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# Exploring the Generic Nature of International English

## Summary

The article investigates the nature of English as an International Language (EIL) from a sociolinguistic and sociocultural point via the notion of ‘genre’. Genre, it is claimed, plays a central role in an understanding of the internal hybridity of EIL in that it represents the ‘using’ as opposed to ‘use’ (register) or ‘user’ (dialect) dimension of language realization. While all three dimensions as linguistic resources for different subjectivities can shape an ensuing EIL discourse (such mixes constituting the ‘interdiscursivity’ of (a) text), it is genre that expresses the actional (inter- and transactional) properties of EIL. Drawing also on other linguistic models of genre, the article concludes by interpreting EIL within the discourses of postmodernity, poststructuralism and postcolonialism and pointing to the possibility of developing a new ‘postlinguistics’ for the new millennium.

**Key words:** English as an International Language, genre, dialect, register, Bakhtin, CANCODE, discourse analysis.

# Preučevanje generične narave mednarodne angleščine

## Povzetek

Članek s sociolingvističnega in sociokulturološkega vidika in ob upoštevanju pojma “žanr” preučuje naravo angleščine kot mednarodnega jezika (EIL). Velja, da žanr igra centralno vlogo pri razumevanju notranje hibridnosti angleščine kot mednarodnega jezika, tako da predstavlja “uporabljanje” v nasprotju z “rabo” (register) ali “uporabnikom” (dialekt) kot dimenzijami jezikovne uresničitve. Medtem ko lahko vse tri dimenzije kot jezikovni viri za različne subjektivitete oblikujejo nastajajoči EIL diskurz (takšna mešanja tvorijo “meddiskurzivnost” besedila), pa je žanr tisti, ki izraža akcijske (inter- in transakcijske) značilnosti mednarodne angleščine. Ob upoštevanju tudi drugih jezikovnih modelov žanra, zaključimo interpretacijo angleščine kot mednarodnega jezika v smislu postmodernih, postkulturnih in postkolonialnih diskurzov in nakažemo možnost razvoja nove “postlingvistike” za novo tisočletje.

**Ključne besede:** angleščina kot mednarodni jezik, žanr, dialect, register, Bakhtin, CANCODE, besediloslovje.

# Exploring the Generic Nature of International English

## 1. Introduction

The purpose of the present discussion is to reflect on the multifarious nature of English as used as an International Language (EIL) in Europe and by doing so to explore ways in which an understanding of the phenomenon might gain from linking (socio-)linguistic analysis with sociocultural theory in ways which have hitherto not been explored. It will be argued that a consideration of the structural diversity of English in transcultural use, particularly of its spoken form, necessitates an equal diversification of the categories of linguistic analysis which pertain to the kinds of codes being realised. This diversification at the same time allows a closer connection to be made to the diverse significations and practices of EIL in the sociocultural context of the new millennium. Concretely, it will be shown that expanding a structural-functional linguistic framework as developed by Firth and Halliday - in the very spirit of the polysystemicity which they advocate - might lead in a truly poststructural turn in linguistics of the kind called for by Graddol (1994), Pennycook (2001) and also James (2005, 2006). The key to this expansion/diversification is in the present context the notion of 'genre'.

## 2. English as an International Language in use

The many contexts and functions of EIL have been commented on often enough in the sociolinguistics and applied linguistics literature, and hardly need be repeated here. However, concerning the forms of EIL, a kind of double-think has emerged in recent discussion. While on the one hand, the structural conformity-with-diversity of local Englishes around the world is celebrated (e.g. McArthur 2002) and the structural conformity-with-diversity of Englishes for Specific Purposes (ESP) is noted (Widdowson 1997), on the other hand speculation as to the emergence of a new 'non-conforming' EIL as English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) (note, not Englishes as LF) has been rife. Evidence for the latter has been culled from a number of empirical studies of the spoken English of (mainly European) interlocutors, whose primary linguistic socialization has not been via English and who employ it as a shared language (e.g. Jenkins 2000, Seidlhofer 2001). However, it has been argued elsewhere (James 2005, 2006) that while local - in the temporal as well as spatial sense - *ad hoc* emergent structures of English may be observed in such conversations, which do not accord with the well-described *written* norms of the language, no evidence for any codifiable 'new' EIL/ ELF is seriously forthcoming. In fact, when comparing like with like, i.e. the same speech and conversation types of different communities of English language practice including English as a 'Native' Language, the typological characteristics of the language used are uncannily similar (James 2000).

One essence of the problem would seem to be that many linguists prefer their languages to be codifiable monoliths and we should be careful not to look for a new linguistic monolith with EIL/EFL. Such systematic sociolinguistic variation as is accepted is mainly restricted to Halliday's (1978) 'dialect' (regional or social variety) or 'register' (subject-matter variety), whereas variation in ESP is largely semantic and lexical (= 'register').

However, the variation that has been established in the spoken EIL/ELF data thus far analysed is largely grammatical (syntactic and morphological) and lexical (cf., e.g. James 2000, Seidlhofer 2001, Haegeman 2002, Dewey 2003, Breiteneder 2005), and this fact itself indicates that perhaps a new sociolinguistic categorization of this type of language in use is now necessary. While remembering that *any* single language shows variation of this three-way kind, it is the varied roles of English in the world that throw this linguistic situation into particular relief, and this state of affairs is itself a reflection of the particular sociocultural constellations of the times. It is suggested that the notion of ‘genre’ may be appropriate to handle this type of use. Genre, in the sense it is developed here, is indeed characterized by grammatical-lexical variation.

### 3. Genre

This is certainly not the place to engage in a comprehensive discussion of genre as employed in a linguistic, as opposed to, literary context. However, the notion of genre as employed here has nonetheless to be differentiated from the concept as developed in other areas of applied linguistic practice. There is extensive discussion of ‘register’ vs. ‘genre’ in the fields of stylistic analysis, translation studies, educational linguistics and not least English for Academic Purposes (EAP) (for a discussion and review cf. Limon 2003). Suffice it to say that in these fields, the notion of ‘genre’ as understood in ‘genre analysis’ is couched in ideas of ‘community’ and ‘convention’ within social practice: e.g. from an EAP perspective, genres “are socially authorized through conventions, which, in turn, are embedded in the discursive practices of members of specific disciplinary cultures” (Bhatia 2001); from an educational linguistics point of view genres are “culturally evolved goal-directed social purposes which are ‘in principle’ enabling and facilitative of some sociocultural purpose” (Painter 2001). ‘Register’, on the other hand, is seen as a text-linguistic phenomenon, in many ways the more strictly structural counterpart of ‘genre’, in agreement with the original Halliday (1978) formulation.

By contrast, the present notion of genre owes much to the work of Bakhtin (1981, 1986), McCarthy (1998), Fairclough (2003) and Carter (2004). With reference to Halliday’s (1978) characterization of ‘dialect’ as ‘variety according to user’ and ‘register’ as ‘variety according to use’, here ‘genre’ may be specified as ‘variety according to using’, i.e. as that manifestation of language which is shaped by immediate actional contexts and which does *not* reflect the conventions of communities in any traditional sense. Following the original Halliday framework of description developed for ‘dialect’ and ‘register’ (1978, 35), the specification of ‘genre’ can be stated as:

A genre is:

- what actional mode you are speaking in determined by how you are doing it, and expressing diversity of social practice(s)

So in principle genres are:

- ways of saying things differently and tend to differ in:

- grammar (syntax and morphology and lexis)

Extreme cases:

- text messaging, chat (?)

Typical instances:

- casual conversation, conversational varieties

Principal controlling variables:

- type of speech event; individual verbal capacities

Characterized by:

- major distinctions in types of verbalization (James 2005, 142)

In other words, genre is that type of language which emerges in online discourse (in the first instance spoken) in recognition of the kind of verbal action being engaged in. Of course dialect and register also co-shape any discourse, the point being with genre, though, being that the subjectivity a language user derives from it is neither origin- (dialect) nor subject matter-based (register), but action (interaction or transaction)-based, and as such highly variable, dynamic and non-essentialist in nature. As such, it would seem to reflect closely the type of language variation and performance exhibited in ‘everyday’ (spoken) EIL/ELF for immediate interactional/transactional purposes.

## 4. Bakhtin and genre

Of genre Bakhtin states: “A speech genre is not a form of language, but a typical form of utterance. Genres correspond to typical situations of speech communication” (1981, 87). Elsewhere he observes that to learn to speak involves learning to construct utterances, i.e. to ‘cast our speech in generic forms’ (1986, 79). However, it should be noted that Bakhtin (1981) distinguishes ‘primary’ from ‘secondary’ genres. Whereas ‘primary’ genres are types of oral dialogue, i.e. correspond to the present definition of genre, ‘secondary’ genres include literary, ‘commentarial’, scientific and other text-types, i.e. conform to the present ‘register’. Genres are therefore seen as constitutive linguistic frameworks for everyday oral action, or in his own words, “If speech genres did not exist.....speech communication would be almost impossible.” (Bakhtin 1986, 60).

Indeed, other aspects of Bakhtin’s socioculturally informed theory of language connect well with the present conception of EIL/ELF in use and will be briefly addressed below.

## 5. The CANCODE model of genre

McCarthy (1998) presents an extensive theory of genre, drawing on the analysis of spoken language deriving from the CANCODE (Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in

English) database in which “extracts display similarities at the lexical-grammatical level which correspond to higher-order features of generically-oriented activity” (1998, 2). Focussing on the occurrence of unrehearsed, non-formal talk, he distinguishes five broad contexts of talk based on the type of relationship among participants as comprising:

transactional-professional-pedagogical-socialising-intimate

Examples of these contexts would be for ‘transactional’ a service encounter, for ‘professional’ a staff meeting, for ‘pedagogical’ obviously a teaching situation, for ‘socialising’ a cultural activity of some kind, and for ‘intimate’ engagement with family, close friends, etc. (1998, 8-9)

For each context, three ‘goal-types’ may be distinguished (1998, 10):

provision of information-collaborative tasks-collaborative ideas

Examples of these goal-types would be for the first, an enquiry at a tourist office, for the second, parking a car, and for the third, sharing thoughts, ideas, etc.

Combining contexts and goal-types produces a matrix of 15 cells:

An example of a transactional context with provision of information as goal-type would be (again) an enquiry at a tourist office, one of a socialising context with a collaborative task as goal-type would be preparing food together, etc.

If the combination of context and goal-type supply 15 more concrete situations of generic activity, which are partly given, and partly negotiated, then the ‘social compact’ (via cooperative behaviour) of such activity is signalled linguistically by ‘formulations’, ‘expectations’, ‘recollections’ and ‘instantiations’ on the part of the participants (1998, 32-8). Finally, McCarthy demonstrates that ‘lower-order features’ of genre (i.e. lexicogrammar) do indeed correspond to the ‘higher-level features’ of context and goal-type (1998, 38-46).

In subsequent work the model has been slightly modified by reducing the ‘context types’ to four, omitting ‘pedagogical’, thereby allowing only for a 12-cell matrix (Carter 2004, 149-50). Also generic typology has been linked to a ‘cline of creativity’ and to nonnative English use (Carter 2004, 165 ff.)

Again, this model would appear to provide a very suitable basis for the analysis and understanding of the manifestation of EIL/ELF as genre. It allows for a sociolinguistically sensitive analysis of the language in various and changeable, ultimately emergent trans- and interactions. However, it may be argued that an abridged version of the model will suffice for the purposes of EIL/ELF talk. Indeed in the spirit of treating generic activity as primarily interactional and/or transactional one might conflate the four ‘context types’ to two, as illustrated by the following table:

Actional type		Goal orientation	
		<b>information exchange</b>	<b>collaborative idea</b>
Interactional	e.g.	relating about self	matching opinions
			<b>collaborative task</b>
Transactional		asking tourist information	co-planning a trip
			buying a backpack

*(Note that the ‘goal orientations’ are largely suggestive only and – even – more empirical evidence would be needed for full substantiation)*

## 6. Critical Discourse Analysis and genre

In his analysis of the discourse of social practices, the major proponent of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Fairclough, defines ‘genres’ as constituting ‘ways of acting’, i.e. they realize text meaning as ‘action’ (2003, 26). He goes on to distinguish ‘pre-genres’, i.e. generalizable genres such as Narrative or Report, ‘disembedded genres’ such a particular interview and ‘situated genres’ such as an ethnographic interview (2003, 69). Fairclough’s conception of genres and generic structure is summarized as follows:

“Genres are the specifically discursal aspect of ways of acting and interacting in the course of social events: we might say that (inter)acting is never just discourse, but it is often mainly discourse. So when we analyse a text or interaction in terms of genre, we are asking how it figures within and contributes to social action and interaction in social events” (2003, 65)

From a political perspective, it is ‘genre chains’, i.e. mixed genres, that are particularly interesting because “analysing [them] allows us to locate texts within processes of social change and to identify the potentially creative and innovative work of social agents in texturing” (2003, 216).

Significant for the present analysis is the fact that Fairclough locates the linguistic expression of genre firmly within grammatical sub-systems (2003, 92 ff.).

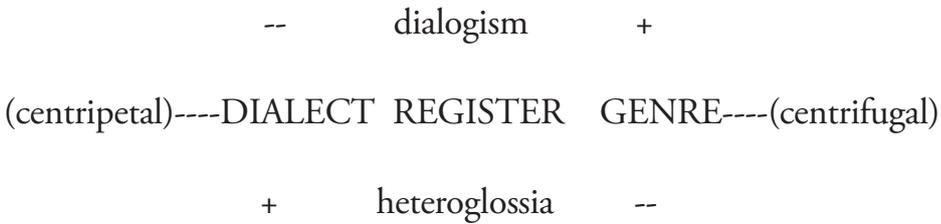
Finally, one notes in the analysis of social practices that ‘discourses’ constitute ‘ways of representing’, i.e. they realize text meaning as ‘representation’ and ‘styles’ constitute ‘ways of being’, i.e. they realize text meaning as ‘identification’ (2003: 26). It might be evident that Fairclough’s ‘discourses’ and ‘styles’ closely correspond to the present ‘registers’ and ‘dialects’, respectively. A further important aspect of the CDA social practice/text model for EIL/EFL analysis will be discussed briefly below.

## 7. The end of the monolith: hybridity in EIL/ELF and the discourses of poststructuralism, postmodernism and postcolonialism – a brief consideration

Hybridity now emerges as a salient sociolinguistic characteristic of English as an International Language/English as a Lingua Franca in that any realization of language will be shaped by dialectal, register and generic resources. Users of the language may wish to express a primary

social subjectivity (via dialect – e.g. as a speaker of British English, Hong Kong English or even of European English or East Asian English, etc.), a professional or lifestyle subjectivity (via register – e.g. as a nutritional scientist, lawyer, skateboarder or war-games *aficionado*, etc.) and/or an actional subjectivity as facility for doing things in English (via genre). The balance between the three resources for subjectivities will of course always be in flux; the resulting language is polysystemic in structure-function and the texts a mix of ‘interdiscursivity’ (Fairclough 2003), i.e. of his ‘genres’, ‘discourses’ (here registers) and ‘styles’ (here dialects). And as Fairclough notes, an analysis of the interdiscursive hybridity in texts provides a resource for researching postmodern processes which “stress the blurring and breakdown of the boundaries characteristic of ‘modern’ societies, and the pervasive hybridity (mixing of practices, forms, etc.) which ensues” (2003, 218). The point out EIL/ELF is that its hybridity is that much more salient – if only via its instability and variability, but also by its prominent positioning in multilingual and transcultural space – than that of less exposed languages.

Bakhtin (1981, 1986), in his own form of poststructuralism develops, in addition to genre, the concepts of ‘heteroglossia’ and ‘dialogism’ to characterize language in use. Both concepts refer to the fact that language users are not entirely the free agents modern structural linguistic theory (from Saussure on) would like to think they are. On the contrary, “our speech, i.e. all our utterances, ... is filled with the words of others” (1981, 89) [= ‘heteroglossia’] and our choice of language is in any case also oriented to the other as addressee [= ‘dialogism’]. He equally stresses the fact that languages are kept in place by competing *centripetal* (or homogenizing) and *centrifugal* (or heterogenizing) forces. With regard to these claims about the poststructural constraints on language, we might illustrate the position of EIL/ELF as the following:



Dialogism is most clearly manifested via genre, (least clearly via dialect), and heteroglossia is most clearly manifested via dialect (least clearly with genre); but also centrifugal forces are strongest with genre (weakest with dialect), and centripetal forces strongest with dialect (weakest with genre). Register takes up an intermediate position in all cases. In other words, the cutting-edge addressivity and diversification of EIL /ELF is carried via its generic qualities, its ‘employing the words of others’ and its conformity via its dialectal qualities. Significant linguistic change over time in EIL/ELF will be most likely be genre-led and dialect-trailed.

Finally, to discourses of postcolonialism and the position of EIL/ELF. By convention, of course the ‘chutneyfication’ of English (Rushdie) via the Caliban phenomenon (Shakespeare) is mainly located within dialect and linguistically described in terms of phonological and lexical innovation. However, beyond this, the concept of a ‘third space’ (e.g. Bhabha 1990) depends very much on an interpretation of hybridity such that “the meaning of hybridity is no longer traceable

back to two original elements out of which a third emerged, rather hybridity informs a *third space* out of which other positions can emerge” (1990, 135). Such a third space is that created and inhabited, for example, by postcolonial writers positioned between but also beyond the periphery and centre, the diaspora and the metropolis. With regard to EIL/ELF, we have already indicated above that inasmuch as it is genre-driven, (addressive and nonconformist), it could equally be said to occupy a third space between and beyond the historically first space of English and the second space of the users’ own historical language(s), as well as beyond ‘first space’ dialect and ‘second space’ register.

## 8. Conclusion: towards a postlinguistics, a translinguistics?

It has been argued that a sensitization of linguistic analysis to the hybridity of EIL/ELF as an eminently poststructural, postcolonial, postmodern language phenomenon is possible via the incorporation of ‘genre’ as a social and text meaning resource in transcultural communication, which can open up very fruitful avenues of exploration connecting sociocultural and (socio-)linguistic theory. Perhaps the resulting form of language inquiry gets nearer to the post- or trans-linguistics which researchers in the field are calling for.

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