# The arguing genre and the explaining genre: A comparison in terms of discourse relational analyses of texts written in English and texts written in Māori

**Winifred Crombie**
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato* (University of Waikato)
Private Bag 3105, Hamilton, New Zealand
[crombie@waikato.ac.nz]
**Ian Bruce**
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato* (University of Waikato)
Private Bag 3105, Hamilton, New Zealand
[ibruce@waikato.ac.nz]
**Ngaere Houia-Roberts**
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato* (University of Waikato)
Private Bag 3105, Hamilton, New Zealand
[nroberts@waikato.ac.nz]

## Abstract
There is a commonly held belief that those who are immersed in indigenous cultures have a tendency, when constructing academic texts, to avoid sequential, deductive argumentation. We report here on a comparison of two groups of texts exhibiting two different genres – *explaining* and *arguing*. One group of texts was written in Māori by indigenous authors, the other group was written in English by non-indigenous authors. Our findings are that although the percentage use of logico-deductive relationships is roughly equivalent for both groups of texts/ writers in the case of the *explaining* genre, the Māori texts/ writers use almost twice the percentage of logico-deductive relationships as do the English texts/ writers.

## Introduction
There are a number of schools in New Zealand – Kura Kaupapa – where the teaching of academic subjects is conducted wholly, or largely, through the medium of Māori language and where the philosophy upon which teaching is based is embedded in a Māori world view. For the vast majority of students and many teachers, Māori is a second language. Some of these students go on to university and continue to study through the medium of Māori. Other students who study Māori and also study through the medium of Māori at university – many of whom are training to be teachers – will have little or no proficiency in the language when they begin their university programmes. Another group of students is those educated in Kura Kaupapa schools who then study academic subjects at university through the medium of English. For all of these students, the writing of academic assignments (both in Māori and in English) raises issues that need to be addressed. If we are to provide them with adequate assistance in writing in both English and Māori, we need to understand the characteristic similarities and differences between authentic texts belonging to different genres and text-types written by educated native speakers of both languages. This type of understanding will help address the following three concerns:

- students often appear to produce assignments in Māori that are, we believe, structured in ways that are typical of assignments written in English and that, therefore, do not capture the authentic essence of genuine Māori textual organisation and structuring;


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- students whose lives are deeply embedded in Māori cultural contexts often appear to structure assignments written in English in ways that are different in some respects from those typically written by other students and may, as a result, be given poorer grades by some teaches and lecturers;

- there appear to be widely held beliefs about the writing of Māori and other indigenous peoples (including the belief that it is likely to be less marked by sequential, deductive argumentation), that need to be subjected to rigorous investigation.

Over the past few years, a number of staff members at the University of Waikato have been involved in conducting research that relates to genre and text-type. One research project (Houia-Roberts, 2004) examined texts written in Māori by educated native speakers of the language from the perspective of genre and text-type; another (Bruce, 2003), examined texts written in English from the same perspective. Both of these research projects were conducted under the supervision of the same person, someone whose own research has included text construction in English and Māori and who, therefore, has been able to facilitate the comparison of the results of these two different research projects, one aspect of which is reported here.

**Background**

Although Bruce (2003) and Houia-Roberts (2004) reviewed many of the same books and articles in setting the context for their research, the analytical approaches that they eventually adopted were different in a number of respects, as was their use of terminology and the ways in which they categorised texts and text-segments. Thus, for example, Bruce refers to *explanation* as a 'cognitive genre', Houia-Roberts refers to *explaining* simply as a 'genre'. Both believe, however, that a single text may exhibit a range of different genres/ cognitive genres. In looking at whole texts in terms of different social purposes (e.g. advertisements), Bruce uses the term 'social genres', whereas Houia-Roberts uses the term 'text-type'. A further difference is that because the research of Houia-Roberts was concerned only with those text-types that are characteristic of academic assignments, she was able to reduce the number of text-types investigated and to align them directly with genre types. Thus, for example, she refers to a whole text whose primary focus is the presentation of an argument as exhibiting the ***argument text-type,*** a whole text that focuses on the provision of an explanation as an ***explanation text-type***. Although an argument text-type will necessarily include ***arguing*** as a central genre, it may include other genres, such as ***explaining*** or ***describing***.

In spite of the differences of approach and terminology between these two research projects, there are some central areas of agreement in relation to analytical approach. Our focus here is on one of these areas (analysis of different genres in terms of discourse relations), and on two particular genres – *explaining* and *arguing*.

**Discourse patterning and discourse relations**

Both Bruce (2003) and Houia-Roberts (2004) analysed samples of text exhibiting a number of different genres in terms of discourse relations, the model used categorising discourse relations into three main relational types which are seen as

representing different cognitive processes: *logico-deductive*, *associative* and *tempero-contigual* as outlined in *Table 1* below (adapted from Crombie, 1985a; 1985b):

***Table 1:*** **Cognitive processes and associated discourse relations (adapted from Crombie, 1985a; 1985b)**

| **Cognitive processes and discourse relations** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Cognitive processes** | **Associative (comparison/ contrast)** | **Logico-deductive (cause and effect)** | **Tempero-contigual (time and space)** |
| Inter-propositional relations | Simple contrast; Comparative similarity (Simple comparison); Statement-affirmation; Statement-exception; Statement-exemplification; Statement-denial; Denial-correction; Concession-contraexpectation; Supplementary alternation; Contrastive alternation; Paraphrase; Amplification. | Condition-consequence; Means-purpose; Reason-result; Means-result; Grounds-conclusion. | Chronological sequence; Temporal overlap; Bonding. |

Definitions and examples of these relations are provided in *Appendix 1: Definitions and examples of discourse relations.*

**The *explaining* genre in English and Māori**

Bruce (2003) analysed a corpus of academic articles exhibiting various different genres in terms of discourse relations. Houia-Roberts (Houia-Roberts, 2004) analysed a corpus of texts exhibiting different genres written by highly educated and highly proficient first language users of Māori in terms of discourse relations. The findings of both, as they relate to relations belonging to the three different cognitive process types in the case of the *explaining* genre (Bruce, 2003, p. 250; Houia-Roberts, 2004, p. 205), are outlined in *Table 2* below:

***Table 2:*** **Distribution of relations in terms of cognitive process in a corpus of English texts and a corpus of Māori texts exhibiting the explaining genre**

| **Explaining genre** | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **English corpus** | **Māori corpus** |
| Associative | 20% | 34% |
| Logico-deductive | 20% | 18% |
| Tempero-contigual | 60% | 48% |

What this *Table* indicates is that although the percentage of *logico-deductive* relations is approximately the same in each case, the percentage of *tempero-contigual* relations is lower and that of *associative* relations higher in the case of the Māori corpus. Thus, so far at least as the corpora analysed by Bruce and Houia-Roberts are concerned, Māori texts exhibiting the *explaining* genre rely considerably more heavily than do English texts belonging to the same genre on discourse relations of the *associative* type.

An examination of the percentage occurrence of certain of the discourse relations themselves is even more revealing. *Table 3* is derived from Bruce (2003, p. 248) and Houia-Roberts (2004, p. 207) and includes only relations or groups of associated relations that occur at least 5% of the time in at least one of the two corpora.

***Table 3:* Percentage occurrence of certain discourse relations in a corpus of English texts and a corpus of Māori texts exhibiting the explaining genre (including only relations or groups of associated relations that occur at least 5% of the time in at least one of the two corpora).**

| | **English texts** | **Māori texts** |
|---|---|---|
| **Associative** | | |
| *Simple Contrast & Comparative Similarity* | 2% | 9% |
| *Concession-Contraexpectation* | 5% | 7.3% |
| *Supplementary Alternation* | 1% | 5.5% |
| *Amplification* | 7% | 7.3% |
| **Logico-deductive** | | |
| *Means-Purpose* | 6% | 9.1% |
| *Means-Result* | 6% | |
| *Reason-Result & Grounds-Conclusion* | 4% | 5.5% |
| **Tempero-contigual** | | |
| *Bonding* | 58.5% | 38.4% |

*Table 3* indicates that, in the case of the corpora analysed, the Māori texts exhibiting the *explaining* genre make *considerably less* use than do the English texts exhibiting the same genre of the *Bonding* relation (38.5%; 58.5%) and *considerably more* use of the *Simple Contrast* and *Comparative Similarity* relations (9%; 2%).

**The *arguing* genre in English and Māori**

Houia-Roberts (2003, p.69) refers to the *arguing* genre as involving "[persuading] readers to accept a point of view"; Bruce (2003, p. 215) refers to the *discussion* genre as having a "[focus] on the organisation of data in relation to possible outcomes, conclusions or choices". Although these descriptions are not identical, they would appear to be indicative of the same genre (as would the actual examples provided in both cases), a genre referred to here as *arguing*. Comparing the discourse relational analyses of English and Māori corpora in this area yields the information in *Table 4* (derived from Bruce, 2003, p. 250; Houia-Roberts, 2004, p. 161)

***Table 4:*** **Distribution of relations in terms of cognitive process in a corpus of English texts and a corpus of Māori texts exhibiting the arguing genre**

| **Arguing genre** | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **English corpus** | **Māori corpus** |
| Associative | 27% | 30% |
| Logico-deductive | 26% | 47% |
| Tempero-contigual | 46% | 23% |

In the case of the corpora examined, there is a considerable difference between English and Māori texts exhibiting the *arguing* genre in terms of the overall occurrence of relations belonging to the three cognitive process types. Although the percentage of *associative* relations is roughly equivalent in both cases, the texts in the Māori corpus seem to rely far more heavily than do the English ones on *logico-deductive* relations. If this finding is anywhere near representative of texts in general exhibiting the *arguing* genre written by educated, highly proficient writers of English and Māori, then it seems to run counter to popular beliefs. It is useful, therefore to make a further comparison of the two corpora in terms of the percentage occurrence of specific discourse relations (as was done in the case of the *explaining* genre). The result of such a comparison (see Bruce, 2003, p. 248; Houia-Roberts, 2004, p. 151) is provided in *Table 4* below.

***Table 4:*** **Percentage occurrence of certain discourse relations in a corpus of English texts and a corpus of Māori texts exhibiting the arguing genre (including only relations or groups of associated relations that occur at least 5% of the time in at least one of the two corpora).**

| | **English texts** | **Māori texts** |
|---|---|---|
| **Associative** | | |
| *Concession-Contraexpectation* | *11%* | *6.6%* |
| *Amplification* | *4%* | *9%* |
| *Supplementary Alternation* | *2%* | *5%* |
| **Logico-deductive** | | |
| *Condition-Consequence* | *5%* | *10.5%* |
| *Reason-Result & Grounds-Conclusion* | *15%* | *30%* |
| **Tempero-contigual** | | |
| *Bonding* | *43%* | *21%* |

The most significant differences here relate to the occurrence of the *logico-deductive* relations of *Reason-Result* and *Grounds-Conclusion* (English corpus 15%; Māori corpus 30%) and the tempero-contigual relation of *Bonding* (English corpus 43%; Māori corpus 21%).

**Conclusion**

So far as the corpora examined are concerned, Māori texts belonging to both the *explaining genre* and the *arguing genre* have, overall, a higher percentage occurrence

of *associative* relations (only slightly higher in the case of the *arguing* genre), and a lower percentage occurrence of *tempero-contigual* relations than do English texts. The overall percentage occurrence of *logico-deductive* relations is slightly lower for Māori than for English texts exhibiting the *explaining* genre, but considerably higher in the case of Māori texts exhibiting the *arguing* genre.

Several objections could be made to the particular comparison reported here in that, for example, the nature of the corpus is rather different in each case. For this reason, the results should be regarded as indicative rather than definitive. However, the findings reported here represent the first stages of a more extensive comparative study, a study that will be based on a range of different corpora and will take account not only of genres but also of text-types (in terms of overall rhetorical structuring), and not only of the percentage occurrence of different discourse relations, but also of their interaction. It is hoped that this study will help to resolve some of the current uncertainties about the typical comparative compositional characteristics of texts written in English and texts written in Māori by highly proficient users of these languages.

**References**

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## *Appendix 1:* Definitions and examples of discourse relations

| PROCESS | RELATION | DEFINITION | EXAMPLES |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Associative** | Simple Contrast | Involves the comparison of two things, events or abstractions in terms of some particular in respect of which they differ. | He was Tuhoe; she was Tainui. |
| | Comparative Similarity (Simple comparison) | Involves the comparison of two things, events or abstractions in terms of some particular in respect of which they are similar. | He was Tuhoe. She was Tuhoe too. |
| | Statement – Affirmation | The truth of a statement is affirmed. | **A**: He should leave.<br>**B**: I agree. |
| | Statement-Exception | Involves a statement and an exception to that statement. | All of the warriors returned except for Rangi. |
| | Statement-Exemplification | The first member provides a general statement and the second adds a proposition which is presented as an exemplification of the general statement in the first member. | All iwi, Ngāti Porou, for example, use symbolism in their songs. |
| | Statement-Denial | Involves the denial of the truth of a statement or validity of a proposition. | **A**: He won.<br>**B**: Not so. |
| | Denial – Correction | Involves a corrective non-antonymic substitute for a denial. | She wasn't a teacher; she was a lawyer. |
| | Concession-Contraexpectation | Involves direct or indirect denial of the truth of an inference. | Although there was a good combination of rain and sun, the plants failed to flower. |
| | Supplementary Alternation | Involves two or more non-antithetical choices. | Nobody tended the plants or fed the animals. |
| | Contrastive Alternation | Involves a choice between antitheses. | Either he did it or he didn't. |
| | Paraphrase | Involves the same proposition expressed in different ways. | He began combat; he started to fight. |
| | Amplification | Involves implicit or explicit repetition of the propositional content of one member of the relation in the other, together with a non-contrastive addition to that propositional content. | He seized someone. It was Aroha. |
| **Logico-deductive** | Condition-Consequence | Involves a consequence which depends upon a realizable or unrealisable condition or hypothetical contingency. | Had he fought, they would have won. |
| | Means-Purpose | Involves a consequence which depends upon a realizable or unrealisable condition or hypothetical contingency. | He did it in order to win favour. |
| | Reason-Result | Involves an action that is/was/will be undertaken *with the intention of* achieving a particular result. | He left because there had been no powhiri. |
| | Means-Result | Involves the provision of a reason *why* a particular effect came about or will come about. | He angered her by refusing to speak. |
| | Grounds-Conclusion | Involves a deduction drawn on the basis of an observation. | He is wearing a medal so he must be one of the winners. |
| **Tempero-contigual** | Chronological Sequence | Involves a sequential (non-causative) link between propositions. | He tidied up and then left. |
| | Temporal Overlap | Involves a link between two events which overlap either wholly or partly in time. | As he fled, he looked over his shoulder. |
| | Bonding | The 'base line' relation. Involves a non-elective, non-sequential relation between juxtaposed propositions. | He wore a cape and carried a dagger. |