

JOHN M. SWALES – A RENOWNED APPLIED LINGUIST AND EDUCATOR

John M. Swales (1938–2025) was a distinguished applied linguist who made a pioneering contribution to genre theory and analysis at their intersection with the fields of rhetoric, discourse analysis, and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), including English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Born and educated in the United Kingdom, he moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1985. There, he served as a Director of the English Language Institute (ELI) at the University of Michigan in 1987–2001 and stayed till the end of his life.



In 1990, Prof. Swales published his most cited book titled “Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings.” In this book, he formulated his genre concept based on the vision of genre as a class of communicative events, all members of which share same communicative purposes. According to Swales, this set of shared purposes is a criterial feature that turns a collection of communicative events into a genre. In other words, “genres are communicative vehicles for the achievement of goals” [10, p. 46]. He also identified and formulated other important characteristics of genres (such as a various degree of their prototypicality and constraining conventions) as well as the role of discourse communities in forming genre nomenclatures. The notion of discourse community, also introduced by Swales, emphasizes that such groups of individuals are formed based on mutual goals and share the ways (genres and discourses) of communicating about them. This engagement into genre practices requires rhetorical and linguistic knowledge of genre structures which can be revealed through the textual analysis.

Such an analysis suggested by Swales has become known as genre analysis, or rhetorical genre analysis, or move-step analysis. It consists in identifying functional textual units which show the conventionalized structuring of genre governed by its communicative purpose. Swales called these units “moves”, while the “steps” in his terms are smaller functional fragments which realize the moves. John Swales used moves and steps in his CARS (Create-a-Research-Space) model of research article Introductions [9] which became not only extremely popular but was also extended to the study of other academic genres (see, for example, [8; 20]) as well as the genres of various social spheres (for instance, press releases [21], female personal accounts [7], or webchats [17]). It was also expanded to incorporate cross-cultural and cross-linguistic research (e.g., [3, 22]). Although Swales himself admitted that his move

analysis has been somewhat “over-explored” [14, p. 76], it remains an effective instrument for the study of different genres and a further evolving methodological framework incorporating new developments, such as multimodal analysis and corpus linguistics. Overall, John Swales profoundly shaped genre theory and analysis and established a systematic framework for understanding how academic and professional texts function within specific social and communicative contexts.

The concept of genre and the procedure of genre analysis are applicable, as Swales has shown, to pedagogical situations, in particular, to teaching academic writing. Being himself a devoted and innovative teacher of research writing courses, he wrote and published (together with his colleague Ch. Feak) a number of textbooks (see, for example, [15–16]) which have become known worldwide (the experience of using one of these teaching materials in Ukraine has been described in [18]). The textbooks uniquely integrate theoretical perspectives on academic genres with practical tasks that help learners better identify and understand the complexities of academic writing. Overall, Swales’ work bridged the gap between theory and educational practices by showing how the knowledge of genre conventions can help learners make informed choices while constructing academic texts.

John Swales was also a prominent figure in the field of ESP. He authored books and articles dealing with ESP issues and was a co-editor of the *English for Specific Purposes* journal (1986–1994) which became, under his leadership, a flagship journal in the field (it has been a Scopus-indexed Q1 journal since 2001). According to K. Hyland, Swales created a space for ESP by persistently showing that “language use is always related to social contexts and that practice should always be firmly grounded in theory” [4, p. 144].

Swales’ research interest in this area, probably, arose from his inclination to sciences; as Ann Johns, a co-editor of the ESP journal noted, “he would be the first to admit that his heart is in science and technology...” [5, p. 20]. Furthermore, Prof. Swales was known for his interest in nature: he was an enthusiastic bird- and butterfly-watcher and a knowledgeable expert who contributed to specialized editions, such as “The Birds of Washtenaw County, Michigan” [6]. His love for the natural world can also be traced in his book “Other Floors, Other Voices” [12], where, using a textographic approach, he analyzes the readings and writings of three academic discourse communities; one of them was that of the herbarium described in the book with admiration for botany, its artifacts, and discourse. John Swales was also engaged with corpus linguistics projects – MICASE (The Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English) and MICUSP (The Michigan Corpus of Upper Level Student Papers) which have been used by many researchers (among them Ukrainian ones). Overall, Swales has authored or co-authored twenty seven books and about 130 research articles or book chapters. The impact of his ideas and writings extended across the global academic world and shaped the professional development of numerous scholars, including the author of this text.

I got acquainted with Prof. Swales’ work while reading books in the library of the University of Strathclyde in 1994 during a short research visit to the United Kingdom. Driven by my interest in genre, I was exploring the literature and was lucky to come across Swales’ “Genre Analysis.” I started reading the book and was fascinated from its first pages, both by Swales’ ideas and his remarkable writing style – lexically rich, elegant, and at the same time clear and convincing (not surprisingly, his style has become an object of linguistic inquiry

and was characterized as “highly personal, modest and interactive” [4, p. 144]). Very soon I realized that working under Prof. Swales’ guidance would be invaluable for me and, without any hesitations, I sent a letter to him asking about the possibility of a research fellowship at the University of Michigan. The answer which came unexpectedly quickly was quite positive. I applied for funding to IREX (International Research & Exchanges Board), obtained it, and started my first fellowship at the ELI in early September 1995.

John Swales welcomed me in his usual warm and encouraging manner. He showed me around the ELI, introduced to his colleagues, arranged a working space for me and offered regular office hours for discussing genre matters. He also recommended using “genre boxes” (where papers related to the study of genres were kept) in the ELI library and invited me to his weekly seminars for doctoral students, which I, certainly, was quite glad to attend. John appeared to be an attentive and motivating host professor and mentor (although he himself disliked the last word “as being both superior-sounding and overly intrusive” [13, p. 176]). One of his most distinctive qualities was what might be called “intellectual generosity”: he was eager to share the wealth of his research ideas and was happy to see when they were further developed by his students or colleagues. Prof. Swales loved researching, writing and, overall, intellectual challenges, and always supported others in their various research endeavors. I remember his encouragement when I decided to write my first article in English: John discussed with me its topic, suggested the title, advised the journal, and attentively read the first draft (I keep a yellowed page of this draft with his comments in green ink). Later, he provided a brief commentary to this paper in his article “Language, science and scholarship” [11]. During my second, Fulbright fellowship, in the ELI in 1998, he also supported my research on conference abstracts and even included some parts of it into his and Feak’s textbook on advanced research writing for international students [15, p. 32–35].

During my two fellowships, I had also the pleasure of observing Prof. Swales in the role of an English research writing teacher. I remember well one of his classes on writing conference abstracts which was organized in the following way: the students (doctoral ones, working in quite different, non-linguistic fields) brought the conference abstracts prepared at home, switched them, and started discussing their rhetorical and linguistic features under Swales’ (quite delicate!) guidance. It was indeed amazing to see how students with various backgrounds were turning into “linguists”, developing sensitivity to rather subtle nuances of language and context. This was obviously Swales’ teaching method: being a person and scholar of an inquisitive, broad and open mind, he enjoyed stimulating the ability of his students to think and analyze. Also, he was concerned more with developing them as writers rather than with merely correcting and improving their written texts [13, p. 195]. Not surprisingly, John Swales was recognized as an outstanding educator whose scholarly ideas were inseparably linked to teaching and learning. This connection between theory and practice impressed me so much that I tried to incorporate it in my published work [1–2] designed for Ukrainian higher education context and, later, in the course “Genres and Genre Analysis” which I have been teaching to doctoral students at Ivan Franko National University of Lviv since 2017.

Overall, I was privileged to stay in touch with Prof. Swales – at least periodically – for nearly 30 years. In 2001, he greeted me again in Ann Arbor where I came on a short-term research visit. I also communicated with him at a number of conferences: the 11th World

Congress of Applied Linguistics (Jyväskylä, 1996), LSP Forum '99 (Prague, 1999), the 14th European LSP Symposium (Guildford, 2003), Conference in Honor of John Swales (2006, Ann Arbor, MI), InterLAE International Conference “Interpersonality in Written Academic Discourse: Perspectives across Languages and Cultures” (Jaca, 2008), ESP/EAP Conference (Kavala, 2010), and 2nd International *PRISEAL* Conference (Sosnowiec, 2011). For the last time, I have seen him in Zaragoza, at the AELFE-LSPCC Conference in 2023 where he talked via Zoom. Needless to say, Prof. Swales was always a highly awaited keynote speaker whose presentations gathered full conference halls. In various informal conference and other situations, he was also a central figure due to his warm and emotional communication style, sense of humor, aptitude for telling entertaining stories, and general interest in life and people. Even after retirement (including his last years), John Swales was an extremely active and productive scholar. He was constantly reading, writing, publishing and presenting as well as always showing interest in and appreciating the work of other researchers (I remember receiving a message from him in early January 2020 in which he praised my stylistic analysis of the language used in peer reviews [19]). Perhaps, it is this combination of exceptional intellectual and personal qualities which made John Swales so unique.

Prof. Swales concluded the book of his memoirs with the following philosophical sentence: “... Somewhere down the road there will be a place where an educational story ended” [13, p. 208]. Regretfully, his own professional and life story came to an end in 2025. However, Swales’ intellectual legacy will undoubtedly remain a source of ideas and inspiration for generations of researchers and educators around the world. In Ukraine, his profound contributions still await for deeper reflection, conceptualization, and appreciation.

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