CHAPTER

3 Genre

Bransford and Johnson's 'Washing clothes' text, which was discussed in Chapter 1, was part of a wider research effort in the 1970s investigating the ways in which topic knowledge and mental constructs of various kinds appear to be essential to text interpretation. On the basis of that research it was argued that as part of our efforts at comprehension we access various 'mental structures', which contribute to the comprehension process. Some of these were included in the diagram in Figure 1.1 above.

To begin this chapter, the nature and role of some of these mental structures will be considered in more detail. It will then be suggested later in the chapter that as well as drawing on mental representations of concepts, situations and procedures, we also make use of mental representations of genres, and that these are also important factors in our comprehension and production of texts. When we see a sign on the beach we do not act as if we have never seen such a thing before; on the contrary, we draw quickly and efficiently on a host of *genre knowledge*, organised in a *genre schema*, to help us in our interpretation of what the sign tells us.

3.1 Mental representations in text comprehension

One aim of the research effort in the 1970s into these mental structures and their role in reading and listening, was eventually to devise artificially intelligent computer programmes which might imitate this complex human behaviour. Despite these efforts, and many efforts since, computers still cannot fully imitate human text comprehension (which shows incidentally how complex and intricate the processes are) but in the process, researchers in this field proposed a number of terms such as 'schema', 'scripts', 'frames' and 'mental models', terms either adapted from earlier research (for example, Bartlett's research

on schemas in the 1930s; see Bartlett, 1932), or else introduced into cognitive psychology and linguistics from computing or other areas of cognitive science (see Schank and Abelson, 1977; Jeffries and McIntyre, 2010: Chapter 5).

The research into mental models demonstrated that comprehension cannot be described simply as a matter of decoding words and grammar from the page in some sort of direct and automatic way, as was once assumed in early more linear models of communication (for example, Cherry, 1957). It was now clear that some sort of 'mental structures' must exist in order for us to understand texts as we do, but research continues into the exact nature of these cognitive structures.

The first part of this chapter will sketch out a broadly accepted position concerning the importance of such mental constructs in our process of text comprehension, as well as outlining the meaning of *concept, script, schema, frame* and *mental model*, and their general role in the comprehension process. The aim here is not theoretical completeness but rather to set the scene for the more substantial focus on our understanding of genres in the rest of the chapter, since it will be argued that genres can be seen as mental constructs somewhat akin to schemas.

Concepts and mental models

Let us start with the most basic of these mental entities, namely the *concept*. If I asked twenty people to draw a cat, or a chair, I would get twenty subtly different representations, and part of the reason for this is that we all have slightly different mental *concepts* of each object. But where do we derive our concepts from? Concepts have been debated in philosophy for thousands of years (and the debate still continues in philosophy, in cognitive psychology and in artificial intelligence) but of course concepts are important in linguistics too, since when someone tells us 'It is cold with that window open', as Ann did in Chapter 1, we must have in our mind some 'concept' of a window which tells us what it is physically, and also tells us what it does or what it can do, that is, it can open and close. Without such mental concepts we could not understand language and texts, which is why concepts were included in the diagram in Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1.

An early, relatively clear and helpful discussion of the nature of concepts and how they relate to other conceptual structures was offered by Skemp (1979:24–6,113), who suggested that concepts group together in our minds to form 'mental models', which are similar in some ways to maps, diagrams and anatomical drawings. In Skemp's account 'mental models' are similar to such real physical maps, except that mental models are not physical, but internalized into our psychology. For Skemp, an important point about both concepts

and mental models is that 'their elements nearly always represent not just one actual object or event, but what is common to a number of these' (Skemp, 1979:24). So as we encounter real-world examples of, say, ticket offices, we gradually 'abstract' what is common about all of them and that gives us the abstract *concept* of 'ticket office' which allows us to recognise them in future and also to buy tickets from them. (This process of abstraction, as I shall argue, is also part of how we come to have a mental sense of *genres*.)

Skemp explains the process, and the relation between concepts and mental models, as follows:

> when I get to London and go to the ticket office on the underground station, the mental representation which I use for directing my actions is not of just that particular ticket office, but of a class of places where, by giving money to the person behind the counter, I get in exchange a piece of paper or card which entitles me to ride on a train, or bus, or boat. (Skemp 1979:24)

From this discussion we can derive a simple but useful definition of a *concept*, and also of larger mental models, which is conveniently set out as three points:

> A mental entity of this kind [e.g. a ticket office] is called a concept...
>
> A mental model, which is made up of a number of interconnected concepts, is a conceptual structure.
>
> The process by which certain qualities of actual objects and events are internalised as concepts, while other qualities are ignored, is called abstraction.
>
> (Skemp, 1979:24, spacing and emphasis added)

This definition still raises questions – for example, when does a *concept* become complex enough to be called a *mental model*? How can we produce any empirical evidence of such structures? Do they help to explain understanding of language? Some such questions have been considered in the specialist literature (see, for example, Halford, 1993), but for our purposes this definition offers a sufficient starting point in our attempt to understand larger mental organizing elements such as schemas, scripts and genres.

Concepts are fuzzy

Birds can fly. Flying is a central characteristic of birds, as even a child knows. But penguins and ostriches cannot fly, so does this mean that penguins and ostriches are not birds? In the 1970s Rosch and others, in an area of research which is now known as Prototype Theory research, sought to explain this kind of apparent anomaly in human cognition. Put simply, Rosch showed that when we think of a concept such as 'bird' we have in mind certain core characteristics of birds which are central to our concept, such as flying and beaks. She demonstrated this by showing that when we are presented in an experiment with examples of birds such as robins and eagles which have these central characteristics we quickly agree that they are birds, but when presented with examples which do not have all of the central prototypical characteristics (such as penguins) we tend to be slower to agree (Rosch, 1978).

Her conclusion, in very rough outline, was that our mental concepts are 'fuzzy', and not fixed and clear, and that when we think and speak about such concepts we tend to operate with *prototypes* of each class, clear examples which fit all features, and we then decide on a case by case basis whether less clear examples fit the category or not. In short, concepts are not clearly defined, but 'fuzzy', and revolve around a few clear-cut examples which are the *prototypes*. So in terms of the question posed above, eagles are *prototypical* birds, because they do all the 'birdy' things and possess all of the 'birdy' features which are prototypical. When it comes to ostriches, however, we recognise them as being in the same class of 'birds', even though they are not prototypical because they lack one central defining feature, namely the ability to fly.

The importance of this for texts and discourse is that when we are confronted with a particular text it is probable that a similar mental operation occurs, in other words we probably evaluate that text with reference to our *prototypical* concept of one genre or another, and we then categorise that text as being either close to that mental idea of the genre, or perhaps less close but still a member of that broad class. In other words we probably operate with texts as we do with other concepts, by drawing on a set of mental prototypes, but also allowing a certain degree of 'fuzziness'. Indeed it is likely that this 'fuzziness' is a crucial part of the flexibility of various levels of discourse. At the level of lexis, when a politician in a speech talks about 'democracy', for instance, we perhaps have central core examples or prototypes of democracy in our minds and we use these, rightly or wrongly, to respond to what he or she is saying. Likewise with genre labels such as 'greetings card' – recalling the 'Squirrel' text – it is probable that we draw on certain *genre prototypes* as a means of assisting our interpretation of the class and function of texts, as a key part of our interpretative process.

Combining concepts

Concepts then, according to Skemp's account above, can combine in our minds to give larger conceptual structures which Skemp calls 'mental mod-

els'. These can be models of physical entities, such as railway stations (since we all have a mental model of railway stations, for example, which includes concepts such as ticket offices, platforms, trains, public toilets, and so on). Mental models can also be representations in our minds of more abstract things, for example about how a management structure works in a company. These concepts and mental models then operate in intricate ways as we use them in our everyday behaviour and discourse, but nonetheless we seem to be surprisingly efficient at using our mental models and concepts first to understand and negotiate our way around the real world, and then to understand and to produce texts about them.

3.2 Schemas

It seems from research evidence that as we grow up and experience the world around us, including texts, we develop certain patterned ideas about the world around us, through the important process of *abstraction* which Skemp mentioned, and we then use these ideas to interpret other things we experience. In order to explain this numerous researchers have posited the notion of 'schemas' (sometimes called 'schemata' from the original Greek plural), to refer to clusters of mental concepts which we draw on in order to interpret the world around us and also to interpret language. A schema can be defined as 'a set of interrelated features which we associate with an entity or a concept' (Field, 2003:39) and which helps us quickly and efficiently to understand language and to produce it so others can understand it.

It has been pointed out that the term needs to be used cautiously, and that since 'there is relatively little empirical theory attached to schema theory' (Grabe, 1999:24) the notion of schema might best be seen as no more than 'a useful metaphor for the role of background knowledge in reading' (ibid). Others have also argued that the term is too general and poorly defined to be of use in understanding, for example, the reading process (Urquhart and Weir, 1998:68–72). These caveats need to be borne in mind, but it is nonetheless generally accepted that schemata seem to be broadly helpful ways, if only metaphorical, for explaining some of the types of knowledge we appear to draw on when we come to interpret reading and listening texts.

According to schema theory, schemata are, like mental models, groups of concepts related in various ways. If we see a series of concepts like this:

classroom, book, desk, board, teacher, bell, learning

we would probably all agree that they relate to a socially shared schema of 'school'. To put it more formally, *schemas* or *schemata* are 'well integrated chunks of knowledge about the world, events, people and actions' (Eysenck and Keane, 2000:352) which we all possess and use to interpret events and texts. Like mental models they are conceptual or mental structures which we develop through experience, and which allow us to interpret the world and also to share that interpretation with others. However, where schemas differ from mental models is in the ways in which the concepts in each relate to each other. For example, I have a *concept* of teachers and desks, a general *schema* about schools, and a more complex *mental model* about how exactly a school is structured, organised and operated, and how I can behave within it. Mental models therefore include a more complex relationship between the various concepts, the parts of the model, whereas a schema is a more general association of ideas.

All of these mental structures – concepts, schemas and mental models – are important as we interpret texts. If I read a story and come across the word 'teacher' my *concept* of teachers is activated, which leads me towards certain ideas (sometimes stereotypes) of what the teacher in the story will do. When I read the word 'school' my general *schema* about schools is activated, which includes several concepts and leads me to have further expectations about the story. As I then read further so I may also draw on my particular *mental model* of my own former schools to help me further interpret what is going on in the story.

Frames and scripts

This story has something strange about it:

> When I entered the restaurant the waiter said goodbye, gave me the bill and then handed me my coat. I sat down at the table. Then I paid the bill and ordered ice cream. He brought me some soup.

Here the elements of the *schema* are all in place, since everything that happens here fits into a typical restaurant schema in terms of content. The social roles are as expected (waiter, customer) as are other important elements (food, bill). However, what is unexpected and peculiar here is the *order* of the events, since in most restaurants we receive the bill after and not before the meal, and in many societies we eat the sweet ice cream after the savoury soup. The reason, in other words, for the oddity of the story lies in what we perceive as the wrong or muddled ordering of events. This has led researchers

in Schema Theory to suggest that we use several different kinds of schema, as explained here by Gregoriou:

> Schema theorists make a useful distinction between two types of information stored, that which is ordered sequentially (in a sort of narrative) and that which is not. Non-sequentially ordered information is said to be stored as a 'frame', and sequentially ordered information as a 'script'. (Gregoriou, 2009:87)

The term *frame* can therefore be reserved for non-sequential sets of concepts, while the term *script* refers to a conventional sequence of activities (Eysenck and Keane, 2000:352; Schank and Abelson, 1977), a 'socioculturally defined mental protocol for negotiating [or understanding] a situation' (Stockwell, 2002:77). An important feature of scripts is that typically with the people around us we share an understanding of how that sequence will unfold, which enables us all to cooperate in such things as restaurant meals, and also of course, in texts which we hear and read. Like all schemas, the precise makeup of scripts will inevitably differ slightly from person to person and from culture to culture, both in terms of their elements and in terms of their sequence, but there is nonetheless enough consensus to allow us to cooperate in most sequential events, and also to interpret texts which draw on our script knowledge.

Schemas in the comprehension process

Our mental schemas therefore set up expectations which help us to predict what we will find in any new situation, and scripts help us to predict what will happen next. Both types of conceptual structure help us to function and cooperate effectively in the real world, and both also impact on our understanding and construction of texts. A reader or listener combines her or his knowledge of the world, partly structured in the form of schemas and scripts, together with knowledge of lexis and grammar, in order to build up interpretations. Drawing on an example text about assassination and invasion, van Dijk, in his discussion of news reports and how we understand them, describes the process as follows:

> generally, socially shared script information is combined with actual personal ('remembered') model information, and with the new information in the news text, to form a new model, namely about the actual events of the assassination and the invasion. (van Dijk, 1985:81, emphasis added)

This neatly captures several key elements of the process – we draw on socially shared script information' (a specific type of 'schema information') then we also add elements derived from personal experience, and combine them with what the text itself tells us, so as to construct a new model of the situation. The process is rapid, complex, dynamic and constructive.

Text schemas and genre schemas

Field distinguishes further between types of schema as follows:

> When considering how listeners and readers process language information, it is useful to think in terms of three types of schema:
>
> a 'World knowledge': including encyclopedic knowledge and previous knowledge of the speaker or writer. This helps us to construct a content schema for a text.
>
> b Knowledge built up from the text so far: a current meaning representation.
>
> c Previous experience of this type of text (a text schema). (Field, 2003:40, emphasis added)

The general schemata discussed in the previous section, including frames and scripts about the world in general, would come under Field's first category. His second category would include the ongoing representation about meaning which a listener or reader uses while reading or listening, so as to move towards a full interpretation, in ways described in process models of listening and reading (such as Emmott, 1997; Khalifa and Weir, 2009; Buck, 2001). However, it is the third category in Field's summary which is of particular importance to our discussion of genre, since it brings out the point that in comprehension we draw specifically on prior knowledge of various aspects of *texts*. This insight derives in turn from Carrell who distinguished between two types of schema, the first concerning the form of the text (*formal schema*) and the second the content (*content schema*) (Carrell, 1983; Carrell, Devine and Eskey, 1988).

In some accounts this concept of *text schema* appears to be restricted to our knowledge of the *structure* of texts, as indeed is suggested by the idea of 'form' in Carrell's original discussion of it. However, given that we appear to store and make use of far more information about texts than simply their structure or form, this interpretation of text schema may be too limited a way of explaining this part of the comprehension process. The point can be illustrated by reference once again to the Barbecue Sign text which was dis-

cussed in chapter 1. When we see such a public notice we interpret it on the basis not only of our knowledge of the structure and form of similar texts we have seen previously, but also on our knowledge of the *function* of such texts, our prior knowledge of their *layout*, of their typical *lexis* and *grammar* – in short we bring to the text the full range of our prior *genre knowledge* built up over experience of many similar public signs, and not only knowledge of the structure or form of such texts.

For this reason – and to emphasise specifically the fact that that we bring to comprehension more than knowledge of textual structure and form alone – the term *genre schema* (following Frow, 2006; Harris, 2005) will in this book be used to complement the term *text schema*, to refer to the ways in which we draw on and make use of the prior knowledge of all aspects of genres, including their typical contexts, forms, functions, lexis, grammar and so on, which we bring to bear as we interpret written and spoken texts.

3.3 Genre expectations

A video on the website YouTube is simply called *Car Advert* and this title sets up an expectation about what kind of video it will be, deliberately evoking our *genre expectation* or *genre schema* of car advertisements. The video starts by meeting our expectations perfectly. We are shown a distant shot of an expensive new car driven along a calm winding road accompanied by relaxing music, beautiful countryside and a sense of luxury, just as in typical television advertisements for luxury cars. But suddenly a huge hideous zombie figure jumps up screaming in front of the camera and scares the viewer, the music cuts out, and the video ends. It is not a real advertisement at all, but a spoof or parody, whose effect comes from activating our genre expectations, and then disrupting them suddenly for humour and shock purposes.

This example helps to highlight the difference, noted above, between *text* and *genre*, and also to illustrate once again the concept and role of *genre schemata* in comprehension. Texts, as defined above, are the actual manifestations, visible or audible, such as the YouTube zombie video described above. Frequently texts draw on our genre knowledge, for example by following a genre prototype closely, but they may also – as in this case – deliberately undermine our genre expectations for humour or other effects. In that particular text, the director of the video was drawing on our genre schema to trick us, subverting our expectations to make us jump.

It will be appreciated from this that genre or rather our knowledge of genres, acts on our comprehension like mental structures such as schemas and scripts. This view of genre sees it not as a grouping of texts in a sort of library, but rather as a mental construct which we draw on as we create and interpret actual texts. As Johns puts it, genres in this view are 'socio-cognitive schemas' which 'often have to be reformulated as [the] writer produces texts for the demands of specific contexts' (Johns, 2008:239). Johns then offers a clear example of how this works for a writer, using as an example the situation of preparing a paper for a conference:

> an expert writer might have a genre schema for the academic abstract, but as she prepares the actual abstract for an identified conference, she must adapt her schema, and the resultant text, to the conference requirements. (Johns, 2008:239)

Genres in this view, then, are ideal, whereas texts are actual. To give another example, we have a notion in our minds, a genre schema, of what a recipe consists of, first of all in terms of its function, and of its structure, content, lexis, grammar, layout, illustrations and so on, including the possible contexts of occurrence. We use this idealisation both to identify recipes and to write recipes. However, each actual instance of a recipe – a *text* – might differ slightly from the prototype in our minds and from other actual recipe texts. This is because texts are free – they can borrow in a highly flexible and creative way from one or more genres, or from none, and of course in the practice of comprehension this is not a problem, precisely because users of the language implicitly know this and expect it.

Just as we develop our concepts, mental models, schema knowledge and script knowledge from our experience of the world and from what we read, see and hear, so we probably develop our genre knowledge largely through our experience of texts in the world around us and also more explicitly in educational contexts, which means that our knowledge of genres is part of our broad *intertextual knowledge*. Genre knowledge is therefore related to intertextuality because it concerns the relation between one text and other texts. For this reason, as intertextual knowledge was included as a fundamental part of the definition of discourse, in the previous chapter, it can now be seen to relate to genre knowledge also.

3.4 Classifying and sorting genres

The characterisation of genres here differs, then, from more traditional accounts which tend to see them as somehow more physical, as sets of text which could literally be sorted into piles, or found in distinct sections in a bookshop or library. This view, that texts can be sorted into clearly defined groups such as fiction, poetry, drama and so on, and then perhaps into subgroups such as romantic fiction, cowboy fiction and so on, in what we could

call the 'classifying' approach to genre, has been common and valuable in literary analysis and in practical contexts, such as libraries and bookshops, for many years. However, even in the seventeenth century Shakespeare saw the problems of trying to sort texts in this way and then give names to the groupings, referring ironically to 'tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral' (Hamlet II ii).

As Hamlet implies with this mild mockery, even in literature it is difficult to make classifications account for all texts. So when we try to enlarge the scope of our analysis to encompass everyday texts as well, the attempt at classification becomes even more complex and unwieldy.

Unger discusses some of the different criteria used by researchers in their attempts to classify genres. These have included aspects of the situation in which the genre occurs (such as the number of speakers, or their social rank) or their mode (whether they are written or spoken) or the purpose of the genre (Unger, 2006, following Renkema, 1993). However, faced with the natural complexity and 'hybridity' of real texts, these attempts have generally been unable to cover all occurring examples, and often resort to a host of complex and unconvincing groupings, rather like Hamlet's list of types of drama, with the result that we find terms such as 'pre-genres', 'primary genres', 'secondary genres' and 'super-genres', whose connection with each other is often unclear (see, for example, Bregman and Haythornthwaite, 2001).

It is not surprising, given the wide range of texts in the world and their perplexing hybridity, that this broad 'classifying' approach repeatedly runs into problems. Indeed if we accept that texts can draw on a wide range of genres creatively and flexibly, as was illustrated above, we might conclude that such attempts at classification are doomed to failure from the start, simply because most texts are naturally 'hybrids', drawing on genres as their starting point, but then developing in highly fluid and creative ways in response to their creators' particular aims and contextual conditions. So although we may try to set up ideal categories, we should not be surprised when actual texts stubbornly refuse to fit them; an element of 'fuzziness' is inevitable.

This causes obstacles for disciplines (such as librarianship) which see a need to establish clear categories and classifications of the texts they deal with, but fortunately discourse analysis does not in principle need to have any such fixed sets at all. Perhaps it is more important simply to acknowledge that a key fact about genre schemata is that language users operate with a very fluid and flexible set of categories – so that as we listen to or read a text and ask ourselves 'what genre is this?' we might frequently be unable to reply with any certainty. One reason for this, as has already been argued, is that real world *texts* do not neatly correspond to ideal mental *genres*. A second reason is that the genres we have in our minds are not clearly separate from each other, and may not even be clearly delineated in all their characteristics. They are – like concepts, schemas and scripts – useful general ideas which are 'fuzzy', and that fuzziness is an important reason for their usefulness. This means that just as users accept a degree of fuzziness in their acts of interpretation, so discourse analytical approaches and frameworks must allow for a similar degree of flexibility.

3.5 Genres: linguistic or social practices?

In moving towards a working definition of text and genre, then, it is important to accept the fact that any classification will be fuzzy and flexible. One reason for this inherent fuzziness and flexibility where texts and genres are concerned is that they are affected not only by linguistic considerations but by social factors – indeed they could be said to be at the interface between language system and society, as would appear from the place of discourse at the centre of the diagram in Figure 1.1 (see p. 9).

Since discourse and genre have this dual linguistic and sociological dimension, writers who seek to define the terms may emphasise one over the other (Widdowson, 2007: xv). If we look at the definition of genre in the quotation below, for example, we can see an emphasis on the linguistic – indeed Paltridge (contrary to the practice followed in this book) even treats genres and texts as roughly the same kind of thing:

> A genre is a kind of text. Academic lectures and casual conversations are examples of spoken genres. Newspaper reports and academic essays are examples of written genres. (Paltridge, 2006:84)

My preference in this book has been to distinguish more sharply between genres (as abstract) and texts (as actual) than Paltridge does here. That aside, Paltridge clearly adopts here a relatively linguistic approach to genre, since he places linguistic texts at the forefront of his definition. By contrast, other writers tend instead to emphasise the *social* or the *activity* dimensions, as in Martin's definition here:

> genre is a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful *activity* in which speakers engage as member of our culture. Examples of genres are *staged activities* such as making a dental appointment, buying vegetables, telling a story, writing an essay, applying for a job, writing a letter to the editor, inviting someone to dinner, and so on. (Martin, 2001: 155, emphasis added)

While all of the activities in Martin's list probably do typically involve some element of language use, his definition emphasises the activity rather than the linguistic dimension, thereby adopting a rather more social view of genres. Fairclough likewise, in his definition below, also stresses the activity aspect, subsuming language within a broader world of signification (the 'semiotic' mode):

> Genres are diverse ways of acting, of producing social life, in the semiotic mode. Examples are: everyday conversation, meetings in various types of organisation, political and other forms of interview, and book reviews. (Fairclough, 2003:206, emphasis added)

In describing genres as 'activities' and 'ways of acting' in these two definitions, Fairclough and Martin are in essence choosing to prioritise the social interaction over the linguistic. This of course is a matter of the analyst's particular emphasis and perspective, since all would probably agree that genres include both the linguistic and the social, but my preference in this book will be to confine the term 'genre' to behaviour or activity which has a clearly linguistic dimension to it.

To illustrate what this means in practice, and to show how the terminology will be used from now on, my analysis of a person buying vegetables – to take up Martin's example – would be to say that s/he is drawing first of all on a mental *schema* of shops and shopping, and on a *script* of how such interactions are sequenced. The participants would thereby be drawing on the first of Field's three categories cited above, namely 'world knowledge'. The concept of *genre* only becomes relevant, in my view, if and when the participants start to use language, at which point the activity might involve a linguistic *genre schema* of 'buying and selling', including an expectation of how such interactions typically proceed, to include typical lexical patterns and grammatical structures. All of these – schema, script and genre schema – would operate to shape the participants' language behaviour, and on this basis they would then jointly construct and participate in an actual *text*, namely the conversation between the two of them, which might in practice be close to the expected *genre prototype*, or might diverge from it.

The function of a genre

A further well-known view of genre is that of Swales, who defines genres as follows:

> A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style. (Swales, 1990: 58)

Swales was mainly concerned with written language and with academic writing in particular, but his definition usefully makes the general point that genres are guided by *purposes*, in other words by the *functions* which they are intended to fulfil. Furthermore, 'the purposes expressed in genres are defined by the community which uses them, not by individuals: shared rules must be learned and used for genres to operate' (Bregman and Haythornthwaite, 2001). This means, among other things, that members of the community (which in my view should include non-experts, incidentally) will recognise and broadly agree on the key *function* of the genre. This *function* then to a large extent governs the other *features* of the genre, its structure, content and so on.

This is not only a valuable insight into genres, but it also allows us an important methodological starting point in any discourse analysis. Take as an example the Barbecue Sign on the beach discussed in chapter 1. It is clear that the main *function* of that text, typical of the genre of public notices on which it draws, is to instruct and inform the general public. Accordingly all of its *features* were designed to achieve that function – features such as its location secured to a post, its vertical orientation, the size of the lettering, the choice of grammar and lexis and so on. In other words, its *function* governs its *features*. Likewise, to take again the example of recipes, the function of a recipe is to inform us how to cook a particular dish, and to do so economically and quickly (as we might be preparing and even cooking as we read). This key *function* of the recipe then governs its length (usually quite short), its structure (title, picture, list of ingredients, instructions and so on), the layout, the style of language and so on. *Function*, in this approach, is taken frequently to govern the text's *features* to a large extent.

Features of a genre: lexis and jargon

When I was a student living away from home for the first time, and came across the instruction 'fold the flour into the cake mixture', it was not clear to me how to 'fold' flour. On asking someone more experienced, I was told that the verb in cookery means to take a spoon with some flour in it to 'cut' the mixture lightly down the middle, then turn the flour into it bit by bit until it was all absorbed. If you put the phrase 'fold the flour' into an internet search engine it consistently appears in recipe contexts because it is part of cookery *jargon*, that is, language specific to a particular occupational or social group.

Table 3.1 The relation between text function and text features

FUNCTION	FEATURES	EXAMPLE: RECIPE GENRE
The function determines to a large extent the features	A recipe aims to inform us quickly and efficiently how to prepare a particular dish. Therefore the function determines these features:	
	Location	In a magazine or recipe book
	Topic focus	How to prepare food
	Visual aspects and layout Pictures, position of different parts, diagrams, colours	Frequently starts with a bold title and has pictures, perhaps with various colours to make it attractive
	Length	Typically no longer than one page
	Structure	Title, picture, ingredients, instructions, etc.
	Subjects / agents / focus Who is actually doing the actions? Subject of the verbs?	Imperatives. The ingredients are in *describing* discourse mode and the instructions in the *interacting* discourse mode
	Style and register Formal or informal? Related to any particular professional domain?	Typically relatively informal
	Grammar Tense (past, present future)	Imperatives, some conditionals (*if/when it is tender, then* ...)
	Syntax (word order)	Standard, but simple
	Length of sentences	Simple short sentences
	Lexis Any jargon or technical language?	Cooking terms, names of foods, weights and measures

From a functionalist perspective, we can explain this by saying that the *function* of the recipe genre – in particular the need for brevity and speed – leads recipe writers to use shorthand (jargon) terms when referring to common and familiar actions and objects. A genre's function, in other words, can govern or influence not only the structure and contents of the genre, but also the lexis and grammar.

This principle will play an important role in the approach to discourse analysis to be set out in Chapter 5. In the method which I set out there as a broad plan for analysing discourse, the function of the text will be of central importance, followed by analysis of how the features of the text help to achieve that function. This relationship between the two elements is set out in Table 3.1, which shows how the *function* of the genre (in the column on the left) can typically lead to particular combinations of *features* (in the middle column). The final column offers a fuller example, showing how the features of a recipe can be analysed as meeting the recipe's main function.

The point of this illustration is to exemplify ways in which the function of a text can act as the first point of departure in any analysis, so that the various features of a text can subsequently be explained by reference to that function. So the *style* and *lexis* of a text, for example, can be explained in terms of the role they play in the function of the text as a whole.

Classifying and organising genres

Having suggested that genres can usefully be seen as idealisations, and having also seen the way in which their perceived function typically determines or guides their features, the next step is to consider how genres are organised, and how one genre relates to another.

Over the last two decades substantial research into genre and the relations between genres has been carried out and this has naturally involved classification. To take one interesting example, the group of researchers known as the Sydney School identify a number of genre classes in ways exemplified in Martin and Rose's recent work, to include amongst others recounts, descriptions, reports, protocols, narratives and explanations (Martin and Rose 2008:1–8).

Martin and Rose acknowledge the generally educational bias in the genre theory which they present, and it is undoubtedly useful to approach genres in this way if the aim is to use them in education, since it allows for the development of school curricula where progression is linked to different genres. Nonetheless, when we try to deal with texts from other domains outside education we may need to look beyond such analytical frameworks, because many real-world texts cannot easily fit straightforwardly into such classifica-

tory schemes. The central problem here is essentially textual hybridity, the fact that frequently 'a text may not be "in" a single genre, it may "mix" or hybridize genres' (Fairclough, 2003:34), and may draw on a mixture of genre schemata in order to achieve its effects. The 'Squirrel' text discussed previously illustrates this kind of hybridity or mixing, of the letter and greetings card.

This issue can be further illustrated through consideration of 'narrative' in particular, which can be characterised as the reporting of a sequence of events, usually in the past. Narrative has sometimes been treated as a genre in its own right, and in some domains such as education, or others in which narrative may be used in fairly 'pure' ways, this may be sufficient as a category. However, any scheme which wants to explain all texts we encounter must face the problem that narrative enters in fundamental ways into a wide variety of texts which seem best associated with other genres, such as news reports, jokes, histories, biographies, films and so on. Since it seems problematic to say at the same time that narrative is a genre in itself, and also that it enters in fundamental ways into other genres, it seems more satisfactory in any classificatory scheme to consider narrative at a more general abstract level, somewhere 'above' particular genres, and entering into many genres in flexible ways, rather than being a genre in itself. As these authors put it:

> [b]ecause narratives are used in many different kinds of texts and social contexts, they cannot properly be labelled a genre. Narration is just as much a feature of non-fictional genres...as it is of fictional genres... It is also used in different kinds of media...We can think of it as a textual mode rather than a genre. (Thwaites, Davis and Mules, 1994:112, emphasis added)

Other writers note the same phenomenon and move towards a similar solution. Fairclough, for example, makes the same point that the narrative would seem to be best considered as being at a different 'level' of abstraction than, say, the news story, and he considers the same to be true of other categories, noting that: 'If Narrative, Argument, Description, and Conversation are genres, they are genres on a high level of abstraction. They are categories which transcend particular networks of social practices...' (Fairclough. 2003:68). For this reason Fairclough terms them 'pre-genres' (following Swales, 1990) to take account of the fact that they seem in some sense to be 'prior' to actual genres, and that they enter into several different genres in flexible ways, transcending the particular.

In essence, these proposals turn on the view that any fully operational framework of texts and their relationships requires some sort of analytical level 'above' genres and texts, this level to include narrative and a number of

relatively abstract modes of discourse which seem to enter into many actual genres, and which might be termed 'pre-genres', 'textual modes' or similar. In fact, this idea of positing some more abstract general level above genres has a long history, with its roots in traditional categories of rhetoric such as description, exposition, argument and narrative (Smith, 2003; Brooks and Warren, 1972). Grabe refers to 'a long rhetorical tradition of modes of discourse going back to the eighteenth century, and taking on a preeminent status in the nineteenth century with Bain's (1877) formulation of expository, descriptive, narrative, and argumentative modes of discourse' (Grabe, 2002:252).

In more recent times this approach has been given a more linguistic basis. A relatively early example is Werlich's proposal for a Text Grammar (1976). Werlich identifies five categories, which he considers basic to human discourse, namely the four cited above, *narrative, descriptive, expository, argumentative*, along with a fifth, *instructional*, and his *Text Grammar* describes in detail the typical linguistic features of each. In his view these types of discourse are so central to communication in all languages that they are probably related to basic human cognitive processes, rather as Ricouer has argued for narrative (Ricouer, 1990).

Werlich's detailed treatment was followed by Smith's (2003) no less meticulous attempt to analyse the linguistic features of such modes (though curiously she does not refer to Werlich's work). Smith identifies in her analysis *narrative, description* and *argument* to parallel three of Werlich's categories, but her analysis discusses *reports* and *information* instead of Werlich's *expository* and *instructional*. The thrust of her work is in essence the same as Werlich's, namely to identify and analyse in depth certain modes – she calls them *discourse modes* rather than Werlich's *text types* – which she considers to be basic to human discourse and 'above' texts and genres in terms of abstraction. She takes as her unit of analysis the 'passage' which she defines as being as small as two sentences, and her analysis includes detailed discussion of each of the discourse modes in turn and how they enter into a range of texts in flexible ways.

Applied genre theory

A further extended proposal for such an approach, again involving a more abstract level of analysis 'at a superordinate level' above genres, is Grabe's argument for what he calls 'macro-genres' to include *narrative* and *exposition* (Grabe, 2002). Part of Grabe's reasoning is, again, that both narrative and exposition seem to be very general in nature and to enter into many genres rather than being genres themselves. In addition he alludes to the argument (citing Bruner, 1986; 1990) that these modes are as much 'modes of thought'

modes of discourse, and in fact represent clear ways of interpreting the world and 'of drawing meaning from interactions with the world' (Grabe, 2002:252).

Bhatia (2002), responding to Grabe's proposal, first outlined an approach which he later elaborated in greater detail as part of an 'applied genre theory' (Bhatia, 2004), and which attempts to set out in some detail the relation between texts, genres, and discourse modes (which he terms 'generic values'). Bhatia's approach to analysis consists of three levels, the first of which is termed *generic values*, such as narration, description, explanation and persuasion, which Bhatia says are 'independent of any grounded contextual constraints' (Bhatia, 2002:281), in other words they are not dependent on any particular context. This distinguishes them from the elements of the second level which he calls *genre colonies* (for example, promotional genres), which are 'constellations of genres...across genre boundaries' (Bhatia, 2004:xv), 'serving broadly similar communicative purposes' (Bhatia, 2004:59). The third is the *genres* themselves, for example advertisements. This gives us, in Bhatia's scheme, the following hierarchy:

Bhatia's levels	Example
Generic values	Persuasion
Genre colonies	Promotional genres
Genres	Advertisements

3.6 Discourse modes in the analysis of discourse

All of these approaches, although they use different terminology and offer varying analyses of the different modes, nonetheless share the conviction that it is theoretically valuable and analytically useful to identify and make reference to a relatively abstract level of operation, above genres and texts in order to explain how texts and genres operate in discourse.

It can be seen that the elements at this level have been given different names in different accounts, including the terms 'pre-genres', 'generic values' and 'discourse modes'. The last of these terms, *discourse modes*, will be adopted here, firstly because it is the term used by the majority of writers who discuss this area, secondly because this is the term adopted by Smith (2003) in her particularly detailed linguistic elaboration of these modes, and thirdly because the term captures the sense that these ways of using language are general 'modes of operating' with language, (rather than simply being 'values', as Bhatia sees them.)

To make it clear from now on when I am referring to discourse modes I will refer to them as *narrating, describing, reporting* and so on, in italics. It should be noted, incidentally, that these *discourse modes* are not to be confused with the Hallidayan term 'mode' (Halliday and Hasan, 1985:12; Martin and Rose 2003:243).

Table 3.2 summarises the ways in which some of the writers mentioned have envisioned the different discourse modes (or the equivalent in each discussion).

As is clear from the table, narrative, description and argumentation – or as I term them *narrating, describing* and *arguing* are generally taken to be typical at this level of abstraction, but writers vary in their inclusion or exclusion of other modes, partly owing to their different interests, approaches and terminology. In addition it will be noted that an important limitation in most studies (for example, those of Bhatia, Smith and Werlich) is the fact that they restrict themselves explicitly to written discourse, and exclude all discussion of speech. Since any broad analytical scheme for our purposes must include spoken discourse as well as written, this limitation needs to be addressed.

Consider the start of a simple joke: 'Have you heard the one about...?' Jokes frequently make use of *narrating mode* in the form of a short story with a punchline (in ways to be further discussed in Chapter 7). However, some have a different approach, starting with a question such as that above. Question forms cannot easily be incorporated into any of the modes identified in Table 3.2; this joke form, for example, is neither *narrating* nor *describing*, nor *arguing*. In fact, it is quite different from the modes already identified, since here the speaker is not using *narrating* or *describing* or *arguing* mode, but is using a question to elicit a conventional response before completing the joke with a punchline. Just as the listener can recognise *narrating mode* and respond appropriately, so s/he can recognise that this joke starter is part of an *interaction* which will require a certain response.

Table 3.2 Discourse modes

Bain (1877)	Werlich (1976)	Smith (2003)	Bhatia (2004)	Fairclough (2003)
Descriptive	Description	Description	Description	Description
Narrative	Narration	Narrative	Narrative	Narrative
Argumentative	Argumentation	Argument	Argument	Argument
	Instruction		Instructions	
Expository	Exposition		Explanations	
		Information		
		Report	Reporting	
			Evaluation	
			Persuasion	
				Conversation

This kind of interactional activity seems, like *narrating*, *describing* and *arguing*, also to be in some sense prior to or 'above' genres, partly because it enters into many genres and actual texts, both spoken and written. Although it is different from the other discourse modes in several ways, it appears plausible to suggest that it resembles them in that users can employ it flexibly in a wide range of genres, such as jokes, interviews, emails, text messages and so on, and it therefore operates as a sort of discourse mode.

Some analysts include spoken discourse at the same level of abstraction as the other modes. As noted above, Fairclough (2003) includes conversation with the other pre-genres, suggesting that it is at the same level of abstraction as narrative, description and so on. Renkema (1993) also includes what he terms 'interaction' at this level, considering it to be at the same level of abstraction as narration and argumentation. In both of these discussions the implication appears to be that spoken interaction (at a more general abstract level than conversation in fact) can be seen to be in some way 'basic', somehow more abstract than genres themselves, and entering into several. This will be revisited in the next chapter, but for these reasons *interacting discourse mode* will be provisionally included as a discourse mode alongside those itemised above, despite its differences.

3.7 The relation of discourse modes to genre

Having discussed and described discourse modes in a preliminary way, it is useful to sketch out in greater detail the relationship between these modes and genres. It has already been noted that discourse modes are at a more abstract level than genres, and can enter into several genres in flexible ways, but how does this happen?

To take an example, texts which draw on the broad genre of Advertisements can make use of the discourse mode of *interacting* (in an advertisement which uses a conversation) or the discourse mode of *narrating* (if it uses a story), or other discourse modes, in flexible ways according to how it seeks to achieve its main function of selling a product or service. Similarly, the broad genre of the Novel might include both the *narrating* and also *interacting* modes in reported form (in reported conversations). The same applies to jokes and to many other genres in ways which will be elucidated in the later chapters devoted to particular spoken and written genres.

Table 3.3 offers a characterisation of the way in which *discourse modes* can be seen to link up with *genres* and then with actual *texts*. It is intended to allow the analyst a vocabulary and a framework by which to describe and explain a wide variety of genres and texts. In this view, the discourse modes can be analysed as being at a more abstract level than genres, and so are

Table 3.3 Aspects of genre and text

Discourse modes

Discourse modes do not have unique functions in themselves but enter into many genres

Examples	Interacting	Narrating	Describing	Instructing	Others
Typical main features	Turn-taking, adjacency pairs	Sequencing of events, often in the past	Combining of descriptive elements, non-sequential	Listing or sequencing of actions or items, non-historical	

↓ *Discourse modes* enter into *genres* (*or genre schemas*) in flexible ways

Genres / genre schemas

Our mental idea of groups or families of texts which share common functions and features

Example of **genres/ genres schemas**	Genres typically perform particular **functions**	As we use genres, we can draw on any of the various **discourse modes** in flexible ways
Conversation	Social interaction – to make social bonds and relationships	The genre of **conversation** mainly draws on the **interacting discourse mode**, but it might also include **narrating** (when someone tells an anecdote), **describing** (when someone describes a person or place) and also **instructing** (when someone tells you how to do something or get somewhere)
Classroom lessons	Educational – to teach something	The genre of **classroom lessons** is typically a form of **interacting discourse mode** between pupils and teacher, but the turn-taking is different from a conversation. It might also include any of the other discourse modes such as **explaining, describing** and **narrating**
Novel	Entertainment, aesthetic	The genre of **novel**, which is often divided into sub-genres such as romantic novels and historical novels, predominantly draws on **narrating** discourse mode, but of course frequently includes **interacting and describing**
Weather forecast	Informative	The genre of **weather forecast** typically draw mostly on **describing discourse mode**, telling us what the weather is like, and will be like, but can also include **instructing**
Recipe	Informative, instructing	The genre of **recipe** typically draws on **instructing discourse mode.**

↓ *Genre schemas* are then used flexibly in *actual texts*

placed at the top of the table. Discourse modes are abstract ways of expressing relationships about the world. They can enter in highly flexible ways into various genres, as shown by the arrow leading downwards to the second level of genres, illustrating the point that one genre might draw on one or more modes. The recipe genre, for example, typically uses *describing* mode to set out the ingredients and then *instructing* mode to give the cooking sequence. At the bottom of the table are the actual texts, which may draw on the discourse modes, or on the genres, as they choose. So an actual recipe might follow the genre closely, if it is prototypical, or it might diverge from it.

While offering this representation as a general view of the way in which discourse modes can enter into genres and then be taken up in actual texts, it is worth repeating that many texts deliberately break our expectations for particular effect. A key aspect of the way we deal with texts in the real world, as producers and consumers, lies in our flexibility and our ability to shift and mix discourse modes and genre expectations in ever-changing ways, as has already been argued. For this reason the table, whilst it may be of use as a depiction of the general relationship between discourse modes, genres and texts, should not disguise the fact that texts often stubbornly resist the categories we set for them.

In Chapter 5 it will be suggested that it can be useful to take account of these discourse modes in discourse analysis, but it is important not to overstate their role in texts and genres. Noting that these discourse modes have been advocated before as a way of understanding texts and genres, Grabe (2002:252) warns that 'such a scheme has been conventionalized as a generic instructional format with unrealistic models that artificially highlight each mode.' Grabe is correct here to warn against setting too much store by the discourse modes in an analysis, and also against assuming that each mode has greater weight in particular genres than in fact it has. The lesson from this is that discourse modes might be identified and discussed as one of a genre's or text's strategic resources, but we should not expect to find these modes entering into every genre or every text in any systematic way, nor should we seek to set up an elaborate analytical scheme on that assumption.

3.8 Genre, style, register and jargon

Additional terms which are often mentioned in the literature, and which it is useful briefly to mention at the close of this chapter, are *style, register* and *jargon*. With regard to the term *style,* van Dijk offers a definition through this example:

> For instance, in order to describe the civil war in Bosnia, we may refer to the various groups of participants in terms of 'fighters', 'rebels', 'insurgents', 'terrorists', etc. The choice of a specific word in this case may depend on the type of discourse (for example news report, editorial or political propaganda), or on the group membership, position or opinion of the speaker or writer. That is, in order to refer to the same people, we may use different lexical items. If such variation is a function of the context (speaker, perspective, audience, group, etc.) we usually call it a property of the style of the discourse. (van Dijk, 1987a:11, emphasis added)

This broad definition of *style* will be followed here, to refer to the general way in which language is used in any written or spoken text, mainly in terms of its formality or informality. (Though note that in the field of stylistics the term *style* has a rather different sense, as discussed in Jeffries and McIntyre 2010). The main determinant, as van Dijk notes, is the context of use, and this does not mean only the physical location. A lawyer in a law court, for example, might use a relaxed informal style in court if speaking to a clerk before the judge enters, but when the case begins, s/he will use a more formal style. The reason for this style choice is the social occasion, and not merely the physical location.

Some writers would use the term *register* to describe this more formal legal style, defining it for example as: '[a] set of specialized vocabulary and preferred syntactic and rhetorical devices/structures, used by specific socioprofessional groups for special purposes' (Schiffman, 1996:41). These include, for example, a legal register, a medical register and so on. I will also make use of the term *jargon* to refer specifically to lexis which is used in particular, usually professional domains, such as *legal jargon, medical jargon* and *cooking jargon*.

How do styles relate to genre? A good way of understanding this relationship is through the example of conversation. If we speak of the *genre* of Conversation we mean something which is structured, in that it has a beginning, middle and an end, however informal, which users can recognise and respond to. Conversational *style*, by contrast, in my definition, means simply a general informal way of talking, probably influenced heavily by the location and the occasion. The Conversation *genre* will typically make use of the conversational *style*, of course, but other genres may also use a conversational style for particular effects. A politician working within an Interview *genre* might for example adopt a conversational *style* to make him/herself seem more friendly and personable (Fairclough, 2000:101).

As I use the terms here therefore, *genres* have structures, beginnings and ends, or structural layouts, which we can recognise, whereas *styles* indicate more general ways of talking or writing which vary according to the occasion and situation, usually along a continuum of formal-informal. In practice, it is not always easy to see the distinction. For example we may ask whether text

messaging is a style or a genre. It does not seem to have any clear structure, any beginning or end, so in that sense it seems more like a style, but we could say that a finite *text message exchange* is more like a genre, and can be analysed as such. Despite these difficulties, the distinction is generally a useful one.

3.9 A summary definition of genre, style and discourse mode

The discussion in this chapter now allows us to present a working definition of genre as it relates to texts, drawing together the various threads of the preceding discussion. Our definition can be presented as a series of key defining features:

1. Genres are akin to mental structures such as *concepts* and *schemas*, in that we carry mental representations about genres around with us and make use of them to prepare for communicative events, and to interpret communicative events.
2. Genres are *ideals*, whereas texts are real.
   Texts can therefore draw on one or more genres in their realisation.
3. Genres may include language or they may not.
   For example, a mime show could be classed as a genre, with function, features, structure and so on. However in my discussion I will focus only on genres which do have a linguistic dimension.
4. Genres are *shared* as mental constructs by members of a particular community.
   For this reason, the features of any genre are in part socially endorsed. However, individually 'people participate in genre usage rather than control it' (Mulholland, 1999:59).
5. Genres often have particular names, but not always.
   Because genres are often shared amongst users in the same speech community, they sometimes have accepted names, as well as clearly identified function and features (in the case of prototypical genres). However, many genres do not have socially agreed names, but are genres nonetheless.
6. Genres are characterised first and foremost by the *function(s)* which they perform.
7. The function of a genre then guides the *features* of the genre.
   These features include the location, structure, layout, style, lexis, grammar, and other aspects.

8. Genres have *structure*, as one of their main features.
   One important feature of genres is the fact that they have structure, and we can identify and recognise that structure, perhaps subconsciously. This distinguishes them in my analysis from *styles*, which are simply *ways* of speaking or writing.
9. Genres are identified not only by *formal* criteria, but also by *social* and *contextual* factors.
   When we examine a genre we look not only at its grammar and lexis, say, but at where it is used, who makes use of it and so on.
10. Genres are highly *flexible*, and they can change, blend, evolve and die out.

This means that, for example, *legal language* or *courtroom discourse* are not in themselves genres in this definition, as they do not have a structure with a beginning and end. They are more like a style or register. However, a notional *Cross-Examination* in a courtroom is a genre in this definition, as it has a clear structure, with beginning and end, which lawyers and other participants can recognise. An actual cross-examination in a real court would be a *text* in this definition, which might conform to the expected genre but might diverge from it for various reasons. (Genres under this definition will be signalled by an initial capital letter.)

Similarly when we talk about conversation, we might mean simply an informal *style*, or we might mean a *genre*, in which case it is a discourse with a clear structure, with an opening, middle and end. In other words, what distinguishes a genre from a style, in the definition to be followed here, is in essence a matter of *structure*.

Genres and text-types

Some writers (e.g. Paltridge, 2001) distinguish between *genre* and *text type*, largely on structural grounds, identifying as text types such categories as 'problem-solution...description, discussion, cause-and-effect, and compare-and-contrast texts' (Paltridge, 2001:24).

This distinction between *genre* and *text type* will not enter into the discussion and analyses in this book, however. For one reason, some of these categories are already included as discourse modes, for example, 'description'. Furthermore, in the definition to be adopted here, the term *genre* is already taken to include structural features such as the problem-solution pattern, so any such features of texts will be examined as integral parts of a particular genre, and not separately.

3.10 Summary

This chapter has addressed the nature of the term *genre*, emphasising the ways in which readers and listeners draw on *genre schemas*, along with other types of *schemas* and *scripts*, in their efforts to interpret texts. It drew a distinction between notional 'genres' and actual *texts* in the world, and considered the ways in which a text can draw flexibly on one or more genres in its creation. Some texts, for example those in more formal settings, might follow a particular genre closely (for example, an academic essay or business letter) whereas other texts (for example, those in the media) might draw more flexibly on a variety of genres to create more hybridity.

For readers and listeners it was argued that the *function* of any text and genre is central. For this reason it is useful for the analyst to start with the text's function and then examine ways in which the features of the text support that function in various ways. The features of a recipe, for example, might be analysed to see how far they support the main function of that genre. An actual recipe might then be analysed to see to what extent it fits with those expectations, in ways which will be considered in detail in the heuristic scheme for analysing discourse set out in Chapter 5.

The present chapter also discussed a more abstract level of analysis, in the form of *discourse modes* such as *narrating, describing* and *reporting*. It was suggested that these modes appear to be common to a number of genres and in some way 'above' them, as well as being identifiable in terms of common sets of features. It was suggested that for this reason it can be useful to examine the ways in which these modes operate in texts. However, although it was stressed that these modes are an additional useful way of approaching genres and texts, it would be a mistake to set too much store by them, for example by building an analytical framework upon them.

Having seen, then, what genres are in principle, how they operate with respect to texts, and how they can draw on various discourse modes, we can turn in the next chapter to look at a number of the discourse modes in detail, as this will allow us in the later chapters, when we look at a range of genres from a variety of situations, to understand and appreciate how these discourse modes and genres can be used by texts in various ways and for a variety of purposes. This will also prepare for discussion in Chapter 5 of how in practice to carry out a discourse analysis.

CHAPTER

Discourse Modes 4

Chapter 3 examined the nature and role of genres and genre knowledge in discourse, and introduced the notion of discourse modes. These are important because they feature in many of the genres we know in daily life, and therefore occur in many actual texts, as will be illustrated in the analyses of jokes, conversations, advertisements and other texts in the chapters to come. As noted above, discourse modes differ from genres because they do not have a specific social function in themselves; instead they are building blocks which we can draw on in many different genres and then use in actual texts in flexible ways for a range of purposes.

4.1 Patterning in discourse modes

Smith offers some general insights into the way in which discourse modes relate to the real world:

> People intuitively recognize passages of the Discourse Modes, although they are probably unaware of the linguistic basis for the differences between them. Each mode – Narrative, Description, Report, Information, Argument – introduces certain entities into the universe of discourse, with a related principle of discourse progression. The features have linguistic correlates of a temporal nature. In fact temporality in the larger sense is the key to the discourse modes. Temporal factors are woven into the fabric of a language and are part of our tacit knowledge of language structure. (Smith 2003:22)

She later clarifies the way in which each mode relates to temporal and other aspects of the world, setting out her reasoning as follows: