

Digital Frontiers and Traditional Boundaries: The Transformation of Genre Studies from 1995 to 2023

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on conducting genre analysis on research articles from the core collection of Web of Science database, specifically from the years 1995 to 2023. The research utilizes advanced scientific tools, i.e., CiteSpace, to analyze the distribution of academic journals and the theme evolution. These figures methodically examine the internal relationship and progression of the research content in genre analysis. This paper utilizes bibliometrics and scientific knowledge mapping. Through a thorough examination of the numerical data, the following conclusions were derived: a) analysis of academic journals counts the distribution of the top 10 journals in the field of genre analysis; b) theme evolution analysis reflects the theme evolution of genre analysis, indicating that keywords change with time. According to the results, the researcher concludes that genre analysis has evolved in Web of Science Core Collection and elaborates the factors affecting the evolution of genre analysis. The present study holds relevance in offering valuable insights to scholars within the domain of Genre Analysis.

Contribution/Originality: The study contributes the current existing Genre Analysis literature. It possesses significance in providing valuable perspectives to scholars in the field of Genre Analysis.

1. Introduction

The term "genre" originates from the French language and is pronounced with a distinctively Parisian, smooth, rounded, and mysterious tone. Originally, it denoted the non-verbal realm of genre paintings, which depicted realistic scenes of daily life. The concept of genre is borrowed in this context. The concept of genre appears to have lost its distinctiveness, transitioning from art to discourse and from the material world to the realm of speech. The genre has been popular for more than 2,000 years and is widely used in literature, film, music, television, fashion, art, video games, and linguistics. Various viewpoints on using this style in these areas lead to different understandings of the genre notion.

The genre we are talking about is a type of discourse, a social categorization of symbols. Numerous research has been carried out on the concept of genre. The three most prominent genre classifications highlight both similarities and differences in genre concepts. Miller (1984) of the Rhetoric School claims that genre should not be determined by the substance or form of the discourse, but rather on the action that the discourse achieves. It refers to a conventional classification of discourse-based in massive amounts typification of rhetorical performance. Sydney School mainly adopts the theory of systemic functional linguistics to study genre. Systemic Functional Linguistics focuses on the social attributes of language, that is, the social functions of language. It considers genre as follows: Staging, aim-driven, sociocultural procedures (Christie, Martin, & Rothery, 1989) while Swales (1990) of the ESP (English for Specific Purpose) school points out that genre is a category of communicative occurrences when the participants have a common set of communicative goals. The professional members of the discourse community acknowledge these aims, which form the basis for the genre. This reasoning influences the overall organisation of the discourses. The varied viewpoints provide a thorough comprehension of genre, showcasing its complex character in the domains of discourse and social interaction. Ultimately, the genre being discussed serves as a unique kind of communication, functioning as a social classification of symbols.

The definitions emphasize the universal significance of context in genre study. The discourse community concept in ESP tradition, the social orientation argument for genre in the SFL tradition, and the idea that genre responds to shared rhetorical settings all highlight the social aspect of genre. Each genre is formed by society and closely connected to its social background. As human civilization continues to expand, genres based on reality and mirroring reality will undergo inevitable modifications (Xia, 2020).

Genre has undergone significant modifications and advancements, particularly in the past twenty years. Recent study indicates that digital genres are developing independently from traditional paper-based genres due to its multiplex mode, hypertextuality, and interaction. These aspects significantly alter the structure and purpose of digital texts beyond what is typically possible in print texts (Belcher, 2023). Jiang, Yu, and Lee (2022) contend that digital genres, incorporating diverse semiotic resources like languages, visuals, and video clips, exhibit notable distinctions from conventional print-based genres. They view digital genres as recognized and abstract strategies of using resources within digital media communication. The unique designs and functionalities of the modified and developing genres categorised as digital indicate that they warrant separate investigation (Belcher, 2023). Some people wonder that digital genres are not only analytically challenging but also threaten genre theory. The basic characteristics that genre researchers depend on, like *purpose and audience, text and context*, are currently being challenged (Luzón & Pérez-Llantada, 2019). Genre analysis appears to be outmoded due to the swift advancement of technology. Currently, digital platforms are used virtually daily.

With the emergence of new multimodalities and subsequently, potentially new forms of genre, there then is the need for a review of existing theories or concepts that researchers have relied on in their analysis. This will serve as the premise of this study, where there will be an examination of whether new developments of genre can be examined or understood through conventional genre theories of concepts. The objectives of this paper are to elicit whether or not genre analysis has evolved in Web of Science Core Collection and the factors affecting the evolution of genre analysis.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Genre Analysis

Genre analysis refers to the examination of language use within formal academic or professional contexts. This involves studying patterns of rhetorical actions, consistent social processes, and the overall purpose of communication (Bhatia, 1997). The primary objective is to analyse the communicating purposes of a discourse and the methods employed in language use (Qin, 2000). In other words, genre analysis is primarily used to investigate the objectives for communication and techniques of a specific discourse in technical and academic contexts (Basturkmen, 2012; Lim, 2010). It is mainly used in analyzing the texts of ESP (English for Specific Purpose) (Bhatia, 2010).

Many famous scholars put forward their own unique views on genre analysis. For example, Miller (1984) believes that genre is not only a text form, but also a social behavior. She is famous for her influential article *Genre as Social Action*. She emphasized the relationship between genre and social background, and pointed out that genre is influenced by the communication needs of specific communities. Swales (1990, 2004) is famous for his research on discourse community and genre analysis. He introduced the concept of "discourse community" and emphasized the role of genre in creating and maintaining these communities. Bazerman (1997) has made fundamental contributions to understanding genre as a social and cognitive phenomenon. He argues that genre is not a static form, but a flexible response to repeated situations. His research deeply discusses how genre evolves with time and adapts to different social backgrounds. Those experts provide their own unique views on the role of genre in different social, cultural and communication backgrounds.

2.2. Digital Genre Analysis

Blogs, social media posts, emails, YouTube, Facebook, and WeChat are becoming more significant in people's life due to innovations in science and technology. These new media and formats might be seen as belonging to the digital category. We need to stop and consider the concept of the term digital genre. Hafner and Pun (2020) offered a comprehensive definition that appears suitable for this recent discovery. They characterised digital genres as recurring, purposeful, communicative occurrences facilitated by digital resources together with the range of activities that encompass such occurrences. They also emphasized that digital mediation is the key differentiating element of *digital genres*, supporting Askehave and Nielsen's (2005) claimed that *web genres* were closely tied to their medium. They offered a thorough definition of digital genre that might adapt to the changing nature of this phenomenon.

2.3. Web of Science Core Collection

The Web of Science Core Collection is a scholarly document retrieval service provided by Clarivate Analytics. It is a database that includes top-tier academic journals from around the globe. It is primarily utilized for accessing and obtaining research documents, periodical articles, and proceeding papers in academic disciplines. The Web of Science Core Collection encompasses several fields such as natural science, social science, engineering technology, and medicine.

Web of Science Core Collection has a citation index tool that enables users to monitor the citations of publications and studies. The user can assess the impact and significance of the research by examining how many times an article has been referenced in other academic articles. The Web of Science Core Collection is a crucial tool for academic researchers, students, and scientific research institutions. It aids in literature retrieval, citation analysis, and tracking academic research trends. Many research institutions and colleges use the number of publications indexed by the Web of Science Core Collection as a criterion to assess the academic standing of scientists.

Aside from the Web of Science Core Collection, other databases including Scopus, ScienceDirect, ProQuest, and Wiley Online Library offer extensive academic resources targeted for various investigation scenarios. The researcher carefully assessed the research's primary goal, field requirements, and data availability before picking the Web of Science Core Collection database. The author decided based on three key reasons: Firstly, the data quality of the Web of Science Core Collection is high and reliable. The database is renowned for its high-quality academic journals and conference documents, spanning various fields and ideal for scientific study and academic assessment. Secondly, the publication contains abundant cited data that is suitable for the inquiry. The Web of Science Core Collection offers extensive citation data for scholars to study the citation connections between documents, enabling a thorough investigation of the academic relationships and influences among documents. Thirdly, the Web of Science Core Collection has a strong international reputation. Web of Science is highly regarded and commonly utilized in academic circles due to its global reputation as an academic information service platform, which may enhance its credibility among researchers conducting literature analysis.

3. Methodology

3.1. Approach

This study mostly utilizes quantitative descriptive research analysis as its research approach. Theme evolution analysis aids in comprehending the evolution of popular themes in a research field and uncovers the development and changes in research focus through quantitative theme analysis. Journal analysis entails examining data such as the quantity of scholarly articles published in various journals. These are all methods of quantitative analysis. The analysis approach include qualitative explanations and summaries, but this study primarily focuses on using quantitative descriptive methods to describe evolutionary trends, changes in themes, and periodical distribution.

3.2. Design

This study aims to examine research articles with the key term "genre analysis" in the core collection of the Web of Science database, with a specific focus on literature published between 1995 and 2023. This work conducts theme evolution analysis and journal analysis on the literature using modern scientific techniques like Citespace to systematically uncover the internal link and evolution of the research content. Citespace is utilized to convert themes and topics into measurable data, which is then subjected to quantitative analysis to uncover the internal structure and evolutionary trends within the research field. Statistical analysis of numerical data is used to create visual graphs in order to address research inquiries and reach conclusions.

3.3. Tool/instruments

Citespace is mostly utilized for doing theme extension analysis and publication analysis in the literature reviews. Citespace is a knowledge visualization tool that utilizes literature to assist scholars in exploring the correlation and evolution of literature. Bibliometrics and scientific knowledge mapping are utilized to facilitate an in-depth study of the literature. These methods are useful for quantitatively uncovering information about topics and the distribution of periodicals, and offer a way to quantitatively describe research. The research strives to thoroughly comprehend the literature relationship, evolution trend, theme change, and periodical distribution in the field of genre analysis by applying various tools and methodologies. It stresses the characteristics of quantitative descriptive research.

3.4. Sampling

The process of sampling involves establishing the time duration, which in this case spans approximately 30 years from 1995 to 2023. Next, a search is conducted based on the keyword "genre analysis" to retrieve and pick articles and reviews. Following that, documents in review format are chosen. The references are exported in a pure text format with full quotations and citations. The researcher has completed the sampling analysis process and is now fully prepared for the upcoming quantitative analysis of this study.

3.5. Data Filtering

Data filtering is essential in Citespace analysis literature research to guarantee research accuracy and credibility. This study's data filtering design is as follows:

- i. Keyword filtering: It involves selecting literature that specifically includes the keywords "genre analysis." This stage is to guarantee that the analyzed documents are closely related to the research topic.
- ii. Time filtering: The literature are published between 1995 and 2023. This ensures the study is both current and credible. The study has a sufficient duration to monitor the evolution of themes and trends in academic journal publications, as well as to stay updated on the latest research discoveries.
- iii. Literature type filtering: Some types of literature, such conference abstracts and book reviews, aren't taken into account to guarantee that the chosen literature is an academic paper with original research value.
- iv. Research content filtering: By reviewing the abstracts and outlines of articles, those not relevant to genre analysis are eliminated.
- v. Language filtering: Filter the literature based on the requirements and select solely for English literature.
- vi. By implementing rigorous data filtering, the research may guarantee that the investigated papers possess high quality, relevance, and academic worth, hence enhancing the credibility and effectiveness of the research.

3.6. Data analysis

This work utilizes bibliometrics and scientific knowledge mapping as research approaches (Chen, Chen, Liu, Hu, & Wang, 2015). The author employs literary analysis approaches to examine various components of literature within the topic of "genre analysis". Themes and academic journals are chosen for examination. They undergo

investigation through theme evolution analysis and academic journal distribution analysis, resulting in the creation of scientific knowledge maps.

The data is retrieved from the database in the Web of Science Core Collection (WoS). This study employs genre analysis as its theme, specifically focusing on English language research articles related to genre analysis. 584 search results were obtained, including scientific papers and reviews. Following filtration, 459 items were recognized from the original dataset, spanning from 1995 to 2023. This study's data filtering design involves filtering keywords, time, literature type, research content, and language. By implementing rigorous data filtering, the research may guarantee that the examined documents possess superior quality, relevance, and academic significance, hence enhancing the research's credibility and productivity. Citespace is used to statistically and scientifically examine the number of papers that discuss genre analysis and theme changes emphasizing the features of quantitative descriptive research (Chen, 2006).

4. Results

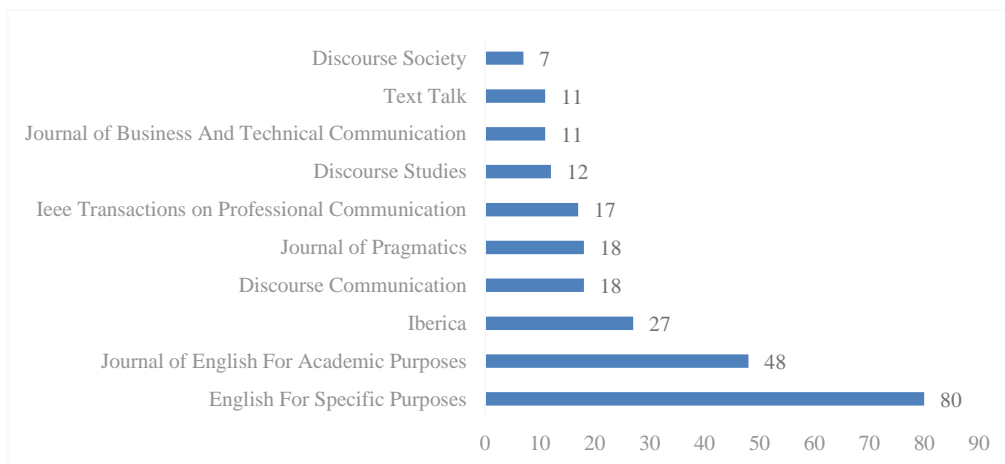
This section will go under two primary aspects: the distribution analysis of academic journals and the examination of theme evolution. The researcher will thoroughly examine the distribution of the top ten academic journals in the genre analysis field and discuss their contributions to the field. The researcher will next examine the evolution of genre analysis from 1995 to 2023. This investigation will uncover the evolution and significant patterns in this field during the last three decades. By thoroughly examining these two characteristics, the authors will have an integrative understanding of the present status and prospective direction of genre analysis.

4.1. Analysis of Academic Journals

In this section, the distribution status of the top 10 journals in the domain of genre analysis is counted by Excel as shown in Figure 1. In the research field of genre analysis journals with more than 10 published articles include: *English for Specific Purposes*, *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *IBERICA*, *Discourse Communication*, *Journal of Pragmatics*, *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, *Discourse Studies*, *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, *Text Talk*. The amount of published articles reached 80 in *English for Specific Purposes* which accounting for 17% of all published articles. It indicates that this journal pays more attention to the study of genre analysis. Moreover, it is a special English journal which contains rich exploration and application of genre analysis. In addition, *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* published a total of 48 articles ranking second in terms of publication quantity. It indicates that genre analysis of academic English articles is an important research focus of the journal. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* is a renowned journal which index by SSCI (Social Science Citation Index) in Q1 with citesscore 4.9 and impact factor 2.811 in 2023. In general, the total amount of published articles in the top 10 journals constitutes about 54.25%, which is more than half. It shows that the top 10 journals contain most literature of genre analysis, and their literature distribution is relatively concentrated. From the academic perspective, the top 10 journals perform a significant impact in the domain of linguistics. By observing the themes of published articles in top 10 journals, the author concludes that the research topics of high-yield journals mainly tend to follow the directions, including: English articles writing, exploration and application of discourse, business and technical exchanges, etc. It indicates that scholars have deepened and enriched genre analysis from different perspectives and directions.

Scholars need to explore various journals and expand the research horizon, thus providing a broader perspective for genre analysis.

Figure 1: The top 10 journals with the most publications

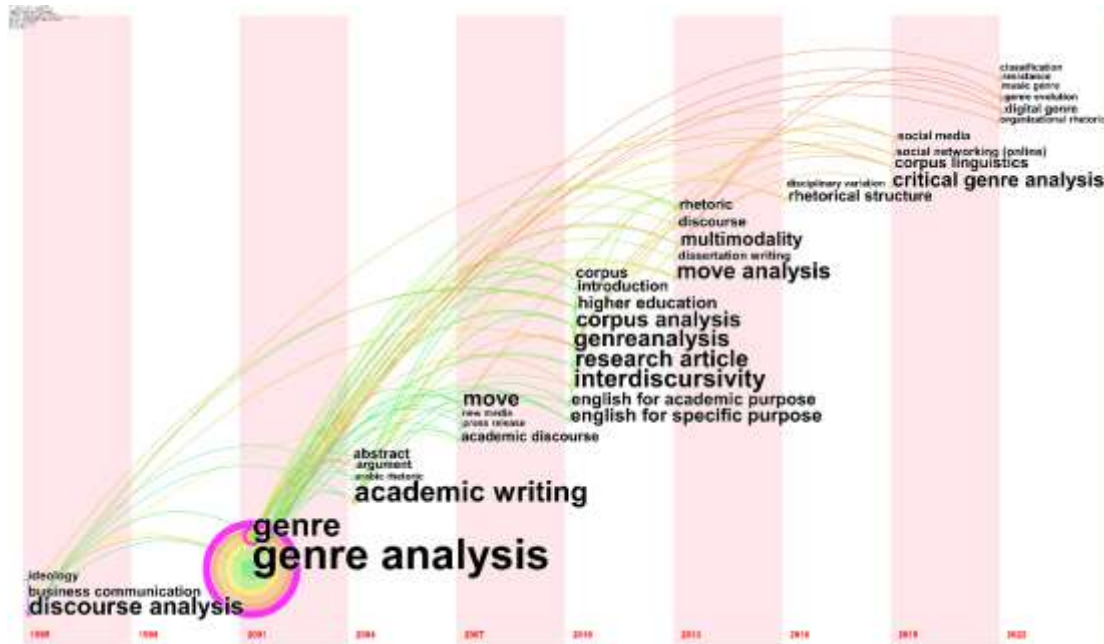


4.2. Themes Evolution Analysis

In this inquiry, the writer elects Timezone as the analysis node to generate the time series evolution diagram of keywords in the field of genre analysis on the web of science, that is, the evolution of keywords over time. The particular indicators and threshold value are set as follows: the time slice is 3, the threshold is selected as g-index=5, and the smaller nodes' keywords are concealed to obtain the current map. Finally 101 nodes and 246 connections are observed, with the density of 0.0487, as illustrated in [Figure 2](#).

The timeline demonstrates the variations of keywords with time, that is, the corresponding position of keywords is the time when keywords first appeared. We could get a vivid theme evolution of genre analysis. As shown in [Figure 2](#), we can infer that during the period from 1995 to 2004, research topics such as discourse analysis, business communication, ideology, genre analysis, genre, academic writing, arguments and Arabic rhetoric appeared in the field of genre analysis. The concepts of genre and genre analysis were first introduced into linguistics research by [Swales \(1990\)](#) which later became one of the hot topics in applied linguistics. This proves that in the early stage of research, scholars were mainly keen on discussing issues such as discourse analysis, business communication, thought, genre analysis, genre and academic writing in the field of genre analysis. During the period of 2005-2012, the research topics of genre analysis became more colorful, such as move, new media, press release, academic discourse, intertextuality, corpus analysis, ESP, corpus, research articles, academic English and higher education. During this period, scholars started to explore topics such as academic English, higher education and research articles, and conducted in-depth excavation of genre analysis of corpus. During the period of 2013-2023, the research topics of genre analysis appeared to be diversified. For example, mobile analysis, multimodality, thesis writing, rhetorical structure, disciplinary variation, critical genre analysis, social media, genre evolution, digital genre, organizational rhetoric, etc. The research in this period is also the main topic of concern in the field of genre analysis in current years, including: the application of genre analysis of articles under digital media, the evolution of different genres (like music genre, digital genre, etc) and the appearance of critical genre analysis.

Figure 2: Keyword-timezone



5. Discussion

The examination of the results indicates that genre analysis has undergone transformation and advancement in the Web of Science Core Collection over the last three decades, including digitalization, multi-modal, and interdisciplinary approaches. The variables impacting evolution are as follows:

The rapid progress of digital technology has brought an entirely novel perspective to the study of genres. The Internet, social media, and the development of digital communication platforms has given rise to new genres such as blogs, Weibo, YouTube, and online forums. The new genres exhibit unique language characteristics and give rise to innovative pragmatic occurrences in communication and social interaction. Analysts started examining the linguistic features of digital texts, social interaction, and information dispersion to understand the development of genres in the digital age. As technology becomes more widespread in modern culture, genre analysis is likely to be impacted by it, according to this perspective.

Recently, multimodality has become an important aspect in genre analysis, incorporating the examination of several modes like words, visuals, and sounds to enhance genre comprehension. Norris (2004) classifies communicative styles as either embodied or disembodied. The former means communication is the methods individuals use to convey their thoughts, emotions, or perceptions, including speech, gestures, head movement, facial expression, and gaze. The latter describes the mediums—print, layout, and music—through which other people can respond. These two modes can be combined to create a wide range of multi-modal genres (Xia, 2020). Traditional genre studies focus on the linguistic features and structure of texts, while multimodality expands this area of research to stress the interaction and integration of several modalities. Digital technology's broad use enables the incorporation of texts, images, and sounds into a single message, creating a more complex and varied form of interaction.

Social progress and cultural evolution have significantly influenced the evolution of genre. Political developments, social movements, and global events have influenced the genre. The revolutionary events led to the creation of new genre forms and influenced the linguistic style and expression of traditional genres.

Interdisciplinary study has recently been prominent in the field of genre. Integrating several disciplines including sociology, psychology, business, and computer science enhances and expands the study of genres (Williams, 1999). This interdisciplinary partnership enhances academics' ability to comprehend genre phenomena more thoroughly by offering a wider range of tools and viewpoints for explanation.

Can classic genre theories effectively analyse or comprehend the advancements in new genres that incorporate multimodality, hypertext, and interaction, which have become ubiquitous in contemporary media (Belcher, 2023)? Is the concept of genre still relevant? Genre definitions have a similarity in modifying the concept of genre by shifting the focus from form to function, as discussed by several scholars (Askehave & Nielsen, 2005; Heyd, 2009, 2015; Belcher, 2023). The widespread agreement on the fundamental aspects of genre, especially their focus on function, is beneficial for understanding digital genres according to Belcher (2023). Many experts and scholars believe that the concept of genre is still relevant. According to Miller (2018), genre is an important idea that serves as a bridge between theory and practice, creation and tradition, agency and construction, form and action, and the social and cognitive dimensions of rhetorical engagement (as cited in Belcher, 2023). Scholars should analyze genres from a dynamic and diachronic perspective to understand how socio-technical elements, such as digital platform improvements, influence genre development. The genre is now viewed as a dynamic and interconnected social activity rather than a separate and static entity (Heyd, 2008; Xia, 2020). The advancement of civilization, culture, and technology will further encourage the growth of genre. The evolution of genres is influenced by digital technology, multi-modality, social changes, and other factors. The core concept of genres, which involves understanding language mechanisms and communicative purposes within a specific social context remains relevant in explaining and comprehending these changes (Swales, 2004). The concept of genre should be adaptable to accommodate new genre forms and non-text types as they emerge over time. According to Reid and Anson (2019), they argue that a more intricate genre model is necessary due to the emergence of a willingness multidirectionality of impact. They suggest that single actions of producing should be viewed as performing in *multiple genre ecosystems* and accomplishing several roles simultaneously (as cited in Belcher, 2023). The concept of openness can incorporate diversity, including changes in digital technology, multimodal expression and social changes. The flexibility and openness of genre concept enable it to cope with the changing context and provide a framework for researchers to explore and adapt.

6. Limitation

Researchers employ bibliometrics to comprehensively assess the current status, latest developments, and predominant research themes in genre analysis over the last thirty years. This is accomplished through quantitative examination of the features of literature and referenced data. However, the results of bibliometrics are affected by the subjectivity of the author's selection of key terms and documents. Omitting certain crucial papers from the analysis can result in deficiencies in the thorough comprehension of genre analysis. Selecting particular keywords or journals can induce

bias, leading to study results that are not sufficiently objective. Furthermore, bibliometric analysis relies on data from published literature, which is subject to a time delay. The literature may not adequately capture emerging research paths and hot spots, resulting in a limited awareness of the newest trends in field development to certain degree. Bibliometrics is a valuable tool, but its limits must be acknowledged when combined with qualitative approaches and subject expertise to gain a more comprehensive understanding of genre analysis research.

To overcome selection bias in bibliometrics, authors can seek advice and recommendations from specialists when choosing keywords and documents. Expert agreement can help minimize the bias of subjective choice, leading to more objective and complete research outcomes. To reduce the time delay in bibliometrics, real-time databases and search engines can be utilized to get the most up-to-date literary information promptly. Certain academic databases include a real-time updating feature that allows academics to monitor recently released documents to shorten the time it takes to identify emerging research trends.

Additionally, due to the author's restricted energy, only articles written in English are included in the research, while publications in other languages are excluded. This will also restrict the thoroughness of the conclusion to some degree. This work aims to have theoretical implications regarding subsequent genre analysis research.

7. Conclusion

The researcher conducts an extensive examination of genre analysis literature in Web of Science databases during the last 30 years (1995-2023) using Citespace and other technologies. The author creates a figure for analyzing the evolution of themes and another figure for analyzing academic publications. The research reaches the following conclusions:

Through themes evolution analysis, it was found that a range of research themes emerged in the field of genre analysis between 1995 and 2004, including discourse analysis, business communication, ideology, genre analysis, genres, academic writing, arguments, and Arabic rhetoric. [Swales \(1990\)](#) introduced the notions of genre and genre analysis to linguistic studies, which later gained popularity in the field of applied linguistics. During the preliminary research phase, scholars concentrated on specific issues such as discourse analysis, business communication, ideology, genre analysis, genre, and academic writing. From 2005 to 2012, new study topics were incorporated into genre analysis studies, including steps, new media, press release, academic discourse, inter-discourse, corpus analyses, English for academic purpose, English for specific purpose, corpora, research articles, higher education, and so on. Scholars have begun to delve into topics such as specialized English, higher education, research articles, and have intensified their deep dive into corpus genre analysis. From 2013 to 2023, various new study themes have surfaced in the genre analysis research field, including mobile analytics, multimodality, essay writing, rhetorical structures, disciplinary variation, critical genre analysis, social media, genre evolution, digital genres, and organizational rhetoric. Recently, the discipline of genre analysis has focused on researching topics like applying essay genre analysis in digital media and the evolution of multiple genres.

Analysis of academic journals employed Excel to quantify the top 10 journals in the domain of genre analysis, specifically emphasizing English for Specific Purposes. 80 papers have been published in the journal, representing 17% of the total number of publications. This indicates that this journal places a strong focus on genre analysis. The Journal of English for Academic Purposes has a significant collection of 48 publications, establishing it as a leading research venue for studying academic English genres. The majority of literature on genre analysis is concentrated in the top 10 journals, suggesting a more targeted dissemination. The top 10 journals are considered notable publications in the field of linguistics. Observing the titles of these highly productive journals, they focus on several research directions, including English article writing, discourse exploration and application, text talk-related research, business and technical communication. Various researchers have enhanced the study of genre analysis from different perspectives and approaches. Future scholars could begin by examining several publications to broaden their research scope in genre analysis.

To sum up, genre analysis in the Web of Science Core Collection has experienced advancements in digital technology, multi-mode development, globalization, societal shifts, and multidisciplinary collaboration over the past thirty years. The modifications have led to innovative research paths and challenges for scholars specializing in discourse analysis. The genre notion's flexibility and openness allow it to address the changes in society, culture, and technology. It has become a fundamental concept in explaining how genres evolve due to digital technology, multimodal expression, and social change. Researchers benefit from the flexibility and openness of the framework, allowing them to examine new genre forms and non-text sections as they evolve.

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