

Journalistic Genres across Europe and Brazil: a Vanishing Category

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Abstract

Journalistic Genres, once a core discipline in journalism graduation courses, is being replaced in many curricula by the teaching of media-embedded reporting techniques. Instead of learning on genre and type reporting techniques, many graduation courses rely no more on the practice of traditional journalistic genres, preferring to include instead media practices in their curricula such as radio, television and web reporting. This paper maps the extension of the discipline's teaching in Portugal, Spain, Brazil, and Northern Europe's graduation courses – showing Journalistic Genres are surviving at different rates, and are a vanishing category in northern countries.

Keywords: Journalism; Genres; Curricula.

Géneros periodísticos en Europa y Brasil: una categoría en desaparición

Resumen

Los Géneros Periodísticos, disciplina central en los cursos de graduación de periodismo, están siendo reemplazados por la enseñanza de técnicas de información integradas con los medios. En lugar de aprender técnicas de reportaje de género y tipo, muchos cursos de graduación sólo

incluyen prácticas como la presentación de informes en la radio, la televisión y la web. En este trabajo se muestra el mapa de la enseñanza de la disciplina en Portugal, España, Brasil, y en cursos de graduación del norte de Europa, revelando qué Géneros Periodísticos sobreviven a un ritmo diferente, y están desapareciendo en países del norte.

Palabras clave: Journalism; Genres; Curricula.

INTRODUCTION

Journalistic Genres, once a core discipline in journalism graduation courses, is being replaced in many curricula by the teaching of media reporting skills. Instead of learning on genre and type reporting techniques, many Bologna graduation courses do not teach traditional journalistic genres in separate disciplines, and instead are turning to media practice skills such as radio, television and web reporting – in their curricula. This paper maps the extension of this disciplines representation in Portugal, Spain, Brazil, France, Netherlands, Sweden and Germany’s Journalism and Communication courses through the analysis of a sample of 257 universities, 109 of those offering graduation degrees in the field, to conclude there is a wide representation of media practices in most countries, and that journalistic genres are mostly ignored in northern countries, while remaining quite relevant in southern countries *curricula*.

1. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Bourdieu (2002) has distinguished field as a symbolic interactional space relatively homogeneous and autonomous. Fields emerge by a process of differentiation into increasing specialized spheres of action, cultivating their symbolic autonomy against similar structures – and by defining this symbolic space in a structure through struggle and symbolic exchanges. Fields are governed by tacit rules that grant them coherence and autonomy against external forces and other fields, producing a certain homogeneity and recognition of its members.

Some properties of the fields are “being structured spaces of positions whose properties depend on their position”, having “general laws of fields [...which are] invariant laws of functioning”, “specific interests”, and people with “knowledge and recognition of the immanent laws of the game”, as well as a “habitus” of its agents, “techniques, refer-

ences, beliefs” that “are a condition for the field and a product of its functioning” (Bourdieu, 2002:119). Studying mass media through Bourdieu’s field theory has revealed particularly fruitful, as the concept helps delineate the field, and also can account for the conceptualization of news media as a journalistic field, empowered by the professionalization of a journalistic class and a struggle for legitimation against external forces and pressures that helps create homogeneity and recognition inside the field.

Schudson (2003, 2009) has shown the intimate relationship between professionalization, objectivity, truth-seeking and the emergence of the journalistic field, and indeed as such professionalization relies on a professional ideology expressed in claims over a specific knowledge, namely the ability of reporting the news as facts, that is, a claim that builds on “objectivity that acts both as a solitary enhancing and distinction-creating norm and as a group claim to possess a unique kind of professional knowledge, articulated via work” (Schudson, 2009:99). Creating a “professional jurisdiction” has been a class accomplishment that creates boundaries between those inside and outside the field, and so “journalism’s authority, status, occupational norms, and claims to expertise can be analyzed as facets of a professional project, of an inter and intra-group struggle” (2009:94) played among professional norms, journalistic style, and “rhetorical conflict” over the journalistic jurisdiction.

Such is one of the fundamental roles of journalism teaching in the academy: shaping the journalistic field while transmitting specific and unique skills to the elements inside the field, regarding the higher education system as, among other roles, a means for professional reproduction and legitimation. Formal and informal education shapes their practitioners performances and “*habitus*” – something which Bourdieu defined as “a system of dispositions acquired by means of implicit or explicit learning, generating strategies that objectively conform with the objective interests of its authors, without having been expressly conceived to that end” (2002:125).

Journalism defines itself against other discourses for the inner values it purports carrying, but also by shape and form of its product – something we’d be ready to identify with a discursive genre. Though the problem goes back to Aristotle *Poetics*, it is still somehow difficult to define genre. Todorov called them “classes of texts” and “a historical codification of discursive properties” (1988:35). Newcomb suggests genres are

expressive forms that act as “systems of classification or grouping. Traditional classifications of expressive culture originally grouped forms of presentation” (2004:423) in which a small range of qualities, a “patterned work” enabled the classification within a genre.

McQuail (2009:ch14) claims that “the term ‘genre’ simply means a kind or type and it is often loosely applied to any distinctive category of cultural product”. The concept, however, has the following characteristics: a) its collective identity is recognized both by producers and consumers; b) this identity relates to purposes, form and meaning; c) has been established over time and owns familiar conventions; d) follows an expected narrative structure, draw on a predictable repertoire of images and basic themes. As such, McQuail envisages genre as a “practical device” for helping media “to produce consistently and efficiently and to relate to the expectations of its audience”, “ordering the relations between producers and consumers” (2009:ch14).

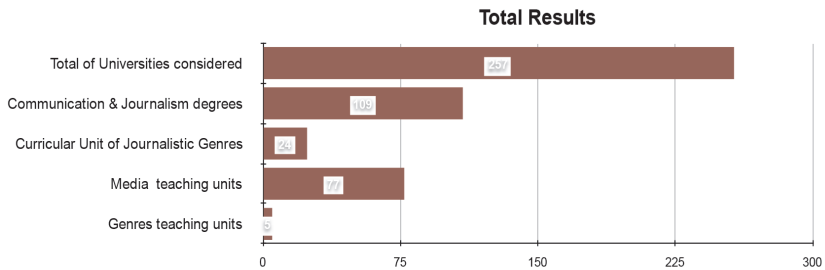
A key aspect of genre is the fact that regulating the relations between producers and consumers, offers goods that are predictable and recognizable for the audience. Stuart Hall (1973) analyzed the question in terms of coding and decoding. Subjects are close to a genre whenever these operations of encoding and decoding are unambiguous and subject to consensus among producers and consumers.

Such is the importance of journalistic genres for journalism: to manage the delicate expectations of the contract between the journalist and its audience, making its product recognizable for its form, which stands for a set of long loved values (truthfulness, public service, public interest, and democracy – inasmuch as the government by the people, for the people, depends on an informed population).

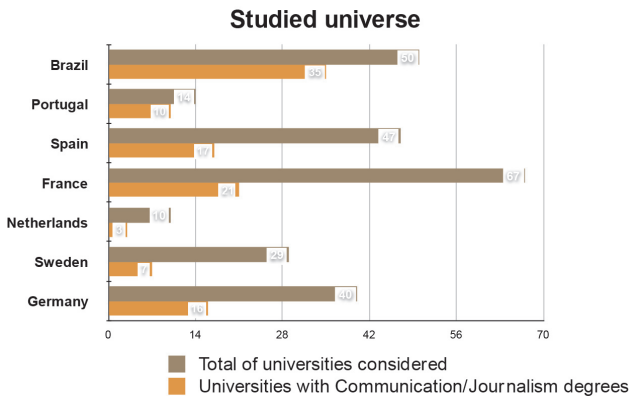
Zelizer (2004) distinguishes between the scholars who study journalism, and those who teach journalism’s practice to students. One can’t stress enough the importance of the practice of traditional journalistic genres, usually divided between the informative (hard news, interview, feature) and the opinion (editorial, opinion, chronicle), as a skill academia should convey to future journalists. And yet, it is undeniable the discipline seems to be lacking room in contemporary graduation curricula, while the practice of producing for the different media –radio, tv, web–remains ever as popular. Our empirical approach to the problem seems to demonstrate just that.

2. METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

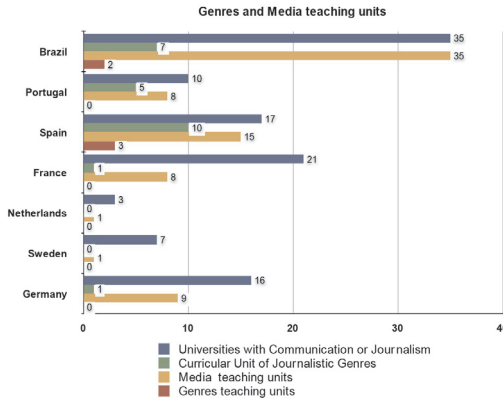
To map the presence of journalistic genres in curricula of graduation courses in Portugal, Spain, Brazil, France, Netherlands, Germany and Sweden, we’ve analyzed the courses offered by 257 public universities, of those, 109 offering communication or journalism degrees to their students. Evaluating their course plan, as divulged on the institutional page of each university, we have found that 77 of those courses have units devoted to the different media production; 24 have Journalistic Genres as an autonomous discipline; and 5 ensure several units devote to genres: for instance “Narrative Genres”, “Opinion Genres”, “Informative Genres”, “Analysis”, “Interpretative Genres”, etc.



Disaggregating data per country, one can see that France and Germany were the countries where the *ratio* or gap between inquired universities and those providing communication or journalism degrees is the largest:



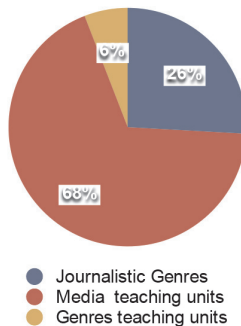
A more detailed decomposition of data will show that media teaching units are extremely popular, in some countries are found in all the courses evaluated, and that journalistic genres, or genres teaching units are a minority, and absent in several countries.



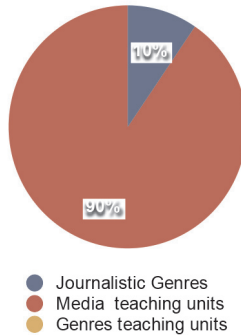
This latest chart also shows clearly that there is a significant difference between the prevalence of Journalistic Genres, in both modalities considered, among northern and southern countries; a difference that is slighter in the case of the prevalence of media teaching units, but also statistically significant: those disciplines are more popular in the south than in the north, expressing a more vocational or professional oriented training in those universities.

The following charts illustrate the *ratio* between media teaching units and genre teaching units among northern and southern countries:

Southern countries: Brazil, Portugal and Spain



Northern countries: France, Netherlands, Germany, Sweden



On the whole, southern countries have a ratio of 32% of genres to 68% of media practices; while in the north genres occupy only 10% of units devoted to journalistic abilities, in a universe where the total of media skills and practices is already less expressive, denoting a more theoretical and less vocational oriented training of students.

A finer analysis of the data gathered also shows that 28 of the 109 graduation courses studied don't have disciplines oriented for genres or media skills alike, and these comprise mostly northern countries; that all courses that provide journalistic genres teaching also have media teaching practices, offered after the general genre studies; and that 52 courses only have media teaching units, in general privileging Radio, Television, Press and Web or Online Journalism-although the combinations between the media practices offered vary greatly among countries and courses.

3. DISCUSSION

The 28 graduation courses that don't teach genres or media skills rely on the theoretical and conceptual formation of students, but most courses have internalized some level of professional preparation for their graduates: from the 109 evaluated, an overwhelming majority—81—lecture on genres, or media skills, or both. Programs offering genres and media practices seem more balanced than those concentrating only on media production.

The reports over journalism's death have been greatly exaggerated—but there is some consensus as to a crisis worsened by digital technologies and the difficulty of traditional media in monetizing on new busi-

ness models. And it isn't an exclusively financial crisis. Journalism's territory is being disrupted by several competitors: social networks, "citizen journalism", the pervasiveness of infotainment and the blurring of boundaries between both, clearly found in the triumph of the *fait divers* and self-promotion. Many Gen Y and Z (those born in the eighties and nineties) can no longer distinguish clearly journalism, from news, from entertainment, and those boundaries seem to be breaching both from the side of consumers and producers.

Journalistic genres defined expectations and a territory. Media practices can be managed purely on the side of content production, dissolving journalism, infotainment, and content share on social networks. If journalism matters (Zelizer, 2004), or is to matter, defining the field (Bourdieu) and struggling for professionalization (Schudson) are intimately connected to a clear view of the genres and their practice. So, why are these so much less popular than producing media contents?

4. CONCLUSION

It is possible this divorce between genres and media practices results of confusion between type and genre, a distinction coined by Todorov. Genres, coming from other genres with which they maintain a dynamic relation of agreement or transgression, are recognizable discourses that can be approached inductively or deductively. In this sense, genres can only be found inductively, one "verifies their existence from a certain period" (Todorov, 1972:162) creating a meta-discourse over these recognizable narrative structures. On the other hand, types are built deductively: their existence is postulated as a deductive and normative construction from literary theory.

Genres properties' makes them "horizons of expectation for readers" and "a writing model for authors" (Todorov, 1988:38). The existing system determines norm and transgression, and audiences read messages from the point of view of the genres system, which is deeply rooted in the dominant ideology of the epoch. Genres are historically rooted and materializing in determined practices. As so, curricula would be better off teaching genres (linguistic abstract inductive constructions recognizable by both producers and audiences), as well as practices (media embedded reporting), instead of replacing one for the other. It is possible it might not be doing so by confusing genres with types (abstract deduc-

tive constructions). But teaching genres, discursive epoch rooted constructions would help create what Barbie Zelizer has prescribed as the future of journalistic studies: “Keeping craft, education and research together in the curriculum” to “help us understand journalism more fully” (Zelizer, 1990:38). That will be taking journalism seriously.

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