– regardless of the particular medicinal product – is used to guide the patient as how to take the medicine (see 'Patient Information Leaflet' below). This type of relationship among texts that share the same function and the same formal characteristics is called generic intertextuality.

## 2.4 Articulating written communication through genres

### What is a genre?

As has been pointed out, texts share participants, functions, and the situations in which they are used as well as formal conventions with many other similar texts; that is, any text belongs to a more or less recognizable textual genre (i.e. editorial, original article, review article, case report, book review, text book, clinical guide, etc.). Following Bazerman (1998: 24), we could define genre as:

> [...] not just [...] the formal characteristics that one must observe so as to be recognised as correctly following the visible rules and expectations. Genre more fundamentally is a kind of activity to be carried out in a recognisable textual space. That activity embodies relations with the readers and kinds of messages to be developed in order to carry out generically appropriate intentions and interactions – to complete the rhetorical and social possibilities of the genre. Thus genre presents an opportunity space for realising certain kinds of activities, meanings, and relations. Genre exists only in the recognition and deployment of typicality by writers and readers – it is the recognisable shape by which participation is enacted and understood.

According to this definition, an original article as a genre is not just a set of formal characteristics – structure, length, tenor, degree of specialization of the information contained, and so on – that must be fulfilled, but is also a communicative activity carried out by researchers whose purpose is to convince readers of their conclusions, gain prestige, make the discipline advance, and so on.

Thus, written communication in health practices covers more than just the purely expository research genres. According to the overall rhetorical purpose of the writer, we can distinguish three basic types of genres.

| *Overall rhetorical purpose of the writer* | *Examples of genres* |
|---|---|
| Instructional: give instructions to readers so that they carry out certain actions | Clinical guidelines, patient information leaflet, manual. |
| Expository: provide information to readers | Anatomical atlas, treatise, review article, case report, first part of an informed consent. |
| Argumentative: convince readers | Medical editorial, original article, poster in health campaign. |

*Figure 2.5. Examples of genres according to the main rhetorical purpose of the writer*

In addition, we can distinguish further medical genres according to their overall social function:

| *Overall social function* | *Examples of genres* |
|---|---|
| Preventing disease, educating the general public, creating awareness of risks, etc... | Genres in institutional campaigns such as press releases, information for patients, etc... |
| Carrying out domestic actions such as following a diet, or a treatment... | Diet, patient information leaflet, etc... |
| Communicating new discoveries to non-specialized readerships | Newspaper article, summary for patient, mainstream book, non specialist manual, etc... |
| Teaching and learning how to become a health professional | Text-book, manual, encyclopaedia, anatomical atlas, etc... |
| Carrying out clinical practice, implementing new techniques in clinical practice | Patient's history, guide of practice, manual, etc... |
| Selling products to professionals | Advertisement, leaflets and other promotional material |
| Communicating new research to specialized audiences | Original article, review article, scientific editorial, etc... |

*Figure 2.6. Genres according to overall social function*

## Bridging communication gaps within the same language

Some genres are used to store information and transmit it among members of the same knowledge community, be it professional – researchers, physicians, and so on – or non-professional – patients, general public. For example, a research article is conceived of as a genre for storing highly specialized information so that it is available in the future and for transmitting it to the community of researchers in that particular field of research. Likewise, the clinical history of a patient is a macrogenre used to facilitate clinical exchange between and activity in health professionals during treatment.

Some other genres are used to bridge communication gaps between speakers of the same language that belong to different knowledge communities.

| *Communication gaps* | *Some genres used to bridge them* |
|---|---|
| Between patients and physicians (patients need to understand clearly the details of their disease: mechanism, causes, risks, treatment, etc...) | Fact sheet for patients; patient information leaflet. |
| Between patients and researchers (patients need to and have the right to know the progress of research in the disease that affects them...) | Summary of research articles for patients; popularizing article; press release. |
| Between physicians and researchers (physicians need to apply advances in research in order to improve clinical practice and patients' treatment...) | Clinical guidelines; review article. |

*Figure 2.7. Bridging communication gaps through genres*

## Why should we pay attention to genres and not just to texts when translating?

In professional practice, a translation is required and commissioned when there is a communicative niche – in our case, the need of a text – within a target communicative situation, and more specifically, within a target genre. Thus, when translating, target genre knowledge and skills are key elements, from both a communicative and a formal point of view (García and Montalt, 2002). As medical translators, we are especially interested in genres because our translation strategies,

procedures and decisions may depend on four factors:

a) *Comprehension.* Understanding the source text depends on the profile and previous knowledge of the reader to whom the genre is typically addressed. A medical translation student will be cognitively and communicatively closer to some genres – such as a patient information leaflet – than to others – such as a clinical trial protocol. Socializing with genres with which we are not familiar is vital for the adequate comprehension of specialized texts.
b) *Translation process.* Knowing about structural elements in different genres enables us to anticipate the type of information we should be looking for as we read the source text and draft the target text (see chapter 4).
c) *Interlinguistic differences.* Even if the target text belongs to the same genre as the source text, there might be important differences in the way it is realized in the target culture.
d) *Genre shifts.* Depending on the translation assignment, the target text may or may not belong to the same genre as the source text (see 4.6 Genre shifts: Drafting heterofunctional translations).

**Task 2. Spotting genres**

Read the following excerpt:

Without humor, life would undeniably be less exhilarating. Indeed, the ability to comprehend and find a joke funny plays a defining role in the human condition, essentially helping us to communicate ideas, attract partners, boost mood, and even cope in times of trauma and stress.

Can you guess where it was originally written?:

(a) A newspaper article?
(b) A specialized medical text?
(c) A resource book for comedians?

The answer is (b), although it could probably have been the first paragraph of any of the above. They are the introductory words to the article "Humour modulates the mesolimbic reward centers" (Mobbs, D. *et al.*, in *Neuron*, 2003).

Now compare the text (above) with the title and the first two paragraphs of the same text (below) as it was rewritten by Helen Pearson for *Nature* (4 December 2003):

***Jokes activate same brain region as cocaine***
*Humour tickles drug centre that gives hedonistic high*

There's truth in the maxim 'laughter is a drug'. A comic cartoon fired up the same brain centre as a shot of cocaine, researchers are reporting.
A team at Stanford University in California asked lab mates, spouses and friends to select the wittiest newspaper cartoons from a portfolio. They showed the winning array to 16 volunteers while peering inside their heads by functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI).
The cartoons activated the same reward circuits in the brain that are tickled by cocaine, money or a pretty face, the neuroscientists found. One brain region in particular, the nucleus accumbens, lit up seconds after a rib-tickler but remained listless after a lacklustre cartoon.

Let us now return to the specialized medical text. Continue reading it (below) to spot the differences in register, conventions of presentation, vocabulary and phraseology between this text and the one written for *Nature* (above) inspired by Mobbs et al:

... (Dixon, 1980; Gavrilovic et al., 2003; Martin, Neuhoff and Schaefer, 2002; Nezlek and Derks, 2001). These beneficial manifestations are complemented at the physiological level where humor (i.e., the perception that something is funny; McGhee, 1971) is thought to have numerous salutary effects, including acting as a natural stress antagonist and possibly enhancing the cardiovascular, immune, and endocrine systems (Bennett et al., 2003; Berk et al., 1989; Fredrickson and Levenson, 1998; Fry, 1992; Lefcourt et al., 1990). It is therefore apparent that developing a sophisticated understanding of the discrete neural systems that modulate humor appreciation is of both social and clinical relevance.

As a last step, translate the two different texts as if they were assignments from two journals with different readerships in your country. If your country is English-speaking, you may carry out an intralingual translation (English to English).

## 2.5 Some common medical genres

As we have seen, written medical communication in formal contexts is carried out through well-established genres. Researching medical genres and getting to know them well – their communicative purpose; the situations where they are used; their participants' motivations and expectations; and their typical structure and form – is a key to successful medical translation. In this section we look at some medical genres as examples of what the medical translator normally has to