

Introduction to the Reissue

I

The original *Aspects of Article Introductions* appeared in fall 1981 as a ring-bound 90-page monograph. The “publisher” was the Language Studies Unit at the University of Aston in Birmingham, and the byline was “Aston ESP Research Reports No. 1.” The monograph had been typed on a typewriter by my secretary at the time, Val Bonney, and we ran off, as best I recollect, 120 copies and arranged for a light-weight board cover in blue. Copies were distributed to colleagues at Aston and Birmingham Universities and, a few weeks later, to the 25 students on our inaugural intake for our new MSc in Teaching English for Specific Purposes. Copies were also mailed to various people around the world whom I supposed would have an interest in this kind of work. These included Betty-Lou Dubois, Ann Johns, Larry Selinker, and Elaine Tarone in the U.S.; Ronald Mackay, Pauline Robinson, and Henry Widdowson in the U.K.; Michel Perrin in France; Jack Ewer in Chile; David Blackie in Kuwait; and Angele Tadros in Sudan. In subsequent years, further annual batches of around 50 a time were duplicated, a practice which I believe continued for a few years after I had left Aston at the end of 1984. My best estimate would be that at most about 400 copies were produced at Aston over the years.

It might then be asked why a work of such obscure provenance should now reappear some 30 years later under the aegis of the University of Michigan Press, and to answer this we need to reflect briefly upon what information scientists would call its “reception history.” It turns out that *Aspects* has had—and continues to have—a surprisingly vibrant citational life; for example, recently I found more than 300 hits on *Google Scholar*TM and around 50 on the much more restrictive *Science Direct*TM. Although essentially an “underground” work, it thus remains a relevant part of the short intellectual history of English for Academic Purposes, particularly as genre-based or genre-driven approaches to EAP research and pedagogical practice have, in this cen-

tury, become increasingly popular, indeed *à la mode*. Further, one does not need to be a skeptic about contemporary scholarly practice to come to the conclusion that some of these citations to *Aspects* have presumably not emerged from an actual reading of the text, but have, as it were, derived from some inherited tradition of citing this somewhat mysterious work. In consequence, a decision has been made to make *Aspects of Article Introductions* more easily available than it has ever been, particularly for the use of university libraries and for younger and newer practitioners and researchers in the rapidly expanding and increasingly global field of English for Academic Purposes.

After some hesitation, I have decided to reissue *Aspects* almost exactly as it was originally written. The only changes made have been the correction of a few obvious typos, the replacement of the multiple underlinings by italics (italics of course not being an option for a typewriter), and a few accommodations to the style of the University of Michigan Press to improve readability for modern readers. The decision not to revise the 1981 text was not exactly an easy one—for the following reasons. First, the original version assumes throughout that readers and writers are male. This unfortunate “narrative exclusion” of what today is almost certainly a majority of members of the relevant professions is much to be regretted, even if it was still fairly conventional in British academic circles some 30 years ago. Anyway, my belated apologies to all my female ESP friends, colleagues, acquaintances, and readers. Second, on its original issue I received a long list of comments from my Aston colleague Dr. Alexander (Sandy) Urquhart, a discourse analyst and a well-known authority on reading in a second language. These comments I religiously kept over the years. Of course, if *Aspects* had been keyboarded rather than typed, I would have been able to incorporate the substance of many of them in a subsequent Aston revision. However, in the end, I have concluded that 2011 was no longer an appropriate time to do this—one reason being that I have not been able to get into contact with Sandy, who apparently is no longer on the staff of the University College of St. Mark and St. John in southwest England. Too much water under the bridge, I eventually decided.

Third, I have been going back and forth as to whether to include the original Preface. Although prefaces often contain a certain amount of apologetics as their authors make various kinds of excuses, my own

now seems an extreme example of shooting myself in the foot. It opens, for example, with this extensive sentence:

This small volume is very much an interim report and I dare say it shows all the signs of being brought to term in unseemly haste: the establishment of categories and the criteria used to underpin them lack the solidity that I would like; in terminological matters there is much arch and evasive use of inverted commas; important considerations . . . have been merely trifled with; and often the writing itself falls below even the indifferent standard that I usually set for myself.

Mustering whatever abilities I have for objective reading and judicious self-criticism, I would conclude that the above self-mutilations are almost entirely unmerited. On the contrary, the work is careful—and even meticulous in the way it accounts for the linguistic realizations of categories—and not at all, as the Preface confessed, “. . . a ‘quick and dirty’ analysis of journal introductions.” The argumentation is, for the most part, rigorous, the exemplification is full and extensive, and the writing, even at this distance, now strikes me as being generally of good quality, apart from the chauvinism mentioned above and several instances of (relatively) youthful over-writing. However, I have decided to leave it as it was, perhaps in the hope that readers might focus on the single redeeming and penultimate sentence: “Finally, the data itself is of a certain interest and a report of this length does allow a much larger proportion of that data to be scrutinized by others than would be possible in an article.” That, at least, seems to be the case.

II

Before I comment on the current status of our understanding of journal-article introductions and the place of *Aspects* in that understanding, a few further remarks on the 1981 monograph may be pertinent. As the opening section entitled *Rationale* indicates, the original starting point was an investigation into how article authors set about Describing Previous Research (DPR), particularly with regard to “the subtle

stylistic and rhetorical interplay between *research* and *researcher* as a DPR develops." The ensuing survey of the literature shows how little attention had been given to such issues by 1981. Although several of the 30 or so names listed in the References would go on to significant careers in ESP/EAP, many others, such as Dwyer, Gillette, Hepworth, Heslot, O'Connor, Oster, Tomlin, and Woodford, would doubtless move on to other things.

The opening chapter also puts forward a number of arguments for a study of article introductions: the lack of adequate pedagogical materials, especially for non-native speaker researchers; the need for introductions to catch the attention of an increasingly busy readership; and this last:

Third, the "publish or perish" syndrome has made the journal article a high-value card in a highly competitive game of professional advancement, and one in which the non-native speaker will, *ceteris paribus*, be at some disadvantage.

As the reader will recognize, certain features of the academic world were not, in actual fact, so very different 30 years ago!

The short middle section of the opening chapter describes the corpus of 48 article introductions drawn equally from the physical sciences, the life sciences, and the social sciences. By today's standards, this is a small corpus, but probably just about adequate for an exploratory study. It also seems a rather haphazard selection as Vijay Bhatia, who acted as my research assistant, and I moved around the serials section of the Aston University library, looking for introductions to photocopy. (The switch to *we* rather than *I* in this part of the study reflects our particularly close collaboration at this stage.) As for the thinking behind the numbering system of the individual introductions, the rationale for this is, as they say, "lost in the mists of time"—not to speak of some apparent errors in basic arithmetic.

Section 1.3 is a key to the future, at least in the sense that it introduces the concept of genre, here described as "a more or less standardized communicative event with a goal or set of goals mutually understood by the participants in that event and occurring within a functional rather than a social or personal setting." As also mentioned in my *Incidents* memoir (2009), I realized how valuable the concept

of genre could be when reading a review in the library of a book by Clifford Geertz on the complex palace ceremonies in the nineteenth-century Balinese State of Negara (Geertz, 1980). Although it turns out that Geertz himself did not use the term *genre* in this book, at one point the reviewer quoted a passage describing these formal protocol-driven events and then identified them as genres. Suddenly, I had discovered the concept (and term) I had been looking for over the previous year or two.

At the end of the opening chapter, I raise some issues about analytic procedures, particularly with regard to subjectivity and circularity. I suggest that the lone analyst, working without the benefit of specialist informants or independent raters, may fall prey to self-fulfilling introspections: "In effect, the discourse analyst labels something as *x* and then begins to see *x* occurring all over the place." This issue of circular argumentation surfaces from time to time. Here is a recent spelling-out of the putative dilemma:

A major problem in most studies of abstracts (and also in studies of research articles following Swales's 1990 approach) is that the identification of moves seems to be based on both a bottom-up and a top-down approach. The description "bottom-up" means researchers distinguish moves on the basis of certain linguistic signals. "Top-down" means they do this on the basis of content. For example, Anderson and Maclean (1997) identify the *Conclusion* move of the medical abstract by signals such as the present tense and certain nouns and verbs. At the same time, they rely on their intuitive interpretations of content. They then point to those particular lexical items as characteristic of this move. This results in a circularity of the identification of rhetorical moves and linguistic realizations. The two processes, bottom-up and top-down, therefore need to be separated. (Pho, 2008: 233)

Pho's solution is to identify moves based solely on the content or function of the text; my own—perhaps partial—solution was indeed to identify moves both ways, but to postpone giving those moves any rhetorical content by adopting a neutral color-coding system. The latter kind of approach might lessen the force of the circularity charge, which, I believe, with careful work, is an objection more on the theo-

retical rather than practical level. The reason for saying this is that the genre analyst, in her attempt to explicate what is really “going on” in a particular body of texts, is essentially engaged in a hermeneutic enterprise. As ever, Geertz is particularly enlightening about this kind of exegesis:

Practically, two approaches, two sorts of understanding, must converge if one is to interpret a culture: a description of particular symbolic forms (a ritual gesture, an hieratic statue) as defined expressions; and a contextualization of such forms within the whole structure of meaning of which they are a part and in terms of which they get their definition. This is, of course, nothing but the by-now familiar trajectory of the hermeneutic circle: a dialectical tacking between parts which comprise the whole and the whole which motivates the parts, in such a way as to bring parts and the whole simultaneously into view. (Geertz, 1980: 103)

So, at least for me, an iterative “dialectical tacking” back and forth between moves and linguistic expressions, between top-down and bottom-up approaches, produces a suitably rich and hopefully clear account of both parts and whole—an enterprise in which *Aspects* at least partially succeeded. Fairclough (2003) in a similar vein refers to the discourse analyst as “oscillating” between texts and structural elements. And, of course, this shuffling back and forth becomes even more important when the analyst goes beyond texts to incorporate various kinds of contextual and situational features, as ably discussed by the likes of Flowerdew (2002), Bhatia (2004), and Hyland (2009).

With regard to the “big picture” of article introductions, in Chapter Seven I introduce two metaphors to try and characterize, in their two different ways, the rhetorical development of these part-genres. One is a largely predictable *problem-solution* scenario (Hoey, 1983). The other is more eccentric in that it invokes the conversational practice of “second storying”—one person’s anecdote enjoins a second person to offer a connected and (hopefully) even more successful one. I suggested that the rest of the article would be the author’s *second story*, prior to which our author needed to construct in the introduction a suitable literature-based *first story* in order to establish the relevance and pertinence of the research to come. Although this metaphor can

have a light-bulb-going-on effect in classes and workshops, it has been pointed out—most recently by my colleague, Christine Feak—that the metaphor doesn't really work because the same individual has to construct both stories. Somewhat reluctantly I concede the point, and I would now offer instead the *old story* and the *new story* at least for those papers that offer some departure from the previous literature.

Finally, in the short closing chapter, I offer a number of pedagogical suggestions for how the genre analysis might be converted into classroom activities. It is quite customary, in my experience, for reviewers and examiners of applied discourse-analytic texts to be quite critical of those closing sections wherein pedagogical and practical applications are discussed. Often these are found to be unimaginative, boring, and overly generalized. Not so, I fondly believe, for the final chapter of *Aspects*, and this despite the (again) unnecessary demurrals at its outset. Indeed, I anticipate that the reader will find that these few pages still retain a certain vitality and vivacity as they create specific links between what has been learned and what might be taught.



The account of what happened after 1981 must necessarily be incomplete and cursory. To start with, by the time *Genre Analysis* appeared in 1990, there had been a number of developments. In *Aspects* I was able to cite just two studies of article introductions; by the beginning of the new decade that number had grown to nine, with another 25 or so devoted to selected features of the research article as a whole text. Today, I don't really know how many discourse-analytic studies involving RA introductions have been published or have been produced as part of higher degree requirements, but it is certainly well into three figures. Nor is there any sign of any abatement in this flood—and one reason why I know this is that I am (all too) often asked to review or examine studies of this kind. There are, of course, a number of reasons for this concentrated attention on introductions. They are known to be troublesome as writers confront their blank sheets of paper or stare at the blinking cursor on their empty monitor screens. Introductions also tend to be shorter in length and simpler in structure than, say, the discussion sections of research articles. Third, the RA itself has become

the most influential genre in most areas of scholarship, and introductions are at least *supposed* to be read first and to be designed in such a way as to attract as large a readership as possible.

In *Genre Analysis* I came up with a new ecological metaphor for the dynamics of introductions; this was taken from the ecological concepts of establishing a territory and creating a niche for yourself in that territory. I characterized it as *Creating a Research Space*, and it has since become usually known as *the CaRS Model*. In it, I reduced the moves from four to three, now folding *Describing Previous Research* into the opening move. I partly did this because I had begun to notice that references to previous work were more widely distributed than I had earlier envisioned (though I believe that Vijay Bhatia long held the view that a four-move model made better pedagogic sense, especially for undergraduates). One of the other developments was the extension of Move 3 (*Occupying the Niche*) to include a further concluding step, in which the author or authors find it necessary to explain the structure of the remaining parts of their paper. This addition derived in large part from Catharine Cooper's 1985 M.Sc thesis at Aston—I was not, in fact, the supervisor—because she found that most computer science RAs did not follow the traditional IMRD schema and so needed to signal in advance some outline of their organization. Further research by others has shown that an *Indicating Structure* concluding step is in fact quite widespread, having been also attested in astrophysics, economics, engineering, theoretical linguistics, and management studies.

By the time I came to revisit the *Introduction* part-genre some decade and a half later in *Research Genres* (2004), the bold and confident outline of 1990 had become considerably blurred. The almost ubiquitous use of references throughout introductions now meant that relying on the presence or absence of these to indicate structural boundaries had become moot (Samraj, 2002). The range of disciplines being studied by genre analysts around the world had greatly expanded. Meanwhile, during the period between the two books, there was considerable evidence that RA introductions had become, in ways both obvious and less obvious, more promotional. RA authors, in other words, were taking up opportunities to make *early* statements about their major findings, their methodological strengths or innovations,

and/or their definitional clarifications. Nor could I any longer avoid integrating into the model all the evidence indicating that many introductions involved recycling, that cycles of Territory + Gap sequences could and would recur—a phenomenon that had, in fact, been pointed out by Crookes as long ago as 1986.

There have, of course, been a number of other developments that the space here does not permit a substantive accounting thereof. However, I could instance the spread of Move Analysis to other sections of the RA, and to many other genres, including letters, business communications, grant proposals, fund-raising solicitations, advertizing material, book reviews, and dissertations. Mention too needs to be made of recent, and largely successful, attempts to combine Move Analysis with corpus linguistics techniques (Biber, Connor, & Upton, 2007), as well as the many interesting attempts to use this kind of analysis to tease out differences in discursal patterns across cultures and across languages. So, looking back over the last 30 years, reflecting on the reissue of that small, locally produced 1981 Aston monograph, it would seem that *Aspects of Article Introductions* was indeed the start of something. Whether that something will continue to “have legs,” or whether it will be replaced by other approaches, or indeed whether its considerable influence has, on balance, been for the good are, however, questions for those from a younger generation to grapple with.

IV

I am grateful to Professor Pamela Moores, Executive Dean of the School of Languages and Social Sciences at Aston University, for permission to reissue the monograph. I would also like to thank Vijay Bhatia and Christine Feak for useful comments on this introduction and Theresa Rohlck of Michigan’s English Language Institute for her intelligent keyboarding of the original typescript. Finally, many thanks to Kelly Sippell of the University of Michigan Press for her enthusiastic endorsement of the proposal to reissue this monograph.

JMS
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