Professor Diane Belcher

Plenary Title:
Defining the elusive "digital genre" and contemplating implications for LSP research and pedagogy

In early research on digital genres, Miller and Shepherd (2004) explored a then relatively new genre called the weblog. Five years later, Miller & Shepherd (2009) backtracked and argued that the blog was not really a single genre so much as a "multiplicity" of new genres made possible by a new medium, calling attention to the difficulty of distinguishing new genres from new media. In LSP, recent research on the research blog (Luzón, 2013, 2018) appears to suggest how distinctive a new genre it is, offering new opportunities for "social action," the defining purpose of genre according to Miller (1984), as well as for translingual practices (Canagarajah, 2013). In research on another new professional digital genre, the science video methods article, Hafner (2018), employing multimodal genre analysis, offers evidence of how technology-enabled semiotic resources can facilitate genre innovation. Expertise in such new genres as the video methods article, Hafner suggests, is not easily separable from expertise in new modes.

What do we mean when we use the term digital genre? Is any digitally-mediated genre a digital genre? Does a new medium automatically produce new genres as it enables various modes, or are genres more often surprisingly stable across media (Giltrow & Stein, 2009; Heyd, 2016; Pérez-Llantada, 2013, 2016)? Does it even matter, and if so, why?

This paper will argue that such questions do matter. Without a working definition of digital genre, how will we recognize these new discursive demands placed on language users when we see them? How will we arrive at an understanding of them—what forms they take, how they function, what they enable, how they might be taught—hence prepare language learners to navigate, critically consume, and agentively produce them? Heyd (2016) mentions that there was a time in earlier Internet history when it was thought that the apparent proliferation of new genres would slow down and stabilize. In fact, with accelerating technological change, the opposite has happened. Emerging genres can be, as Tardy (2015) points out, "bewildering," in their "fuzzy" demands on users, but concurrently "liberating," with new opportunities for creativity, agency, and audience outreach. Helping academic and professional language/literacy learners negotiate these new opportunities is a service that LSP specialists should be especially well suited to provide.

Workshop title:
Leveraging digital multimodality in the teaching of all linguistic modalities for academic purposes

This workshop will explore how the teaching of academic reading, writing, listening, and speaking can, individually and in various combinations, be enhanced by a digital multimodal approach. More specifically, learning goals addressed will include successful navigation of multimodal reading, with visual images as well as verbal text, of multimodal listening in multimedia contexts, and of digital composing of written and spoken multimodal ensembles as a collaborative process. Sample classroom activities for specific digital genres will be presented and critically discussed, and sample learner assessment rubrics shared and examined. Hands-on participant activities will include development of variations on presented materials that would be suitable for multiple proficiency levels. Also included will be discussion of ways in which critical reading and listening and audience-aware and responsive writing and speaking can be promoted through digital multimodal activities.

Bio of the speaker:

Diane D. Belcher, Professor and Chair, Applied Linguistics and ESL, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA, USA. Former co-editor of the journals English for Specific Purposes and TESOL Quarterly, she has also guest edited three special issues of the Journal of Second Language Writing and currently serves as co-editor of a teacher reference series titled Michigan Series on Teaching Multilingual Writers. Her publications include eight edited volumes, chapters in a number of books, and articles in such journals as the Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, Applied Linguistics Review, and Journal of English for Academic Purposes. Her research interests mainly focus on advanced academic literacy.