

Stability and variation in genre

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Published in *Multidisciplinary Views on Discourse Genre*, edited by Ninke Stukker, John A. Bateman, Danielle McNamara, Wilbert Spooren. New York: Routledge. 2024.

Abstract

The notion of genre implies stability in that genres are inherently conservative. The existence of genres relies on rules and conventions that are expected to be followed. At the same time, genres allow for much variation, leading some researchers to claim that the notion of genre eludes systematic investigation. This chapter investigates the mechanisms behind the paradox between stability and variation in genre, and goes into questions like: How stable are genres? What features are likely sites of innovation? How many features can change before a new genre arises? What is the cultural dimension of genre change? If, as has been suggested, communicative purpose is a more central characteristic of a genre than other dimensions, is there evidence for the hypothesis that communicative purpose is not a site of genre variation? To conclude, this chapter formulates a research agenda pointing at the importance of genre systems and a multidisciplinary approach to genre change.