

From gene sequencing to genre sequencing: A corpus-based analysis of British patents of invention, 1711 - 2011

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This lecture has three aims. The first aim is to present a novel corpus-based methodology for the diachronic analysis of generic text structure, which combines previous work in corpus-based genre analysis with ideas and techniques drawn from the field of computational genomics. The second aim of the lecture is to present the preliminary results of an ongoing empirical research project which uses this new methodology to identify changes in the generic structure of a diachronic corpus of British patent texts spanning three centuries. Finally, the lecture will consider the broader implications of the abovementioned empirical research for a key theoretical question in current diachronic genre studies: is the process of genre change Darwinian or Kuhnian? That is, is genre change best understood as a constant process of gradual evolutionary change, or is it better understood as a series of extended periods of relative stability punctuated by sudden and dramatic paradigm shifts?