

# CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSING WRITTEN INTERACTION

## *1.1 Overview*

Within the literature of genre theory to date, there is scant reference to research on the 'genre' of email texts as the products of a *discourse community*. The word 'genre' has been loosely used to refer to the texts generated in email list forums for some time (e.g. Collot & Belmore 1996, Gruber 2000), but this thesis takes the position that the complexity arising from technological mediation of this form of written communication makes discourse oriented analysis of these types of text-unit problematic. I maintain that the texts instantiated by posts<sup>1</sup> to a list are better regarded as representative of a type of *mixed-genre* constituted by prototypical stages, but by no means consistent in their generic organisation. While they certainly show a number of conventions in formatting and functional staging, and entail an argumentative purpose, their description as a 'genre-type' is not warranted.

This thesis introduces a methodology for analysing the texts produced in this context by offering a theoretical perspective which differs from many previous investigations of CMC<sup>2</sup> discourse communities. Such previous investigations do not consider email list texts *per se*, but concentrate on ethnographic, action or linguistic approaches to analysis (e.g. Marshall 2000, Ekeblad 1998, 1999, Hård af Segerstad 2002, Ho 2002). In contrast, I consider the posts to the list as the primary unit of analysis, and investigate means of characterising the list interaction in terms of this unit of analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> It is assumed that the reader has read previous modules in which email-related terms were first discussed (Module 2: Appendix 1: Glossary). However, a copy has been provided with this Thesis: Appendix A12 glosses basic email-related terms. The boundaries and definition of a post are in any case made clear in subsequent chapters describing the primary text-units of a post.

<sup>2</sup> Computer Mediated Communication

While Collot & Belmore (1996) for example, maintain as I do that there is no clear grammatical distinction between spoken and written forms of discourse, their study of CMC texts does not investigate the internal generic structure of the texts they selected, but conducts a Biberian style feature analysis of texts (see for example 1988, 1993, Conrad & Biber 2000) which have been classed as members of a genre *a priori*. This means that they have classed the products of such interaction as examples of a genre without specifying in what ways such texts represent a genre. Therefore I maintain that claims as to relative 'written-spokenness' may not be applicable to notions of a CMC 'genre' in their study. My approach is rather to treat the analysis of these types of *asynchronous* interactive written discourse as somewhat problematic with respect to mode, and what has traditionally focussed on the dimension spoken – written in verbal texts. The approach introduced in this thesis addresses some of the issues raised by the nature of the texts. For example, I maintain that they need to be regarded as more or less *interactive* (at 1<sup>st</sup> order register,) or *involved* (at 2<sup>nd</sup> order register)<sup>1</sup> rather than either written or spoken; and that the material context of situation, i.e. their technological mediation<sup>2</sup>, allows and constrains the meanings which can be made in specific and identifiable patterns. These issues were discussed in detail in Module Two, Part I (hereafter Mod 2: I), and the methodological approach or framework presented in the following chapters was developed with these factors in mind.

This thesis therefore presents a framework for providing insights into the products and processes of written interaction from a genre *perspective*. In doing so, it represents an attempt to integrate a variety of approaches, rather than a focus on only one of the many possible orientations to the analysis of discourse. The model was developed in this way firstly because, as acknowledged above, the texts on which the thesis is based incorporate features which have been analysed in the

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<sup>1</sup> See Mod 2, part 1, section 2.1 for discussion of orders of register (c.f. Martin 1992: 571-572, Halliday 1978). See also *Figure 1.1* below

<sup>2</sup> i.e. at 1<sup>st</sup> order *Mode*: c.f. for example Martin 1982: 571. See also *Fig 1.1*

past using approaches developed for analysing either spoken or written discourse. These past approaches concentrate on those features which are therefore typically associated with registerial *mode*, due to their typical construction of the texts as interactive, or *overtly* dialogic. In Mod 2: 1, I argued that a focus on features associated with mode is inadequate for my purposes, since my primary concern is not with relative writtenness or spokenness of email as a mode of discourse. Rather, my use of the term ‘genre’ in this study and in the discussion which follows is tied to a notion of *social purpose*, and therefore the model needed to incorporate features related to inter-personal relations and to ideological meanings, as well as the textual meanings most commonly associated with mode and the degree of writtenness-spokenness in a text. Secondly, and most importantly, this thesis approaches the analysis and interpretation of generic staging—and discourse organisation in general—as a function of evaluation. Hence, one perspective on the internal organisation of these texts considers their staging to be a function of the interrelationship of what Systemics refers to as the four fundamental *metafunctions* of the lexicogrammar<sup>1</sup>. In contrast, most approaches to text and discourse analysis of email interaction concentrate on (metafunctional) areas more narrowly focussed on cohesion (textual) and clause relations (logical).

In summary, the first 3 chapters of Module Three which follow present a framework of analysis which recognises the insights of a variety of approaches to the analysis of both written and spoken discourse, but focuses on integrating these approaches within a genre perspective on the texts. This framework, or methodological approach, is also largely dependent on analysis using an approach introduced in Mod 2: II—the representation of social actors, and their (self) positioning and status as revealed by appraisal analysis. The framework is also concerned to incorporate what is known as ‘evaluative prosodies’ as a means of interpreting each text as a staged argument. A variety of rhetorical strategies used by writers to help signal text organisation are also discussed as diagnostic tools for this purpose.

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<sup>1</sup> These are: experiential, logical, interpersonal, and textual

Chapter 4 presents extended discussions on how texture and rhetorical purpose are interwoven in several texts representative of five previously identified text-type styles. An extension to the framework focussed on the construction of textual identity in this context is introduced in chapter 5, together with the relationship of textual identity to the negotiation of 'status'<sup>1</sup>. This chapter incorporates results of appraisal analysis to highlight some of the means by which three list participants 'construct' a textual identity. The matter of textual identity is discussed both in terms of 'stylistic identity' concerned with the relative preferences for discourse conventions in sets of representative texts, and in terms of affiliation, or positioning of self (the writer/addresser) in relation to others and their values—what I term 'negotiated identity'. It reports briefly on the results of an analysis of attitude *targets* in order to demonstrate ways in which the textual identity of three selected posters can be distinguished. I argue that texts of each poster identity use the resources of the list conventions in distinctive and 'identifiable' ways, while their use of these resources constructs a 'persona' aligned to particular ideological values, and as therefore affiliated or disaffiliated with specified 'others'.

## ***1.2 Written interaction and the unit of analysis***

Most written interaction is necessarily materially *monologic*, with no possibility of actual response reaching the original writer of a text. However, it is a commonplace in most language or literature research today to assert that all text is *dialogic* to some degree, because the writer takes the part of an *Addresser* (or *narrator*), and in this role, constructs through the text, a relationship to an Addressee (or *Ideal/Imagined Reader*). In addition, the extent to which the writer is able to make reference to other voices or positions as informing the writer's stance, results in texts which can be classed as more or less *heteroglossic*<sup>2</sup>. In this sense, then, all

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<sup>1</sup> This 'status' refers to social status and is related to Tenor and Dimensions of Tenor such as status or 'power' realised in discourse. See e.g. Poynton 1985. See also *Figure 5.3*

<sup>2</sup> Discussed in detail in Module 2, Part II: 2.2, 2.3 inter alia

written texts take up positions with respect to the projected voices and positions in other texts, both past and future, and through this means, writers respond to those voices already encountered, or to imagined responses to come. In choosing to study the texts produced in the interaction of a group of email list members, I was originally motivated by the fact that actual written responses are produced by members of the group. It was possible to study the way in which each participant made reference in their contributions to a variety of positions and voices, and in turn, how other participants made sense of these contributions via their own responses.

Chapters 2 and 3 to follow outline a framework for analysing what might be called the *generic structure potential* (Hasan, in Halliday & Hasan 1985: 63ff) of the *prototypical* contributions to the interaction of the *list*—in what is known as a *post*<sup>1</sup>. Exchanges between members of the group typically occur within posts, via strategies of formatting and other means of recontextualisation, and these fundamental *framing* conventions, while technologically prompted, are at the same time, developed and adopted by group members in particular ways in order that meanings be more coherently made. This means that *turns* are usually constructed within the post by the writer, sometimes interspersed with the 'interrupted' turns of another listmember's previous contribution (see for example Herring 2001: 619-20, who makes similar observations).

Module 2, Appendix E demonstrated how a thread, or written conversation is engendered by means of extracting sections of previous posts, and then responding to these re-framing extracts in order to construct an ongoing conversation within a single post. Ex 1.1 below provides one example of this formatting, with what I term the *overtly* (or *simulated*) *interactive* post style (c.f. 2.2.2, and Mod 2: I, section 3.6 for the 5 categories of post styles), in which quoted material is commonly marked by carats (>):

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<sup>1</sup> Again, please see Appendix A12 'Glossary', for further definitions of basic email-related terms.

**Example 1.1: [SPM4/simon7]**

Date: Sun, 25 May 1997 23:10:09 +0000  
From: "full-name" <email>  
Subject: Re: Spam - (And not the lunch meat)

Mike:

In response to your comments about spam, I must remind you that what I posted was written by the editor of the Red Rock Eater News Service. Those were not my words, but not far off my own opinions.

>First, let's differentiate between targeted ads and "spam."

No. Let's not. Spam in my mailbox is unrequested advertising. In certain cases I have volunteered to receive promotional material from a company (Some software companies offer updates on their stuff that I like to hear about.). I do not object to receiving this because I asked for it. However, if I order a book on Tibetan Rifle Shooting from amazon.com and then receive an advertisement from them about Tibetan Archery, it is spam, it is evil, and I don't like it.

>I operate a phone coaching service, and have no ethical problem with presenting it in newsgroups where it is relevant. For example, since I know quite a bit about weight-loss psychology, I put ads targeted precisely towards that end in an ng as alt.diet-support. I get the usual feedback to the effect that I am Evil.

You are. But that sort of evil is so common on unmoderated newsgroups that I have been driven from them completely. Not reading the newsgroups has pretty much solved the problem for me. My question has not to do with evil, but are you making any money?

>As I see it, targeted ads are not "spam."

As I see it they are and I will support legislation to stop it.

>"Spam" is, as I understand it, ads that are not precisely targeted to the unmoderated newsgroup or mailing list in question.

See above.

>(Moderated newsgroups or mailing lists exist at the behest of the owner or moderator...so they are in totally separate categories).

In the case of mailing lists, this is not really true. We at Netdynam are not moderated, yet I can kick people off and filter them so that they cannot resubscribe. In the case of someone repeatedly trying to sell a product here, I might very well do so. On Netd, of course, you would have the option of gathering enough support to get me unelected as listowner. On most unmoderated groups you don't even have that option.

>There should never be guilt in responding to targeted ads or to spammers.

Yes there should. Lots of it. (Notice we are trading pronouncements. Is that arguing, discussion or just posturing. Inquiring minds want to know.)

>If the cost is low to email, as Simon mentions, that is the joy of the Internet.

No, it's a curse upon the internet.

[...]

>We use them. Let us save  
>our vitriol for the things in life that count.

I agree with this somewhat. I will choose the social battles I want to fight. I choose not to put much effort into this one. You might choose not to put much effort into trying to get homeless alcoholics off the booze. So we differ in where we do our community service. Nevertheless, I will encourage those fighting spam just as they would probably support me.

Methinks.

Simon

[sig file]

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Thus, each post can either be considered to be one text—since they are each created and sent by one list-member in one chunk—or they can be considered to

be comprised of a number of texts of varying types, resulting in a type of exchange complex, whose boundaries happen to be technologically signalled. In terms of Bakhtin's (1986: 72ff) discussion regarding the boundaries of the utterance, "changes in speaking subject" are clearly signalled within each post:

This change of speaking subjects, which creates clear-cut boundaries of the utterance, varies in nature and acquires different forms in the heterogeneous spheres of human activity and life, depending on the functions of language and on the conditions and situations of communication. (p.72)

However, in the case of the email post, the signals of these changes within posts are managed by the writer, mainly through formatting—a matter of control over the expression plane of mode—and thus *the conditions and situations of communication* can be regarded as providing for the interpolation of the Other as a case of *manifest intertextuality* (Fairclough 1992: 117ff), rather than as a signal of the "*finalization* of the utterance" (Bakhtin 1986:76, my italics), which Bakhtin notes as one of the boundary conditions of a complete utterance. Therefore, following Bakhtin and others (c.f. for example Stubbs 1996: 32), the complete utterance, or complete text-unit, is considered to be bounded by a change in 'creating' subject, as well as by the various signals of 'finalization' that posts typically employ (see e.g. 3.5.2). Thus the post itself is considered as the primary text unit for analysis in this thesis.

The framework that I have developed looks at posts from both perspectives mentioned above: firstly, from the perspective of the post as complete utterance, as "primary text", one which makes reference to other texts and contributions in more or less overt ways, and locates itself in the context of an ongoing conversation:

Each individual utterance is a link in the chain of speech communion. It has clear-cut boundaries that are determined by the change of speech subjects (speakers), but within these boundaries the utterance, ... reflects the speech process, others' utterances, and, above all, preceding links in the chain (sometimes close and sometimes—in areas of cultural communication—very distant). (Bakhtin 1986: 93);

and secondly, from that of the internal organisation of each of the basic discourse units (e.g. *turns, stages, phases* (or 'parts'); c.f. also discussion Mod 2: II). This perspective incorporates the idea that each post may be comprised of a series of turns and shifts of register, and that writers will mark the boundaries of these text units using a variety of signals.

My objective in developing this model is to account for the means by which posters adopt, and creatively reproduce, what I have previously referred to as the 'group norms of interaction' (Don 1997) by which members of the email list attempt to make their meanings intelligible to the other listmembers using only graphic channel means. My investigation is therefore concerned with:

...the uniqueness of process [which] is made intelligible by reference to the general regularities of a shared system familiar to the members of at least some specifiable social group.. (Hasan 1999: 223)

As argued in Mod 2: I, resources of the graphic channel (Hasan 1985) have not previously formed the main communicative means for group practices to develop via what Hasan terms 'process sharing' (1985: 58). An email list provided a way of investigating features of process sharing in a written-only context, such as the way in which posters regularly incorporate the previous posts of other listmembers, the way in which posters stage their texts, and the ways in which attitudinal meanings functioned to both signal staging and to signal affiliation with respect to other listmembers. A further related objective was to reach conclusions about the ways in which posters creatively manipulate these norms of interaction as they set about constructing for themselves, by means of this communicatively restricted graphic channel, discursive identities or personas.

It is my position that 'the post' represents a type of *speech genre*, what Bakhtin (1986: 78) refers to as the "relatively stable typical *forms of the construction of the whole*" (italics in original). A linguistic analysis of the representative texts in this study, and my active participation in the interaction of the list has allowed me to identify a number of 'relatively stable typical forms of construction of whole

posts', and to note that listmembers use these forms as flexible templates or conventionalised social practices in which they manage their identities as textual personae. This aspect of textual identity, or what I will term *poster identity*, is taken up in more detail under a discussion related to the regular stylistic features used by poster identities in Chapter 5.

### ***1.3 Rhetorical organisation potential***

In describing the typical post, rather than adopt the term 'generic structure potential' mentioned above, instead, I use the term *rhetorical organisation potential* (first proposed in Module 2), for a number of reasons. The first relates to the applicability of the term *rhetorical* as an attribute of text organisation: most of the contributions to the group discussion forum I see as organised by *argument* in the service of *identity maintenance*. In other words, the social purpose of all of the contributions is to maintain identity—to explore difference and similarity (*alignment/disalignment* or *affiliation/disaffiliation*) with respect to others. The means by which list-members explore difference or construct solidarity is through argument, using a form of expository discourse—by positioning themselves and others in relation to ideological value systems, via reference to ideologically-charged tropes such as family, work, aesthetics, religion, gender, and so on. These types of text belong to the category of what Martin (1985) describes as expository writing, both *hortatory* and *analytic*, in which writers' social purpose is defined as *persuading to* and *persuading that* respectively (Martin 1985: 17). In the service of these arguments, the use of evaluation and the evocation of attitude remains an obvious rhetorical device. However, the term 'genre' is contestable with reference to these texts: while they are recognisable as distinctive texts and employ local conventions of rhetorical development, similarities of structure and of narrowly-defined social purpose are not evident across the whole corpus.

Secondly, rather than use the term 'structure', which has overtones of rigidity and obligatory elements, 'organisation' in this thesis refers to a looser sequence of text

events. It refers to a general tendency of posts to be sequenced, or ordered, in typical or conventional ways, which in turn allows for noticeable marked behaviour. When such marked behaviour occurs, it tends to function as an overt signal of attitudinal stance. This is the case even if no explicit evaluative lexis is present due to the way conventions tend to set up expectancy of typical sequences: to break with convention is a means of calling attention to that act. Furthermore, while 'structure' connotes a somewhat static view of text creation and interpretation<sup>1</sup>, 'organisation' allows for a more 'mutable' conception of a generic *prototype*, one which can accommodate recursivity, and transition phases or boundary conditions between stages or segments, rather than strict boundaries between the stages of any text.

As will be discussed again in the following chapter, the relationship between the various stages or segments of texts, and the boundaries of the texts themselves, is conceived of as *layered by frames of coherence* (a term I first introduced in Don 1997), and these 'layers' can be partially accounted for by differences between constituency and dependency relations. In other words, 'coherence' in the context of an email post to a list can be described as a matter of embedding at one layer, and as a matter of reference and sequence at another. The conception of 'layering', 'framing', or 'tracks' owes much to the notion of metacommunicative, logical levels of analysis prevalent in cybernetics (c.f. Bateson 1972, Wilden 1980, Lemke 2000) and in Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth SFL) to account for the fact that features at one level of analysis contribute to meaning at the next level 'up', and rely on sequencing<sup>2</sup> in order that these meanings be made and interpreted. It also owes its conception to the work of Goffman (1981), particularly his notion of *footing*.

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<sup>1</sup> This obviously differs somewhat from Sinclair's use of these terms, in which 'structure' refers to a 'dynamic' perspective on discourse development.

<sup>2</sup> See also Module 2, Part II, section 1.2 on the notion of *logogenetic* development of texts, and their *chronotopic* nature.

These perspectives can be used both to account for texts as organised wholes after the event, or from a more dynamic perspective of text as utterance (or *reading event*)<sup>1</sup>, as sequences of textual events which make their meaning by reference to ever wider intra- and intertextual chains. From this perspective as well, insights into the nature of the "reading event" provided by Sinclair and others (e.g.1993, Hunston 1989, 2000, Francis 1994)—particularly the notion of the signalling of coherence on both the autonomous and interactive planes of discourse—have influenced my investigation into how both reference and discourse markers (analogous to signals of Engagement under the appraisal framework) contribute to the articulation of a text's organisation. Bhatia (2004) also outlines a view of genre in which the description of genre can be 'characterized at various levels of generalization' (p. 59), and his approach can be usefully compared with the one adopted in this module.

## ***1.4 Genre and written interactive texts***

Fundamentally, I view genre as a function of the dynamics of its *texturing* (Fairclough 2003: 100ff), and thus it can both account for, and take into account the legitimated options for action that any participant can undertake at any given juncture of the unfolding of the discourse. In the case of specific institutional practices, which include the activity-sequences *legitimated* within a 'community of practice' (Lave & Wenger 1991, Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1998), the conceptualisation of genre is put at risk by issues relating to mode, and some of these were addressed in Mod 2: I. Therefore, 'genre' needs to be characterised at a variety of levels of delicacy by reference to both linguistic (synoptic) and discursive (dynamic) orientations, which take into account the development or contestation of the norms of the group's discursive practices over time. While this view of genre is not necessarily new (e.g. Miller 1994, Bhatia 2004), the application and integration of this view in analysing the discourse of communities of

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<sup>1</sup> See also Module 2, Part II, section 3.3.3 on one of the means by which provoked Appraisal is constructed: via attachment to the 'identity chaining' of the *autonomous plane of discourse*, and cued by elements on the *interactive plane*.

practice—outside academic and commercial discourse communities at least—has not been developed to any great extent (recent work on pedagogical contexts e.g. Coffin, Painter and Hewings 2005 an exception).

On the other hand, while not specifically genre-related, Ho's 2002 work represents an in-depth study of website mediated communication, what she terms electronic discussion forums (EDF), and many of the areas of investigation in her study parallel areas of concern in this thesis. Ho distinguishes between the various forms and approaches to the study of this type of discourse, and goes on to examine in detail the nature of the discourse evident in the EDF in which she was involved. Her work focussed in particular on the construction of a particular Singaporean identity within the texts in her study. Using a slightly different perspective, Hård af Segerstad (2003) analysed in detail the features of email mediated communication discourse in the context of an overview of several other forms of CMC discourse. Both works provide detailed surveys on the literature addressing analysis of CMC texts, and therefore such a review is not attempted here. However, while both of these works address areas of similar concern to that of this thesis, they do not focus on the development of an approach and a model which may be adapted to the investigation of generic conventions of a wide range of written interactive texts. As Ho (2002: 30) observes:

The specifics of how discourse features and linguistic devices function to fulfil particular roles within specific contexts in the dynamic, interactive environment of online communication, however, does not seem to have received [comparable] attention.

The aim of this thesis therefore is to contribute to this research with a particular emphasis on the organisation of a social community's prototypical text-units, and to pay special attention to the ways in which attitudinal meanings appear at regular intervals and thus help to signal staging in texts (e.g. via 'attitudinal prosodies'). This leads in turn to the description of what I have called rhetorical organisation potential.

### ***1.4.1 Genre and the post as the unit of analysis***

As stated above, the fundamental unit of analysis in my study is considered to be the *post*, and the 'relatively stable typical forms of the whole utterance' (Bakhtin 1986: 78). This means that the actual 'content' of any post may be comprised of any number of *core-genres* such as narrative, recount, exposition, and so on. In the context of this thesis, the mixed generic potential of each post means that they incorporate what Fairclough (2003: 69) refers to as "the socially available resource of genres in potentially quite complex and creative ways." Core-genres, in contrast, are resources at an abstract level of linguistic and social organisation, recognisable by a wider range of community members than the institutional or community group which develops its local conventions of practice, and which lead to the development and negotiation of *local conventions or practices* represented in texts. Couture (1986: 82, quoted in Swales 1990: 41) provides one fundamental definition for the analysis of genre as conventional *form of the whole utterance* which accords with the approach taken in this thesis: "[genre] specifies conditions for beginning, continuing, and ending a text".

Eggins and Martin (1997: 236) represent the notion of a (core) genre as "the way the types of meaning in a text co-occur [is] a pattern typical of a particular genre", and continue "the sequence of functionally distinct stages or steps through which [a text] unfolds". They note that "linguistic definitions of genre [identify] 'relatively stable types' of interactive utterances [and] define genres functionally in terms of their social purpose" (Eggins and Martin 1997: 236).

Martin elsewhere (1997) describes the functional parameters of genres more precisely, and in doing so paradoxically acknowledges that the boundaries between genre 'types' are not precise, and that genres are better located in a topology, rather than a typology. What this means, is that "core genres" can be recognised within texts which are of completely different types if, for example, *mode* is the variable—as I am proposing here.

### ***1.4.2 Genre identification and genre users***

Bhatia (2004: 149), contrasts the notion of discourse community with that of *community of practice*. He makes the distinction between the *texts and genres* that enable the community to maintain their communicative purposes for 'discourse communities', and the *values and practices* which hold a community together for 'communities of practice'. In Module 2: I the term 'community of practice' was adopted in order to describe the texts analysed as products of the practices of the email list participants, and for the same reason, in Don 97: 2.2-2.7 the activities of the list were described in terms of Halliday's (1985: 44ff) levels of context. This is because prototypical texts need to be considered as a part of the wider social contexts within which they function as units of meaning.

However, Bhatia's (ibid) criteria problematise the categorisation of the products of this online group, since these products appear to be classifiable under the two types of community he distinguishes which are noted above. Following Bhatia, I class participants of long-term mailing lists as members of *a discourse community* rather than a community of practice, especially since members of any discourse community can also be members of other discourse communities by virtue of their *control* (in terms of ability to manipulate the conventions of a genre) of a variety of (macro)genres, while being at the same time, members of different communities of practice depending on their participation and recognition in that community. With respect to the email group in this study, while many long-term members are affiliated by the values and the practices of interaction developed within the group over time, it is also the case that they each belong to widely differing (cultural, ethnic and national) communities and hold widely different values on many issues. Therefore, the classification of participants as members of a *discourse community* acknowledges that it is the products of this group that are the focus of this study, rather than the participants themselves, even when their textual identity becomes a means for distinguishing between them in Chapter 5.

These factors led to the prototypical text-units of this email-mediated discourse community being regarded as 'generalisation', and distinguishes them from objects known by such terms as idealisation, universal template, schema, and so on.

Because the identification of genre is contested in the literature, and complicated by the appearance of genres in a variety of mediated forms, the next section addresses some of the issues relating to mode and genre in more detail.

## ***1.5 Issues of genre, text-type, and mode***

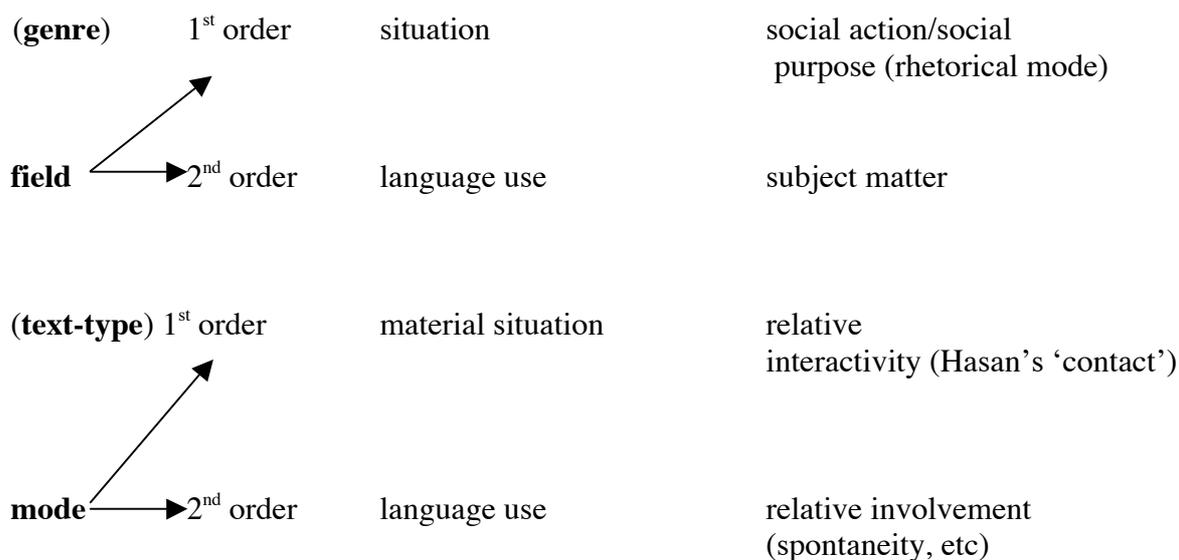
### ***1.5.1 Identifying boundaries of text segments with reference to context of situation***

Hasan (1999: 253ff) discusses at great length the problem of identifying the boundaries of stages within any text, and relates this to the interface between register and context as it is conceptualised in SFL. If register is the textual realisation of Context of Situation, then any change in register, whether it be of *field*, *tenor* or *mode*, also signals a shift of context, and hence engenders an internal text boundary. For Hasan, one of the problems attending the notion of *genre* concerns the identification of boundaries or stages in text structure, and relates to the location of what SFL refers to as *rhetorical mode*, and whether it is related to a specific register variable—field, tenor, or mode.

While the definition of core-genre adopted by Martin and others within SFL, incorporates the notion of *social purpose*—for example, to persuade, to report, to explain, and so on—traditionally within Systemics, this aspect of a text's functionality has been subsumed under *rhetorical mode*, or 'the part language is playing', along a continuum of ancillary  $\leftrightarrow$  constitutive. Thus, *rhetorical mode* has lately been considered as helping to construe *mode* due to its reference to the material activity which accompanies the *ancillary*, whereas Hasan (1999) argues that the feature 'social purpose' attending *rhetorical mode* reinforces her contention that it remain a matter of *field*. Martin and others regard 'social

purpose' as helping define a level of discourse realised *by* register (i.e. *genre* in Martin's conception), at a different level of abstraction. For Hasan, this provides for problematic contradiction within SFL. At the same time, if *genre*—whether core or macro—is conceived of as a level of abstraction realised by a variety of layers or tracks interrelated to signal shifts rather than strictly demarcated boundaries—as between stages in a text—then such contradiction might be seen instead as part of the normal flexibility of language. The concept of 'layering' that I present in the next chapter was adopted in order to overcome such contradiction.

The relationship between orders of register (c.f. Martin 1992: 571-572), registerial field and mode, and genre are illustrated in *Figure 1.1* below. In this thesis I make a distinction between *text-type* and *genre* based on their respective relationship to materiality and abstract generalisations. Whereas text-type is defined by methods of reproduction and distribution, genre relates to cultural ideas that are generalisations of recognised staging of a whole text in the service of some social purpose. As the diagram below also suggests, genre is highly correlated with field, while text-type may be defined by reference to an array of dimensions referencing mode. Hence email post and various formatted styles of email post are matters of text-type, while their content and staging conventions—such as anecdote, explanation, argument, etc—are related to genre.



**Figure 1.1: comparison of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order aspects of register**

Therefore, text segments or units and the boundaries between them are in fact a matter of generic staging, and related (primarily) to the field of discourse, not (necessarily) to the mode of discourse. To label email posts or contributions to an email list as representative of a *genre* is therefore to confuse issues of material context of situation with textual context of situation. The actual textual realisation of email-mediated text-units and their staged organisation would not be theoretically restricted to email—there is nothing to stop such text-units from appearing in any material form. In other words, the constraints of the technological mediation tend to promote such textual realisations in interaction, rather than to produce them.

### **1.5.2 Distinctions of text-type and genre**

Hasan (1999) argues that examples of 'verbal action' such as "defining, explaining, generalising, narrating, lecturing, persuading..." (p. 276) are accounted for by field (rather than genre), and goes on to state that *mode* is better viewed as limited to matters of *contact* (p. 282), or what I have been referring to as *relative interactivity* (see discussion Mod 2: 1). This relates to Hasan's conception of 'contact' as applying to "activities which *just cannot be performed with verbal*

*action ALONE*: they call for material action" (1999: 276, emphasis in original). She argues that there is no need for a separate level of discourse known as *genre*. This thesis on the other hand, does see the relevance of a more abstract level of discourse, and finds that for the purposes of describing the texts of email-mediated discourse, a genre perspective remains useful in accounting for the staging of many of the text-units. At the same time, the texts themselves do not as a whole, represent a genre type, or a set of core-genre types. Rather, they appear as variations on a theme—that of argumentative purpose—and to this end they reference a variety of socially recognised generic conventions.

In summary, just as the register variable *field* is foregrounded in the construal of *genre* (as suggested by Hasan's 1999 argument), the register variable *mode* is foregrounded in the construal of *text-type*. This does not suggest that a description of genre is exhausted by reference to field, just as a description of text-type is not exhausted by reference to features of mode.

Similarly, the core-genre *exposition* encompasses a great variety of sub-genres, one of which is the academic discourse act—and their sub-types, such as lecture, presentation, examination submission or dissertation. The social purpose of exposition may be glossed as persuading or arguing. With this in mind, it can be seen that a variety of text-types may be represented by the rhetorical mode activity of 'persuading'<sup>1</sup>, and that the social purpose pertaining to argument and persuasion may be realised by a great variety of generic sub-categories. The distinction proposed here is aimed to obviate the confusion of genre and text-type—at least within the confines of this thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> e.g. journal article, face to face lecture, recorded broadcast of lecture, transcript of lecture, PhD thesis online, PhD thesis bound in library, etc

### ***1.5.3 A genre perspective on email texts***

One recent study of the textuality of email messages (Gruber, 2000) used the notion of 'genre' in order to present a clear description of the nature of 'scholarly e-mail messages' in terms of their use of theme and intertextuality—indicating that Gruber also regards activity-type and field as foregrounded in the construal of genre. The notion of genre adopted by Gruber owes its conceptualisation to Fairclough (1992) and differs slightly from that proposed by Martin (1992) although the two are related. This thesis aims to follow a similar path, but with a relative focus on the interpersonal metafunctions of the texts.

Bhatia (2004: 60) outlines his own framework for the investigation of genre, and conceives of what I am calling core-genre as *generic values*, preferring this term due to what he claims as a lack of 'any specific textual sequencing' of *rhetorical acts*. While this has resonance for my own corpus of texts, I maintain that recognised core-genres are regularly sequenced/staged, and that many of them are incorporated into the organisation of email posts as interdiscursive elements. The inclusion of recognisable core-generic stages signals an assumption that the audience will recognise their core-generic status (see for example texts [tvs84.20/rob] and [tvs228.56/stan33]<sup>1</sup> which employ narrative and limerick sequences respectively). Figure 1.2 below offers a comparison of the levels of genre proposed by Bhatia (opcit) with those conceived for this thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> See [Appendix A3](#).

| IDENTIFICATION                   | GENRE E.G. SPECIFICATION                        | BHATIA'S GENRE LEVEL | THIS THESIS GENRE LEVEL                               |
|----------------------------------|---|----------------------|---|
| rhetorical act                   | description; evaluation                         | generic value        | core-genre [exposition: hortatory; recount; anecdote] |
| communicative purpose - general  | "promotional genres"                            | genre colony         | community text-unit [purpose: identity maintenance]   |
| communicative purpose - specific | Book blurbs; advertisements; job applications   | genre                | Register + Text-type + purpose [field, tenor, mode]   |
| medium                           | TV ads; print ads; radio ads                    | sub-genre            | Text-type + Register [mode foregrounded]              |
| product                          | Car ads; cosmetic ads; airline ads              | sub-genre            | Text-type + Register [field foregrounded]             |
| participants                     | For holiday travellers; for business travellers | sub-genre            | Text-type + Register [tenor foregrounded]             |

*Figure 1.2: Levels of Generic description (adapted from Bhatia 2004: 59)*

### **1.5.3.1 Summary**

This thesis offers a framework based on the assumption that texts do incorporate socially recognised sequences of text events in order to make their meanings, and that such sequences are creatively reproduced by participants in seeking communicative goals. It therefore incorporates a genre perspective on the texts without seeking to fit each text into a specific genre sequence *a priori*. The framework has attended to finding the means for identifying recurrent and typical sequences of text-units, and then assigning these text-units functional labels in context.

In the following chapter, the notion of Layers is explored in detail by reference to the related notion *frames of coherence*. Then, in Chapter 3, methods of collection and analysis of the texts in the main corpus are presented together with an introduction to the primary text-units comprising the unit of analysis, a post to the list. Chapter 4 discusses and exemplifies the 5 text-type styles by a close analysis of several sample posts and their generic organisation as a function of their orientation to response and rhetorical purpose. Chapter 5 extends the framework by suggesting how the notion of textual identity can be investigated in the context of a mailing list.