A GENRE ANALYSIS OF AMAZON.COM "MOST HELPFUL"

PRODUCT REVIEWS

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
Department of English

MAY 2012
To the Faculty of Washington State University:

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I thank my chair for her guidance and wisdom during the initial drafting stages of the thesis, as well as my committee members for their feedback and encouragement. I also thank all of the professors, graduate students, and faculty at Washington State University that have contributed to the wonderful experience of obtaining this degree.
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Abstract

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May 2012

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This thesis draws from genre theory in order to present an analysis and
application of one particular genre. Drawing from the theoretical background of English
for Specific Purposes (ESP), which itself is rooted in the larger field of applied
linguistics, I develop a framework for a systematic analysis of Amazon.com "most
helpful" product reviews: reviews that are designated as the most popular reviews for
particular products. By examining an online genre that is neither professional nor
academic, I stretch the traditional boundaries of ESP-based genre analysis and
demonstrate how genre analysis may help to gain insight into the shared goals and values
of the community of people that author and read Amazon.com product reviews.

I also provide a pedagogical application of Amazon.com "most helpful" product
reviews. By situating the results of my analysis within the framework of genre-based
writing instruction, a pedagogy designed for second-language (L2) writing students, I
briefly discuss the history and benefits of this pedagogy for use in a L2 writing class and
how the genre of Amazon.com product reviews can be used in such a classroom.
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Introduction
Writing is a form of communication used in multiple aspects of human life. People write emails, compose text messages, draft memos, grade essays, or scribble notes, to name a few of the different forms of writing. All of these examples exhibit certain features and characteristics that work to distinguish them from one another. This is the reason that a text message typically won't be confused for a business memo. A common and even unremarkable word that captures this process is genre, coming from French and which literally translates into "kind" or "type."

The typical ways that genre is used to categorize writing is largely due to literary studies, which has long been concerned with the careful study and analysis of written genres. Bawarshi (2003) claimed that literary studies uses genres "mainly...to structure and classify a literary textual universe" (p. 17). Citing Northrop Frye's 1958 Anatomy of criticism, which equated the word genre with convention (p. 96) and argued that genres are idealized representations of literary works (p. 247), Bawarshi (2003) considered this literary view of genre as an "artificial and arbitrary system of classification" (p. 7).

As further evidence that the literary method of using genre as a classificatory device has permeated the everyday, one simply needs to walk into any modern bookstore. Chances are that one will find books organized based on literary genres. It appears then, that genre is a useful way of categorizing writing for ease of identification. A typical dictionary or lay definition of "genre" supports this idea. For example, The Oxford online dictionary defines genre as "a style or category of art, music, or literature" ("Genre").

However, recall the initial examples I listed in the first sentence. Are text messages or business memos considered literature? The answer from an English or
literary studies perspective would most likely be "no." Yet those types, or genres, of writing are clearly distinguishable from one other, much like a mystery novel is different from a textbook. Furthermore, have people relied on literary studies to provide them with the names and features of these genres? The answer, again, is "no." Clearly, writing need not be "literary" in order for it to be recognized as an example of a particular genre. This notion, combined with Bawarshi's (2003) claim that literary genres are "artificial and arbitrary," suggests that genres are something much more complex than one discipline's list of classifications.

In this thesis, I intend to explain how the literary or traditional view of genre is complicated when genres of writing are analyzed through non-literary approaches. Specifically, I draw on the field of genre analysis, which is the process of analyzing written text in order to gain a deeper understanding into the rhetorical choices that authors make while constructing texts.

One particular school of genre analysis, known as English for Specific/Academic Purposes (ESP/EAP), has traditionally focused on using genre analysis as a way to teach non-native speakers of English (NNES) how to learn and produce genres that are written in English. ESP/EAP provides a methodological approach that deconstructs genres into rhetorical units, or moves, which helps provide explanations for why authors of written genres make the rhetorical choices that they do.

These rhetorical choices are laden with ideological and cultural assumptions. Thus, another important task of genre analysis is to also identify the assumptions embedded within the rhetorical choices and strategies of authors. This process helps explain both the conscious and unconscious choices that writers make when
communicating in various settings. Genre analysis is therefore an ideal strategy for those who are working with students that are trying to adapt to different cultures and contexts.

However, ESP/EAP has traditionally focused on academic and professional genres of writing (e.g. research papers or business documents). A relatively untouched pool of genres exists on the Internet, where multiple genres are authored by anyone with access to a computer and the Internet. One of these genres can be found on online retailer Amazon.com's website. Amazon.com allows customers to write and publish reviews of products on its website, effectively birthing a new web genre that has yet to be considered through the framework of ESP/EAP-based genre analysis. Users categorize these reviews as "helpful" by casting votes, resulting in a sort of sub-genre of "most helpful" reviews. Even more interesting is that Amazon.com has created categories of "most helpful positive" and "most helpful critical" reviews. A genre analysis that explores these "most helpful" reviews will help explain what features of reviews are typically deemed as helpful or not by the community of consumers and review writers on Amazon.com.

By focusing on a non-academic and non-professional web genre, in this thesis I intend to stretch the traditional boundaries of ESP/EAP and perform a genre analysis of a web genre that investigates its rhetorical and ideological form and content. By demonstrating how a web genre can also be used to teach NNES the rhetorical and ideological elements of English writing, the results of this thesis can justify the continued use of ESP/EAP approaches in the ever-increasing digitization of writing. The following is a brief summary each chapter in this thesis.

The first two chapters comprise a broad review of literature that works towards several goals. In chapter one I summarize and explain the main theoretical approach to
genre analysis that I draw from. I then further explain what genre and genre analysis is, while also explaining other important concepts and terms related to genre analysis. I then present a review of past scholarship that has been concerned with analyzing online and review genres in order to situate this thesis relevant literature. Finally, I present a series of research questions, based on my understanding of genre analysis and the findings of other literature, that the analysis in chapter 4 will work towards answering.

In chapter two I present the main methodological approaches of ESP-based genre analysis in order to develop my own methodology for analyzing Amazon.com customer reviews. Drawing mainly from a process in ESP known as move analysis, I also incorporate other perspectives into my framework in order to end up with a set of research focuses that serve as a heuristic framework for analysis.

Chapters three and four detail my genre analysis of Amazon.com "most helpful" product reviews. Chapter three, the methods chapter, takes up the framework from chapter two and further explains how I developed the framework into an applied analysis of Amazon.com product reviews. I describe the data collection process and detail the various steps that I took while performing the genre analysis. In chapter four I present and discuss the results of my analysis. I then return to my research questions from chapter one and attempt to provide answers based on the results.

Finally, in chapter five, I consider the Amazon.com review genre for pedagogical applications. An initial description of genre-based writing instruction and an exploration of current literature and theory, and criticism behind this pedagogy transitions into an explanation of how the genre of Amazon.com customer reviews can be applied in a second-language college level composition classroom.
Chapter 1: Literature review: Genre, genre analysis, and relevant studies

In this chapter I will discuss genre and genre analysis as it is seen from the theoretical perspective of ESP/EAP, which draws its roots from the discipline of applied linguistics. I will then review current studies of web genres, including those that have looked at Amazon.com and other online review genres, in order to situate this thesis within the theoretical frameworks employed by previous studies, as well as their results. Based on my understanding of genre analysis and what has already been uncovered by previous genre analyses into web and review genres, I will formulate a series of research questions that will guide the methodology and analysis in chapters two and three.

1.1 What is genre?

The traditional concept of genres is a relatively uncontroversial one. Recalling the dictionary definition of genres stated in the introduction, genres are typically thought of as nothing more than categorical devices; jars within which to store certain types of things. For example, literary genres include poetry, fantasy, detective novels, self-help books, and so on. Musical genres include rap, soft rock, country, etc. By sharing certain elements and characteristics, different types of writing or music are lumped into certain categories. If a book contains knights, magic, and dragons, it would typically be categorized as fantasy. If a song is dominated by an organized set of orchestrated instruments and includes no singer, it would be considered as classical music. This definition of genre frames the world in a way that conceptualizes various things as belonging to genres.
On the other hand, genre analysts essentially view genres as written examples of *discourse*. Whether defined as "language in use" (Brown & Yule, 1983), "language used to do something and mean something, language produced and interpreted in real-world context" (Cameron, 2001), "actual instances of communication in the medium of language" (Johnstone, 2002), or "authentic language use as it occurs in context" (Wennerstrom, 2003), *discourse* is the act of communicating in situated and authentic ways. For example, the literal meaning of the phrase "what's up" is not what is typically meant when the phrase is uttered as a greeting. Rather, "what's up" usually means something like "what is it that you are currently doing or plan to be doing in the future?" or "what is new in your life that you may like to share with me?" depending upon the context in which it was uttered. In order to both use and understand that example of discourse, one must be a part of, or relatively familiar with, the *discourse community* that uses the phrase.

A *discourse community* has been defined as "sociorhetorical networks that form in order to work towards sets of common goals" (Swales, 1990, p. 9). In other words, discourse communities are groups of people who share common social interests or values and, whether implicitly or explicitly, have historically decided on preferred methods of communication that share, protect, and promote those values *among* the discourse community. These forms of communication also differentiate *members* of a discourse community from non-members.

One easily conjured example is the discourse community of those in the military. Based on the needs of members in that discourse community, and the typical roles members are asked to play, the military has developed a highly structured set of
acronyms and phrases in order to aid and speed communication among members of the military. Because the military values clear, precise directions, words like "negative" and "positive" are used when answering questions (to avoid confusion when answering a question where a "yes" could mean agreement with the speaker or agreement with the content). Taking this example further, each specific branch of the military (army, navy, etc.) has its own specific ways of communicating that best represent the needs of those particular branches of the military and their members. For example, members of the U.S. Army do not say "squad automatic weapon," instead they simply say SAW. A person who refers to the clothing soldiers wear as “camouflaged uniforms” instead of "BDUs" marks himself or herself as an outside to that discourse community.

This diversion from genre was necessary in order to fully justify the above declaration that genre analysis sees written text as discourse. In other words, written texts are representative of the shared goals and values of a discourse community. Discourse communities create written texts that represent these shared goals and values. Instead of a genre determining what a text looks like and contains, the discourse community shapes text into ways that form genres. To state it differently, a dictionary definition of genre sees texts as members of a genre, whereas genre theory sees texts as representing a form of authentic, contextualized language use that create genres. The study of these genres can thus shed light on the discourse communities that employ genres to communicate (Wennerstrom, 2003).

To state it simply: genres are dynamic, socially constructed, socially mediated, and socially perpetuated forms of writing. People use written genres to perform a variety of communicative tasks, and as communication becomes faster, quicker, and more
widespread, so does the spread and use of genres. As genres are spread around the world into different discourse and cultural communities, they begin to change yet again, taking on new meaning for different communities of people. (For example, Stevens (2000) reported how contracts in Russia were characterized by a more oral and contextual approach, contrasting with the more structured and regulated way that contracts are used in the United States. Her conclusion was that the contracts were shaped in part by cultural and ideological assumptions.) Genre analysis attempts to look at this complexity and explain it so that outsiders, interested parties, language learners, and anyone else may begin to understand everything that comes along with the genre and the discourse communities associated with them.

1.2 Major theories of genre

At the broadest level, genre theory currently spans three major "camps" or groups of scholarship. From applied linguistics comes English for Specific/Academic Purposes (ESP/EAP) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), while rhetoric and composition has created the field of New Rhetoric, which draws largely from literary and English studies. Bawarshi & Reiff (2010) provide a detailed look at these three different approaches to genre theory. Essentially, the main differences between these approaches are the level of analysis, definition of genre, and the target audience for pedagogical applications.

ESP/EAP has traditionally focused on whole texts and has been used to teach adult learners of English, while SFL has traditionally taken a narrower scope, looking at parts of text, and has had a much younger (i.e. grade school) focus and has been used for
both NES and NNES students. For example, ESP/EAP would focus on how to write a resume, dissertation abstract, or technical manual, whereas SFL would focus on the linguistic structure of sentences contained in those genres. A useful way of conceptualizing this difference is by picturing ESP/EAP as a "top down" analysis, which examines the whole of a genre then works towards narrower features, while SFL is a "bottom up" approach, starting at smaller linguistic units and working upwards towards a whole (Biber et al., 2007).

The third perspective, New Rhetoric, has been concerned largely with the social nature of texts (i.e., examining how texts are constructed by the larger social context, rather than individuals) and focused on college-level composition for native-English speaking students (NES) (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Johns, 2008). Genres, for those in New Rhetoric, are the contextualized ways that individuals approach and respond to different situations (Devitt, 2004). New Rhetoric sees genres more like frames of action, rather than individualized forms of writing. A New Rhetoric approach to genre would examine the larger social context present when people communicating and how that social context constrains and shapes their response.

For example, a composition textbook authored by New Rhetoric theorists described how the context of a courtroom would determine the genres that are available and useable by different participants (Devitt et al., 2004, p. 21-22). (Note: this example appears to be widely used among various discourse and genre theorists). While a judge will have certain communication options available during a courtroom procedure, those options would be much different for a witness under oath, and even more constrained for the jurors, who are unable to communicate at all. However, in a different social situation,
all of those same people will possess different communication options. For example, a juror that is unable to talk during a trial may also be a teacher, and once that juror enters the classroom, her communication options are increased while those of her students decrease.

It is important to note that all fields of genre theory have a pedagogical application, and that all see genre as a representative of something more than the dictionary definition of genre as a classification system (as explained in section 1.1.). Perhaps a universal goal of all genre analysis theories is to develop ways of teaching language or writing to students whom are attempting to understand a new language or become familiar with a new discourse community, whether they are native or non-native speakers of English.

Of the previously mentioned schools of genre theory, ESP/EAP is the most appropriate choice for the scope and purpose of this thesis. ESP/EAP has a strong history of producing systematic methodologies for examining the rhetorical nature of text, and has always situated itself within the larger realm of discourse analysis (Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993). Furthermore, it continues to incorporate much of the social viewpoint that is advocated by New Rhetoric (Swales, 2004; Bhatia, 2004). The current state of ESP/EAP thus represents a theoretical background that views genres as discourse (i.e. contextualized and authentic language use); values both the form and content of written discourse; and recognizes the larger social and cultural influences that shape and are shaped by discourse. The following section will detail the ESP/EAP approach in more detail. Because the designation between ESP and EAP is contextual and not
methodological, only the term ESP will be used from this point. It should be understood that both ESP and EAP are represented in the continued use of the ESP acronym.

1.3 ESP and genre analysis

Two scholars from applied linguistics, John Swales and Vijay Bhatia, are largely credited with the popularity of the ESP approach to genre theory. Based on his work teaching international graduate students how to write research papers, dissertations, and other typical genres of graduate school, in 1990 Swales published *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Pedagogical in purpose, the book set out to discuss and define "discourse community, genre, and language-learning task" (Swales, 1990, p. 1) in order to develop a framework for teaching English through genre. In writing this book, Swales provided ESP with a theoretical foundation that is still widely recognized as influential and relevant. Perhaps the most important contribution from the book was the definition of genre that Swales developed.

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, p. 58).

This definition has been fundamental to the field of ESP and to genre analysis in general. By privileging the communicative purpose as the primary identifiable characteristic of a genre, Swales draws focus to the *content* of a genre. The identification of communicative
purpose also grants genre analysts the ability to concretely define the types of genres that they are analyzing.

The definition, however, does not ignore the form of a genre (i.e. the textual structure), and indeed states that while genres do possess a recognizable structure that is sometimes constraining, it is up to the expert members of a discourse community to police this form. The implication is that the very reason that genres have constraining features is because the expert members of a discourse community have recognized, either consciously or unconsciously, that those features are the best ways to represent the shared values and goals of the discourse community. Put simply, genre is shaped by the purposes of a discourse community; those purposes result in the textual manifestation of written genres.

Bhatia's 1993 *Analysing genre: language use in professional settings* builds upon Swales (1990) and develops a further argument for the study of genre as something that must go beyond pure textual description (recall that Swales is concerned with the shared social purpose of discourse communities). Bhatia argues for the need for a "thicker" description of genre (Bhatia, 1993, p. 39). Both Swales, Bhatia and other studies explained in this thesis use the word "thick" or "thicker" to describe analyses of discourse that go beyond surface-level features, a concept originally introduced by anthropologist Clifford Geertz in 1973 and explained in Bhatia (1993). A thicker description of genre is one that does more than describe what is found textually; it works towards explaining the social and contextual elements of the genre.
Bhatia also takes the definition of genre that Swales (1990) offers in *Genre analysis* and parses out the individual elements of the definition, adding his own interpretation to the four main parts of the definition. Briefly, these four parts are

- communicative purpose of genre (what is the writing trying to do),
- structure of genre (what does the writing typically look like),
- constraints of genre (what content is allowable),
- and expert members of genre (who can expertly use and recognize the genre)


Bhatia does this because he feels that Swales' definition is good, but still somewhat lacking in its approach. Bhatia argued that Swales did not pay enough attention to the psychological aspects of genre construction (p. 16).

What Bhatia means by this is that Swales' definition of genre lacked emphasis on analyzing the socio-cognitive (socially influenced ways of thinking) choices and elements of genre construction. By arguing that both the shared goals and needs of the discourse community help shape genres *as well as* the socially influences ways of thinking, Bhatia tweaks the 1990 definition in order to work towards his "thicker" description of genre, one that gives more attention to the social and dynamic nature of genre.

The Swales/Bhatia definition of genre existed and dominated the field of ESP for many years. Perhaps not surprisingly, criticisms of ESP emerged quickly after it became widespread. Although both Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993) stressed that ESP should be used by language teachers as a method for students to understand and eventually enter into new discourse communities, many scholars objected to the ways that ESP was being used (or at least had the potential to be used) as a way to merely teach students how to
acquire genres without delving into the larger social properties inherent in genres and discourse communities (Belcher, 2004).

Indeed, despite the fact that both Swales and Bhatia have both revised and updated their conceptualizations of genre in separate 2004 publications, the definition presented above from Swales (1990) continues to be cited, and criticisms of ESP still exist. As the criticisms revolve mainly around ESP's pedagogical application, chapter 4 will further explain the details of the arguments against ESP. It is enough to know at this point that despite the updates to ESP made by Bhatia and Swales, these criticisms continue to exist (Jo
dns, 2008).

In 2004, Swales published Research genres: Explorations and applications. While being careful to narrow his focus to a discussion of genres that exist in academic research, Swales (2004) also discussed and updated his previous 1990 definition. 'Updating' is perhaps too kind a word - Swales all but abandoned his definition because of a realization that "the easy adoption of definitions can prevent us from seeing newly explored or newly emergent genres for what they are" (Swales, 2004, p 61). Instead of using a single definition that applies in all instances, Swales now preferred to envision genres as a series of metaphors. In other words, Swales felt that genre can be seen through multiple different worldviews and lenses, and thus a strict definition of genre was not only unnecessary, but also potentially unproductive.

More dramatic than this, however, was Swales' rejection of communicative purpose as the initial and primary means of identifying and defining a genre. Instead, Swales now argued that genres must be viewed in their relations to other genres - by doing so, an analyst can better determine what the purpose of a genre is (p. 68-73).
Swales identified three main sites of interaction between genres: chains, sets, and networks (p. 18-21). Briefly, genre *chains* are all of the genres that have come before the genre in question. To borrow from the example that Swales (2004) uses, a conference paper relies on the call for proposals, the submitted abstract, instructions for the conference, and revised drafts to occur before the conference paper is actually created. To ignore the other genres that led up to the creation of the conference paper is to miss a large part of the production of the genre. Genre *sets* are groups of genres used by individual or similar members of a discourse community. To continue borrowing examples from Swales, one example of a genre set would be all of the seminar papers that graduate students in a seminar complete. Finally, genre networks represent the larger group of genres that are available to particular members of a discourse community. By being using and exposed to these different genres, members of a discourse community can form *intertextual* relations between these genres.

These intertextual relations, known as *intertextuality*, occur when genres borrow elements or features from, or implicitly or explicitly refer to, other genres (Gee, 2011). For example, writing that refers to other texts explicitly (e.g. "regarding our previous email") contains intertextual elements, while writing that refers to other texts implicitly, whether through borrowing textual resources or not, (e.g. an academic essay that contains a poem, or a food menu that puns famous music lyrics for names of food) can also be considered to possess intertextual properties.

For Swales, then, the communicative purpose of a genre thus becomes something that is identified through the process of genre analysis, rather than being used as a starting point. Only by considering the sets, chains, networks, and intertextual properties of
genres can the communicative purpose of a genre truly be understood. These updates to Swales' seminal definitions of ESP tenets represent an even more drastic incorporation of the socially contextual view espoused by New Rhetoric. By expanding the identification of the communicative purpose of a genre outwards to the larger social world that a genre resides in, Swales (2004) managed to combine the systematic method of ESP with the social focus of New Rhetoric.

Bhatia also published a volume on genre in 2004, titled *Worlds of written discourse: A genre based view*. The book is largely a compilation of his published works between 1993 and 2004, although they are woven together into what Bhatia dubs a "genre-based view" of discourse (Bhatia, 2004, p. 22). What this really means is that Bhatia is now situating himself within the larger discipline of *discourse analysis*, which is where much of the theory and method for *genre analysis* come from.

Discourse analysis and genre analysis is fundamentally the same thing: the systematic study of language in use (Johnston, 2002; Gee, 2011). The manifestation of that "language in use," whether it is through spoken utterances or through written texts, and the different approaches that analysts take, are the main differentiations between the fields. For Bhatia (2004) to take a step back and re-situate genre analysis within its parent discipline of discourse analysis indicates a recognition that ESP genre analysis had strayed too far from its roots. Bhatia's "genre-based view" of discourse is thus an attempt to redefine genre analysis in a way that continues to recognize genre for the complex and authentic representation of language use that it is.

By "turning his back" (p. vxii) on his earlier focus on the pedagogical applications of genre analysis, Bhatia attempted to provide a more theoretical description of genre
analysis as a version of discourse analysis. While Swales continued to narrow his focus on academic and research genres, Bhatia broadened his focus and retreated from pure academic and institutional analysis.

Thus, Bhatia (2004) provides an updated view of ESP, arguing that the way ESP envisions genre is too ideal and does not reflect the "world of reality" (Bhatia, 2004, p. xiv). Just as Swales (2004) argued that genres must be analyzed through their relations to other genres, Bhatia (2004) also claims that genres cannot be seen in isolation. The importance drawn from the "world of reality" is that genres never exist in a vacuum; rather, genres are always interacting with other genres. Much like how "discourse is shaped by prior discourse, and discourse shapes the possibilities for future discourse" (Johnstone, 2002, p. 9), Bhatia and Swales now argue that genres are also shaped by prior genres and have an effect on future genres. Bhatia claims, then, that a position that envisions genres as isolated entities, as he claims ESP tends to do, does not reflect the realities of the world. The bulk of his book is devoted to an articulation of a refined methodology for performing a genre analysis, (further discussed in chapter 2).

This explanation of the ESP approach to genre analysis has revealed several important elements. First, ESP theory has always been concerned with both the textual and the social elements of genre. However, the tendency has been for ESP analyses to focus on the textual elements of a genre, most likely due to its roots in applied linguistics and discourse analysis. Recognizing this, both Swales and Bhatia have continued to work towards incorporating viewpoints from other schools of genre theory, and the major changes all revolve around a more social view of genre and discourse. Not surprisingly, the majority of theorists they both cite for support are from the New Rhetoric. Thus,
current ESP theory argues for a focus on both "text-internal" and "text-external" factors (Bhatia, 2004) when analyzing genre. Also, genres must be considered in relation to other genres in order to gain a better understanding as to the purpose of the genre. The actual methodological process of ESP genre analysis will be explained in chapter 2 of this thesis.

1.4 Literature review of studies related to online reviews and genres

In this thesis I apply theory and methodology from ESP-based genre analysis towards studying the online web genre of Amazon.com customer reviews. Amazon.com reviews exist within a confined, online space that operates as an online discourse community. There is a system in place that allows members of the Amazon.com discourse community to assess acceptable and unacceptable versions of the genre. Moreover, the institution (Amazon.com) provides guidelines as to what constitutes a "good" (i.e. recognizable, acceptable) example of a product review. By reviewing the rhetorical structure of user reviews that are deemed to be "most helpful" by members of the Amazon.com discourse community, a genre analysis is able to explore community-preferred examples of the genre. These community-endorsed examples are most likely to be the best representations of the values and shared goals of the discourse community.

It is necessary to first examine the current literature that is relevant to this type of study. The following represents a brief explanation of literature concerned with analyzing online genres, analyzing reviews as a genre (including Amazon.com reviews), and analyzing the effects of the web on genres.
In a 1999 article, Inmaculada Fortanet discussed the importance of watching for the ways in which the Internet shapes current and future genres, concluding: "these new genres and applications will deserve the special attention of linguistic researchers" (99). Since then, there has been plenty of attention paid to Internet genres, and not only from the fields of rhetoric, linguistics and applied linguistics. Indeed, it appears the "special attention" Fortanet called for has been heeded by information science, business, communications, and rhetorical theory, to name a few.

Several years before Fortanet's 1999 article, Yates & Orlikowski (1992) published an article titled *Genres of organizational communication: A structural approach to studying communication and media* that serves as a relatively important milestone for the interface of genre analysis and digital texts. Drawing from rhetorical genre theory, Yates & Orlikowski formulated a framework for analyzing genres as they evolve over time. Yates & Orlikowski coined the term "genre rules" (p. 302), and these rules are effectively the same as the rhetorical structuring that ESP genre analysis explores. More importantly, Yates & Orlikowski focused on the social and technological factors that influence the ways that genres are changed over time. By analyzing the genre of the business memo, and how the technology of email has shaped the genre, Yates & Orlikowski provided a model of analysis for future researchers, and then called upon those researchers to continue providing research that "investigate[s] the various social, economic, and technological factors that occasion the production, reproduction, or modification of different genres in different sociohistorical contexts" (p. 320).

Maria Luzon is one researcher whose work has taken up the call put forth by Yates & Orlikowski. Luzon (2005) has expanded Yates & Orlikowski's discussion by
arguing that not only does the digitization of a genre affect the structure of a genre, it can also affect the way that a genre is used (p. 28). In a 2005 article, Luzon analyzed online product reviews in order to investigate the way(s) that online mediums influence the user review genre. While Luzon did not mention Amazon.com, she still looked at 25 different online review sites, examining one review per site. The stated purpose of her article was to investigate how medium affects the production of the genre, as well as the author/reader interpretation of the genre (p. 29).

Luzon (2005) described genres as social, dynamic forms with "fuzzy boundaries" (p. 29-30), and claimed that the online medium makes it extremely difficult to identify a single genre of "online review." This is due to how she approached the websites studied in her article, as she focused on the hybrid and embedded nature of websites' user reviews that included product specifications, hyperlinks to other products, advertisements, and other elements that made the entire genre difficult for her to define. However, Luzon (2005) also provided a purpose for the user review, stating "[t]he main purpose of a product review is to evaluate a product in order to help the user take a buying decision" (33). By identifying a communicative purpose of the online review, Luzon, in the eyes of ESP genre analysis, certainly did identify the genre of online reviews. The problem for Luzon was her inability to describe the features of an online review in ways that would be universally applicable. This is, of course, the nature of genre and discourse analysis, and should not be seen as discouraging, but rather supportive of the need to analyze genres and discourse within their own contextual spaces.

Sandra Racine took up a similar study in her 2002 dissertation titled Changing (Inter) Faces: A genre analysis of catalogues from Sears, Roebuck to Amazon.com. The
essence of her argument and analysis is that digital catalogues such as Amazon.com and other online retailers represent subgenres of the overall "catalogue" genre that has existed for decades (p. 144). What is most important about this study is the high level of attention and analysis Racine gave to studying Amazon.com - specifically the effect that customer reviews have on the website. Her results argued that Amazon.com relies heavily on customer reviews to separate itself from other online catalogues. This use of customer reviews gives Amazon.com a register that Racine dubbed "e-style," (p. 146) - a style that is much more personal, informal, and fluid than the typical professional product descriptions found in other online catalogues. Racine argued that the use of customer reviews is integral to the overall structure of the Amazon.com site when viewed as a catalogue - certainly a consideration if one were studying the entire website of Amazon.com - and argued that these customer reviews build an overall sense of trust between the website and the consumer (p. 159). Although this thesis is focused on only the customer reviews as a genre, Racine's insights into the personal tone of the customer reviews provide a useful resource to draw from.

Interestingly, Racine (2002) is not the only analysis to indicate shifts in register due to the medium of the Internet. Stuart (2006) published a genre analysis from a traditional linguistics perspective (i.e. focused on linguistic elements almost exclusively) that investigated the differences that medium has on the ways academic writing is realized. By comparing linguistic data from "traditional academic genres" (p. 387) and academic blogs, Stuart found that one of the main differences between the two forms of writing was in the use of pronouns. The blogs he studied had a high rate of second person pronouns, while the traditional academic genres he analyzed had a high rate of first
person pronouns. Stuart argued that this indicated that blogs have a "diary/journal aspect" (p. 399) and that the authors were "very aware of their audience" (p. 399). Stuart concluded that the overall conversational aspect of the academic blogs he studied is due to the public and interactive nature of blogs. Stuart analyzed the back-and-forth between the author and visitors of the blogs (found in the commenting sections of the blogs), and this is where the high occurrences of second person pronouns occurred, indicating that the public and digital medium had an impact on the way that authors communicated with one another. This conversational aspect of blogs is very similar to the "e-style" register of Amazon.com that Racine (2002) identified.

Mudambi & Schuff (2010) analyzed over 1500 Amazon.com customer reviews for the purpose of determining what makes a review "helpful." They defined online customer reviews as "peer-generated product evaluations posted on company or third party websites" (p. 184) and then defined a helpful review as "a peer-generated product evaluation that facilitates the consumer's purchase decision process" (p. 186). In other words, a helpful review is a review that helps a potential consumer make a purchasing decision about a particular product. Mudambi & Schuff (2010) also defined two main types of products: experience goods and search goods. Search goods are those types of products that consumers can objectively make a purchase decision about by looking at existing information of the product, (cameras or vehicle parts would be search goods), whereas experience goods are those that customers must actually use before being able to confidently make a decision about, such as video games and movies (p. 187).

Essentially, search goods rely on more objective categories of selection, while experience goods rely on much more subjective qualities such as taste and personality.
While many products may prompt both objective and subjective evaluation, (for example, an e-book reader may have all the correct specifications that a consumer desires, but, after purchasing, the consumer finds that the reader is uncomfortable to hold), Mudambi & Schuff (2010) still found this distinction to be important when analyzing the content of online reviews.

Mudambi & Schuff's methodology was to count how many "helpful" votes the product reviews received (Amazon.com users are allowed to cast votes for reviews) and then to look at word count, product type, and the star rating of the review in an attempt to locate similar characteristics. Their analysis found that product type (experience or search) had a significant impact on whether or not a review was deemed helpful, the extremity of the review (i.e. what "star" rating the review gave the product) played a role, and that length of the review also mattered (p. 194). One of the calls Mudambi & Schuff made for further research was for future studies to analyze the actual content of the user reviews (i.e. the text) (p. 195).

While Racine (2002) and Mudambi & Schuff (2010) dealt specifically with Amazon.com reviews in their studies, there are also other analyses (including the aforementioned Luzon, 2005) that looked at online reviews from similar websites. Taboada (2011) analyzed fifty online movie reviews and performed a genre analysis from a systemic functional linguistics (SFL) perspective. While the SFL approach treats the linguistic and sentence-level elements of a genre as its main focus (it is a "bottom-up" approach), the results of Taboada's (2011) analysis did include two distinct stages (or moves) of the online movie review genre: evaluation and description. Taboada's deep analysis of the textual features, specifically his measurement of the frequency of
evaluative words, offers another example a linguistically descriptive study. Taboada's results, that there are distinct evaluative and descriptive elements to user reviews, provide preliminary evidence about what an analysis of Amazon.com reviews may yield.

Jo Mackiewicz (2009) analyzed over 750 online user reviews of electronic products in order to investigate how "assertions of expertise" (p. 5) were made in writing. Working with the assertion that "Whether consciously or unconsciously, readers of online reviews look for signs that reviewers have credibility (p. 7)," Mackiewicz focused on the ethos or credibility building practices of review writers. Mackiewicz approached this analysis from a business studies perspective and looked for "explicit statements" (p. 10) in the corpus that asserted expertise. Her study located ten ways in which online review writers are able to establish credibility by asserting expertise.

Even though Mackiewicz's methodology differs from ESP or rhetorical genre theory, (she only looked for specific, explicit expressions of one linguistic function), her results do appear to share some outcomes similar to if one were to perform an ESP-based analysis of a genre. Specifically, the different ways that users reveal their expertise could be considered as different rhetorical strategies. Mackiewicz's conclusion that "assertions of online reviewers can be reliably classified into types, and these types fit into three broader categories that have their roots in previous research on credibility in online commerce" (p. 21) indicate that there are visible, readily categorical elements of the genre that he studied. It is likely that assertions of expertise could be one of the moves or steps found in Amazon.com customer reviews.

Finally, Pollach (2008) provided a study of online reviews that was concerned with the effects of "word of mouth," (i.e. the spreading of good or bad news among
consumers about a product or service) on online marketplaces. Pollach argued that websites that allow users to leave reviews and communicate with one another about those reviews foster "virtual communities" (p. 285), which are very similar to discourse communities. Her conceptualization of these communities and the reviews they write is that they constitute a "truly digital genre" (p. 284) and that the Internet and digital medium is wholly responsible for providing consumers with the means to create and use this genre.

Pollach's study analyzed 384 reviews of digital cameras from a website dedicated to aggregating online user reviews. She analyzed the reviews by looking at four elements: structure, content, audience appeal, and stylistic and word choices (p. 289) and drew from ESP theory as well as the discipline of rhetoric and composition. Because the particular website Pollach analyzed placed tight control over the structure of the reviews by having users fill out predetermined text boxes, the structure of each review was the same. Pollach's content analysis, roughly analogous to an ESP-based analysis, found that the most frequent strategies that review authors employed involved comparing cameras, stating how much the cameras cost, and explaining how to use the cameras (p. 291). Pollach's focus on "audience appeal" looked at the ways that review writers were considerate of the audience. Her results indicated that there was a large amount of first-person singular and second person pronouns (p. 292). Pollach stated these results as evidence that review authors "address[ed] their audience directly" (p. 292). This is in line with the aforementioned "e-style" register that Racine (2002) identified. Finally, Pollach's analysis of word frequency and choice found that aside from general verb and noun use, "positive words, negative words, and words of emphasis play important roles in product
reviews" (p. 293). Her study further analyzed the semantic qualities of words using specific computer software.

Pollach's overall conclusion confirmed that product reviews reflected the typical methods of genre use and perpetuation. The virtual community fostered conventions and constraints that were typically used by all members of the community (i.e. content, format, and language) (p. 297). The product reviews that Pollach analyzed reflected contextual and institutional constraints on how the genre was realized; these constraints mingled with the values and shared goals of the virtual community (i.e. aid in making a purchase decision) to craft a localized version of the user created product review genre.

This overview of relevant literature has revealed several important trends. First, there is a concern with the way that the medium of the Internet (or simply being digital) is affecting the way that genres are constructed. Whether digital and online genres are something new or an evolution of preexisting genres is one popular focus (Fortanet, 1999; Racine, 2002; Luzon, 2005; Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). Moreover, analyzing the textual, linguistic, and social features of online genres (through various different methodological forms of genre analysis) have all revealed similar results. Namely, online product reviews and other genres tend to have a more personal register (Racine 2002; Stuart, 2006; Pollach, 2008), contain a large amount of evaluative and explanatory content (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010; Taboada, 2011; Pollach, 2008), and follow similar rhetorical strategies (Pollach, 2008; Mackiewicz, 2009).

Finally, while some past studies have analyzed Amazon.com reviews specifically, one study looked at the entire website of Amazon.com as a genre (Racine, 2002) and another applied a methodological framework to the study of reviews that is several
disciplines away from ESP-based genre analysis (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010).
Furthermore, Mudambi & Schuff’s corpus of data differs from the approach of this thesis by including all types of reviews from six different products. The results from this review of the literature indicate that Amazon.com product reviews that are voted as "most helpful" represent prototypical examples of a real world web genre that has yet to be formally analyzed by the framework I intend to employ. The results of these aforementioned analyses will provide a strong scholarly conversation within which an ESP-based genre analysis of Amazon.com reviews can situate its results.

1.5 Research questions

Based on the current scholarship surrounding online reviews, the explanatory focus of ESP-based genre analysis, and the nature of the Amazon.com customer review genre, I used the following research questions to guide my analysis:

• What are the typical rhetorical strategies used by authors of "most helpful" Amazon.com product reviews? Do the rhetorical strategies of positive and critical reviews differ?

• How does the institutional and online context of Amazon.com product reviews place constraints and provide affordances to authors of product reviews?

• What is the rhetorical focus and intended audience of these product reviews?
Chapter 2. Method of genre analysis: Building a framework

Chapter one explained the theoretical perspective that ESP-based genre analysis takes towards defining and studying genres. This chapter will ground that theory in the methodological processes of ESP-based genre analysis and then selectively combine those processes with other approaches in order to develop a framework for analysis that is suitable for studying Amazon.com most helpful product reviews and can answer the research questions stated at the end of chapter one.

2.1 Move analysis: The fundamental ESP approach

The fundamental methodological approach in ESP-based genre theory is a process that is known as move analysis. Swales (1990) introduced move analysis as a methodology for understanding the rhetorical structuring of genres. A move analysis breaks genres down into different rhetorical units, or "moves."

Swales (2004) provided a clear definition of a move as "a discoursal or rhetorical unit that performs a coherent communicative function in a written or spoken discourse" (p. 228). In other words, a move is a recognizable section of spoken or written discourse that performs a certain task. In an analysis of written texts, such as the one this thesis will perform, a move is a specific section of a written text that serves some sort of purpose. Much like a written genre itself is described to possess an overall primary communicative purpose, individual moves inside a genre have their own purposes that all work towards the greater communicative purpose of the genre. Furthermore, moves contain steps, which are different strategies for creating moves (Bhatia (1993) refers to steps as strategies). In short, written genres are made up of moves, which are themselves
comprised of steps. Each step has a communicative function that works towards the larger function or purpose of a move. The move's function works towards fulfilling the larger purpose of the genre. Swales' famous example of this process is his CARS (create a research space) model, where he identified the different moves and steps located in the introductions of research journal articles (Swales 1990). His CARS model will be explained below in order to better explain the relationship between genres, moves, and steps.

The first move of Swales' CARS model looks like this: Move 1 in a research article is "establishing a territory." Possible steps that an author can take to establish territory are claiming centrality, making topic generalization(s), or reviewing items of previous research articles (Swales, 1990, p. 141). An author could choose to employ any combination of the steps in order to "establish a territory." For example, chapter 1 of this thesis attempted to establish a research territory by outlining previous genre studies of online review genres, therefore this thesis has performed Move 1: establish a territory by "reviewing items of previous research articles."

Move 2 of the CARS model is "establishing a niche." Authors can perform this move by "counter claiming," "indicating a gap," "question-raising," or "continuing a tradition" (p. 141). Again, using this thesis as an example, I have identified a gap by pointing out how no studies have yet analyzed Amazon.com product reviews through ESP-based genre theory, I have raised questions about the nature of the genre I will analyze, and I am continuing a tradition of genre analysis by contributing to the existing amount of different studies that have been analyzed through an ESP lens. This example
also helps explain that authors can use multiple steps in order to help realize the purpose of an overall move.

Finally, Move 3 of the CARS model is "occupy the niche," and can be realized through the steps of "outlining purposes," announcing present research," "announcing principle findings," or "indicating RA (research article) structure" (p. 141). Because this thesis contains a different sort of introduction than a research journal article would, I have not yet announced any findings. I have, however, begun outlining my purpose in this chapter and will continue to announce my research and findings as the thesis continues. This helps explain how moves are realized differently in different genres. (This MA thesis is a different genre from a published research article. While there are commonalities between the purpose and structure of the two genres, there are also differences. Examining the different ways that rhetorical moves are used in these two genres helps to both explain and differentiate them.)

2.2 Bhatia and ESP: Building upon the move analysis

Much like how Bhatia (1993) modified Swales' definition of genre, Bhatia also modified and explained the move analysis in great detail. In *Analysing genre*, Bhatia provided seven steps as a framework to guide a genre analysis. The first five steps are all representative of the social approach to studying genre. By "placing the given genre-text in a situational context," "surveying existing literature," "refining the situational/contextual analysis," "selecting corpus," and "studying the institutional context" (p. 22-24), Bhatia takes care to point out that much can be gleaned by studying the context that the genre exists in. Once the context has been thoroughly studied, an
The analyst is then able to select a corpus of examples that are tightly associated with a discourse community that the analyst is interested in exploring. Only then, once a context is thoroughly understood, can the textual analysis occur.

The textual analysis itself is composed of three levels: one that focuses on specific grammatical features of the writing (p. 24-25); one that focuses on the typical word and phrasal choices that authors of the genre make (p. 26); and finally a structural interpretation of the genre, i.e., Swales’ move analysis. The structural interpretation is a restatement of Swales’ move analysis, and an important part of genre analysis, as it provides insight into the rhetorical or "cognitive" ways that members of a discourse community structure text and genre. As the final step of an analysis, Bhatia (1993) argues that expert members of the discourse community should be consulted to verify or dispute results and insights gleaned from the analysis (p. 34).

Bhatia updated this process in his 2004 volume by proposing a new "multidimensional analytical perspective" comprises four separate approaches: textual, ethnographic, socio-cognitive, and socio-critical (p. 163). Briefly, the textual perspective incorporates the traditional ESP approach of analyzing the rhetorical structure of genres. The ethnographic (ethnography is the "investigation of naturally occurring behaviors of a group of people in their community" [Paltridge & Phakiti, 2010]) perspective is concerned with the experiences of those who participate with the genres, as well as the historical and institutional context of the genres. The socio-cognitive perspective encompasses the interdiscursivity (the ways genres reflect social and institutional values, (p. 50)) of genres, namely the way that genres are can reflect "private intentions." Finally,
the socio-critical perspective focuses on aspects of ideology, power, and social structures located within the use of the genre (p. 165-167).

The major difference between this new perspective and Bhatia’s (1993) approach is the focusing of his framework into a four-pronged methodology. The textual approach remains largely intact, and this is where move analysis remains. The ethnographic approach represents a majority of the steps from Bhatia's 1993 framework, focusing primarily upon explaining the members and practices of the discourse community that uses the written genre.

The last two elements of Bhatia's multidimensional perspective, the socio-cognitive and socio-critical, require further explanation. The socio-cognitive perspective focuses intently on the various strategies that expert members of a discourse community employ when using genres. The essential strategy that Bhatia identifies is the *appropriation of generic resources* in order to embed *private intentions* into a genre. What this means is simply that expert authors of a genre are able to take elements and features of certain genres and create mixed or embedded genres in order to achieve individual purposes.

In order to explain exactly what "appropriation of generic resources" is and how "private intentions" rely on that appropriation, Bhatia provides examples of advertisements that *bend* genres (i.e. share elements) between philanthropic fundraising letters and commercial fundraising letters to emphasize that while both examples may seem very similar at the *surface* level, they are in fact different genres because of their different private intentions (p. 87-97). Both philanthropic and commercial advertisements *share a communicative purpose*, but they have different *private intentions*. While
philanthropic advertisements intend to solicit funds for altruistic purposes, commercial fundraising letters work to solicit funds in order to benefit an individual or a corporation. In each case, both of these examples will look the same, possess similar textual characteristics, and perform the same communicative function. The intentions of those authoring the two genres, however, are different. And for Bhatia, this is a consideration that needs to be made when analyzing genres in order to gain a larger understanding of the values or goals of the community or authors behind each of these letters.

The essential point here, then, is that if one were to only analyze those elements of the genres (textual features, etc), one would declare that philanthropic and commercial fundraising letters are indeed examples of the same genre. However, because the private intentions of the letters (i.e. those intentions left unstated) are vastly different, Bhatia argues that these two letters should be considered, at the very least, as separate versions of advertisements. Both of these examples are soliciting money, but the intentions of the authors are different.

Therefore, both of these types of letters appropriate generic resources from other genres (advertisements, fundraising letters) to establish new genres that, on the surface level appear identical. By considering the private intentions of the two letters, which requires an investigation beyond the textual and surface features of a genre, major differences between the purposes of these letters is revealed. Bhatia claimed that authors who appropriate generic resources are acting naturally, working within conventions of genres but in creative and innovative ways (p. 156-157).

Bhatia's concept of private intentions further complicates the idea that communicative purpose should be a primary categorical device for separating genres, and
lends yet more evidence to both Swales' and Bhatia's insistence that genres must be considered in relation to the larger context that they exist in. Bhatia also recognizes that the ideas intertextuality and appropriation of generic resources are similar terms. Therefore, a distinction needs to be made. The difference boils down to a distinction between borrowing and owning; intertextuality, as defined in chapter one of this thesis, is something that is temporary and contextual, whereas Bhatia sees appropriation of generic resources as a strategy employed among users of the genre that has a more permanent and lasting change on the overall manifestation of the genre.

Finally, Bhatia's socio-critical perspective is concerned with the social power relations between members of a genre. Much like New Rhetoric's explanation of how different power relations in a courtroom determine what generic resources are available to different participants, Bhatia's socio-critical perspective calls for an analyst to examine the larger social network that genres reside in for any insight into how social structure may be affecting the genre being studied, and the choices available to users of that genre.

The primary conclusion from this framework is that in order to understand the *generic integrity* (p. 112) of a genre — the elements of a genre that allow it to be identified as a particular genre — both a "text-internal" and a "text-external" focus is necessary (p. 113). In other words, Bhatia argues that both an examination of the things going on *inside* the text, such as the "lexico-grammatical, rhetorical, and organizational features" (p. 113) and a consideration of the things going on *outside* the text, such as the ethnographic, socio-critical, and socio-cultural factors is necessary in order to be able to approach a greater understanding of the generic integrity of a written genre.
This is a rather large framework that suggests move analysis, on its own, only provides limited information about a genre. Yet Bhatia argued that this integration of multiple perspectives is necessary in order to arrive at a more thorough description of genre. Instead of claiming that the multiple perspectives must always be used in a genre analysis, Bhatia explained that his multiple perspectives should be used as a sort of toolbox within which analysts can piece together their own methodological framework for analyzing genre. Depending on the goals and backgrounds of the practitioners, each individual can select and combine perspectives that best suit the needs of a particular context. Bhatia does add one warning, however, and that is that as more perspectives are added to a methodological framework, "we are more likely to find increasing flexibility, fluidity and tentativeness in our understanding of generic integrity" (p. 181). In other words, while multiple perspectives are desirable for a thicker description of discourse, the results from a broader analysis will become more and more muddled as context expands. Not surprisingly, this continues to reflect the complexities of the real world of discourse that Bhatia has become so focused on.

2.3 Drawbacks of ESP-based genre analysis

There are two drawbacks or criticisms of ESP-based genre analysis that need to be addressed before settling on a methodological framework that will be used in this thesis. The first critique comes from the field of communications. In a 2005 article, Askehave & Nielson provide an argument that ESP-based genre analysis is incapable of analyzing genres that appear on the Internet. Specifically, they argue that ESP-based genre analysis, were it to analyze a webpage, would only focus on the printed text. They claim that web
genres are not simply digital analogues of printed genres (p. 124), and that the digital medium must be considered as an essential part of a genre.

Askehave & Nielson (2005) call for and develop a refined methodology to move analysis that can "capture the essence of genres mediated through the net" (p. 121). The essence of their updated approach is to argue that digital genres should be analyzed through two lenses: a navigation mode and a reading mode. This they dub a "two-dimensional genre model" (p. 127). By analyzing the home page of large company, the authors explained how zooming in to the "reading mode" of a webpage allowed it to be analyzed like any other written text. However, by zooming out into the "navigation mode," the webpage became a series of navigational choices and options for a user. The authors argue that since move analysis only focuses on rhetorical units of written text, it is unable to account for the "navigation mode of websites." Askehave & Nielson (2005) conclude that the two-dimensional model of move analysis:

Not only suggests a close interplay between medium and genre but claims that media properties influence both the purpose and form of web-mediated genres and should therefore be included in the genre identification (p. 128).

This critique reveals a concern with the ways that medium, especially online and digital environments, affects genres. However, Askehave & Nielson (2005) do not consider the updated views of ESP theory articulated in Swales (2004) and Bhatia (2004). While Askehave & Nielson's article was published at similar times as the 2004 updates, Bhatia's 2004 book is largely a re-articulation of his published works since 1993, meaning that most of his multidimensional perspective has been available in article form since the mid-
1990s. However, since most of the critiques of ESP focused on move analysis and its pedagogical application, it makes sense that Askehave & Nielson would focus specifically on move analysis. Even though Askehave & Nielson's (2005) argument, that ESP genre analysis has been hyper focused on printed text, doesn't directly consider the updates that Swales and Bhatia made to their theoretical perspectives, it is still an important critique. Recognizing that the medium is part of the message should be part of a genre analysis. That being said, the multidimensional perspective outlined in Bhatia (2004) is more than capable of recognizing the medium of a genre, making the Askehave & Nielson (2005) approach unnecessary.

Another drawback of ESP-based genre analysis is that a move analysis is difficult to apply to a study that contains a large amount of examples. Recognizing that it "is highly labor-intensive" (p. 15) to perform a move analysis on a large amount of texts, Biber et al. (2007) attempt to ameliorate this problem by marrying the fields of corpus linguistics and ESP-based genre analysis. Corpus in this sense can be defined as "a collection of naturally occurring language samples...[that] represents a speaker’s experience of language in a specific domain," (Hyland, 2010). In other words, a corpus is a large collection of discourse examples that is constructed by a researcher for a specific purpose. Corpus linguistics is thus an approach that specializes in analyzing large corpuses of data for linguistic features. Biber, Connor, and Upton's 2007 book Discourse on the move: Using corpus analysis to describe discourse structure outlines this combined approach.

In an article derived from the approach presented in Biber et al. (2007), Upton & Cohen (2009) provide an informative and succinct summary of this type of analysis,
which is called a corpus-based discourse analysis. Using a corpus of "birthmother letters," letters that are written by future parents of adopted children to the biological parents of those children (p. 7), Upton & Cohen (2009) illustrate a corpus-based discourse analysis in action. Essentially, a few representative examples of a genre are examined for rhetorical moves, just as in an ESP-based genre analysis. Then, the moves and steps are assigned to a coding scheme. An analysis then goes through the entire corpus, attempting to apply the coding scheme to all of the examples in the corpus. As the analysis continues, the rhetorical moves are constantly updated and refined pending new findings. Eventually, a fully coded corpus can then be transcribed into a computer program that is able to read the coded moves and provide the analyst with various results. Specific moves can be studied for linguistic features using the software (p. 20).

The strength of this approach is that it analyzes both the rhetorical and linguistic elements of the entire corpus of examples. By identifying not only the moves of the genre, but also how those moves are typically employed across a corpus of examples, a corpus-based approach to genre analysis allows for a researcher to engage in a somewhat more quantitative discussion about how the genre typically appears and functions in the real world. While this approach helps provide more detailed results, it does contain its own drawbacks, in that the analyst must possess, and be familiar with, corpus-based linguistic software that is used for these types of studies. The important lesson to draw from this process is that even without using computer software to analyze discrete linguistic features, a genre analysis can apply a coding scheme and more efficiently analyze rhetorical moves across a large sample of genre.
By combining the multidimensional perspective from Bhatia (2004) with a corpus-based genre analysis, and being sure to recognize that the medium of a genre is an important part of an analysis, these critiques help strengthen an ESP-based genre analysis. The next section will explain how this framework will be realized for the analysis of Amazon.com product reviews that will take place in chapter three.

2.4 Framework for analyzing Amazon.com product reviews

Because genre analysis designed to study authentic language use, or discourse, it should not be a fixed methodology. Because the nature of a genre analysis should never be to simply describe, but rather to explain, the analysis should choose the best methodology that fits the background(s) and purpose(s) of the researcher(s) and the nature of the genre(s) being analyzed. This does not mean that an analysis will not be systematic. It simply means that each individual analysis should take on a life of its own, adapting and responding to the nature of the genre and the analyst(s). The following chart summarizes these elements in order to help conceptualize a framework for use.

Table 2.1: Preliminaries for framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of Amazon.com &quot;most helpful&quot; product reviews</th>
<th>Background of researcher</th>
<th>Purpose of genre analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Online and digital medium</td>
<td>• Familiar with ESP-based genre analysis</td>
<td>• Describe and explain the genre of Amazon.com &quot;most helpful&quot; product reviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Authored by any user of Amazon.com</td>
<td>• Little formal training in descriptive linguistics</td>
<td>• Provide a pedagogical application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Voting mechanism in place that allows users to assess the &quot;helpfulness&quot; of reviews</td>
<td>• Background in rhetoric and composition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Institutional and medium-based constraints and affordances placed on reviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This chart reveals that there are built-in elements of Amazon.com product reviews that will help provide a thicker analysis. Aside from looking at the textual structure of the reviews, the voting system in place for users of the website, along with the published institutional constraints on product reviews will provide insight into the way that the genre of Amazon.com product reviews is shaped and realized. The voting system creates an explicit mechanism that allows members of the discourse community to voice their approval or disapproval over the content or structure of reviews.

The background of the researcher also shapes the approach taken. Because I have little formal training in descriptive linguistics, a thorough analysis of complex linguistic structures is not part of this study. Furthermore, because I lack the software that allows me to code an entire corpus of examples, a variation of a corpus-based move analysis that does not rely on corpus software was used. Finally, as part of the purpose of the analysis is to both describe and explain the product reviews, both text-internal and text-external elements were considered in the analysis. An additional purpose of the analysis was to compare positive and critical product reviews; therefore basic features of the reviews were compared against each other in order to glean any important differences. On the following page a summary of this framework has been paired with the research questions from chapter one in order to provide an overview of the process of analysis. The next chapter will provide further detail into the method and approach to analyzing the Amazon.com "most helpful" product reviews.
Table 2.2: Research framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the communicative purpose of &quot;most helpful&quot; Amazon.com product reviews?</td>
<td>• Analyzing genre chains, sets, and networks</td>
<td>Following Swales (2004), I considered the product reviews in terms of chains, sets, and networks by exploring the Amazon.com website and relying on personal experience as a consumer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| What are the typical rhetorical strategies used by authors of "most helpful" reviews? Do these strategies differ between positive and critical reviews? | • Modified corpus-based move analysis to identify rhetorical moves  
• Analyze word count  
• Analyze distribution of "most helpful" votes | Following Upton & Cohen (2009), I identify separate rhetorical moves in the data, devise a coding scheme, and apply that scheme to the entire corpus of data. I then analyze the rhetorical moves for frequency and distribution among the product reviews. I also counted and compared the length of reviews and percentage of overall "helpful" votes. |
| How does the institutional and online context of Amazon.com product reviews provide affordances and constraints for authors of these product reviews? | • Researching and exploring Amazon.com website                                                  | I researched institutional instructions provided by Amazon.com, and also undertook the process of writing a product review in order to encounter any constraints or affordances placed on the genre from the institutional level. |
| What is the rhetorical focus / intended audience of the reviews?                  | • Analyze rhetorical focus  
• Analyze pronoun use                                                                 | Following Pollach (2008), I considered the intended audience of the reviews by categorizing the reviews into three types: author-based, reader-based, and product-based. I also analyzed the frequencies of first and second person pronouns. |
Chapter 3: Method and approach to studying Amazon.com reviews

This chapter broadens the framework developed in chapter two and explains the methodological process that was taken to analyze the Amazon.com product review genre. First I describe the process of selecting examples for the corpus, before moving into a discussion of the actual method of analysis.

3.1 Corpus Selection

It is crucial to select examples for a corpus that are representative of that genre after deciding upon a genre to study (Bhatia, 1993). Since Amazon.com product reviews are located in a confined space and are only authored by people who have purchased products on Amazon.com, it was relatively simple to identify examples of this genre. However, it was still necessary to place constraints on corpus selection in order to ensure that factors such as product type did not affect the results of the analysis. Also, examples needed to be chosen systematically to ensure that each example possessed similar characteristics that identified them as "most helpful" reviews. This section explains how the corpus was initially selected and then finalized.

The preliminary data set for this study was obtained by browsing through a sample of convenience: the author's purchasing history on Amazon.com over a period of several years. It was then expanded by including additional items located in the "bestsellers" sections from various Amazon.com departments, including kitchen & dining, power and hand tools, baby, automotive, and strength training, during the months of December, 2011, and January, 2012. Additionally, a special request was made for an electronic oven thermometer to be included in the corpus.
As mentioned in chapter one, Mudambi & Schuff (2010) made a differentiation between "experience goods" and "search goods." An initial analysis of the preliminary corpus of Amazon.com reviews confirmed Mudambi & Schuff's findings that products that identify more strongly as experience goods contain reviews that don't address the actual nature of the product. For example, reviews of video games tended to focus on the quality of the gameplay - not on the quality of the physical DVD the game came on. Moreover, reviews of movies also tended to focus on the artistic merits of the film, rather than on the merits of the product itself. Because this analysis focuses on the actual products and the ways that the Amazon.com discourse community relates information about these products, any products that identified strongly as search goods were excluded from the final data set. However, other criteria also influenced the way that products were chosen for this study.

Because one of the main purposes of this study is to investigate the shared goals and values of the Amazon.com discourse community, I decided to only investigate the "most helpful positive" and "most helpful critical" product reviews. Because the Amazon.com discourse community has flagged these reviews as "most helpful," it is assumed that these "most helpful" reviews will contain elements that members of the Amazon.com discourse community value and desire.

The way that reviews are judged to be "helpful" also affected data collection. This process of having items judged as helpful or not is by having readers of the website vote on product reviews. Users are asked a simple yes or no question, as seen below.
Unfortunately, this means that some reviews that have received a relatively small amount of overall votes could still be selected as a helpful critical review. For example, the following image shows how a review with one vote can still be considered as the "most helpful critical review," even when the votes are against the review.

Therefore, in addition to only using products that identify as experience goods, I also decided that product reviews needed to have a minimum number of votes in order to qualify as data for this analysis, in order to ensure that reviews had some justification for being considered "most helpful." Any helpful reviews needed to have at least 20 overall votes in order to avoid selecting reviews that became "helpful" due to low overall votes (as shown above), as well as provide evidence that a number of members of the Amazon.com community have voted, and thus assessed the review.

This brought the final data set to a total of 71 products. Since only the "most helpful positive" and "most helpful critical" reviews were taken from each of these products, this resulted in a final corpus of 142 product reviews.
3.2 Overall process of analysis

Chapter one outlined the major theoretical influences of my approach to genre analysis, and chapter two explained the methodological framework derived from those theoretical approaches. This section will detail the actual procedures taken while applying the methodological framework to the genre. The following is an expanded discussion of the methodological framework that was outlined at the end of chapter two.

Essentially, the corpus was analyzed at two levels: "text-internal" and "text-external" (Bhatia, 2004). The first procedure was to perform a modified corpus-based move analysis in order to provide a foundation for the analysis. Besides the rhetorical moves and patterns revealed through the corpus-based move analysis, the corpus was also analyzed for other text-internal features, such as word count and rhetorical focus.

Text-externally (or socially), the genre was considered in its relations to other genres by applying the concept of genre chains, sets, and networks, as outlined in Swales (2004). The twofold purpose of this investigation is to broaden the overall context that these reviews reside in, as well as to identify the communicative purpose of the review. Once that was identified, other text-external factors were considered, including the institutional context and constraints of the genre and other non-linguistic structural elements of the genre. The following table summarizes the text-internal and text-external aspects of the framework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text-internal</th>
<th>Text-external</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Word count</td>
<td>• Genre chains, sets, and network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rhetorical focus</td>
<td>• Communicative purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Number of &quot;helpful&quot; votes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Institutional context &amp; constraints</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Summary of methodological framework.
3.3 Text-internal process of analysis

The textual elements of the corpus were first isolated through a move analysis, which was carried out through a modified version of the corpus-based discourse analysis methodology as presented by Biber et al. (2007) and Upton & Conner (2009). The corpus was then analyzed for word count and the primary focus of each review.

**Move analysis:** Identification of individual moves was based on determining the rhetorical or communicative function of units of text. While this was simple in some cases, due to the authors of the reviews providing explicit linguistic features that organized the functions of the text (through paragraphing or meta-commentary), there were times when moves were closely intertwined and difficult to unravel. In other words, the complex and chaotic ways that some authors organized their reviews affected the way that moves were identified. In order to determine the separation of moves in these circumstances, the simple definition of a move offered by Biber et al. (2007), that a move "refers to a section of a text that performs a specific communicative function" (p. 24) was combined with James Paul Gee's (2011) "idea units" or "speech splurts" (p. 22). Gee's "idea units" are sections of text or speech, typically one or more clauses (or sentences) long that work towards expressing a single idea or topic. Gee explains that the content (subjects, verbs) and the function (grammar) of an utterance form an overall context that must be considered in order to determine what constitutes separate "idea units."

In this analysis, idea units and communicative purpose are roughly analogous - therefore in situations where the purpose of the move was unclear, the larger context of the review was studied in order to determine the overall purpose or idea behind a stretch of text. For example, if a review author stated that they were going to list the positive
elements of a product, the entire chunk of text was taken as one move. Conversely, if the author switched from praise to critique to personal narrative in a sort of staccato fashion, each switch from idea unit constituted a new move. This means that in some situations, a single paragraph contained a large number of moves, as an author fired off idea after idea without separating these ideas with organizational and linguistic devices. For example, the following three sentences all appeared one after another in a single paragraph. Each sentence also represents a different communicative purpose or "idea." The following table separates the sentences in order to better illustrate my point:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence</th>
<th>Separate Moves</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I've had this attached to my key ring for a number of years.</td>
<td>Author states length of ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't need it often but when I have it's been useful as long as I am very careful while handling it.</td>
<td>Author provides hedged compliment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The knife is extremely sharp and because the key is pretty thin it can rotate easily in your fingers.</td>
<td>Author describes product</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the other hand, I sometimes counted a very large chunk of text as a single move because it was working towards a single communicative purpose. Thus, in situations where the counting of a particular move was uncertain, the communicative purpose, context, linguistic and organizational markers, and interruptions were all considered in order to split moves apart. I tended to be conservative when marking moves, shying away from marking multiple units of text in close proximity as multiple instances of the same move. This was done in an attempt to avoid an imbalance in the frequency and distribution of moves.
Keeping in tune with the Cohen & Upton (2009) framework, "multiple readings and reflections" (p. 9) of the corpus were made in order to establish a preliminary list of rhetorical moves. After reading through the corpus several times, I converted the list of moves into a coding system. This means that I assigned each move a code and compiled the coded moves into a list. For example, Move 1, step 3 would be coded as "[1.3]." I then coded the corpus by hand, using Microsoft Word's track changes feature. Once the coding was complete, I read through the corpus again in order to ensure that the codes were accurate and accounted for the entirety of the corpus. The codes were then tallied using the count feature in Microsoft Word and then exported into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for analysis.

After the coding was converted into a spreadsheet for analysis, several more passes of the data were made before results were finalized. Throughout this entire process, the move and step categories were refined, changed, consolidated, or removed as the functions of each move and step category became more concrete. For example, during the last phase of tabulating the coding, I found that one step of one move only appeared a single time in the entire corpus. I then scrutinized that instance and determined that while the surface features hinted at one type of communicative purpose, the actual function of the step was congruent with one of the other step categories that were already created. Therefore, the initial subjective and interpretive categorization of the moves and steps was continually refined before arriving at the move / step listing that appears in the results section.

**Word count:** As mentioned previously, the corpus of reviews was copied and pasted into a Microsoft Word document for analysis. Word counts were determined by
selecting the main section of the customer review. I then used the word count feature in Microsoft Word MS to count the number of words in each review. Extraneous information such as the author's name and the title of product were excluded from the word count. I then input the results for each review into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for comparison. The formulas function in the Microsoft Excel program was then used to calculate averages and totals of word counts.

**Rhetorical focus:** Following Pollach's (2008) focus on "audience appeal," which examined the ways that review writers considered audience, I decided to examine the rhetorical focus of the reviews in order to consider any evidence for awareness of audience in the Amazon.com product reviews. I considered three overall categories for the products: author-based reviews, reader-based reviews, and product-based reviews. Author-based reviews are reviews that include a high number of first person pronouns (e.g. I, my) and center around the author of the review. Audience-based reviews are reviews that include a high number of second person pronouns (e.g. you, your, you're) and center around the reader of the review. Product-based reviews are those that center around the product and include lots of demonstrative pronouns (i.e. this product, it) or the actual naming of the product.

It is important to note that in this analysis the mere presence of a pronoun did not determine how a review was categorized, rather, I considered the actual *use* of the pronouns in order to determine an *overall* first or second person focus of each review. For example, an author-based review may include a second person pronoun as a rhetorical question, as the following excerpt shows. (Emphasis added in each example.)
Review 2B: "You would think that for over 200 dollars the machine would have some sort of solid state speed control."

Many author-based reviews were easily identifiable through their explicit reference to, and focus on, the author of the review as the main topic of the review.

Review 58A: Perhaps coincidental, but I started pooping like a newborn when I started using this belt.

While the previous example contained a demonstrative pronoun ("this belt"), the overall focus of the example is on the author. Because of the primary focus on the author, I consider the example as author-based.

Reader-based reviews typically included specific reference that the review was being written for other consumers' benefits. For example:

Review 40A: As a Mother who owns both models, I will tell you the major differences between these two seats from my point of view.

Review: As a high-tech product, you need to know how to use it.

The use of the second person pronoun "you" in these cases recognizes the reader explicitly (as opposed to abstractly, as in rhetorical questions). Thus, I considered these examples as reader-based, even though there exist instances of first person pronoun ("I").

Finally, product-based reviews placed the product at the center of the review. For example:

Example 17A: "It requires far less effort than the long-travel typewriter-style keyboards that are so ubiquitous today. It's scissor-mechanism keys do produce a mechanical tickity-tackety sound when you're typing, but it's hardly obnoxious."
Note how "it" and "it's" [sic] frame the product as the primary agent of the review. Other examples of product-based examples relied on demonstrative pronouns such as "this," (e.g. this product).

The previous example also highlights some of the methodological struggle with this categorization. Although I would code the above example as product-based, there is a second person pronoun "when you're typing." This indicates that simply counting pronouns would provide unreliable results as to the primary focus of the review. Without sophisticated software, like that used in Pollach (2008), a deep analysis of pronoun distribution must be combined with subjective interpretation of each review on a case-by-case basis. In fact, most reviews contained instances of first person, second person, and third person or demonstrative pronouns. However, I considered both the overall pronoun use and the main focus of the review (author, reader, product) when assigning reviews to one of the three categories.

3.4 Text-external process of analysis

Text-externally, I analyzed the corpus and its larger context for institutional affordances and constraints, other interacting genres, communicative purpose, number of helpful votes, and intertextuality.

Institutional context and constraints: I analyzed the larger institutional context of the corpus by researching elements of the Amazon.com website that. Specifically, this was done by accessing the Amazon.com information pages of "guidelines for writing a good review" (Guidelines for review," n.d.) and the Amazon Vine program, a special program that rewards authors for writing "good" reviews, explained below, ("Vine," n.d.).
Additionally, an infographic was captured from the website that provided a summary of Amazon.com's guidelines for writing product reviews. Finally, I followed the steps that authors must take to draft a review in order to gain as much familiarity with the pages and features that the review authors are typically met with.

**Interacting genres and communicative purpose:** As mentioned in chapter two, Swales (2004) updated his understanding of communicative purpose, arguing that genres must be analyzed in a way that considers the other genres that interact with them. The three levels of interaction considered were genre chains, sets, and networks. Relying on personal experience as a consumer to recall the other genres typically involved in making a purchase on Amazon.com, I also explored the various genres that were connected to product description pages on Amazon.com. I also returned to my Amazon.com purchasing history in order to visit the various genres that appear when purchasing a product. Finally, I undertook the process of purchasing an item, making careful note of the genres that appeared while navigating the various screens and forms required in order to complete a purchase on Amazon.com.

**Helpful votes:** Similar to word count, I counted the total number of helpful votes for each review and then entered the results into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. I then converted the results into percentages, so that the total percentage of "yes" votes could be compared for positive and critical reviews.

**Intertextuality:** Analyzing intertextuality was an organic process that occurred during the overall analysis. Any cases of intertextuality were noted and considered for their overall effect on the genre.
Essentially, I pursued subjective and interpretive hunches by looking for patterns in the data during my analysis. My background and previous exposure to other genres contributed some knowledge to this process, as did the exploration of the Amazon.com website and its rules and constraints placed on the reviews that can be written. While the text-internal and the text-external sections are explained separately, this is done more for clarity than anything else. However, the entire process of analysis, both textual and social, should be considered as intertwined through the conclusions made in the results section to follow. In short, all tacks of analysis occurred at the same time and fed off of one another. The following chapter details and discusses the results of this process.
Chapter 4. Genre analysis of Amazon.com product reviews

The Internet has revolutionized communication in ways that allow many people with access to the Internet to congregate online and communicate with each other. Because of the ease with which any person can communicate on the Internet, it serves as an ideal starting place for finding a real world genre for an analysis. Amazon.com is a large online retailer that has enjoyed growing success providing the people in a range of countries with an online marketplace that sells a variety of items. Amazon.com allows users to write and publish reviews, ostensibly for the purpose of aiding other consumers in making a purchasing decision. These user reviews have become a preferred method of product research in my own life, and if their proliferation on Amazon.com is any evidence, many other consumers rely upon these user reviews as well. These reviews can be authored by anyone that has purchased a product on the site. Amazon.com customer reviews appear to be an ideal candidate for a genre analysis that examines a real world genre.

In this chapter, I will first define the elements and features of Amazon.com "most helpful" product reviews and present the results of my analysis. I then discuss these results in light of the research questions posed at the end of chapter one and make suggestions for future research into this topic.

4.1 General description of "most helpful" product reviews

When users visit a product page on Amazon.com, they are met with a highly structured interface that provides many options. The following image is a representative example of how any product page will look (as of the writing of this thesis):
Below the product page is the product description. Further below that are the customer reviews. Once a customer reaches the customer reviews, (either by clicking on the "customer reviews" link under the product name or by scrolling down), they are met with the following scene of the most helpful positive and most helpful critical reviews.

Figure 4.2: Showcase of most helpful positive and critical reviews.
The most helpful positive and most helpful critical reviews are showcased next to each other with a "vs." symbol setting the reviews off (indicating that they are of competing opinions). The user of the website is able to see the review title, star rating, and starting portion of the review. If a user chooses to read the entire review, she may click the "read the full review link" or scroll down and find it among all of the other reviews. From the above example, a consumer would see the following page if she were to choose to read the full most helpful critical review. The snapshot of the review is replaced with the full text of the review, as well as an area to vote on the review or post comments in reply. To the right of the review is a summary of all the reviews, options for purchasing the product, and a summary of the review author's review activity on the website.

Figure 4.3: Example of an Amazon.com review.

4.2 Results

Although the framework and methodology sections separated the textual (text-internal) from the social (text-external), the reporting of results here will better reflect the actual
process of analysis. Since results will shift from textual to social, this differentiation will be dropped in order to retain organizational cohesion throughout the results section. I first present broad results about the genre, focusing on the overall context, and then narrow down to more specific aspects of the product reviews.

Larger institutional context: Institutionally, Amazon.com places some constraints on the content and form of the genre. If users decide to post a review, they are met with the following screen

Figure 4.4: Amazon.com review creation screen.

The image reveals three main structural constraints that Amazon.com places on the genre. First, users must enter a star rating, which serves as a quick assessment of the overall quality of a product. Next, users must enter a title for the product. Finally, a large text box is provided so that users may write the bulk of the review (which must be at least twenty words). Along with these physical constraints on product reviews, Amazon.com also publishes rules and guidelines for writing a product review.
A brief summary of these guidelines is as follows. First, Amazon.com provides guidelines for writing a "great review." The guidelines are: provide reasoning behind why a user liked / disliked a product, be specific in the review, length of 75-500 words, be honest, and to disclose any benefits or free products the review user may have received. There is also a section detailing what users cannot include in their reviews. This includes objectionable content: obscene or profane words; promotional content: advertisements, reviews written by authors / suppliers of the product being reviewed, reviews that are commissioned through money, and reviews that ask for readers to vote for the review as "helpful." These guidelines don't place an overly large amount of constraints on what content authors may place in their reviews. Amazon.com also encourages review writers to "share your opinions, both favorable and unfavorable" ("General guidelines," n.d.). Aside from the written instructions, Amazon.com also has a summary of the rules in an infographic that appears when a user begins to write a new review.

*Figure 4.5: What makes a good review?*

This brief reminder of the institutional guidelines behind writing reviews is perhaps more significant than the official listing of rules. This is because users writing a review will see the above image when writing a review, whereas a user needs to navigate into the official
Amazon.com rules to find the detailed constraints and rules outlined above. This implies that these rules may be the ones that Amazon.com, as an institution, considers as the most important aspects of a good product review.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of these rules is that Amazon.com considers it a breach of the rules for review writers to ask for review readers to vote a review as "helpful." This has two important implications: first, it cements the idea that any review voted as "helpful" is genuine, although it can't be assumed that every helpful vote is sincere. Second, it reveals another institutional element of Amazon.com user reviews that is not immediately apparent unless a visitor to the website does a bit more research.

The main reason that reviews cannot solicit "helpful" votes is because Amazon.com has what is known as the "Amazon Vine" program. Essentially, the Vine program is a system that rewards users of Amazon.com for writing helpful reviews. According to Amazon.com, it monitors both the amount and quality of reviews written by users on their site. If Amazon.com determines that a user is eligible for the Vine program, it contacts that user and enrolls them in the program. Amazon.com uses a "reviewer rank" system in which they consider the total amount of helpful votes a user receives, as well as the type of product reviewed and how recent the review was written. Once a user is enrolled in the Vine program, they are sent free products from various companies in return for their review of that product. Amazon.com is careful to note that by receiving a free product, the review writer is in no way obligated to write a good or promotional review of the product, ("Vine," n.d.).

It appears, then, that there are two separate entities assessing who is or is not an expert member of the Amazon.com discourse community. On the one hand, users of the
site give "helpful" votes to reviews that they deem as helpful - indicating that reviews that meet the communicative purpose of the genre will receive helpful votes. On the other hand, Amazon.com takes not only the amount of helpful votes into account, but also other criteria such as date of reviews as well as quantity of reviews. The institutional constraints are hidden in the background, buried in links that a user must search through before finding out what is allowed to be included in a review. It follows that these hidden constraints are most likely not the guidelines that users of the website are following when assigning "helpful" votes to reviews. The shared goals and values of the discourse community are more prominent than the background institutional constraints.

**Communicative purpose of Amazon.com customer reviews**

At first glance, it appears that Amazon.com customer reviews have a clear communicative purpose: that of providing help to potential consumers of specific products sold on Amazon.com. However, it is important to keep in mind Swales and Bhatia's updated warnings about using communicative purpose as the initial identification structure of a genre. It is necessary to first analyze Amazon.com customer reviews as they relate to other genres, in order to explain the genre chains, sets, and networks that they reside in.

**Chains**: Genre chains consider all of the genres that lead up to the creation of a genre. Any time a product is purchased on Amazon.com, a consumer must navigate a series of other genres first. All of these preceding genres should be considered as helping contribute to the eventual form and content of a product review. Although it is somewhat impossible to theorize about every genre that a consumer has been exposed to before
purchasing a product, there are also some likely assumptions that can be made. Typical genres that consumers would encounter before writing a review on a product would include advertisements about the product, descriptions about the product, online sales forms, packing lists, shipping lists, and receipts. Based on the chains that lead up to a review, one purpose of a customer review is to respond to the advertising and claims made about a product. The genre chain presents information about a product, but it requires someone to purchase the product in order to confirm or deny that information.

**Sets:** Sets of genres are all of the other genres that the product reviews interact with. These are primarily the genres that co-exist with product reviews on the Amazon.com website. Specifically, these genres are Amazon.com instructions, product and manufacturer descriptions, related products pages, comments posted to reviews, and other customer reviews about that product. Amazon.com product reviews interact mainly with three other genres in sets: the product description, comments posted to their reviews, and the other product reviews. The reviews are provided for consumers underneath the product descriptions, allowing consumers to match what is said in a description against what is said in the reviews. Furthermore, customers are able to ask questions by posting comments under reviews, providing them with a way to directly consult the author of the review in a public way. This indicates another communicative purpose: to help consumers make a decision about purchasing a product based on the information presented to them from the product description, the product review, and questions posed to the product reviews.

**Networks:** Networks are the larger context in which a genre exists. Bhatia (2004) uses the word "discipline" instead of networks, but the word "network" helps alleviate the
business-like connotation that is implicit in that word. The network that Amazon.com customer reviews reside in is the overall Amazon.com website and its large corpus of reviews. The largest network is all of the reviews, which can be broken down into product categories (e.g. kitchen or baby) and then further broken down into a network of reviews related to one specific product. Each product on Amazon.com has a collection of reviews that resides in the larger, overall network of Amazon.com reviews. These reviews can be sorted by viewers of the website through several filters, such as chronologically or by star rating. Reviews compete for “helpful” votes which can also alter their positioning on the website. It is a reasonable assumption that potential consumers will read more than one review for a product, meaning that another communicative purpose of Amazon.com reviews is to provide a wide variety of opinions and perspectives on products for the consumer.

When considering the other genres that exist on Amazon.com, such as purchase information and product descriptions, it is reasonable to assume that consumers use Amazon.com with the purpose of researching or purchasing products. When this is considered in light of the three similar communicative purposes identified through analyzing interacting genres – confirming or denying details of the product, providing information about the product, and providing multiple perspectives on a product – it appears that the overall communicative purpose of Amazon.com product reviews is indeed to aid the consumer in purchasing a product by providing information that the consumer can use to make a purchase decision.
Corpus-based move analysis

The corpus-based move analysis resulted in the identification of nine different moves or rhetorical strategies. The following chart names, defines and provides an example the moves that were located. The chart lists moves in the order that they were identified.

Table 4.1: List of moves found in Amazon.com product reviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of move</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Each product review was required to have a title, which was bolded and located at the top of each review.</td>
<td>36B: &quot;Not really for children.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Information</td>
<td>Author provides information about the structure of the review itself (i.e. metacommentary) or provide reasoning for writing or updating a review.</td>
<td>37B: &quot;Leaving a review because I with I'd known before buying&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background Information</td>
<td>Author provides background information about themselves or about the products</td>
<td>Review 2B: &quot;Having had alot of experience taking things apart and being very curious I had to take a look at what made the thing tick.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Experience</td>
<td>Author provided personal experience, typically through narrative, with the product being reviewed.</td>
<td>27A: &quot;...package showed me how to remove my old blades and how to install the new ones. It was a piece of cake.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>Author compares product with other products.</td>
<td>42A: &quot;...this one is far and away the best.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Author provides an evaluation of the product.</td>
<td>53A: &quot;The real problem with these weights is the length.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User Information</td>
<td>Author provides information about the product gleaned through using the product.</td>
<td>53A: &quot;...you turn to select the desired weight. If you select 10lbs, it will then lock in the two weight plates to make 10 lbs...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refer to other Reviews</td>
<td>Author refers to other reviews written about the same product.</td>
<td>23A: &quot;Please ignore the other two users that gave this gauge only one star because...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall statement</td>
<td>Author provides a comprehensive statement about the product, either summarizing the review or explicitly recommending for or against purchase.</td>
<td>Review 18B: &quot;...go for the more expensive brand.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There were a total of 943 instances of these moves identified throughout the corpus. The following chart represents the move distribution throughout the entire corpus from most to least frequent.

*Figure 4.6: Move distribution across corpus.*

The distribution reveals that the evaluation (198 instances) and user information (150 instances) moves were by far the most commonly used moves in all of the reviews. Because the title move is obligatory, there were exactly 142 instances of titles, as expected. External information (106 instances), overall statements (94 instances), personal experience (87 instances) and comparison (84) all occurred with medium frequency. Finally, background information (48 instances, and referring to other reviews (34 instances), were used the least.

These results raise several questions. First, why are "evaluation" and "user information" the dominant moves? Additionally, why are the "background information"
and "refer to other reviews" moves used relatively infrequently? One useful way to frame these questions is to consider the earlier discussion regarding search and experience goods. I specifically chose search goods in an attempt to examine product reviews that focused on the actual products. Mudambi & Schuff (2010) concluded that experience based products consistently received higher numbers of helpful votes than search based products. In light of this, all of the moves were sorted into experience or search based information. Note that these categories represent the reviews written about the product, and not the actual products. In other words, a good can have a review that contains search- or experience-based information independent of whether or not the good is classified as an experience or a search good. The following table reveals the results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Move</th>
<th>Experience-based</th>
<th>Search-based</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External information</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background information</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal experience</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User information</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refer to other reviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall statement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sorting of moves into these categories helps explain the rhetorical distribution of the moves. As the above table indicates, all of the highest frequency moves can be identified as experience-based information: knowledge that can only be gleaned by owning and using the product. Again, this is the kind of information that Mudambi & Schuff (2010) cited as most helpful for Amazon.com users, and it appears that the results from this move analysis agrees with their results. Additionally, the majority of moves that appeared
are experience-based moves, indicating a general preference for this kind of information in product reviews.

Search based moves were very rare compared to experience based moves. Each search based move provided information that a user of Amazon.com could easily gather without reading a particular review. The other product reviews are freely available for a consumer to read, and some of the background information presented by product reviews is research that the author of the review has performed in order to know more about a product. However, background information was also included in the "other" category.

The "other" category of moves contained moves that don't necessarily identify as search or experience. The title, for instance, is mandated and all reviews must create one. The "background information" move was not used much, suggesting that Amazon.com consumers are far more interested information based on experience rather than personal expertise, history, or research. External information was used somewhat frequently. Many instances of the "external information" move occurred when authors updated their reviews with even more experience-based information, or when authors provided organizational guidance in their reviews for the reader. This shows some preference for reviews that have a coherent organizational style, but the offering of experience-based information still remained the dominant theme in reviews that were voted as "most helpful" by consumers on Amazon.com.

Moves were also analyzed for their distribution across positive and critical reviews and then compared. The following chart compares the frequency of moves as they occurred in both positive and critical reviews. The axis of the chart represents the total percentage of the moves occurrence, as compared against the total numbers of
moves that appeared in each type of review. The moves are again presented in order of highest to lowest frequency.

Figure 4.7: Percentage of move distribution across positive and critical reviews

The results here indicate that differences exist between the structuring of positive and critical reviews. Most immediately apparent is that positive reviews contained, overall, more moves than the critical reviews. Although the distribution for both critical and positive reviews lines up relatively well with the overall distribution of the corpus, there still exist noticeable differences in the rhetorical strategies employed by authors of positive and critical reviews. The largest difference is seen in "user info," which accounted for nearly 19% of the total moves in positive reviews, while "user info" accounted for slightly more than 12% of the total moves in critical reviews, resulting in a difference of ~7%. Similar differences, albeit of smaller percentages, are seen in the
"comparison," "background information," and "refer to other reviews" moves, with the positive reviews containing higher percentages of each move as compared to critical reviews. On the other hand, the critical reviews contained more instances of "personal experience," accounting for ~12% of the total moves, whereas "personal experience" only accounted for ~7%, resulting in a difference of roughly 5.5%. Critical reviews also contained a higher percentage of "evaluation," containing roughly 5% more instances of "evaluation" as compared to positive reviews.

In light of these results, more questions arise. Why do positive reviews contain more moves? Why is there such drastic difference in the rhetorical strategies of authors of positive and critical reviews? The largest differences are seen in "user information" and "personal experience," yet there are other differences that indicate a definite distinction exists between the rhetorical choices made in positive and critical reviews. Before exploring the moves in detail for answers, I considered other factors that might explain the discrepancy. Lengths of the reviews were compared based on word count. The following table summarizes the results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.3: Word counts of reviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average words per review</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table indicates that, on average, positive reviews contained more words than critical reviews. The fact that positive reviews are longer, on average, than critical reviews, helps explain why there was a higher amount of moves in the positive reviews as compared to the critical reviews. With an average of forty-six more words per review, this allows positive reviews the space to provide several more moves per review.
This does not, however, provide much of an answer as to why certain moves patterned the way they did across the different types of reviews. The differences in rhetorical strategies between the two types of reviews must be explained by exploring each of the moves in detail. When we turn to an examination of the strategies inside moves (the steps), the reasons for the rhetorical differences begin to materialize. The following sections will examine each move in greater detail. The moves will be considered in the same order as they were presented in table 4.1.

**Title**

Each author was required to write a title for the product review. Titles were typically short sentences using few words. Some titles used ellipses to lead into the main text of the review. The purpose of the title is to provide readers with a glimpse into the tone, content, or nature of the review.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>% (n=71)</th>
<th>Critical</th>
<th>% (n=71)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>69.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaser / Lead In</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name Product</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target audience</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warning</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most common strategy in the title was to simply summarize the tone, nature, or result of the product review. For example:

Review 1A: "Nice upgrade from the LX3."

The only important difference between positive and critical reviews was that critical reviews were the only reviews to employ the warning step in a title. For example:
Review 35B: "Buyer Beware - IMITATION PRODUCT from ZEETRON"

Because the title move is mandatory, and the rhetorical choices made in the title are similar across positive and critical reviews, it should not be taken into consideration when exploring why a difference exists between positive and critical reviews.

**External information**

Some authors provided information about the structure of the review itself (i.e. metacommentary). For example:

Review 44A: "Here is what I look for:"

Others provided information about their thoughts behind writing the review:

Review 44A: "I would prefer to write this review after some time has passed, but I want to make sure I get my thoughts out here early on.

Or their reasons for purchasing the product:

Review 14B: "I bought these bands to use with P90X, but I did not use them for long."

All of this information is external to the product being reviewed. The purpose of this move is to provide the reader with external information in order to guide or explain the review the product.

**Table 4.5: Breakdown of external information move.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>% (n=55)</th>
<th>Critical</th>
<th>% (n=51)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for review</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for purchase</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Update</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for update</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacommentary</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The breakdown of the "external information" move across both types of reviews matched strongly. This suggests that external information is a shared element of helpful reviews and does not contribute to the differences among review types. The relatively high frequency of this move also suggests that Amazon.com users view external information as an element of a "most helpful" product review. Specifically, reviews that used the external information move included introductions and reasons why the author purchased the product. As consumers searching for similar products may share the same needs, it follows that product reviews can be used as a way to confirm whether or not products are able to meet those shared needs. By living vicariously through reviewers who share the same needs, potential consumers are able to experience-based information that helps them make a purchase decision.

**Background information**

Sometimes authors provided background information about themselves:

**Review 2B**: "About me. Aircraft technician for 23 years, I love to cook, I am a perfectionist and, I hate cheap tools."

Their history with the product:

**Review 1B**: "I have now purchased four, count them: 1, 2, 3, 4 of these cameras."

Or about research they have performed that is relevant to the product (example below). The purpose of providing this type of information can be to build credibility and thus provide additional reasons for why a consumer should believe or trust the author of the
product review. Background information typically occurred near the start of a review, although it appeared in other sections as well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Positive (%)</th>
<th>Critical</th>
<th>Critical (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Own product</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background of author</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in the overall move distribution, background information appeared relatively infrequently across both review types. However, some variation does exist between positive and critical reviews, mainly seen in the research step. Authors who contacted the manufacturer, hunted on the internet for information, or performed some other type of research, in order to find out more about the product, typically provided the research step. While research represents a form of search information, this type of search information is typically more difficult to obtain.

For example:

Review 55A: "Finally, at the time of this review, the Iron Gym is available for the same price at Linens-n-Things. If you have one locally, you could save yourself shipping since Super Saver shipping is not offered for this product."

It makes sense why this type of information would be included in a review voted as most helpful: Amazon.com is not likely to publish this type of search information. However, as indicated by the relative lack of background information in the critical reviews, it is seemingly not necessary for an author to provide this type of information in order to be deemed helpful. A final point, while positive reviews contained a higher number of
instances of the background information move, both types of reviews employed the background information overall at roughly the same percentage (~5%).

Personal experience with the product

In the "personal experience" move, the author will typically provide a narrative about an experience they had while using, obtaining, or returning the product being reviewed (examples below). The purpose of this move is to detail actual experiences that a consumer has had based on owning the product. Because this move was typically realized as a narrative, these moves could be very long (several paragraphs). However, some were also as short as a sentence.

Table 4.7: Breakdown of personal experience move.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>% (n=35)</th>
<th>Critical</th>
<th>% (n=52)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive experience</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative experience</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>73.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral experience</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The patterning of moves makes sense here: a higher percentage of negative experiences were found in critical reviews, while more positive experiences were found in positive reviews. Neutral experiences were rare in both types of reviews. More interestingly, however, is that the "personal experience" move occurred more frequently (~5.5% more) in critical reviews than in positive. As explained above, personal experience was most typically realized through a narration of experience with a product. A conclusion that may be drawn from this is that readers of reviews find it more helpful to hear about negative experiences with products than positive experiences with products. For example, one product review related a story of a small child being injured using a product:
Review 41B: "I am so sad to say that my five month old daughter was
injured on this product. Her finger was pinched between the elephant and
the support bar on the main activity area."

This type of information is far more valuable for potential consumers than a narrative
that involves someone happily using a product. For example:

Review 49A: "The first thing that I cooked was a no-no in the eyes of
Cuisinart - a bone-in, skin-on leg and thigh chicken quarter. Too thick,
they say. HA! says I, because I am a bit of an anarchist. I marinated the
chicken in olive oil and rosemary, heated the Griddler to Medium. I
cooked it on the panini plates because I love those little fake barbecue
stripes across my food. It worked just fine. (I should have taken a picture,
it came out looking beautiful. But I was hungry."

Knowing the dangers or faults of a product can prove to be more informative for a
prospective consumer. This helps provide an explanation as to why the critical reviews
voted tended to include more personal experiences than the positive reviews.

Comparison to other products

Many authors chose to compare the product being reviewed against other similar
products. The purpose of this move was to provide consumers with a frame of reference
regarding other products that consumers would most likely be also researching.
Comparisons were used in two main ways. Some authors built their entire review around
comparing products against each other, while other authors would add in short
comparisons during their review as supplementary information. Either way, the bulk of comparisons were typically used in a way that cast the product in a positive:

Review 37A: "We have the Skip Hop drying rack also, but prefer this drying rack hands down!"

Or negative light:

Review 50B: "Note: I've had a less powerful Champion Juicer for over 25 years with no overload problem because it has a mechanical overload switch in it that protects the motor.

Table 4.8: Breakdown of comparison move.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Positive % (n=54)</th>
<th>Critical % (n=30)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive comparison</td>
<td>41  75.9%</td>
<td>3  10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative comparison</td>
<td>8  14.8%</td>
<td>21  70.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral comparison</td>
<td>4  7.4%</td>
<td>4  13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggest alternative product</td>
<td>1  1.8%</td>
<td>2  6.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While both types of reviews showed equal patterns of neutral comparisons and suggesting alternative products, a curious distribution emerged among positive and negative comparisons. While the data makes sense in the way that critical reviews contained mostly negative comparisons, and positive reviews contained mainly positive comparisons, positive reviews also tended to employ comparison moves around 3.5% more frequently than critical reviews. The results suggest that readers of product reviews prefer knowing why a product is better than other products, but for reasons that are unclear, critical reviews did not compare products as often.

One possible reason for this is the way that positive and critical reviews went about comparing products. In positive reviews, the tone was typically upbeat and endorsed the product. For example:
Review 69A: "Overall I have been very impressed with the output of this lantern as well. This is a very bright lantern for its compact size; outshining normal 4D fluorescent U-tubed lanterns and a coleman pack-away LED lantern."

Critical reviews, however, often contained a tone that showed disapproval and disappointment that bordered on sounding more like complaints than comparisons. For example:

Review 9B: "15. PRICE! NO INCLUDED COVER! NO DISCOUNT FOR EARLY ADOPTERS. See SonyStyle.com for details. They allow a trade-in and $100 discount to buy their newest reader if you have the previous version. Too bad they don't have Amazon's content!"

However, much like the difference seen in the personal experience move, it was not necessary for reviews to compare products in order to be voted as "helpful" by the Amazon.com community members.

If any moves are thought to be required in order for a review to be voted as helpful on Amazon.com, the "evaluation" and "user information" moves are the two primary candidates.

Evaluation

During most of the reviews, authors provided evaluations of the product based on various factors. The purpose of providing an evaluation is to give potential consumers the
author's opinion of the product. Overall, evaluations possessed two distinct tones: positive or negative. While some authors made explicit "pro" and "con" categories in their reviews, it was much more common for authors to insert critiques or compliments throughout the reviews. However, here is a typical example of an author (from a negative review) who created a "pro" and "con" list in the product review.

Review 62B: "Positives: small size, carbide cutters are very effective at removing metal, ease of use (no special techniques"

Negatives: small contact point on the blade (see below, not very stable if much pressure is applied."

Again, although the "pro" and "con" list style was rare, it did hint at the existence of either mixing or perhaps appropriation (Bhatia, 2004) of generic resources. Making "pro" and "con" lists about products or decisions may be a strategy certain people have been taught or employ on a regular basis when making purchasing decisions, and thus they feel that this "list" genre is appropriate to use when writing Amazon.com product reviews. Also, other online review sites with more structured review constraints, such as the ones studied by Pollach (2008), may contain "pro" and "con" boxes for authors to fill out.

Authors also sometimes provided hedged or conditional evaluations. For example:

Review 52B: "The quality is what you expect. They are your basic set of dumbbells. The carrying case will likely get damaged in shipment. Mine had a dented corner and broken latch."

In this example, the author implies that the quality is not the best (hinted at with "what you expect), as the product in question (a set of cheap dumbbells) are priced relatively low in relation to similar products and made out of lower quality material. Thus, while
the author is making an evaluation of the quality, he does not necessarily frame it in a negative way. This is further supported in his second sentence with the use of the adjective "basic" to describe the weights, giving the critique an overall mood that suggests consumers should not be expecting anything special from this "basic" product.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>% (n=99)</th>
<th>Critical</th>
<th>% (n=99)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compliment or praise product</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedged compliment or praise</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique product or manufacturer</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedged critique</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While it makes sense that more critiques of products occurred in critical reviews while more positive evaluations of products occurred in positive reviews, the type of evaluation in critical reviews were more variable than in positive reviews. Positive reviews appear to focus mostly on providing a positive evaluation of the product, whereas critical reviews included relatively high percentages of both types of praise.

Furthermore, while the actual occurrences (99) of the evaluation move were identical in each type of review, critical reviews employed evaluation ~4% more than positive reviews. One possible reason for this difference may be suggested by the adage that consumers who are disappointed in a product will tend to be more vocal about that product than consumers who are satisfied. Regardless, evaluation appeared in both types of reviews at roughly a 20% rate, suggesting that Amazon.com users will vote for reviews that provide evaluations of products.

Since evaluation of a product is typically dependent upon a consumers' experience with a product, the evidence here that suggests evaluation is a popular strategy further
strengthens the larger claim that Amazon.com community members tend to desire experience-based information in product reviews.

User information

User information was the second most frequent move in both types of reviews. Based on owning or using the product, some authors provided explanations of various aspects of the product. The purpose of this move is to provide consumers with more contextual information that may not be freely available or is only available through interacting with the product.

Table 4.10: Breakdown of user information move.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>% (n=98)</th>
<th>Critical</th>
<th>% (n=52)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tips &amp; tricks</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclear information</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solve problem</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain or confirm functions</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional capabilities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggest improvement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target audience</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

User information contains the largest difference (~7%) between positive and critical reviews. A detailed analysis of the user information move reveals further insight into the discrepancy between positive and critical reviews. The largest difference within the "user information" move is seen in the "explain or confirm functions" step. This step typically confirms or disconfirms the function of a product. For example, a review of automotive windshield wipers describes the function of the product in a positive way:
Review 27A: "Back to the blades: How do they function? Beautifully! I streamed washer fluid onto my windshield and it cleaned it away with no streaking and no noise whatsoever."

Here is an example of a critical review disconfirming the function of a product that advertised itself as a remote home security system:

Review 4B: "Translation: You CANNOT remotely lock the door."

It is clear from the table above the "confirm function" step appeared relatively frequently in both types of reviews, suggesting that the Amazon.com community desires that type of information. Confirming that a product works or responds as advertised is perhaps the most essential and basic piece of information a potential consumer would like to know before purchasing a product. However, critical reviews typically employed this step roughly 17% less than positive reviews.

But if this is a valuable piece of information that Amazon.com community members find helpful, it is not a piece of information that critical reviews need in order to be deemed helpful. One explanation for this is that the function of the negative narrative (from the "personal experience" move) may sometimes serve the role of critiquing the product function. For example:

Review 47B: "Very disappointing, good reviews but this did not work for us. The Auto-off was broken and it just kept boiling."

This information helps reconcile one of the major differences between positive and critical reviews - negative reviews dispute a product's function through narratives (move 4), whereas positive reviews overtly declare that a product works as advertised.
The other step with the largest difference is named "tips & tricks" because of the way authors provided helpful tips on how to use a product; this is the type of information that can only be gleaned by using the product. For example:

Review 50B: "I had them fix the unit and will just have to treat it very gently. Listen to the motor for a change in speed."

Review 64A: "Another trick I came up with is for all of you that have trouble loading this flashlight up with batteries. Next time, try this..."

This helps explain why the "user information" move was determined to be helpful by the users of Amazon.com, and it also explains why critical reviews contained less instances of this step. Many critical review authors indicated in their reviews that they would not continue using the product, whether through product failure, return, or disappointment. Therefore they will not have as much experience with the products, resulting in discovering less helpful tips or tricks when using the product.

On the other hand, critical reviews tended to include more "unclear information" and "suggest improvement" steps. The "unclear information" step occurred when an author provided information that either corrected or clarified product instructions or directions. In the following example, the author related how to work a product intended to jump start dead vehicle batteries, and then went on to write:

Review 29B: "...I only wish the instructions included this extra bit of information, or what to do if the car fails to start following the standard instructions. If you have any issues, I'd recommend calling Clore Support."
Some authors would suggest how a product might be improved, or what it would take for them to consider the product in a positive manner. For example:

Review 2B: "I would gladly pay more for solidstate construction."

Thus, even though positive and critical reviews employed different strategies within the "user information" move, both types of reviews worked towards providing experience-based information for a potential consumer. Overall, the "user information" move provides even more evidence that Amazon.com customers desire experience-based information over search based.

Refer to other reviews

Some authors referred to other reviews that had been published about the same product on the Amazon.com website. The purpose of this move is to acknowledge common themes or other information that is being said about the product. Review writers are informing the customer that they are aware of what else is being said about the product. Sometimes review authors do this for the purpose of disagreement:

Review 59B: "I tried the shake weight, knowing full well that I would have to do the shaking. Many of the negative reviews of this product seem to think that the weight itself should be shaking, and that's the sole reason why they don't like it."

Whereas other review authors agreed with previous reviews:

Review 45B: "Some reviewers have said that it is difficult to clean, but that's an understatement: it is impossible to clean after using it for spices."
This indicates that not only do reviewers read other reviews, some of them may assume that a reader of their review has also read these other reviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>% (n=22)</th>
<th>Critical</th>
<th>% (n=12)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dispute other review</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirm other review</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solve problem as others</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same problem as other reviews</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The "refer to other reviews" move occurred the least frequently throughout both types of reviews. With positive reviews employing this move ~4% of the time and critical reviews including it ~3% of the time, it is difficult to suggest that this move is necessary in order for a review to be voted as "most helpful" by the Amazon.com community members.

However, this move still provides the best evidence of intertextuality in Amazon.com customer reviews. As shown in the table above, the most common use of this move, in both types of reviews, was to dispute what other reviews had said about a product. The existence of this type of information in "most helpful" reviews indicates that the authors of Amazon.com customer reviews do spend time reading other reviews about products. However, referencing other reviews is essentially search-based information, as potential consumers are able to read the other reviews. Based on the results, it does not appear that it is necessary for a review to reference other reviews in order to be considered as helpful.

**Overall statement**

Many authors provided a comprehensive statement about the product. The purpose of this move was to provide a clear, explicit reminder of the overall tone and message of the
review for the consumer. Typically, this was a summative comment about the product or review that occurred near the end of the review. For example, this author restated the major points of the review at the end:

Review 65B: "For the price, OK, but factor in a DOA percentage in your buying decision.

Additionally, some authors explicitly recommended for or against purchasing the item:

Review 56A: "This product has been excellent. Buy with confidence."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.12: Breakdown of overall statement move.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Steps</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Try it first&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of review</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The "overall statement" occurred around 10% of the time in both positive and critical reviews. Not surprisingly, positive reviews tended to contain more positive conclusions, and critical reviews tended to contain more negative conclusions. The critical reviews did contain two instances of the "try it first" step, where a review author leaves it up to the consumer to purchase the product first. For example:

Review 4B: "My advice is to try the regular version in one of the big box stores, they all have them on display."

However, asking a consumer to try the product first, in order to determine if it's a suitable product, appears to work against the goal of an Amazon.com consumer: seeking out experience-based information so that the consumer need not "try it first." This provides an explanation as to why the "try it first" step only occurred two times in the entire corpus.
The move analysis suggests that experience-based information is desired and preferred over search-based information by the Amazon.com community. While positive and critical reviews appear to differ in rhetorical strategies, both types of reviews are deemed to be "helpful" by the Amazon.com community by providing experience-based information through different rhetorical strategies. For positive reviews, providing explicit information about the product appears to be a dominant strategy, while critical reviews tend to provide more negative narratives. Both types of reviews provide roughly equal amounts of evaluative information. The result is that both types of reviews provide a potential consumer with a wealth of experience-based knowledge that cannot be gleaned through typical search-based information, and this is what the Amazon.com discourse community deems to be "helpful."

"Most helpful" votes

Although I selected reviews that had received a certain number of helpful votes in order to avoid including reviews that were chosen as helpful from lack of competition (see section 3.1), I still felt it necessary to examine if the Amazon.com discourse community deemed the positive and negative reviews equally as helpful. Therefore, I counted and compared the percentage rates of "yes" votes that each review type received.

Table 4.13: Vote distribution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q: Did you find this review helpful?</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Critical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average amount of votes (both yes and no)</td>
<td>483</td>
<td>531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of votes that voted &quot;yes&quot;</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above first shows the total amount of votes that a review received, which includes votes that indicate whether the review is or is not helpful. Then, the table shows
the overall percentage of votes that votes for the review as helpful. As can be seen, both critical and positive reviews received a similar average amount of votes, although there are more votes overall for critical reviews. While the percentage of votes that positive reviews received is higher than critical, both types of reviews received very high percentages of votes that indicated that the review as helpful. A conclusion that can be drawn from analyzing the helpful vote distribution is that a roughly equal amount of votes were cast for each type of review, resulting in roughly similar percentages of votes indicating that a review was helpful. Based on this, positive and critical reviews were equally "helpful" in the eyes of Amazon.com users.

Rhetorical focus

Because the previous literature surrounding online reviews shared a common theme of identifying an "e-style" (Racine, 2002) or personal register, which influenced the audience awareness of online reviews, I analyzed the reviews for pronoun usage and rhetorical focus. I categorized the reviews as author-, audience-, or product-based in order to see if this form of "personalized" register existed among Amazon.com product reviews. While some of the reviews switched between or mixed their focuses, I concentrated on the dominant or primary focus of each review, as that primary focus created an overall tone of the entire product review (see section 3.3). The following table summarizes the results.

Table 4.14: Primary focus of reviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Positive reviews</th>
<th>Critical reviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author-based</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader-based</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product-based</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results show that reader-based reviews were the least common in both positive and critical reviews, although more total instances occurred in positive reviews. Comparing this table with a direct count of the overall first and second person pronoun distribution appears to confirm the results that indicate more author-based reviews than reader-based.

Table 4.15: Pronoun distribution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Distribution (% of total words in corpus)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First person</td>
<td>2.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second person</td>
<td>1.27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since reviews tended to be heavily author-based, this seems to also confirm the findings from the literature review that associate online review genres with a "personal" style of register (Racine, 2002; Stuart, 2006; Pollach, 2008). However, the high rates of product-based reviews seems to complicate the idea that reviews have an overall personal tone, which is further disturbed by the relatively small reliance on reader-based reviews.

There is a connection between author and product based reviews, however, in that both types of reviews carry more of a narrative or story based aspect then reviews that are designed specifically for a certain audience. By extrapolating from the experiences of review writers, or by reading how a product functioned "in the wild," potential consumers can make judgments about purchases based on information provided in a perhaps more objective way than if reviews are targeted directly at the consumer.

4.3 Discussion

This section returns to the research questions presented at the end of chapter one in order to provide a summary of the above results and situate them within the context of my
Q1: What is the communicative purpose of "most helpful" Amazon.com reviews?

Based on my analysis of the interacting genres, it does appear that the main communicative purpose of Amazon.com "most helpful" product reviews is to aid the consumer in making a purchasing decision by providing experience-based information. The communicative purpose I identified matches up with the purpose of online reviews that Luzon (2005), Mackiewicz (2009), and Mudambi & Schuff (2010) reported.

Recall, however, Racine's (2002) conclusion: that the reviews served a purpose of "building trust" (p. 159) between the consumer and Amazon.com. This illustrates how the focus of an analysis can shape the results. Viewed in isolation, the product reviews serve a particular purpose; viewed in relation to other genres, the product reviews suddenly perform a completely different purpose. Racine's (2002) conclusion does not necessarily disagree with my findings, as I located three separate communicative purposes of the reviews. However, I believe that all of these different communicative purposes work towards an overall purpose of aiding the consumer in making a purchase decision. Racine's (2002) conclusion, that purposes work to build a sense of trust, can certainly be included as another purpose that helps work towards that overall communicative purpose.

Q2: What are the typical rhetorical strategies used by authors of "most helpful" reviews?

My move analysis of Amazon.com "most helpful" product reviews revealed nine main rhetorical moves used by the authors. While each review was required to contain a title
and at least twenty words, there were no other universally organizing features of reviews. Even summative comments about products, such as clear endorsements to purchase, could come midway through a review before an author continued writing. There was a high tendency towards moves that provided experience based information, although some moves did contain search-based information. What is interesting to point out is that many of the moves that contained search-based information provided information that was unavailable on Amazon.com. Again, this agrees with Mudambi & Schuff's (2010) conclusion that experience-based information is typically recognized as more "helpful" than search-based information.

Taboada's (2011) analysis of online movie reviews located distinct "evaluation" and "description" stages. While my analysis found that evaluation was one of the most popular rhetorical strategies used by authors of "most helpful" reviews, it also revealed that "description" was merely a step in one move. The difference here is most likely due to the types of reviews analyzed in each study. Taboada (2011) looked at movie reviews, and the "description" in a movie review is most likely different than a "description" of a product. In the context of movie reviews, describing a movie probably counts more as experience-based information, as one can only glean so much from watching trailers or advertisements for a movie. However, for products, "description" is almost purely search-based, as pictures and explanations of products obviate the need for consumers to rely on other consumers for a description. In sum, while the rhetorical strategies of these two types of review differed, overall they focused on providing experience-based information. This suggests that experience-based information may be a universally desirable aspect for all sorts of online reviews.
Finally, Mackiewicz's (2009) focus on assertions of expertise found in online reviews located three primary strategies that authors used. These were assertions of product-specific expertise, assertions of familiarity with products, and assertions of a relevant role (p. 12-13). Although named very differently, these three dominant strategies loosely match up with the steps I located in the "background information" move, which I suggest is used by authors in an attempt to build credibility. Product-specific expertise and familiarity with the products essentially meant that authors claimed they have owned the product for a period of time, or have done research into relevant products (both steps of the "background information" move). Mackiewicz's "relevant role" category matches with my "author background" step, in which authors provide information about themselves as to why they are more qualified to comment on the product being reviews. While Mackiewicz's study focused exclusively on assertions of expertise, my study suggests that "background information" or asserting expertise was the second least frequent strategy used by authors. Whether this difference is due to the products studied (Mackiewicz only looked at electronic products) or the larger context of the review site (Mackiewicz looked at "epinions," whereas I looked at Amazon) is still left unknown.

Q3: Do these rhetorical strategies differ between positive and critical reviews?

On average, positive reviews are longer than critical reviews and therefore contain more instances of rhetorical moves. While positive reviews have a slightly higher percentage rate of being voted as "helpful," critical reviews received a high amount of votes on average, indicating that, based on the votes, both types of reviews are equally "helpful."
While the rhetorical strategies used by authors of positive and critical reviews do contain differences, most notably in the way authors offer personal narratives and experience-based information, the overall communicative purpose of the genre is still met by both reviews. The positive reviews tended to offer experience-based information and explicitly confirm the function of a product, while the critical reviews tended to provide more personal narrative that had the implicit effect of critiquing or questioning the function of a product. The end result, however, was that the different rhetorical strategies worked towards the common goal of providing experience based information, which is the communicative purpose of the genre.

The only other study to analyze the positive or critical aspect of product reviews was Mudambi & Schuff (2010), and they reported an average "star rating" of helpful reviews of 3.99 (p. 193). The way that Amazon.com separates "positive" and "critical" reviews is by star rating. Reviews that have a rating of 4 or 5 stars are considered "positive," whereas reviews with star ratings of 1, 2 or 3 stars are considered "critical" reviews. Although not presented in the results section above, in light of Mudambi & Schuff's (2010) findings, I calculated the average star rating of positive reviews (4.7) and critical reviews (2.4). This results in an average star rating of all the "most helpful" reviews that I analyzed of 3.55. The difference in results here is most likely due to the data selection process, as Mudambi & Schuff (2010) did not limit their data to only the reviews that were showcased as "most helpful" by Amazon.com.

Q4: How does the institutional and online context of Amazon.com product reviews provide affordances and constraints for authors of these product reviews?
The constraints placed on authors of the reviews by Amazon.com are relatively few. Authors are asked to provide honest opinions and avoid gaming the Amazon Vine reward system. However, Amazon.com does contain censorship power, and several reviews contained indications that they had been edited (although the only evidence left was an ellipsis inside a set of brackets, i.e. [...], there is no notification that the review had been edited or censored on the part of Amazon.com).

Unlike other websites that allow user reviews, such as the one studied in Pollach (2008), Amazon.com leaves the structure of reviews largely up to the author. Pollach (2008) reported that the website she studied forced authors to fill in separate boxes for separate pieces of content. This led to highly structured reviews with almost no variation. On the other hand, authors of Amazon.com product reviews varied drastically in the structural organization they employed. While some Amazon.com product reviews contained metacommentary signals that guided the reader through the review, many of them contained almost stream-of-consciousness types of writing.

Amazon.com product reviews are drafted "in the moment" by typing into a text box provided by Amazon.com. The online medium allows reviews to be edited and updated at any time, taking away a certain permanence that other genres, such as published academic journals, may contain. Furthermore, the reviews are constantly in flux, as the reviews deemed as "most helpful" always face the threat of usurpation from other reviews that may garner more votes. The various sorting and navigation methods that are available to users of the website do not ensure that product reviews will be read or considered.
This helps explain the sometimes unorganized or chaotic patterning of some of the product reviews. By allowing review writers to literally "speak their mind" during a product review, typical organizational characteristics of writing do not always exist in product reviews. However, there existed no evidence to suggest that the Amazon.com discourse community prefers well-organized reviews. The content was consistently the main determining factor as to whether or not a review was considered as "helpful."

The Amazon.com discourse community itself does a far better job of policing the reviews by ensuring that helpful reviews are placed in a showcase for potential consumers. The goals of the Amazon.com discourse community and the goals of Amazon.com appear to synthesize in a way that helps Amazon.com avoid looking like an oppressive force. However, this does not stop Amazon.com from stepping in when a review author violates one of their rules.

Q5: What is the rhetorical focus / intended audience of the reviews?

Based on the three categories the reviews were organized as (author, reader or product based), it appears that a relatively large amount of most helpful reviews were focused around the experiences of the authors of the reviews or the products themselves. First person pronouns were used more than second-person pronouns throughout the corpus. This suggests that the Amazon.com discourse community is relatively uninterested in reviews that are "tailor made" for a consumer, and that product reviews that explain how a user specifically experienced a product is desired. This also matches with Pollach's (2008) study, where she reported that "writers address their audience directly, but to a far lesser extent than they talk about themselves" (p. 292).
This suggests that product reviews that function as a story or narrative, rather than as an explicit review, are deemed to be more helpful by the Amazon.com discourse community. This seems curious, especially when the genre is named product reviews. However, considering scholarship that has focused on the way that advertising uses language helps reconcile this apparent confusion.

When a review is directly targeted at the consumer, with the intention of "selling" the product, the consumer may perceive the review as a form of advertising. Although a strict definition of the genre of advertisement is complicated, Guy Cook offers characteristic features of advertisements in his 1992 volume *The discourse of advertising*. Among the features of advertisements, one is that they have both senders and recipients (p. 202). The language choices employed by senders of ads (in this case, the Amazon.com product review author) influence the ways recipients of ads (in this case, potential consumers reading Amazon.com product reviews) interpret the advertisement.

Cook specifically discusses how the use of the pronoun "you" in English can work to conflate intimate and formal relationships (p. 183). Unlike languages that have specific second-person pronouns for levels of formality, such as Spanish or French, the English language only has one version (i.e. "you"). Therefore, when product reviews directly target the consumer with the pronoun "you," it may cause dissonance as to how "you" should be interpreted. Does the product review conceptualize "you" as a prospective consumer, looking for the facts about a product? If so, this would frame the entire review as more of an advertisement - especially when the review is positive and recommends purchase. Or does the product review conceptualize "you" as a peer - someone with whom you know well and look to for advice. While this may place the
product review a few steps away from the genre of advertisement, the false intimacy implied in the use of "you" may still cause a negative reaction from the reader.

The intimate interpretation of the use of "you" in Amazon.com product reviews is representative of what Fairclough (1989) terms "synthetic personalization, a compensatory tendency to give the impression of treating each of the people 'handled' en masse as an individual" (p. 52, emphasis original). In other words, synthetic personalization is a strategy used on consumers to create a false sense of intimacy - which suggests that even when consumers interpret the use of "you" in Amazon.com product reviews as intimate, they may implicitly recognize synthetic personalization of the review and associate it with a form of advertising. This false sense of intimacy appears to match with the "trust building" purpose of Amazon.com product reviews that Racine (2002) identified.

As Cook (1992) pointed out, "there are undoubtedly many reasons to dislike ads, whether individually or as a genre. Many people do so, either consistently, or from time to time" (p. 203). Any association with an Amazon.com product review as an advertisement may then invoke a negative interpretation on the part of the reader. This further helps explain why any rhetorical focus on the reader of the review appears to be a strategy not deemed as "helpful" by the Amazon.com discourse community.

4.4 Implications for future research

While my study has worked towards answering specific research questions about the nature of the Amazon.com product review genre and the discourse community behind the genre, there is still much more that can be done with this genre.
A natural next step would be to compare the results of this analysis against a similar analysis that focuses on product reviews that receive very low amounts of "helpful" votes. This would help strengthen the results from this analysis, as a comparison between "most" and "least" helpful reviews may further indicate the discourse community's preference for experience-based information. It may also reveal other insights into the genre that this analysis has not covered.

Another avenue for future research would be to analyze the comments sections of the product reviews. All of the product reviews allow other users of Amazon.com to comment on the review. While many reviews contain few comments, some reviews contained discussions that spanned fifteen or more comments. Tracing the way that the community comments further assess and shape the content of the product review may help provide more answers to how the Amazon.com discourse community typically polices the content and structure of the genre.

It would also be fruitful to conduct a more direct study of the users of this genre by creating surveys that ask questions of both users of Amazon.com and authors of the reviews. Research into any guidelines that the Amazon.com community may share with each other about writing reviews may also provide more answers to the shared goals and values of that community. Finally, a sociohistorical analysis of the history of Amazon.com product reviews, which started only as book reviews, would help contextualize the current state of the genre.
4.5 Conclusion

Overall, Amazon.com most helpful product reviews can be a very messy genre. Unlike the research paper introductions analyzed by Swales (1990), most helpful product reviews contain at times a chaotic patterning of moves. Authors switch from telling personal narratives to providing a description of the product to explaining functions back and forth at will. The online medium allows for quick publication with unlimited revision, resulting in a written genre that is never truly "done" being written.

The elements of reviews that are voted as most helpful indicate that the Amazon.com discourse community seeks experience-based information when reading reviews. Although there are surface differences between positive and critical reviews, they both perform rhetorical strategies that work towards the same goal of providing experience-based information to a potential consumer. By extrapolating experiences from a review writer, a potential consumer is able to discover the real world nature of a product, as opposed to reading only a description and intended purpose of a product.

Returning to theoretical considerations, this analysis helps provide evidence that studying a genre that is neither academic nor professional still yields results that help describe and explain situated language use. By using the updated version of ESP-based genre analysis - the version that draws from both rhetoric and applied linguistics - to study an online genre, I have stretched the traditional boundaries of ESP and argued for the continued relevance of such an approach. Studies such as this one help ameliorate claims by critics that ESP-based genre analysis is unable to account for the complexities of the ever-growing digital world. Furthermore, by illustrating how a researcher with a more rhetorical than linguistic background is able to perform such an analysis, I have
provided evidence as to how genre may help further "bridge" (Costino & Hyon, 2011) the divide between rhetoric and applied linguistics.
Chapter 5: Pedagogical application

The preceding chapters have explained the theory and methodology of ESP-based genre analysis and applied those ideas through an analysis of a particular genre. While providing an explanation of the structural and social elements of a genre is fruitful from a theoretical or academic standpoint, as it provides insight into the shared values and goals of a discourse community, another major goal of genre analysis has traditionally focused on providing a pedagogical application. As mentioned in chapter one, ESP has been traditionally used to teach non-native English speaking students specific genres of writing. Although Swales (1990) developed ESP and move analysis based on his work with international graduate students, other scholars, particularly in the fields of applied linguistics and second-language (L2) writing, have been developing ESP and move analysis into a more defined pedagogical approach for teaching L2 writing.

One of these approaches is known as genre-based writing instruction, or GBWI. By using a GBWI curriculum, writing instructors are able to explore certain genres with their students and work towards specific goals, based on the needs of the students and classroom. This chapter will attempt to explain the current state of GBWI and use the genre of Amazon.com product reviews to demonstrate what a GBWI-based composition curriculum may look in a university level composition classroom.

In order to do this, this chapter will first situate L2 writing in the larger context of L1 or native-English speaking college composition; explain the history of GBWI and how it addresses critiques of traditional ESP-based pedagogy; and finally provide an example of how GBWI can be applied into a L2 composition classroom at the university level by using Amazon.com product reviews as an example.
5.1 L1 and L2 composition

Current pedagogical strategies in college-level composition for native-English speakers (L1 composition or FYC) tend to focus on the process of writing and the ways that writing is socially constructed (Berlin, 1982). Much attention has been paid to the ways that writing is not exclusively a result of an individual's efforts, but is always affected by the larger social context an individual resides in. Moreover, by focusing only on the end product, a writing curriculum is unable to recognize and appreciate the larger social influences that influence the ways writers construct meaning through writing. Thus, popular pedagogical strategies for teaching FYC include lots of revision-based activities that culminate in a final writing portfolio at the end of the semester, intending to showcase a student's overall process of writing.

Tony Silva argues that this pedagogical approach is laden with cultural assumptions about writing and learning that not all multilingual students possess, stating that a danger lies in the "unreflective adoption of mainstream composition materials" (Silva, 1999, p. 163) for L2 writing courses. This is an important consideration, because one of the traditional goals of any L2 classroom is something known as communicative competence. A term originally coined by linguistic anthropologist Dell Hymes (1974), communicative competence essentially argues that non-native speakers of languages need to learn more than grammatical or mechanical knowledge of a language - it is also necessary for non-native speakers to become fluent in the rhetorical or pragmatic uses of language (McDonough, 2002, p. 21-22). In other words, students need to know both the formal rules of a language (e.g. how to make a sentence grammatically correct) and the
social rules of a language (e.g. what is considered "proper" language use in certain social situations) in order to work towards developing true communicative competence.

Since any L2 composition classroom is also a language-learning classroom, it is important for L2 composition classes to teach both pragmatic and mechanical elements of English writing in order to build students' communicative competence. Students that speak English as a first language already possess this rhetorical and pragmatic knowledge of language use, and thus many L1 composition courses assume this fluency with language. Returning to Silva's quote above, the "danger" that exists in adopting L1 composition pedagogy for L2 composition is that an insufficient focus will be placed on building students' overall communicative competence. Issues such as this help contextualize the current state of L2 composition theory and practice.

Paul Kei Matsuda, a leading scholar in L2 composition, has documented the history of L2 writing through several publications. This history has seen L2 composition emerge as its own field, separate from L1 composition (Matsuda, 2003), while at the same time being relegated to an unfair "disciplinary division of labor" (Matsuda, 1999) that perpetuates the "myth of linguistic homogeneity" (Matsuda, 2006). This "myth" is the notion that FYC is only composed of idealized, native-English speaking students. Although scholars like Matsuda are attempting to bridge the gap between L1 and L2 composition scholarship, there are still very much two separate disciplines. (This also helps explain why different approaches to genre theory exist, as ESP and New Rhetoric are both situated in L2 and L1 composition, respectively.)

However, the benefits of having two disciplines is that specialists and scholars have emerged in L2 composition (coming from both English studies and applied
linguistics) that have advocated for the recognition and appreciation of multilingual writers in FYC composition (Matsuda, 2010; Canagarajah, 2006), discussed the various needs of multilingual writers (Reid, 1998), and argued for specific pedagogical methods designed for multilingual students (Silva, 1999; Hyland, 2003; Johns, 2011). Because of the work of scholars like these, and others, L2 composition strategies have been designed to provide the informed instruction in research, practice, and theory that this large and diverse population of students deserves. By recognizing that students with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds require different pedagogical approaches (Ferris, 2009), L2 composition has maintained a dual purpose of advocating for multilingual students while developing specific pedagogical methods to meet their diverse needs.

Genre-based pedagogy has been one of the tools that L2 scholarship has used to address the diverse needs of multilingual students. By focusing on the textual and social natures of writing through the frame of genre, ESP and its move analysis methodology have become a popular pedagogical method for teaching L2 writing. The next section will explain how ESP-based pedagogy has traditionally been used to teach L2 writing, as well as summarize criticisms of the approach.

5.2 Traditional ESP-based genre pedagogy

The move analysis developed by Swales (1990) has traditionally been used as a way to break texts up into rhetorical units that can help L2 students understand the ways that writers construct genres. By training students to identify the rhetorical moves of a text, or by explicitly showing students what the moves are, ESP-based genre analysis has been used in a variety of situations to teach students the rhetorical strategies employed by
authors of a variety of genres. While this approach has helped provide L2 writing and language instructors with a pedagogy that is designed specifically for L2 students, traditional ESP-based pedagogy has also been the target of several criticisms.

In a 2004 review of the ESP field, Diane Belcher reported several criticisms of ESP. Belcher summarized a commonality of these criticisms, stating "a common litany of complaints includes the observation that texts used in ESP pedagogy are too far removed from the real-life contexts that learners aim for" (Belcher, 2004, p. 165), meaning that ESP and move analysis focused far too greatly on the rhetorical moves of particular texts without ensuring that the examples being used are representative of how the genres function in authentic professional and academic contexts.

Belcher (2004) also recounted Pennycook's (1997) description of ESP as "vulgar pragmatism" (as cited in Belcher, 2004, p. 166), which represents one of the earlier concerns about the direction of ESP. Pennycook's 1997 article *Vulgar pragmatism, critical pragmatism, and EAP* was a warning to EAP scholars and instructors to avoid the assumption that focusing on pragmatic (or objective) ways of teaching somehow made EAP a "neutral" endeavor. By adopting a neutral stance to language learning, Pennycook argued that EAP allowed for instructors to take a "vulgar" stance: one that avoids critical engagement with the underlying ideology inherent in text and discourse.

Bhatia (2004) provided similar complaints about ESP. Regarding move analysis:

Conventional analysis of genres in terms of move structures appears to be somewhat inadequate when one considers the realities of the world of discourse (p. 72-73)
And also regarding the traditional ESP approach to genre:

In principle, the notion of pure genres is very attractive and extremely useful for a number of pedagogical applications; in practice, however, it is unlikely to capture the complex communicative realities of the present-day professional and academic world (p. 80).

In sum, a common complaint regarding ESP-based pedagogy is that it doesn't present students with genres in context, and that a move analysis of these genres is unable to account for the larger social context that genres reside in. By focusing on isolated examples of single genres, traditional ESP-based pedagogy teaches students how to locate rhetorical moves in examples of genres that won't necessarily prepare those students for the ways that those genres are used in "reality."

Recall the notion of communicative competence stated in section 5.1. These critiques of traditional ESP-based pedagogy argue that students are only being taught mechanical and structural knowledge of isolated genres; students are only acquiring genres. The pragmatic or rhetorical knowledge of genre is being missed when ESP does not use authentic examples of genres, situate these genres in the larger contexts, or have students explore the ways that genres are typically used in the real world.

Many of the criticisms of the ESP methodology orbit around the notions that not enough genres are analyzed, genres are not analyzed in context, or that only idealized versions of genres are examined (Belcher, 2004; Bhatia, 2004). This leads to teaching students genres, rather than teaching students the skill set to learn how to analyze and understand how larger social forces shape genres. Another problem is the lack of focus on genres that are outside the professional or academic world. Many professional and
academic genres are highly structured, whereas other forms of written communication, such as blog posts, emails, and class notes reflect the chaotic complexity of written discourse. Studying these genres may be desirable for English language learners that are not attempting to assimilate into a specific academic or professional discourse community.

To address all of the above criticisms of traditional ESP-based pedagogy, I turn to the current state of GBWI as an answer. While born from ESP-based pedagogy, the current state of GBWI represents the next step in ESP; a step that places emphasis on the larger context of authentic genre use in order to build communicative competence among L2 writing and language learning students.

5.3 Genre-based writing instruction

GBWI is, at its heart, an application of genre analysis into the L2 composition classroom. Essentially, genre-based writing instruction turns students into genre analysts by having them examine different texts in order to develop a larger awareness of the textual and social factors of a genre. While Swales (1990; 2004) and Bhatia (1993) presented their works on genre analysis with a pedagogical purpose, the work of scholars such as Ann M. Johns, Ann Wennerstrom, and Christine M. Tardy has done much to shape genre analysis into a more realized pedagogical approach that ameliorates many of the criticisms of traditional ESP-based pedagogy. This section will briefly summarize their relevant works while explaining how the goals and approaches of GBWI have worked to produce a genre pedagogy that works towards building communicative competence.
Ann M. Johns is perhaps the most prolific scholar of GBWI. In a 1999 article, Johns advocated for a "socioliterate" approach to teaching L2 students, one that “encourage[s] an understanding of the social construction of texts, and promotes text analysis and peer review in light of the social forces that surround…” (p. 291). In other words, the socioliterate approach to teaching texts shares the same goals of genre analysis: revealing how the structural and rhetorical choices of writing are based on larger social factors. Johns (1999) explained how she applied a socioliterate approach in her L2 composition classroom, and familiar terms emerge. She had students focus on "both text-external and text-internal features" while examining multiple examples of writing from a particular genre (p. 292). The ultimate goals of the socioliterate class were to draw from students' pre-existing genre knowledge, continue challenging students' perception of genres as a static form, continually prompt students to develop new writing strategies, to have students develop research abilities that allows them adapt to, and succeed in, multiple different writing contexts, and finally to "cultivate a metalanguage," or a specific set of terminologies, that allows students to discuss and analyze the elements of the texts that they study (p. 293-295).

The socioliterate approach explained above is the foundation of GBWI. Since introducing the socioliterate approach, Johns has continued to shape GBWI by drawing in more theoretical perspectives from ESP and New Rhetoric genre theory. In a 2008 article titled *Genre awareness for the novice student: An ongoing quest*, Johns presented a more succinct view of GBWI by focusing on the difference between genre awareness and genre acquisition and how the three big genre schools (ESP, New Rhetoric, and SFL) approach this issue. In short, genre awareness promotes the socioliterate views that teach
students the social nature of texts, whereas genre acquisition focuses on simply teaching students how to perform a certain genre. Johns (2008) concluded that each genre school had something to offer, but each school also had limitations. Thus, no suitable approach had yet to be determined.

In 2011, however, Johns published another article titled *The future of genre in L2 writing: Fundamental, but contested, instructional decisions*, wherein she detailed her continued struggle with trying to conceptualize a genre-based pedagogy that promoted the goals of socioliterate classroom. Johns again discussed the benefits and drawbacks to each of the genre schools, ESP, SFL, and New Rhetoric; however, this time she articulated a "compromise" that blends the best of each school into a genre-based pedagogy. Her ultimate conclusion was to argue for a mix of the ESP and New Rhetoric schools, indicating that a look at the textual and rhetorical elements of the genre (i.e. move analysis) is the place to start before bringing students into the socially mediated nature of the genre (i.e. New Rhetoric). This blending of ESP and New Rhetoric allows a L2 writing instructor to systematically focus on the structural and social nature of genres with the students, by having a class "begin with text structures and then...move rapidly to viewing genres as socially mediated entities" (p. 64).

Christine Tardy, another L2 composition scholar, published a 2009 volume titled *Building genre knowledge* wherein she argues for a genre-based writing curriculum that works towards building what she terms "genre knowledge," which is a merging of four other types of knowledge: rhetorical, formal, process, and subject-matter knowledge (Tardy, 2009, p. 22). Based on her experience using genre-based writing assignments and working with multilingual writers, Tardy provided a series of statements that help explain
how to construct a classroom that works towards building genre knowledge. First, she stresses the important of constructing a classroom with access to a large variety of genres that students are able to explore. Tardy explains "it is rarely possible to predict which genres each student will encounter in other environments; exposing students to a broad range of genres then, can help to build their genre repertoire" (p. 283). The purpose of doing this allows students to recognize the ways that rules change and vary across genres.

Second, Tardy argues that while having students conduct an ethnographic or multidimensional approach, such as the one advocated by Bhatia (2004), can help students develop a more complex understanding of genres, there are also times when students need a more simplified approach to analyzing genres (p. 285). Finally, Tardy argues that the concept of intertextuality and genre networks should be part of a genre-based curriculum. This helps students recognize the "rhetorical processes through which genres are created, distributed, and responded to" as well as involve students in the "community practices and social words" of genres (p. 286).

While Johns and Tardy both help create concrete connections between genre theory and GBWI, Ann Wennerstrom offers perhaps the most "nuts and bolts" guide to teaching with genre in her 2003 volume Genres of writing. Split into two sections, Wennerstrom's volume first explains the theoretical perspectives of discourse and genre analysis before providing a practical guide to teaching genre in a L2 writing classroom. Her focus on "everyday life" and "academic" genres provides an argument that different genres can be used for different goals. For example, in a writing classroom that is more concerned with developing overall English proficiency, Wennerstrom points out that "everyday genres," such as recipes and children's stories, contain familiar cross-cultural
elements that can help introduce students to genre analysis (Wennerstrom, 2003, p. 73).

On the other hand, "academic genres" include examples such as class syllabi and college applications. By studying genres with a specific academic focus, Wennerstrom argues that students can begin joining the academic discourse community through an analysis of genre (p. 124-5). Regardless of which type of genre an instructor chooses to analyze in her classroom, Wennerstrom provides a series of steps that explain how to incorporate genre assignments into the L2 composition classroom.

Wennerstrom's process of using genre is as follows. First, an initial discussion occurs about the genre, where students consider the genre in respect to its historical and functional aspects. Next, students are sent out into the world in order to collect examples of the genre for analysis. Wennerstrom claims students should then perform a "guided" genre analysis - where they are asked to focus on specific aspects of the genre, such as grammar, organization, vocabulary, etc. Once that analysis is completed, Wennerstrom encourages the use of large, computerized databases of discourse, where students can search for particular linguistic or grammatical features in a large corpus of text in order to "learn more about particular lexical or grammatical features of the genre." After these stages of analysis, students should design, draft, review, and revise a final project using the genre. Typically, this final project calls for students to recreate the genre they have been studying, and perhaps applying it to specific audiences or purposes (p. 74).

The advantages of Wennerstrom's approach are numerous. Perhaps most importantly, an instructor is able to use Wennerstrom's framework to tailor a genre-based course around the specific needs of the students in her course. By guiding a genre analysis around organization, grammar, or vocabulary, instructors can develop a modular
pedagogy that adapts classroom-to-classroom, semester-to-semester, or institution-to-institution. Furthermore, by turning students into genre analysts, Wennerstrom's approach helps build communicative competence, as students first examine elements of the genres and then attempt to produce the genres. This also helps keep the balance tension genre acquisition and genre awareness carefully balanced.

It is also important to note that even though the type of GBWI I discuss here has been developed "outside" of L1 composition, it is still highly compatible with best practices from L1 composition. Specifically, students should be encouraged to revise their work throughout the semester, with the aim of focusing on how writing is a process that is improved through revision. Also, GBWI is compatible with portfolio-based classes (where students turn in final writing portfolios at the end of the semester), since students will still be drafting essays and building upon previous research throughout the semester.

These three scholars and their approaches to GBWI provide much-needed answers to the critiques of ESP-based pedagogy detailed in section 5.2. Ann John's socioliterate approach, which bolsters the ESP school by incorporating the social focus of New Rhetoric into her pedagogy; Tardy's focus on the four types of knowledge that form the larger goal of "genre knowledge;" and Wennerstrom's guide to studying all types of genres help situate GBWI as a pedagogy that analyzes authentic genres from a range of sources while also considering the larger social context that the genres reside in. Rather than providing students with only the rhetorical moves of an idealized genre, GBWI takes further steps towards building communicative competence by articulating an approach that recognizes the complex ways that written genres represent authentic and contextualized language use.
5.4 Example of GBWI using Amazon.com product review

The preceding sections in chapter four have explained the history of L2 composition, ESP-based pedagogy, and the emergence of GBWI. To further illustrate how GBWI can be realized in a writing classroom, this section will use the example of Amazon.com product reviews, which were analyzed in chapter three, to explain some possible ways that a GBWI approach can apply a genre into a L2 composition classroom.

The following discussion imagines Amazon.com product reviews being incorporated into a university level first year L2 composition course. Following the framework explained by Wennerstrom (2003), this section will describe how the genre would be introduced to the classroom, what types of approaches could be taken to analyzing the genre, and how this genre would fit into a larger writing sequence.

It should be mentioned first, however, how Johns and Tardy influence this approach. While Wennerstrom provides specific guidelines for using each particular genre in the classroom, both Johns and Tardy provide broader guidelines for the direction of the course. Johns provides guidelines for the focus that should be placed on each genre, through her encouragement to "begin with text structures and then to move rapidly to viewing genres as socially mediated entities" (Johns, 2011, p. 64). Tardy's emphasis on introducing many different genres into the classroom, as well as examining the ways that genres interact, help provide guidelines for the overall planning of the writing course.

The table on the following page summarizes the scholars and their impact on my pedagogical decisions.
Table 5.1: Contributions of gbwi theorists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>Implications in classroom</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tardy (2009)</td>
<td>• Many genres should be used</td>
<td>• Determines which genres will be incorporated into the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Examine interaction between genres</td>
<td>• Encourages students and instructors to focus on the interaction between genres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johns (2008; 2011)</td>
<td>• Begin with textual, then move to social</td>
<td>• Helps guide which focuses to use in Wennerstrom's approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wennerstrom (2003)</td>
<td>• &quot;Nuts and bolts&quot; guide for how to introduce, analyze, and create projects from genres</td>
<td>• Provides a framework or sequence for each particular genre</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to provide a context for this hypothetical classroom, I will situate this application of GBWI in the context of a Washington State University (WSU) English 105 class. English 105 is an equal credit bearing first year composition course designed for L2 students that mirrors the goals and outcomes of English 101, the first year composition course designed for native English-speaking students. Although comprised largely of international students, there are also domestic L2 students that take English 105, resulting in a classroom that represents students from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The general goals of FYC at WSU are to increase familiarity and fluency with academic writing, build research skills, and prepare students for future writing assignments in classes beyond FYC. Thus, an English 105 course that uses GBWI should be mindful of these goals when incorporating genres in the writing sequence.

The Amazon.com product reviews would be introduced as the first genre in a series of genres that students would analyze throughout the semester. This helps students learn how to perform a genre analysis and also learn more about the choices that authors
make when writing. As the course progresses to more academic genres, the skills and insights gleaned from the initial genre analysis of Amazon.com product reviews will help support a recursive pedagogy that builds upon itself by returning to previous concepts.

For each genre that Wennerstrom (2003) uses as an example, she suggests different focuses. For example, her analysis of emails as a genre has students focus on "strategies for making requests," "polite phrases," and "modal auxiliaries and if-structures" (p. 147). These focuses can be abstracted to focusing on pragmatic language use, vocabulary, and grammar, respectively. Because Wennerstrom's approach is modular and allows for a writing instructor to shape a GBWI approach around the needs of the students and institutional goals, her approach to GBWI will be used as a framework to explain how to incorporate Amazon.com product reviews into an English 105 course.

Amazon.com product reviews are not an academic genre by any means, but still contain valuable examples of authentic English that can be used to illustrate how English is typically employed in an online, non-academic context. Therefore, using Amazon.com product reviews at the start of a semester can help introduce students to genre and genre analysis and help transition students into analyzing more academic genres. Furthermore, since research skills are one of the goals of FYC at WSU, and Amazon.com product reviews represent a form of research that potential consumers engage in, this genre can help make connections to academic research as well.

Among the results of the analysis of Amazon.com product reviews in chapter three, it was found that Amazon.com product reviews contained: large amounts of evaluative language; variation in pronoun use; and some instances of metacommentary. Therefore, three focuses that could be used for analyzing Amazon.com product reviews
would be to focus on: the pragmatic ways that authors in English provide evaluation in this context; the different rhetorical effects of using first and second person pronouns; and the rhetorical effects of using metacommentary to guide a reader through a piece of writing. Along with these three focuses, an instructor could also train students to perform a move analysis of product reviews. The following discussion will follow Wennerstrom's (2003) steps, outlined in section 5.3, for using genre in a classroom.

**Initial discussion:** An initial discussion of Amazon.com product reviews could focus on the purpose and use of the genre by asking students how they have typically used Amazon.com. Do students read the reviews? Do they make purchases based on the reviews? Why? Questions could be given to the students in order to help guide the discussion. It would be best if this discussion occurred in a computer classroom, so that students would be able to explore examples of the genre during the discussion. Typical questions to ask about this genre could be:

- Who do you think writes these reviews?
- Who do you think reads these reviews?
- What is the purpose of these reviews?
- What kind of information do you need to know to make sense of these reviews?
- Are there similarities among the reviews? Are there differences among the reviews?

Ideally, students would leave the discussion with thoughts and ideas about the nature and purpose of Amazon.com product reviews. However, these answers would be a starting place; something for students to chew on before the deeper analysis begins.

**Data collection:** The next step is to have students go out and collect data. For Amazon.com product reviews, this would require that students possess access to the
Internet. It would up to the instructor to determine if students printed out examples or saved them to a website. The students and the instructor would also need to define the corpus of reviews they intend to examine. While students could look at only "most helpful" reviews, such as the analysis in chapter three did, the class could also focus on specific products, only reviews with certain start scores, etc. Other limitations could be placed on lengths of reviews, as well as how many examples a student would need to locate. Finally, it should be determined whether or not students are working towards building a class-wide corpus of examples, or if students are collecting examples for their own private analyses. All of these questions would be answered depending upon the instructor's envisioning of the final project that students would produce.

**Analysis:** Once students have collected their examples and formed a corpus for analysis, the three suggested foci (evaluative language, first and second pronoun use, and metacommentary) can be analyzed both inside and outside of class. By initially focusing on the textual elements of the reviews, students are better prepared to then move towards the social elements of the genre (Johns, 2011). Students could distinguish between different levels of evaluation, such as positive, negative, or neutral, and construct lists of words or phrases that indicate evaluation from the author. Students could also hunt for reviews that only used first-person or second-person pronouns, or a mixture of both and then analyze the different rhetorical effects that pronoun use has on the writing. Finally, students could learn to identify metacommentary and analyze the purpose of metacommentary in a piece of writing.

All three of these areas of focus translate into the academic focus of English 105. By having students consider evaluative language, they are able to build strategies and
vocabulary for assignments that ask them to analyze or response to sources. Many students have been trained to avoid using first person in academic writing altogether. However, by analyzing the different rhetorical effects that "I" has in writing, students may become more comfortable with using "I" when they have well supported opinions; something that certainly has a place in academic writing (Graff & Birkenstein, 2010, p. 72). Looking at metacommentary can first teach students what metacommentary is, but then also the purpose metacommentary serves by examining the ways that authors guide readers through writing with various uses of metacommentary. This translates directly into academic essays and research papers that students will later be asked to write.

Wennerstrom (2003) advocates for a computerized corpus database search after the students have conducted focused analyses. Using computerized corpus databases focuses heavily on building grammatical competence in students, but the varying grammatical needs of student in English 105 typically make it more practical for instructors to provide individualized attention on students' grammatical needs. Instead, I would supplement this method with a focus on the organizational and rhetorical structure of the genre. Wennerstrom (2003) sometimes suggests that students analyze the organizational features of a genre. However, she does not appear to suggest teaching students to perform an explicit move analysis. Based on how messy and chaotic the typical move structure of Amazon.com product reviews are, I believe that shying away from identifying an overall organizational structure to the reviews would be best. That being said, it would be worthwhile to have a discussion with students about the organization of the genre and attempt to discover why this particular genre seems to lack organization. I believe that move analysis is an important skill that should be taught to L2
students. I also believe that teaching move analysis should be used with a genre that does not frustrate the process, which means that more structured genres, such as emails and letters, are more appropriate for such a lesson.

After students have spent time focusing on analyzing the genre of Amazon.com product reviews, the next step would be to construct a writing product that has students engage with the review. Because Amazon.com allows any user of the site to write a review of a product, it would be ideal to have students draft their own product reviews. Depending on what kinds of reviews were analyzed, different goals could be determined for the reviews students write. For example, students could attempt to draft reviews that garner "helpful" votes, or students could write reviews of a course textbook, or students could simply write reviews of products they purchased. The crucial element of this project would be to also have students reflect on the writing they produced and connect their analysis to their production.

In other words, students should draw on their analysis of a genre in order to explain the choices that they made when constructing their version of the genre. Ideally, students would be able to point to their analyses as evidence and explain how their version of the genre meets the overall purpose of the genre, contains typical linguistic, grammatical, and organizational features of the genre. A written reflection, included with a student produced version of the genre, would provide students with an assignment that has them writing for multiple purposes (e.g. for the instructor, for the genre) which develops writing skills that help meet the goals of the FYC program. Some sample questions that can be used to prompt this type of reflection are:
• Tell me about the choices you made when you were creating an example of the genre. Why did you make specific vocabulary or grammatical choices?
• Do you think your example will meet the purpose of the genre? Why?
• Does your example follow your analysis? Why or why not?

By starting with a genre analysis of Amazon.com product reviews, an English 105 course can ease students into genre analysis while still building familiarity with written English. Once students have become comfortable with analyzing Amazon.com product reviews, instructors could move to more structured and longer reviews, such as book or movie reviews, and have students analyze and compare those genres (Tardy, 2009). Book or movie reviews could be compared to Amazon.com product reviews in order to help students negotiate the differences between the genres of "reviews." Ideally, this would help students build an awareness of how context, purpose, and audience help shape the form and content of a genre. The ultimate goal would be to thoughtfully transition through genres, moving towards the academic. In order to prepare students for writing a research paper, an English 105 course would eventually need to bring in examples of research papers for students to analyze and review. Because research papers tend to be longer, this could be suitable for a group project. The ultimate decision would be with the instructor of each individual class.

This section described one possible way of employing the genre of Amazon.com product reviews into one specific academic context. The possible applications of genre into writing courses are as various as there are different institutional contexts, constraints, and student and instructor needs. By using a modular framework, such as the one used here and adapted from Wennnerstrom (2003), and possessing a familiarity with genre and
genre analysis, a L2 composition instructor possesses a powerful pedagogy that can help build communicative competence and academic literacy skills at the same time.

**Conclusion**

In Anis Bawarshi's 2003 volume *Genre & the invention of the writer*, he recounts a personal story between him and his father. Bawarshi explains that when he initially told his father about the content of his book, (i.e. genre), his father argued that genre "is nothing," implying that his son was "writing a book about nothing" (p. 7). Of course, Bawarshi uses this story to showcase the traditional conception of genre, and to help justify the need for a book such as his, one that helps expand the definition of genre beyond "artificial and arbitrary systems of classification" (p. 7). The study of genre is certainly more than the study of "nothing;" it is an attempt to provide a systematic and powerful tool that moves beyond a superficial analysis of textual structure.

It is hoped that this thesis, while merely a drop in the larger pool of works discussing genre, has further helped explain how genre is much more than "nothing." The work of scholars and theorists concerned with genre have helped to not only produce a systematic process for studying genre, but have also provided a practical application of genre that helps students improve writing and language skills. By summarizing, interacting with, and working off of these theories, this thesis has shown that genre theory has continued to evolve the conceptualization and definition of genre beyond a mere classificatory system.

One of the overall goals of this thesis was to highlight how the analysis of a "real world" genre, (i.e. Amazon.com product reviews) can be just as applicable in the L2
composition classroom as analyzing academic and professional genres. By explaining just one possible way of applying Amazon.com product reviews into a specific context, I believe that this thesis serves as evidence that "real world" genres are just as useful in a L2 writing classroom, and works towards building an overall communicative competence with English that a hyper-focus on professional or academic genres may miss.

Finally, the increasing digitization of genres will continue to challenge genre theory as it adapts to new and transitioning genres of the Internet. Projects such as this thesis help to test the boundaries of genre theory, working to further strengthen its scope and range of applicability.
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