to the common stock of the area knowledge, or when they are retrievable from the specialist literature or the visual aids in the text. Other times, the particulars are expressed explicitly. Still other times, the generalizations are substantiated by examples. The topos of Example is also quite versatile in tutorials. Besides being used as support to inductive generalizations, examples furnish the minor premise in syllogisms.

However, the most versatile topos in tutorials is the Definition. Its varied uses make possible a finer differentiation of functions into macro-topos and micro-topos. It operates as macro-topos at the level of the whole text, as macro-topos component of the top macro-topos at the level of sections or subsections, and as micro-topos at the level of sentences. As macro-topos component, Definition is used in all sections except the Introduction and the Summary. In these sections it is effected by means of other topoi: Division, Testimony, Comparison, Relationship. As micro-topos, Definition is used sparsely: once in section Definition and twice in a topical sub-section. The advantage of the definition is that it makes the section and subsections shorter due to its compact form.

The topos of Division is next to Definition in rhetorical importance. However, it does not evince other uses than those noticed to occur in reviews and overviews. Classification is rarely used, but each instance of its occurrence greatly contributes to the neat organization of the text. The modern topos of Enumeration is closely related to Division and Classification. Some uses of Enumeration, e.g. to name the members of a class, to lay out the organization of the text, are indistinguishable from those of Division. Such cases should be considered as instances of Division for the sake of methodological consistency. One use of Enumeration, namely to provide information succinctly, e.g. names of materials, advantages or disadvantages of a technique, comes close to the topos of Example.

The topos of Comparison is not frequently resorted to, but its potentialities are very aptly exploited. It is used for several rhetorical purposes: a) to contrast two definitions when the contrast helps to highlight an essential characteristic; b) to develop a paragraph whose subject is a concept that has two distinctive sides to it; c) to begin the exposition of a class of concepts; d) to round up an expository passage or a subsection; and e) to support a prediction.

The frequent presence of explanations in tutorials can be accounted for by their capability to uncover the cause, the source or the rationale of things, thus promoting
understanding. Material for explanations is provided by the topoi of Cause-Effect and Antecedent-Consequence. They are used to construct both argument lines and expository passages. The Cause-Effect topos is often embedded in an Antecedent/Consequence topos, forming the antecedent. In such arguments, it gives support to claims about developments or predicted situations. Other uses of Cause-Effect are to give the reason for the use of a technology and to account for the origin of an undesirable situation. These latter uses are actualized in arguments or in expository parts.

A specific feature of the review sub-genres is the use of graphics as external aids to invention. In tutorials they are very frequently employed, e.g. in a text of sixteen pages there are no fewer than thirty-nine graphical elements: diagrams, graphs, tables, and photographs. Their high number and variety points to their rhetorical force of securing understanding. Specifically, graphics are used a) to supplement the verbally expressed information b) to clarify it or c) to summarize it. They also serve rhetorical purposes such as a) to support inductive generalizations, b) to support claims and c) to give a visual representation of a Classification, a Definition or a Comparison. In other words, they give support to the material produced either inductively or deductively.

The complex use of inventional means in tutorials is determined by their specific purpose, that of facilitating understanding, storage, and retrieval. The topoi which are drawn upon include Definition, Example, the organizing topos of Division and Classification, the clarifying topos of Cause-Effect and Antecedent-Consequence, and the non-artistic means, graphical elements. The text is produced from inductive generalizations and explanatory statements in balanced proportions.

Conclusions

The analysis of the inventional means in review sub-genres has led to two conclusions:

a) the sub-genre status of the overview and the tutorial is confirmed at one more level of abstraction through the similarities with their parent genre in terms of discursive logic and of the kind and function of the topoi;

b) their differences in the same variables, but notably in the function of the topoi used can be accounted for by the degree of difference in the communicative purposes.
When the article, viz. the overview focuses on the informational needs of the readers, the differences in the kind and function of topoi are slight, but when the article, viz. the tutorial seeks to answer educational needs, the differences are greater.

References