

ESP Writing for Tourism: A Genre-based Approach in Teaching Writing to Iranian University Students

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Abstract

This article aims at investigating the effectiveness of using a genre-based approach in teaching ESP writing to the Iranian intermediate learners. To achieve its objectives, this research benefited from 60 sophomore female university volunteers who were then categorized into two groups of experimental (genre) and control (non-genre). During the instruction process which lasted 16 teaching hours, the experimental group received a genre-based teaching approach. In this condition, the participants were to evaluate six authentic tourist information texts which lasted for six successive sessions. They were encouraged to find out the major constituent moves previously discussed in class. At last the ESP learners had the opportunities for producing texts of the same genre following the rhetorical structure of the tourism texts extracted from brochures already analyzed in class. With regard to the non-genre group, a common teaching approach was applied in which the participants received the same six authentic texts. The activities included cloze exercises, sentence joining activities and error-correction exercises. No attention, either explicit or implicit, was allocated to the kind of genre and its constituent moves. The participants in this group had also opportunities to compose pieces of writing by making use of the six authentic texts. The design of the study considered two major variables: a) move index and b) texture index in relation to method variable. Move index investigated how well the participants performed on the use of appropriate move structures. The texturing index examined how well the writing assignments were textured. Taking the two groups into consideration, and in order to discover if general writing proficiency improves through using a genre based teaching, a two-way ANOVA was used to measure these variables in the participants' pretest and posttest. The results obtained from this study revealed that the participants in the genre group outperformed the non-genre group in their use of allowable move structures and texturing criteria. It was revealed that making use of the genre-based approach is beneficial in developing ESP writing skill of intermediate students.

Keywords: English as a foreign language (EFL), English for specific purposes (ESP), English for academic purposes (EAP), Genre, texture, move structure, text type.

1. Introduction

According to Swales (1990), genre is a definite and conventionalized communicative event with some determined goals composed of a series of constituents called moves. These moves are either obligatory, i.e., they are an essential part of the genre to achieve the communicative goals, or optional in that they do not make any significant change in the main purpose of communication, rather they help to express the communicative goals effectively. The 'tourist information' genre consists of four obligatory moves: 1) identification (I): name of x, 2) location (L): location of x, 3) description (D): description of what x contains or has that makes it worthy of notice, and 4) facilities and activities (F): features not in D that provide the tourists with something extra or unusual to do. There are also four optional moves which include: 1) explanation (E): more detailed information on x, 2) how to get there (T): instructions on how to get there, 3) brief history (H): a brief history of x, 4) motivation (M): some motivating terms that reveal the reason for going to x. (Henry & Roseberry, 1998).

2. Statement of the Problem

Understanding the writing process and involvement of methodology in the purpose of writing can help ESP/EFL teachers in effective teaching of writing purposefully (Beare, 2001; Kirby, Kirby & Liner, 2004). In explaining the problems that ESP/EFL learners face in writing various text types and also the deviancies present in their writing performances,

Coulthart (1994) attributes the difficulty to the linearity of the knowledge in general but non-linearity of the structure of the text, i.e., presenting the non-linear knowledge and message in a linear form. To tackle the difficulties, this study is an attempt to investigate the usefulness of a genre-based approach in teaching ESP writing. Having discovered the fact that an ESP course is possible with students who are at least of intermediate language proficiency, the questions are: Can a genre-based type of instruction a) help the learners in producing appropriate texts by considering the allowable move structures, b) improve the learners' ability in texturing their writings and c) improve the learners' writing ability in general?

3. Methodology

This study is an attempt to investigate the effects of a genre-based approach in teaching writing to the Iranian Intermediate English learners. In the following sections the details of subject participation procedures, instrument and data collection, procedures of treatment as well as data analysis, and finally the design of the study will be mentioned.

3.1 Participants

The participants selected for this study were 60 out of 80 sophomore female students majoring in English Translation at Esfahan Payame Nour University. The selection of the participants was based on a test of homogeneity taken from a TOEFL intermediate collection of multiple-choice questions. The score considered to be desirable was used as a passing criterion for the students' participation. This procedure ensured us of the existence of a fair degree of homogeneity. In order to further meet the condition of homogeneity, GPA was also considered as a criterion for the participants' selection and the most capable students were chosen.

3.2 Materials and Instruments

Six authentic texts of tourist information genre were extracted from tourist brochures. A text of the same genre with some deliberately made missing moves was also prepared for the purpose of course activities and eliciting written performances. The six tourism passages were chosen to be used for teaching materials, and the text with missing moves was applied in getting the students involved in text producing.

The participants had to produce two texts of 90 to 120 words with the characteristics of a tourist advertisement genre in which they would describe their most favorite place of interest in Esfahan, Iran. One of these texts was written at the beginning of the instruction process (pretest), and the other one was produced in the last session (posttest). Both these pieces of writing were used to measure the students' writing proficiency before and after the treatment.

Since most of the participants were living in different towns and villages of Esfahan, their writing assignments were mostly about historical places or beautiful landscapes of the Esfahan like: The Chehel Sutun Palace, Hasht Behest Palace, Ali Qapou, Naqsh-e Jahan Square, Imam Mosque, Char Bagh School, etc.

4. Treatment

The treatment applied for the genre group was a genre-based writing instruction, the focus of which was on analyzing tourist information genre and finding its constituent moves, while for the control group a common traditional method was applied in which the teaching instructions included cloze, sentence joining, and error correction activities. No explicit attention was paid to the genre and its constituent moves.

4.1 The Genre Treatment (Experimental Group)

For the genre group, 6 authentic texts, which were based on tourist information genre, were assigned to the learners. In each session, the students were introduced to one text. Having been introduced to the tourism genre and its optional and obligatory constituents, the participants were asked to read the texts and identify optional and obligatory constituent moves.

After six successive sessions being devoted to analyzing texts and identifying their allowable move structures, the learners were asked to rewrite a text already given to them, which had some deliberately left texturing problems and some deliberately-made missing moves.

The participants had also a free writing task in which they could select one place of interest in Esfahan, Iran and try to promote this piece of writing in the best way possible.

The two writing tasks, i.e., rewriting a text and free-writing exercises, were corrected by the teacher. The correct forms of these writings were then offered to the learners as models for their future writings. The free writing was considered to measure the two dependent variables: a) 'move index': the correct use of the move structures, and b) 'texture index': considering texturing criteria such as conjunctions, connectivity, and other essential criteria while producing the text.

4.2 *The Non-genre Group (Control Group)*

With regard to the non-genre group, the same authentic texts offered to the genre group were introduced to the learners. The texts were presented following a traditional teaching approach. Each session involved the use of specific methods such as cloze passages, sentence joining, and error correction exercises. No attention, either implicit or explicit, was paid to the kind of genre and its relevant move patterns.

Having worked for six successive sessions on authentic texts about tourist information, the participants were asked to rewrite the same badly written text, i.e., the same text with some deliberately-made missing moves and texturing problems which was offered to the genre group.

The participants had also an opportunity to produce a text about their favorite place (free-writing). This piece of writing was considered to measure the two dependent variables, i.e., 'move index' and 'texture index'.

The two writing tasks were corrected by the teacher. The common errors, such as inconsistency among numbers or tenses, which were committed by the learners, were discussed in the class.

5. **The Pilot Study**

In order to gain confidence the validity of the conclusions drawn, a pilot research was carried out on a small group of undergraduate EFL learners. The pilot study was done since the project initially was supposed to investigate the effect of genre-based approach on secondary students' writing progress who were mostly at a low intermediate level.

After assigning a proficiency test to the learners, 20 out of 40 were selected. The participants were then divided into genre and non-genre group, each group consisting of 10 learners. Then a pretest was administered in which the participants were asked to write a text of 50 to 70 words describing their own tourist resource in the place, in this case, Esfahan, Iran. The written products were corrected by considering two essential variables: a) 'move index': how well the participants used the appropriate constituent moves of the genre, and b) 'texture index': how well the participants textured their written products.

Having examined the genre group's written assignments, we found out that no considerable improvement would be observed in the writings. In most cases the students failed to write sentences in accordance with constituent moves of tourist information genre already discussed in class. They could only write one or two optional and obligatory moves correctly in their writings. Our evaluation of the data also indicated that texturing which was already taught to them implicitly, was a deterring problem.

To measure 'move index' the formula introduced by Henry & Roseberry, (1998) was used and for the 'texture index' the seven texturing criteria suggested by Hamplyons and Heasley (1984) was applied. To do so, the first six clauses of the text were analyzed in terms of the existence of these seven criteria. The obtained result suggested an important fact: Genre-based ESP writing instruction does not prove useful for students with a low level of proficiency.

6. **Procedure (The Main Study)**

At the beginning of the study, a proficiency test (TOEFL) was administered to a group of 80 sophomore female volunteers majoring in English translation. The test consisted of 30 multiple-choice items, 10 items being devoted to each skill, reading, writing and listening. Then 60 students were selected according to their range of scores in the proficiency test, i.e., Mean + 1 SD. To further meet the condition of homogeneity, GPA was also used as a passing criterion. The 60 selected participants were then categorized into genre and non-genre groups (experimental & control group), each consisting of 30 learners.

For pretest both groups were requested to compose a text of at least 90-120 words about one of the landscapes or historical places of Esfahan, Iran that they wished. The text had to be written in such a way that it could attract as many readers as possible.

Then, two raters both post-graduate students preparing their Ph.D. theses, rated each text by taking into account two dependent variables: a) 'Move Index', and b) 'Texture Index'. Then the average of the two ratings formed the final

score for the pretest

The move score, designed to evaluate how well the participants could master the appropriate use of the move structure, was calculated according to the following formula borrowed from Henry and Roseberry (1998):

$$OM \text{ Move score} = MP - 0.5 (IM + MM) /$$

MP: the number of obligatory moves actually present in assignments.

IM: the number of inappropriate moves.

MM: the number of misplaced moves.

OM: the number of obligatory moves which ought to be present in the genre.

According to this formula, a text that has all the obligatory moves present in the correct order without any inappropriate moves will receive a score of one, while a text containing none of the obligatory moves will receive a negative score.

The texture index provided information on the devices that make a text look cohesive and grammatical. The criteria used as the major standards in textuality were borrowed from Hamplyons & Heasley (1984). Because of the special characteristic of tourist information genre in which most of the moves are located in the initial part of the text, texturing criteria were evaluated for the first six clauses of each text. The obtained result was averaged over all the other clauses. The two raters examined the texts and one point was devoted to each criterion. As we dealt with seven standards in textuality proposed by Hamplyons and Heasley (1984), the whole texturing variable consisted of seven points. So the result was put on a scale of one to seven: a range of 1-3 was representative of a poorly textured text, a range of 5-7 could be a well-textured one, and 3-5 reflected acceptable texturing. By following this procedure, the participants' written texts (pretest) were rated in order to be compared with their posttest writings.

7. Treatment

The instruction process consisted of two stages for both groups:

1. Elaborating on six authentic tourist information texts to teach students
2. Two opportunities for the creation of tourist information texts. The instruction process consisted 16 hours over a three-week period.

7.1 Genre Group (Experimental Group)

In each two hour session the participants received one authentic text on tourist information genre. They had to read each text and identify the constituent moves existing in the genre. It is worth noting that at the beginning of the treatment, the term 'move' as constituents of each genre and its different models (optional or obligatory) were discussed in detail, in the case of tourist information genre, four optional and four obligatory moves. The four obligatory moves were: 1) identification, 2) location, 3) description, and 4) facilities and activities

The students then had two opportunities to create the genre in the class. In the first, they were requested to rewrite a text that contained some missing moves and some grammatical errors. The second was a 'free writing' exercise in which the students chose their favorite place of interest in Esfahan, Iran and produced a piece of writing about it as attractively as possible (the text was preferred to be in the range of 90 to 120 words). These two written products, i.e., rewriting a text and creation of a tourist information text (free writing) were corrected by the teacher. The free-writing task was considered as the posttest to calculate the two dependent variables, i.e., 'move index' and 'texture index

7.2 Non-Genre Group (Control Group)

Using the same six authentic texts of tourist information genre as used for the experimental group, the researchers used a traditional method mostly based on cloze, sentence joining, and error correction exercises. In one session some words were deleted from the text and multiple-choice items were given to the learners (cloze). In some other sessions some sentences of the text were separated from the whole text and the learners were required to put them together (sentence joining). In still other sessions a passage full of deliberately-left grammatical errors were given to the participants to correct (error correction). Each session with the contribution of the students and the teacher, the correct form of each text was written. All the six prepared texts were then kept as models for students' later writings. No focus was accorded to genre and move structures. Like the genre group, the non-genre group was encouraged to use the six authentic texts of tourist information genre as models for their writings.

In the seventh session, the students were asked to read and rewrite the same badly written text with some missing

moves and grammatical errors used for the genre group. In the last session, the participants were requested to compose a piece of writing about one of favorable tourist resource of their living palace in the most attractive way (free-writing). Both these writings were corrected by the teacher. The free writing was used to measure 'move index' and 'texture index' (posttest) and to find out whether the treatment had improved the results previously obtained from the pretest or not.

8. Findings and Results

Having made sure about the homogeneity of the participants by running a t-test (the difference between the two groups was revealed not to be significant: $t = -.507$, $p = .921$) the writings were then rated by two raters. The results of the posttest were dealt within two steps. In the first step, a t-test was used to find out if the treatment had any significant effect on the participants. ($t = 2.397$, $p = .02$); there was a significant difference between the two groups after the treatment.

In the next step, the results were compared through using a two-way ANOVA. The reason for employing a two-way ANOVA measurement was that there were two groups and two variables, that is, 'move index' and 'texture index'. ($t = 2.397$, $p = .02$); the p score indicates a theoretically significant difference.

According to the result of the ANOVA, represented above, the three null hypotheses of the study can be rejected. We can reach a conclusion that a genre-based approach to teaching writing does have a significant effect on students' performance in ESP writing proficiency.

9. Discussion and Conclusions

In 1998, Henry and Roseberry carried out a study on EAP/ESP advanced learners. The results obtained from this study revealed that a teaching approach based on rhetorical organization can be helpful in an EAP/ESP writing situation with advanced learners being the participants.

Three variables received the major attention: Motivation index, i.e., the degree of motivation the text creates in tourists to visit the place, the move index, and the texture index. It was concluded that motivation and texture indexes examined in the students' writings showed significant differences contrasting the success of the genre and the non-genre groups, while regarding the move index, no significant difference was tangible. This study focused on the same research questions. However, the 'motivation score' was omitted since the data was collected from the Iranian EFL university students who were at an intermediate level of English proficiency, so writing quality was out of question. Therefore we aimed at two variables only: 'move index' and 'texture index'.

With regard to the first research question, statistical measures indicated that the use of appropriate moves was more significant in the genre group than in the non-genre group. The genre instruction presented to the genre-group made them conscious of the generic structure and the relevant move patterns (in this case, tourist information genre and its four optional and four obligatory moves). On the other hand, the learners in the non-genre group had no obvious knowledge on the constituent moves of this genre. In Henry and Roseberry's (1998) research, no tangible difference across the two groups with regard to the 'move index' was observed. The reason for this contradiction in the findings of this study and that of Henry and Roseberry (1998) can be attributed to the participants' EFL proficiency. ESL learners who participated in that study had mostly acquired English in a native English environment where English would be widely in use. But the learners in this study were EFL learners who learnt the language in classrooms, with no previous knowledge of generic structure of a tourist information text.

Referring to the second research question and with respect to the genre group, it was discovered that there was a high degree of increase in 'texturing index', since the rhetorical structure and the texturing devices needed for a cohesive text were taught implicitly by focusing on the main move constituents of the text.

The participants in the non-genre group developed a mastery over error correction skills, which was revealed in their writings. This finding agrees with what Henry and Roseberry (1998) found. Greater length of time was available for the learners to develop error correction skills. According to conclusions in Shaughnessy (1977), through using error correction activities, students reduce their errors from 15-30 per 300-words to 8 during the course of a semester. However, the learners have little opportunity to make use of these points in creating a piece of writing; that is, less opportunity is granted to the learners to understand the observable texturing elements of a text and to derive the rules behind each by themselves. It is the teacher who reveals the elements and rules. The students' role in this regard is to memorize these grammatical and texturing criteria so as to be able to make use of each for their future writings. But in the genre-based approach, the participants analyze each text and find all the obligatory and optional moves mentioned by their teacher and at the same time they can become more familiar with the texturing pattern since they have to examine the writing process actively.

10. Pedagogical Implications

The findings of the present study can have pedagogical implications for teaching writing skill and also reading comprehension. The results can also have implications for translation and tour-leader training programs.

The genre-based teaching approach can lead us to better results than other traditional teaching approaches which do not pay any attention to the function of language. They mostly account for the form of language to be acquired. One of the main advantages of the genre-based approach is its focus on both the form and function of language; i.e., selecting appropriate and grammatical linguistic patterns to convey the message and achieve special predetermined communicative goals.

In traditional writing methodologies, the focus is on different genres. Therefore, it is confusing and even impossible to teach all the various forms and functions essential in writing skill since each genre has its own forms and functions. We are better to concentrate on one genre at a time and recognize its unified features and constituents. We can also derive out texturing patterns behind each genre.

The genre approach is appropriate particularly when there is an immediate need to gain mastery over writing for a specific purpose. In this case, one genre will be taught by considering its constituent moves. The approach can be beneficial since by devoting less time, a specific writing need will be satisfied. The teacher is not a lecturer in class; rather, all students contribute to class activities. The approach provides the learners the opportunities to analyze texts and grasp the generic texturing structures of the texts. Moreover, they can share their learning with other students and this increases collaborative learning. In traditional methodologies, producing a correctly textured piece of writing is the ultimate goal of writing classes, however, the vagueness of the course activities and tremendous points to learn by the students make writing activity a source of anxiety and hopelessness.

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