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A Response to Mohan Limaye

Barbara Couture
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Mohan Limaye presents two important concerns in his insightful response to my article ["Categorizing Professional Discourse: Engineering, Administrative, and Technical/Professional Writing," *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 6:1 (January 1992), pp. 5-37]. I wish to comment on these points and also to submit a correction to the text of the article.

Linguistic classifications may distinguish features discretely and definitively, as do some technical labels, or they may interpret groups of features that are far from discrete and subject to change over time, as do the rhetorical categories that I described. Limaye is correct that shared rhetorical functions characterize the latter. Each of my three categories represents a complex communicative position that explains certain aspects of writing from the vantage point of a single profession within a culture shared by many professions. Similarly, the sentence pairs I selected were adapted from actual discourse in which single linguistic functions could not be isolated. To adjust the rhetorical categories and sentences to make them function perfectly as binary opposites would fail to present these phenomena as they are realized in organizational communication. My point in attempting a marriage between the methodology used to interpret complex rhetorical categories and that used to investigate isolated linguistic features was an effort to bridge the gap between these two ways of looking at communication, an experiment that entailed abandoning binary classifications.

I agree with Limaye's remark that "more productive criteria for categorizing organizational discourse would include the writer's rhetorical purpose." In a forthcoming work entitled "Situational Exigence: Composing Processes on the Job by Writer's Role and Task Value" (*Writing in the Workplace: New Research Perspectives*, ed. Rachel Spilka, Southern Illinois University Press), my coauthor Jone Rymer and I discuss results from our Writers' Survey, which compare the composing behaviors of career writers and other professionals as they are influenced by the sit-

uational constraint of a routine task (one for which speed of completion is more important than product quality) as opposed to a special task (one for which quality is as or more important than efficiency); these classifications maintain the binary distinction that Limaye prefers. The style survey that I reported in *JBTC* was designed specifically to investigate those gut-level stylistic preferences that surfaced among professionals outside the context of a specific situation or purpose. Statistical analysis of responses by profession correlates with behaviors associated with professional ethos, suggesting that the responses are influenced by professional association. As Limaye has appropriately surmised, further investigation is warranted.

In closing, I wish to submit a correction to the published text of my article. On page 30, the data comparing career writers' responses to those of other professionals for Items 2 and 4 are reported incorrectly. The conclusion about the data is stated correctly. To present the correction in context, I offer the following:

Career writers did not differ significantly in their preferences from other professionals when the style preferred by the latter group followed readability guidelines. Of the career writers who responded ($n = 62$), 74% preferred to use the active voice to announce the decisions of an individual in authority (2A) compared to 83% of all other professionals ($n = 365$). Also, of the career writers who responded ($n = 63$), 83% preferred to assume corporate authority and use the first-person *we* with the active voice to announce a decision of a department (4A) compared to 73% of the other professionals ($n = 364$).