

## ASPECTS OF APPLYING PROTOTYPOLOGY TO TEXT TYPES

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### Abstract

The notion of *text type* emerged as far back as Aristotelian times but it is still surrounded by considerable conceptual confusion. Due to the existence of multiple – and conflicting – viewpoints on the notion, the related term of *text type* is also characterized by multiple interpretations. Seeking to propose a means of overcoming the ambiguity surrounding *text type*, the present paper argues a case for the overt application of prototype theory to the notion and term. In accordance with basic postulates of prototypology, the suggestions put forward here are supported by results from a study involving actual users of the notion of *text type*. The study includes 28 linguists working in the field of text linguistics and discourse analysis. The general method adopted is cognitive as it coheres with (and even can be argued to derive historically from) prototypology.

### Keywords

text type, genre, prototype, rhetoric function

### 1 Introduction

The notion of *text type* has been around since Aristotelian times. Currently, it has been employed in a variety of approaches ranging from applied linguistics to translation studies. However, regardless of the length of time and the scope of disciplines employing the notion, *text type* still poses “a severe challenge to LINGUISTIC TYPOLOGY, i.e. systemization and classification of language samples” (de Beaugrande & Dressler 1981: 182). There still exists a lack of sufficient consensus on a theoretically-sound and analysis-friendly definition of *text type*.

Some scholars approach *text type* as text-structure-oriented and dependent on linguistic properties. Aumüller, for instance, defines it as “an abstract category designed to characterize the main structure of a particular text or one of its parts according to its dominant properties” (2014: 1). Other scholars view *text types* from a social-function-based perspective and argue they are “socially effective, efficient, and appropriate molds into which the linguistic material available in the system of a language is recast” (Neubert, as cited in Sager 1997: 31). Those two definitions represent a tiny sample from the pool of diverse existing viewpoints on *text type*. It is precisely the multiplicity and diversity of viewpoints and

interpretations that the present paper addresses. The paper seeks to propose a means of overcoming the conceptual confusion surrounding the notion, and argues a case for the overt application of prototype theory as a means of dealing with that confusion.

Admittedly, the connection between *text types* and prototypes has already been implied in a range of research (e.g. de Beaugrande & Dressler 1981, Virtanen 1992, Toledo 2005). It is sometimes even explicitly formulated (e.g. Hogan 2003, 2011, Herman 2009, Hyvärinen 2012). Nevertheless, a literature review will reveal that all claims of the interconnection between prototypology and *text types* are put forward in discord with one of the basic premises of prototype theory – the premise requiring hypotheses be verified through data obtained from actual users (Rosch 1973, 1975, Ungerer & Schmid 1996, Taylor 2003, Evans & Green 2006, Tinceva 2015). In none of the available theories is there real-user confirmation for the scholars' assumptions and statements. And, as Hogan argues, "our theorizations can diverge quite significantly from our tacit conceptual formations" (2011: 191). The present paper addresses that scientific niche. It aims to, first, seek confirmation of the prototypical operation of *text types*, and, second, try and draw conclusions on the basis of the actual data obtained and not only on the basis of theoretical assumptions.

Thus, the inquiry presented here aims to provide quantitative, study-based verification of the hypothesized operation of prototypology in *text type* use. The major research question is the one of whether linguists indeed see *text types* as functioning around prototypes, or if the prototype-centered perspective on *text types* is only a theoretical abstraction. The general method applied in the study reported is a quantitative one as it coheres fully with the basic postulates of Rosch's (1973, 1975) experimental prototype theory.

## **2 Theoretical foundations of the study**

### **2.1 The notion of *text types***

The complexity of differentiating among the multiple interpretations of *text type* has been repeatedly noted in the literature (e.g. Lee 2001, Virtanen 1992, Trosborg 1997, de Beaugrande 2004). Attempts at systematizing existing interpretations of the notion reveal that those interpretations tend to focus on offering taxonomies of *text types* (cf. also Trosborg 1997). Therefore, tracing basic parameters on which those taxonomies rest could provide us with a better understanding of not simply what *text types* are but what *text types* are perceived to be.

### *Text types and functions*

If one needs to select a single, top-most parameter along which *text types* tend to be classified, ‘function’ looms as the most likely candidate for such a parameter. Werlich defines *text type* as expressing the dominant function of a text (1976: 19). Biber (1989) directly refers to *text types* as underlying communicative functions. Reiss (1976) – who introduces *text types* into translation studies – sees them as dependent exclusively on text purpose (the so-called ‘skopos’ theory, from the Greek ‘purpose’; for a survey, cf., e.g. Snell-Hornby 2006). To Hatim and Mason, *text type* is “a conceptual framework which enables us to classify texts in terms of communicative intentions serving an overall rhetorical purpose” (1990: 140). However, two (interrelated) issues can be traced with respect to the totality of such function-based approaches.

The first issue derives from the absence of agreement on how to interpret the notion of text-type function itself. As evident from the approaches cited above, opinions may vary from ‘rhetoric function’, through ‘communicative function’ and ‘discourse function’ to ‘communicative purpose’. To make matters even more complicated, there exist voices such as Virtanen’s, who postulates *text type* as a formal linguistic category in opposition to discourse type as the actual function-based notion (1992: 302).

The second, and related, issue is that the classifications available in the literature tend to display far from sufficient consensus on how to classify the underlying *text type* functions. Admittedly, the Aristotelian *narration*, *description*, *exposition* and *argumentation* are still frequently employed, especially in teaching practices (cf., e.g. Paltridge 2001, 2013). However, to Werlich (1976) and to Hatim and Mason (1990), the functions are five, as those authors add ‘*instruction*’ to Aristotle’s list. De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981), too, suggest other than the four Aristotelian *text types* be delineated; the list they put forward includes *narrative*, *argumentative*, *descriptive*, *scientific*, *didactic*, *poetic* and *literary*. In contrast, according to Reiss (1976), the list should be shortened; she defines three main functions only: *informative* (in which arguments, intentions, opinions, feelings, etc. are communicated and the *text type* focuses on the text’s topic); *expressive* (in which the artistic expression is of special significance thus focusing the *text type* on the text producer); and *operative* (in which the subsequent actions and reactions of the text receiver(s) are on focus).

The present investigation subscribes to the simple conviction that the length of the list could not be an issue; the actual issue is the combination of parameters (and, as will be argued below, not just a single parameter) along which a *text type* is conceptualized. Thus, the present investigation supports the

assumption that *text type* associates with rhetorical purpose also rather than with communicative intent only. As Hatim and Mason (1990: 145) forcibly argue, there is substantial difference between the two, and text production exists through various combinations between communicative intent and rhetorical purpose. A text producer's intent, they maintain (*ibid.*), may be to persuade but, in order to achieve persuasion, he or she may choose to narrate, or describe, or inform. Moreover, the overtly formulated text producer's intent may be considerably different from his/her actual intent. Furthermore, a text may become incorporated into a larger one, which may lead to modification(s) or even a shift in its overall purpose. Such a line of reasoning is also supported in Trosborg's (1997) research. However, it should be highlighted that Trosborg sees *text type* as having to do with rhetorical purpose exclusively.

The present investigation would rather take up Hatim and Mason's (1990) idea and carry it further to suggest *text types* as a meeting point between communicative functions and rhetoric ones. That such a meeting point exists would be evident whenever one takes the classifications proposed in the literature as a corpus in its own right. In other words, if one should choose to analyze the internal consistency within each proposed classification, one would often find that some of the 'labels' proposed refer to communicative functions, while others refer to rhetoric ones. Sometimes discursive domains would also enter the classification. De Beaugrande and Dressler's (1981) approach could be seen as a case in point as their *narrative*, *argumentative* and *descriptive* types derive from the Aristotelian tradition, while *scientific*, *poetic* and *literary* relate to different discursive domains of operation. Truly, the function-based premise is there in de Beaugrande and Dressler's classification, too, but to what realm each of the functions actually belongs is not entirely unambiguous.

Thus, if one chooses to tackle the taxonomies proposed in the literature as a corpus, a generalization of the existing *text type* function-based labels (and not domain-of-operation-based labels) would reveal that:

- (a) labels such as *narrative*, *argumentative* and *descriptive* express **what** the author does (i.e. what he or she narrates, provides arguments, describes, etc.),
- (b) labels such as *persuasive* and *informative* reveal **why** the author narrates, provides arguments, describes, etc. (i.e. what he or she intends to persuade or inform someone).

An alternative, yet not dissimilar, interpretation could also suggest that communicative-intent related labels (e.g. *persuasive*, *informative*) specify the

*goal* of communication, while rhetoric-purpose related labels (e.g. *narrative*, *descriptive*) specify the *means* to achieving that goal.

Crucially, the very fact that the classifications in existence frequently have the two types of labels (i.e. communicative-intent-oriented and rhetoric-purpose-oriented labels) mixed into a single taxonomy should be viewed as proof that the two types are also often blended into a single conceptual whole (cf., e.g. Fauconnier 1997, 2014, Fauconnier & Turner 2003). Thus, insisting that *text types* be classified in accordance with only one parameter – and not according with at least two parameters in parallel – would seem a rather prescriptive effort against actually existing uses of the notion of *text type*. Hence the present investigation, in its own effort to establish the actual use of the notion of *text type*, will try and avoid such strict and prescriptive requirements. Furthermore, one of the present objectives is to verify the operation of combinations of parameters versus the operation of a single dominant parameter.

### ***Text type and genre***

Another important aspect to note with respect to the notion of *text type* is its interconnection with another frequently debated notion – the one of *genre*. *Genres*, viewed from a *text type* analyst’s perspective, can be generalized to be something *text types* cut across (Trosborg 1997). As Biber argues, *text types* and *genres* are “clearly to be distinguished, as linguistically distinct texts within a genre may represent different text types, while linguistically similar texts from different genres may represent a single text type” (1989: 6). In other words, Biber can be argued to see *text type* as more easily associating with form, and *genre* with function. Virtanen (1992), too, proposes that the notion of *genre* has to do with the communicative function of whole texts, while *text type* should be used to designate linguistic properties of a text.

Admittedly, the opposite view is also supported. An apt example would be the approach proposed by Freedman and Medway (1994: 2):

While recognizing that genres can be characterized by regularities in textual form and substance, current thinking looks at these regularities as surface traces of a different kind of underlying regularity. Genres have come to be seen as typical ways of engaging rhetorically with recurring situations. The similarities in textual form and substance are seen as deriving from the similarity in the social action undertaken.

In other words, to Freedman and Medway, *genres* used to be seen as related to form exclusively but then progressed on to be associated with rhetoric function.

In a similar vein, Miller maintains that “a theoretically sound definition of genre must be centered not on the substance or the form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish” (1984: 151), i.e. *genre* should have to do exclusively with interpersonal functions. Such views are not easy to distinguish from the above-mentioned deliberations on what *text type* is (and not simply on what *genre* is).

However, the present investigation, as already stated, would rather avoid falling into the neat lines of either interpretation. It would rather not aspire to classifying *text type* and/or *genre* along a single axis of differences (e.g. form-function). Instead, by arguing a case for the application of prototypology, it would try and establish a set of parameters, the specific and prototypical combination(s) of which could outline each notion.

To conclude, the relationship between *genres* and *text types* is far from being straightforward. The present investigation focuses on disambiguating the term *text type*, which could, hopefully, lead to future clarification of its complex interconnection with the term of *genre*. Critically, the study presented here approaches *text type* as definable along more than one parameter. It follows in the footsteps of Trosborg (1997), who proposes genres be classified ‘multicriterially’ (her suggestion requires Halliday’s *field*, *tenor* and *mode* be used to account for, correspondingly, linguistic content, communicative functions, and medium). It also employs prototypology as its basis. That could allow for analytical freedom from clear-cut decisions and could see *text type* and *genre* as overlapping categories.

### ***Text types and cognitive factors***

Employing prototypology as a theoretical basis for the present investigation would also emphasize the need to discuss here one further aspect of the notion *text type* – its relation to cognitive factors. True to fact, a number of studies have claimed or have been claimed to associate with principles relating to cognition. Indeed, the potential of focusing on an individual aspect selected out of the totality of aspects in a communicative occurrence can be argued to associate with cognition-based principles.

An example of a *text type*-related approach which rests on the principle of focusing would be Reiss’s (1976). As already mentioned above, she postulates three main *text types* in dependence on the focus of the text – *informative* (focusing on text topic), *expressive* (focusing on form/expression), and *operative* (focusing on text receiver’s re-actions). However, as much as this viewpoint offers a potentially innovative break-away from the Aristotelian tradition, it also seems to limit the investigator’s choice only to three possible objects of interest: content, linguistic form and target audience. In other words, Reiss’s

system of choices seems to exclude at least one alternative which might prove crucial to understanding *text type* – the author’s view of his/her self and his/her objectives. Simply put, taking the author’s perspective as an objectively-existing stepping stone might prove misleading. As Trosborg (1997) and Hatim and Mason argue (1990), the text producer’s intent may be different from the one overtly formulated. And, as other existing taxonomies cited below reveal, other parameters of a communicative situation may also prove likely candidates for a *text type* to focus on.

As far as Trosborg’s own treatment of how *text type* may depend on choice of focus, she argues that there are four prominent components in every communicative exchange: text producer, text receiver, the object being referred to and the linguistic structures used (1997: 13). If the main focus is on the text producer, Trosborg maintains, the function will be *expressive*. If the focus is on the text receiver, the text will be *persuasive*. If the focus falls on the linguistic structures employed, the text type will be *literary*. And if the text highlights objects from reality, the function will be *referential*. Clearly, Trosborg’s classification avoids the pitfall of Reiss’s; all the four elements of content, form, text producer and text receiver are presented in the system of choices.

An earlier cognition-oriented classification which merits at least a mention is the one put forward by Werlich (1976) and later adopted by Hatim and Mason (1990). According to it, there exist five *text types* (i.e. *description*, *narration*, *exposition*, *argumentation* and *instruction*). The rationale behind this classification is that a text producer can perform several different cognitive operations on text elements: for example, *description* is a *text type* differentiating among and interconnecting elements in *space*. As an alternative, *narration* presents interconnections of elements in *time*.

Another cognition-relating classification would be the one proposed by Kinneavy (1980), who classifies *text types* in accordance with the distinction between ‘static’ and ‘dynamic’ modes. Kinneavy supports the existence of four *text types* – *narration*, *classification*, *description* and *evaluation*. He further sub-classifies the two ‘static’ *text types* into one focusing on individual existences (i.e. *describing*) and one focusing on several things grouped together (i.e. *classifying*). The two ‘dynamic’ *text types*, Kinneavy argues, are *narration* and *evaluation*. This specific interpretation is supported by, for example, Trosborg (ibid.) for resting on the existing major ways of conceptualizing the world along the criterion of dynamicity.

### ***Text types and hybridization***

Almost all the classifications cited so far maintain that no text should be expected to display features of one *text type* only but, instead, should be expected to be multifunctional (e.g. Werlich 1976, Virtanen 1992, Hatim & Mason 1990, Trosborg 1997). In other words, pure narration, pure description, pure exposition and pure argumentation are extremely rare as each text may employ several *text types*. Trosborg, for instance, supports the view that one of the set of *text types* being employed will, normally, be identifiable as dominant. Hatim and Mason, too, maintain *text types* are highly susceptible to ‘hybridization’ and what should classify a text as belonging to one of the types is its dominant function (1990: 146). De Beaugrande and Dressler similarly argue that the “demands or expectations associated with a text type can be modified or even overridden by the requirements of the context of occurrence” (1981: 182).

All such theories, therefore, could be argued to suggest the possibility for prototype effects to be operational in the domain of *text types*. None of those theories, however, has provided data from actual users of the term as support. As already declared, this is the main objective of the study presented below.

### **2.2 The notion of prototypes**

Prototypology emerged from the need to provide an up-to-date account for human categorization and its basic principles. Historically speaking, category formation and the boundaries between categories used to be interpreted for centuries from the viewpoint of either dichotomy or classical typology (Ungerer & Schmid 1996, Taylor 2003). In those two views, every category member either fits within clear-cut category boundaries or it does not. However, if that principle was really operative, the non-flying penguin, to provide a simple illustration, should never classify as a bird.

A second issue with both dichotomy and classical typology is that, according to their basic postulates, no category should overlap and share features with other categories. With respect to *text types* in particular, that would translate as, for instance, a narrative and an argumentative text never having anything in common (i.e. a public speech should/could never ‘tell a story’ or make a historic recount).

Furthermore, both dichotomy and classical typology see all classification processes as leading to instant results and displaying no hesitation pauses in users’ decision making. For instance, if one sees a Pekinese dog for the very first time, one is expected to recognize the dog immediately as being ‘the same thing’ as a German shepherd. In a similar vein, dichotomy and classical typology tell

us the Pekinese and the German shepherd should be viewed as equally good, or equally representative, examples of ‘dog’.

Prototype theory (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, Taylor 2003, Evans & Green 2006) – which emerged in the works of Eleanor Rosch (1973, 1975) – rejects all the above assumptions. Research on prototypes has consistently showed that:

1. there are no clear-cut boundaries between categories;
2. there are fuzzy boundaries among categories due to overlaps;
3. some representatives of a category are ‘better’ examples of the core category prototype; and
4. there are perceptual specificities in each person’s classifying an example as belonging to one or more category.

Crucially, to provide support for the above precepts, Rosch bases all her theoretical conclusions on statistical data from experiments with actual language users. In other words, she first obtains experimental statistics-based data and only then uses that to prove the decisive role of people’s perception in determining category boundaries and internal category structure. Furthermore, her studies reveal that it is cognitive modelling, bodily experiences and socio-cultural factors functioning together that actually control human categorization. Hence prototype theory relies heavily on the presence of verifiable agreement among the members of a culture on how categories exist and how they are employed.

The present investigation follows this basic principle and aims to supply data on actual conceptualizations and uses of the notion of *text type*.

### **3 The study**

#### ***Participants and procedure***

The study reported here by necessity operates under the assumption that any investigation on how the notion of *text type* is actually used needs to confine itself to linguists’ responses exclusively. Although knowledge of *text types* is sometimes defined as ‘obligatory textual competence’ every participant in a communicative exchange should possess (as in, e.g., Van Dijk 1972), reality strongly suggests few people unrelated to linguistic academic or teaching practices use the term. Support for such a generalization can be found in the works of, for instance, Trosborg (1997) and Virtanen (1992). They strongly uphold the view that *text types* are important not only to specialists and researchers in rhetoric, communication, ESP and LSP. On the contrary, they argue, knowledge of *text types* even extends to ‘practitioners’ who compose or translate (ibid.). In other

words, extending that far is rather surprising, while the actual expectations of *text type* use stop at the limit of ESP and LSP teaching.

Therefore, the present study includes responses from 28 linguists. The participants were chosen at random, the only criterion for selection was their professional work in the fields of text linguistics and discourse analysis. Out of those 28, 15 are Bulgarian researchers and lecturers, five are from the UK, three are from the USA, two are from Belgium; Canada, Latvia and Croatia participate with one respondent each. Out of the 28 respondents, 16 are involved in both research and teaching, seven work exclusively in research, five are engaged in teaching activities only. Out of the 16 involved in both research and teaching, eight are Bulgarian researchers and lecturers, five are from the UK, three are from the USA, two are from Belgium; Canada, Latvia and Croatia participate with one respondent each.

The participants provided responses to a questionnaire on if and how they actually use the notion of *text type* in their work. The questions themselves were preceded by a brief note sensitizing the respondents to the fact that the questions aim at investigating actual uses of the notion of *text type* rather than knowledge of how the notion in question should be used. Prescriptiveness was not the target; on the contrary, describing the current state of the issue was what the study was entirely directed at.

### **Data**

The first question aims at establishing how many of the respondents actually use the notion and term of *text type*. Question 2 aims at establishing the presence of an alternative notion and/or term which has the potential of competing with the central object of the present investigation. Questions 3 and 4 try and trace regularities with respect to the environment and purposes for which the respondents use the notion and term of *text type*.

The answers to Questions 1-4 are systematized in Table 1 as follows:

**ASPECTS OF APPLYING PROTOTYPOLOGY TO TEXT TYPES**

		Yes	No
<b>Question 1</b>	Do you use the notion/term of <i>text type</i> ?	13	15
<b>Question 2</b>	If you do not use the notion/term of <i>text type</i> , and there is an alternative, or a related, notion/term you employ, please specify that notion/term.		11 'Genre'
			4 'Discourse/ 'pragmatic/ 'interpersonal function'
<b>Question 3</b>	Do you use the notion and term of <i>text type</i> in your research?	9	24
<b>Question 4</b>	Do you use the notion and term of <i>text type</i> in your teaching practices?	11	19

**Table 1: Actual uses of *text type***

With respect to the data in Table 1, it should be further specified that there are four respondents who use *text type* for teaching purposes only, i.e. not in research. There are two respondents who employ it only in research and not in teaching. The remaining seven participants (out of those actually using the notion) use it in both research and teaching.

Question 5 offers the respondents the theoretical options discussed in 2.2 above. The respondents were allowed to choose only one alternative. The answers fan out as follows:

<b>Question 5</b>	If you had to choose one parameter as the dominant one controlling the notion/ term of <i>text type</i> , which would it be:	
	discursive/pragmatic function	8
	rhetoric purpose	14
	text producer's intent	-
	text receiver's understanding	-
	content expressed	2
	linguistic form	4

**Table 2: Single-parameter based interpretations of text type**

With respect to Question 6, in contrast to Question 5, the respondents were allowed to select as many alternatives as needed. The answers obtained are systematized as follows:

<b>Question 6</b>	If you could choose more than one parameter as controlling the notion/term of <i>text type</i> , which would it/they be: (combining more than one parameter is allowed, although not required):	
	text producer’s discursive/pragmatic function	22
	rhetoric purpose	27
	text receiver’s understanding	2
	content expressed	5
	linguistic form	11

**Table 3: Multiple-parameter based interpretations of text type**

Question 7 aims to re-confirm the data from the previous two questions. It also aims to direct the participants’ attention to the future and to summarize their projected opinions. The answers are systematized as follows:

<b>Question 7</b>	If you could choose without considerations about research/ curriculum prescriptions, how would you use the notion/term of <i>text type</i> – to refer to a single dominant factor or to a cluster of factors?	<i>A single dominant factor</i>	<i>A cluster of factors</i>
		9	19

**Table 4: Choices of number of dominant text type parameter**

A meta-question was also present in the questionnaire to help contextualize the process of answering the questions. As discussed in 2.1, according to prototypology, speed and ease of response should be registered as perceptual proof of the centrality or the peripheral status of a concept. In other words, the questions that required the most cognitive effort from the respondents can be argued to focus on issues which are not central, and, therefore, not significant, for the understanding of the notion of *text type*.

<b>Question 8</b>	Answering which of the above questions did you hesitate most on/spent most time answering?	
	Question 1	–
	Question 2	2
	Question 3	–
	Question 4	–
	Question 5	15
	Question 6	7
	Question 7	4

**Table 5: Additional data on each question's central or peripheral status**

### **Discussion**

The data from the tables above can be summarized and evaluated as follows:

- Table 1 reveals that fewer than 50 per cent of the respondents actually use the notion of *text type* either in research or for teaching purposes. That fact could point in one of the following directions:
  - *text type*, from the point of view of historical linguistics, is a notion drawing towards the obsolete, or,
  - *text type*, from the point of view of prototype theory, is a notion not positioned along the basic-level of categorization (cf. Ungerer & Schmid 1997, Evans & Green 2006), which is cognitively more salient and functionally more important. An example of a concept at that level of categorization would be *genre*.
  - Both the above interpretations support the hypothesized operation of principles of prototypology in uses of the notion of *text type* (as the gradual replacement of one notion with another could also be interpreted as a process of a peripheral term gradually becoming central to a category, or vice versa).
  - The second alternative interpretation, from the perspective maintained here, seems the more likely one.
- Table 1 shows that eleven out of 28 respondents (i.e. almost 40% of the total number of respondents) prefer the notion of *genre* over the notion of *text type*. That fact could point in one of the following directions:
  - the present-day concept of *genre* is on its way to replacing the centuries-old concept of *text type*, or,

- from the point of view of prototypology, *genre* is the category perceived as lying along the basic-level of categorization, while *text type* does not associate with that (cognitively most prominent) level.
- Both the interpretations above support the hypothesized operation of principles of prototypology in uses of the notion of *text type* (as the gradual replacement of one notion with another could also be interpreted as a process of a peripheral term gradually becoming central to a category).
- Table 1 displays data on the fact that the only other notion selected as an alternative to *text type* (i.e. a notion other than *genre*) is that of *function* – a fact which validates researchers’ purely theoretical assumptions of the top importance of that parameter.
- The last point to note with respect to Table 1 is that, out of those who actually employ the notion, fewer respondents declare they employ *text type* in research as compared to those who employ it in teaching. This fact could be interpreted as confirming:
  - (a) the waning theoretical aptness of the term as compared to more practical uses, which could possibly be explained through the fact that teaching activities are more conservative in their using the Aristotelian interpretation of the notion, or
  - (b) the strength of the still existing predominantly prescriptive use of the notion, or
  - (c) a possible (historical linguistics-associating) claim of the gradual move of the notion of *text type* towards conceptual theoretical periphery (i.e. the notion is on its way to exiting in the general field of research).
- Table 2 reveals that most users employ *text type* to refer to interpersonal function rather than form or content.
- Table 2 also shows that, out of the possible interpretations of ‘function’, the dominant function of *text type* is perceived to be the rhetoric one rather than text producer’s intent.
- Table 3 displays 67 choices from 28 participants, i.e. a ratio of about 2.4 choices per respondent. This ratio can be interpreted as proof of the need of a combination of parameters to be used in understanding the category of *text type*, and not a single parameter.
- Table 3, among other things, shows the whole set of parameters proposed is relevant to the respondents. In other words, no parameter displays a zero preference, i.e. no parameter is completely rejected as irrelevant.
- The fact that some parameters are more frequently selected again points to the existence of a center and periphery in *the text type* category, i.e. the hypothesized prototypical effects are fully operational in actual *text type* use.

- Table 4 provides further confirmation and reinforces the conclusions about Table 3.
- Table 5 proves conclusively that *text types* exist conceptually as clusters of categories and reliance on a single dominant parameter is not well-grounded.
- All the data in the tables refutes the existence of a single dominant factor in understanding and using the notion of *text type*. The potential for dynamicity, i.e. for any single parameter to loom larger at one point for a participant, or to be suppressed, is further proof of the presence of prototype effects in the conceptualizations of *text type*.

Overall, the data from the study presented here provides consistent quantitative verification of the hypothesized operation of prototypology in *text type* use. The data confirms that linguists do see *text types* as functioning as prototypes rather than as clear-cut, distinct categories. The data also suggests that if the prescriptive element of using *text types* is removed, the notion may prove more usable for both research and teaching purposes.

#### 4 Conclusion

The present paper sought to suggest a means of tackling the existing multiplicity of viewpoints on the notion and term of *text type*. It hypothesized the possibility for prototype theory to present such a means as the theory has the potential to escape the pitfall of prescriptive and clear-cut definitions. To confirm the explanatory potential of prototypology within the domain of *text type* research, the paper presented the results from a study which supplies data from actual users of the notion and term of *text type*. The results obtained through a questionnaire and the subsequent data analysis confirm the assumption that prototypes indeed are seen as the cognitive constructs controlling *text type* conceptualizations.

Further research may build on the data reported and discussed here by, for example, obtaining results from a larger group of respondents and/or respondents representative of a larger variety of cultural, research and teaching backgrounds. It may also trace the actual tendencies in parameter combinations when categorizing and using *text types*.

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