A GENRE-BASED MODEL
FOR TEACHING HOW TO WRITE A DISCUSSION
TO STUDENTS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Teaching how to write (a discussion) in a foreign language context is not an easy task due to the different levels, motivation, and experience of the target language. However the development of genre literacy has recently provided an attempt to create a new pedagogical space in the writing classroom. It is, therefore, this article elaborates how one should develop a genre-based model for teaching how to write a discussion by employing its social function, generic structure, lexicogrammatical features, and the teaching cycles.

Key words: genre-based, social function, generic structure, lexicogrammatical features, and teaching cycles.

BACKGROUND

In recent years, the teaching of writing—especially the teaching of academic writing to students of tertiary education—has become increasingly influenced by the results of genre based studies associated with Swales' analysis of the move structure of an article introduction Swales, (1990). Language researchers and teaching practitioners attempt to create a new pedagogic space in the writing classroom by adapting findings of genre analysis to develop materials and genre programs for teaching writing. This idea has been formed not only in the L1 or L2 environment, but also in the context and background of foreign language learners, who have greatly different levels, motivation, and experience of the target language. "It is for this reason that Anthony proposes that for these learners, a more explicit teaching of the formal features of a genre is desirable" (Anthony 2000: 1). According to Miller "students need both a 'rhetorical awareness' of a texts that they have to write for their departments and a 'linguistic awareness' of the range of language forms that can be used to express the basic rhetoric of the academic papers they write" (Miller 1997: 150). Then various genre analyses may hopefully be beneficial in terms of the availability of its comprehensible inputs in rhetoric and lexicogrammatical features that students

can use as the scaffolds for doing writing. It is also expected that "accuracy develop over time as the acquirer hears and understands more input" (Khrasen 1987: 22).

In this article I wish to consider the genre-based approach to the teaching of writing discussion as one of the possible tasks assigned to students of tertiary education. The questions are (1) what the basic consideration is it for applying genre-based approach in teaching writing? , and (2) how is a particular model developed for teaching how to write a discussion?

SOME CONSIDERATIONS

Genre literacy is an attempt to create a new pedagogical space in the writing classroom, and is underpinned by the language description of Functional Grammar. "In essence it involves a methodology for teaching how a text 'hangs together' and creates meaning in its particular context of use" (Gallagher 2000: 1).

Without neglecting the disagreements of the application of genre in teaching writing, it is worth noticing that this genre-based approach proves to result positively. Anthony states that "written reports produced during the course, demonstrate a dramatic improvement in writing ability, and student surveys show the course to be both useful and enjoyable" (Anthony 2000: 1). In line with Anthony's statement, Torrance, et al. (1993) also say that "genre approach is an effective means of increasing writing proficiency" because "genre fulfills humans' social purposes, enhances awareness in rhetoric and lexicogrammatical features" (Gerot and Wignell 1994; Hyon 1996). In addition, Miller assumes that "imparting certain genre knowledge is a part of a 'short cut' method of raising students' proficiency in a relatively limited period of time to the level required of them by their departments and supervisors" (Miller 1997: 151). These all mean that awareness of the conventions of writing, and teaching students to produce texts that, by following the conventions, appear well-formed and suitably structured to native-speaker readers. So it seems inevitably for every writing teacher to develop genre-based models for his students.

ADAPTED MODEL

To help develop models of writing discussion Gerot and Wignell (1994: 214-216) propose a framework containing the social function, generic structure, and significant

lexicogrammatical features. This framework could be used to increase the students' awareness of the social function, the tendencies of move development and lexicogrammatical features found in a discussion.

This is the framework.

Social Function: To present (at least) two points of view about an issue, or "To argue through the process of expanding a proposition to persuade readers to accept a point of view" (Misson 2000: 3), or "To present information and opinions about more than one side of an issue: it may end with a recommendation based on the evidence presented" (Butt et al. 1995: 17)

Generic Structure:

Issue:

- Statement
- Preview

Arguments for and against or Statements of differing points of view:

- Point
- Elaboration

Conclusion or Recommendation

Significant Lexicogrammatical Features

Focus on generic human and generic non-human Participants

Use of:

- Material Processes
- Relational Processes
- Mental Processes

Use of: Comparative: Contrastive and Consequential Conjunctions

Reasoning expressed as verbs and nouns (abstraction)

In respect to the above Significant Lexicogrammatical Features, Butt et al. (1995: 145) adds the use of Present Tense, tight Thematic Progression, and Modality in opinion or recommendation.

TEACHING TECHNIQUES

An integral aspect of a genre approach is working with texts from the beginning; authentic texts that represent genres that are used both inside and outside the language classroom. A genre approach requires that before attempting to write in a particular genre, the students have been exposed to the genre by reading, analyzing and discussing examples of it. "The interconnection between reading and writing is stressed in most language programs, though often the genre of the reading is different from that which the students are required to write" (Gallagher 2000: 2). So at least there are four steps to pass through i.e. reading the target genre (develop awareness of the aspects of genre), analyzing it (to realize of the social function, move structures, and linguistic features), discussing the analysis, and start to write similar genre.

For students with relatively little experience of writing, Dudley and Evans (2001) propose three stages:

Stage 1: reading stage: develop awareness of the generic structure

Stage 2: immediate planning stage: help students grasp the findings of the genre analysis for their writing

Stage 3: draft stage: use the awareness of genre conventions for ordering or reordering of text.

However, for students with experience of Academic Writing, the genre approach needs to emphasize genre as a means of marshalling ideas into an appropriately ordered and expressed text.

In addition, Hammond (1992) and Misson (2000: 5-6) point out that "the teaching and learning cycle for a genre based program involves a number of phases that allows for the reader to provide the necessary scaffolds and support for the students' learning. These are negotiating field; deconstruction; joint construction; and independent construction."

In the negotiation and building of field knowledge phase students will be unable to provide successful texts if they do not have sufficient knowledge of the content area. Consequently, time must be spent developing field or topic knowledge and suitable reference materials need to be available for students.

The cycle continues with the deconstruction phase, where examples of the focused genre are examined and discussed in terms of the social purpose of the text, the schematic structure and

the linguistic features of the text. This stage familiarizes the students with the genre so they are able to read it and deconstruct it.

The next phase involves the joint construction of a text. Here the teacher and students negotiate what is required to write the text. The teacher scribes as the students contribute to the text. At the same time, the teacher provides a scaffold for the students through discussion and questions. Content knowledge, elements of the schematic structure and linguistic features can be highlighted and focussed upon during this phase.

The final phase is that of independent construction. This phase involves the students in researching a particular area and writing their own texts. Again, the teacher supports the students' learning, acting as a consultant by providing the necessary assistance for each individual. The students are engaged in researching, drafting and editing their writing.

The steps described in the previous paragraphs are free to choose by practitioners in teaching writing with regard to the backgrounds of the students. The framework and the steps must be modified so as to meet the students' need in their writing class. One thing to remember is you should provide enough exposure for the framework and steps as comprehensible inputs that even students with limited writing experience such as foreign language students could perform their procedural knowledge on writing.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion I would like to stress once again the importance of descriptive knowledge of genre for teaching writing practitioners to help students perform their procedural knowledge. It is the teacher's task to help students acquire the descriptive knowledge by being exposed to the kind of genre, the analysis in terms of social function, move structure, and linguistic features (See appendix for discussion essay); and assist the students to order, reorder, and/or write the genre.

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Appendix

Writing a Discussion

Reading phase

Gene Splicing

Genetic research has produced both exciting and frightening possibilities. Scientists are now able to create new forms of life in the laboratory due to the development of gene splicing.

On the one hand, the ability to create life in the laboratory could greatly benefit mankind. For example, because it is very expensive to obtain insulin from natural sources, scientists have developed a method to manufacture it inexpensively in the laboratory.

Another beneficial application of gene splicing is in agriculture. Scientists foresee the day when new plants will be developed using nitrogen from the air instead of from fertilizer. Therefore food production could be increased. In addition, entirely new plants could be developed to feed the world's hungry people.

Not everyone is excited about gene splicing, however. Some people feel that it could have terrible consequences. A laboratory accident, for example, might cause an epidemic of an unknown disease that could wipe out humanity.

As a result of this controversy, the government has made rules to control genetic experiments. While some members of the scientific community feel that these rules are too strict, many other people feel that they are still not strict enough.

Grasping or realizing the Social Purpose, Move Development, and Linguistic features.

The Social Purpose: To present information and opinions about more than one side of an issue: it may end with a recommendation based on the evidence presented.

Move Development:

- Issue (Statement/Preview): **Genetic research** *has produced* both exciting and frightening possibilities. **Scientists** *are* now *able to create* **new forms of life** in the **laboratory** <u>due to</u> the development of **gene splicing**.

- Arguments for:
  - o Point: <u>On the one hand</u>, the ability to create **life** in the laboratory *could* greatly *benefit* **mankind.**

- o Elaboration: For example, <u>because</u> it *is* very expensive to obtain **insulin** from **natural sources**, **scientists** *have developed* a method to manufacture it inexpensively in the laboratory.
- o Point: Another beneficial application of **gene splicing** *is* in **agriculture**.
- o Elaboration: **Scientists** foresee the day when **new plants** will be developed using nitrogen from the air instead of from fertilizer. <u>Therefore</u> **food production** *could be increased*. In addition, entirely **new plants** *could be developed to feed* **the world's hungry people**.

- Arguments Against:
  - o Point: Not **everyone** *is* excited about **gene splicing**, <u>however</u>. **Some people** *feel* that it *could have* terrible consequences.
  - o Elaboration: A laboratory accident, for example, might *caus*e **an epidemic** of an unknown disease that could wipe out **humanity**.

- Conclusion: <u>As a result of this controversy</u>**, the government** has made rules to control **genetic experiments**. <u>While</u> **some members of the scientific community** *feel* that these rules *are* too strict, many other people *feel* that they *are* still not strict enough.

<u>Significant Linguistic Features</u>
- Focus on generic human and generic non-human Participants (in bold)
- Use of: Material, Relational, and Mental Processes (in italic)
- Use of: Comparative: contrastive and Consequential conjunctions
- Reasoning expressed as verbs and nouns (abstraction)

Using awareness of genre conventions for ordering or reordering of text

In this phase you scramble the text (in terms of the move development) and ask students to order or reorder it that it form a text of discussion.

Independent construction

Students create their own texts, and you act as a consultant providing necessary assistance for each individual. Students are engaged in researching, drafting and editing their writing.