

A Case Study on Teacher Practice of Genre-Based Writing and Classroom Interaction Patterns at an Advanced Level

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Abstract

This paper is a classroom-based research study, which explores the practice of the English teacher genre-based writing in the English Foreign Language (ELF) setting as regards the classroom interaction patterns. The study took place in a private tertiary institution in Istanbul, Turkey. To ensure the essence of the qualitative research design, the interpretive participant fieldwork, classroom observation data, structured and semi-structured interviews, course pack, syllabus, and handout analysis were integrated also in the research process. The data collection and analyses occurred simultaneously. The categories along with the subcategories such as *teacher pedagogy of the genre-based writing approach*, *learning outcomes* and *interaction patterns* were created and verified; concurrently with the accumulated data. To ensure the external reliability of the outcome, triangulation and member checking was employed and the results indicate that genre-based writing classes observed in this study have focused on the model texts and the production of similar texts disregarding two other major phases - contextual explanation and joint construction of the text, which are vital for delivering the social purpose of writing skills.

Keywords

Genre-based
writing
approaches,
product-oriented
approach,
interaction
model in writing

Introduction

Having generated various pedagogical descriptions, the genre-based writing approach has become influential in English Language Teaching (ELT). It offers a holistic basis for writing, which emphasizes creating a text as a unit rather than a sentence fragmentation, thus taking the text at the level of discourse, where the purpose for social communication within a certain discourse community is fulfilled. Through genre analysis, the teacher's practice and the learner dynamics in writing classes are

explored to understand the learner's development of rhetorical and contextual consciousness as a language user and social participant of the discourse community (Johns, 2002; Derewianka, 2003; Lin, 2006). It is stated that in a classroom setting, students naturally collaborate and negotiate with each other while constructing their concept of genres (Hyland, 2002; Kress, 2003). Therefore, genre-based writing pedagogy applied by the teacher, the interaction patterns among the students (e.g., peer work and group work) as well as the instructional materials are crucial parameters in the genre-based approach (Hyland, 2002; Johns, 2002; Derewianka, 2003; Cheng, 2006). Genre-based writing pedagogy is mainly based on principles of the Vygotskian school of thought, where social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition and learning. In addition to the Vygotskian theoretical framework, the explicit instruction style is considered for pedagogy. In genre-based writing, the instructions are explicitly provided regarding meaning and context to reveal the social purposes of communication.

Genre-based Writing Approach

The writing skill is one of the most important issues in ELT since it requires a certain level of form-knowledge, idea-organization, along with spelling, punctuation and content mechanism. Since certain approaches lay methodological foundations for writing, they enable learners to acquire knowledge, practice the writing process and present an outcome. There are three kinds of approaches to writing skills: product-based approach, process-based approach and genre-based approach. The product-based approach is also known as the form-focused approach, controlled-to-free approach, the text-based approach and the guided approach (Silva, 1990; Raimes, 1991, Johns, 1997). In the 1960s, when pedagogical procedures were under the effect of behaviorism, the product-based approach was favored in L2 writing classes. The controlled input in textual form was provided to language learners through repetition, observable behavior was desired and learners were expected to memorize certain rules and structural and lexical features of the written texts (Kroll, 1990). The correctness of the response was the key issue. Classroom activities were conducted to highlight learner awareness about statement grammaticality in rhetorical patterns, and various argumentative compare and contrast essay styles. Writing in the product-based approach is seen as a linear process, starting from idea organization and composition

and ending with composition construction, and receiving feedback and correction on the final product. Tangpermpoon (2008) states that it is favored among writing instructors as they believe that systematic learning from simple to complex and from pattern to product takes place, and that learners develop their awareness in the structures of L2 writing. The disadvantages are also mentioned in terms of the learner risk, which may be the lack of motivation due to the intense focus on the accuracy of grammatical rules, lexis and mechanics. In the second half of the 1970s, a radical change took place in line with the research results in cognitive psychology, and the focus of pedagogy shifted from a product-based approach to a process-based approach. The latter approach views writing within the framework of an information-processing model and focuses on the learner cognitive development through problem-solving strategies and meta-cognitive awareness. In the classroom environment, the process-based approach includes cognitive processes and strategies such as pre-writing, planning, outlining, drafting, reviewing, reconstructing and editing. Students are respected for their cognitive capacity for processing information to write and expressing their own views when involved in discovering personal writing styles, strategies and meaning-making processes (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; O'Brien, 2004). Teachers facilitate the activities and guide students to resolve anticipated writing problems by applying the strategies and in order to create their personal writing styles. The nature of the process-based approach is dynamic because students do not follow fixed sequences of the writing processes when formulating ideas. This idea has helped to develop academic literacy in L2, as process-oriented writing is taken as a grounded practice of the academic community where learners are expected to know specific texts in terms of structures and types and to write about a particular academic content. It acknowledges writing social and cultural codes "directing our focus to what is in a text, the roles of the writer, readers and the content in which the text is produced" (Johns, 1997, p. 15). While learners write to explore issues and develop academic literacy, they try to establish a role as writers and seek for a common ground with the discourse community they interact with. In genre-based writing classroom tasks, students work on meaning for the communicative functions of written genre like business letters or academic reports (Badger & White, 2000), practicing writing conventions such as the organization of the text, drafts, and

presentations; and communicate successfully with other learners in the same discourse community (Tangpermpoon, 2008).

Existing studies on the genre-based writing approach present three different perspectives on the construction of genres. The first one relates to the context, meaning the social, cultural and historical context where the genre is created is important for the formation of the genres (Hyland, 2002). According to the contextual framework, the genre analysis begins with the discussion of macro elements (history, audience, social context) as it aims to explain the social influences or situations behind the genre. The analysis continues modeling the genre, drafting, revising and presenting processes of the genre. In the end, students practice how to write the target genre (Matsuo & Bevan, 2002). The second approach is supported by the Australian Sydney School. The linguistic structures, purposes and functions of the genres especially in teaching English for a Specific Purpose (ESP) classes (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Cheng, 2006) are highlighted. The teacher presents models of genres and then assists students when they construct texts by providing grammatical and lexical support and the students finish writing in the target genre. The third perspective lies in between the two ends, that the genre-based writing is formed with the linguistic features in the context where there is a relationship between the social context and the language (Derewianka, 2003). The nature of such perspective is integrative since it has taken the direction of writing from a focused individual task to the socially situated task in the discourse community by providing a link between the forms, writer as self and the socio-cultural environment. As pointed out by Derewianka (2003), the genres in the educational context are practices of the social purposes since when a genre is analyzed; the social purpose of writing is underlined. For example, for the story-writing genre in a classroom context, students explore human conditions through storying such as narratives, moral tales, and anecdotes. She also points out that the genre-based writing approach stresses the notion of choices shaped by the socio-cultural values plus grammatical selectivity. Topics or actions (the field), the interaction of language users (tenor), and the channels (modes) in genre-based writing influence the linguistic choice. It is emphasized that while writing the specified genre, students develop their social identities and interpersonal skills to construct “the self” through the “negotiation of accepted participant relationships” with others in the discourse community (Derewianka, 2003, p. 141).

The classroom interactions in the genre-based writing classes are vital for students' self-positioning, criticism, accepting alternatives or socio-cultural norms, disagreeing and making judgments, and committing propositions. Therefore, the interactions among students and between the teacher and students, as well as the role of the teacher as a coordinator of genre-based writing tasks and a facilitator of these tasks are recognized as the fundamentals of the genre-writing pedagogy.

Classroom Interaction

The language classroom is a social environment where the learner's interaction with peers or a teacher is believed to contribute to the learner's language development through cognitive and social activities (Consolo, 2006) as the negotiation of meaning leads to the generation of input which in turns, leads to language development. The students' participation in the classroom interaction is categorized into three groups by Allwright (as cited in Consolo, 2006). Of these three types of interaction, the observable one is called *compliance*, where student participation is highly dependent on the teacher's routine management in class. In the second pattern, *navigation*, learners take an action to repair a communication breakdown and ask for clarification of what has been said. The third pattern is *negotiation*, in which the participants attempt to reach a consensus. Ur (1996) lists detailed interaction patterns such as group work, close-ended teacher questioning, student work, choral responses, collaboration, student-initiated questions, teacher talk, full-class interaction and open-ended teacher questioning. The interaction patterns are based on four frameworks (Wu, 1998). The first one is called *discourse structure model* by Sinclair and Coulthard (as cited in Wu, 1998). They created a system where the focus of the interaction is the basic structure of exchange with *Initiation* (I), *Response* (R) and *Feedback* (F) (IRF) in the lesson, the largest unit of discourse. This exchange provides a link between the teacher's and students' utterances. The second framework is presented by Long (as cited in Wu, 1998), and called *negotiated modification model*. In this framework, L2 acquisition and interaction is interrelated and negotiated modification in interaction results in the comprehensive input that leads to acquisition. Therefore, our attention is on the negotiation of meaning based on the comprehensible input, rather than the process of interaction in classroom settings, which comes into being as a form of group work, collaboration or full-class

interaction that Ur (1996) suggests. The third framework, *the pedagogical interaction model*, is proposed by Malamah-Thomas (cited in Wu, 1998). In this framework, the interaction between the teacher and learners is referred to pedagogic interaction, where they communicate in a reciprocal mode in an action and reaction chain. It is especially observable when IRF mode is used for interaction. The fourth and last framework, *dynamic process model* is an extension of Malamah-Thomas' pedagogic interaction model which adds a dynamic process to the framework such as inner reception and speech for internalizing the process along with the external mechanisms of verbal exchange (Wu, 1998).

The current study aims to explore an English teacher's practice of genre-based writing in regard to classroom interaction patterns. The aim of relating these two aspects of teaching context is to understand what type of interaction patterns are generated by genre-based writing practice and how the practice of teaching the genre-based writing approach could influence the classroom interaction patterns. The research questions, therefore, investigate:

1. How does a teacher present genre-based writing in sophomore level "Written Communication Skills" classes?
2. How do the teacher's genre-based writing instructions lead to the interaction patterns during classroom tasks in sophomore level "Writing Communication Skills" classes?

Method

Research Context

This research has been carried out in the three-credit genre-based writing course entitled *Written Communication Skills-IV* at the Department of English Language and Literature at a private university, Istanbul. The course is designed for sophomore students. Before taking the course, students have taken three different writing courses, two in their first year and one in the fall semester. The key objectives of the course as expressed in the syllabus are:

- to improve the students' critical thinking skills on literary and non-literary texts or on any given topic,

- to assist students in their writing process in order to help express their reflections and ideas about the provided reading material on paper more effectively.

Participants

The parties involved in this study are a female teacher, Zeynep, who had eight years of teaching experience by then, and thirteen students between the age of 20 and 21 at the advanced level of English.

Data Collection and Analysis

Since the study investigates the teacher practice of genre-based writing and its relation with the interaction patterns in the classroom tasks, the teacher's classroom practice of genre-based writing instructions was observed and the main focus of the fieldwork was on the interaction emerging during the classroom tasks. The data collection instruments for the study were the descriptive observations that the researcher had made during lessons, structured covering twelve interview questions and semi-structured interviews and the course-pack. The data was obtained through field notes, interview transcripts, instructional material, the course pack, the course syllabus, samples of students' written work and assignment artifacts and seating arrangement design. During the data collection, the researcher's role was a non-participant observer. There were twelve hours of observation along with six student interviews at different timelines in a four-week period. The interviews were done to elicit information on the teacher's practice of genre-based writing, giving the genre-based writing instructions and interaction patterns in genre-based writing tasks from the teacher's and students' perspectives. Additionally, informal talk between the participating teacher and the students in the writing class at break times is considered study artifact.

The data collected was transcribed and underwent a coding process. While pre-coding this data, recurrent patterns were found and emerging patterns were added. The data analysis occurred simultaneously, helping to reassess the entire analysis through the period of data collection. The final iteration of discovered categories is accounted for as teacher pedagogy of genre-based writing approach with sub-categories, such as *routine*, *content knowledge* and *task for inside/outside-classroom assignments*.

Learning outcomes with sub-categories such as awareness about genre structure and organizational skill development, interaction patterns with sub-categories of teacher-fronted mode (composed of further subcategories such as previous knowledge, directives, meaning quests, recounts, affirmatives, humor, personal experience and worldview, and feedback) and student-initiated mode (composed of further subcategories such as personal accounts, experience or reaction, clarification and discussion). To ensure the external reliability (LeComplete & Goetz, 1982), triangulation and member checking with Zeynep's routines at genre-based writing practice and classroom interaction patterns were performed. Ten percent of the data (twenty-six recurring patterns, and two emerged categories) was member checked by the English language instructors with ten years of work experience and inter-rater reliability rendered eighty-six percent. As for the ethical consideration, the consent form was prepared for voluntary student participation. Pseudonyms and classroom observation notes were kept confidential.

Findings

Zeynep's practice of genre-based writing pedagogy

Through the classroom observations on Zeynep's practice of genre-based writing and classroom interaction, it was apparent that the pedagogy of genre-based writing approach was based on *routine*, *content knowledge* and *tasks for in-classroom or outside-classroom assignments*. As soon as Zeynep came into class, she greeted the students, reminded them of the previous lessons and the subject of the present lesson. She then asked the students to open the course-pack and follow her. She read aloud the section with marked intonation on important parts. When she came to the section where there were principles or directions to write a specific genre, she used the board to list the principles or directions. To give an example, when she taught writing commentaries on the short story, *Necklace* by Maupassant, she said:

“In writing commentaries to literary texts, we have some rules to follow. First of all, we do not need to read the story in your commentary. You just need to use pieces from the story to support your central argument. The second thing is that you should remind the reader your central argument but do not bore the reader with repetitions. Then you should develop your topic enriching it with original

ideas. Last, but not least, you make your statement exact, comprehensive, and strong.”

This observation indicates that Zeynep follows certain guidelines when specifying important points or rules. She lists the rules as the students see it on the board and want to make some notes about the rules. After explaining the specific genre and reading them aloud from a sample text in the course-pack, she let the students write a sample text as an assignment. During the structured interview with Zeynep, she affirmed she often lectures in her writing classes, which indicates that she sees herself as a resource of knowledge to make the students learn the genre-based writing, as well as a guide and reference in their discovery of meaning and work on the sample texts and produce their own genres. It also shows that Zeynep practices her teaching of genre-based writing with the product-based approach, where students are expected to produce an outcome with the given rules and forms. In regard to content knowledge, she delivers basic information about the genre, making it more explicit with forms and functions. In the classroom observations, Zeynep conveyed knowledge about the genre as a part of pedagogy to teach genre-based writing instructions. For example, she explained the function of the argumentative essay, saying:

“The aim of an argumentative essay is to persuade the reader. In social life, we do not always agree with the ideas around us; we need to react to them at some point. However, what is important is to defend our personal idea being authentic with the logical reasoning and refutation.”

This explanation provides basic information about the genre itself, highlights the reason why the students form certain genres in order to make the students learn what the genre is and how they can create one. When it comes to the writing tasks, it is observed that Zeynep assigns a task such as writing metaphors or an argumentative essay to students as practice and presentation of what they have learned, which can be counted as a product of teaching-learning activities in genre-based writing classes.

Learning outcomes of genre-based writing classes

During the classroom observations and semi structured-interviews with the students, benefits of genre-based writing classes emerged. This was questioned during the interview. Awareness about the structure of the genre and development of organizational skills were two benefits mentioned. Students believed that they gained

awareness about the structure and forms of certain genres. For example, Betül, a female student, states:

“Before, when reading, we used to scan quickly without focusing on the text. Reading nowadays, the introduction, development body, how the conclusion parts are written and what things are more emphasized engage our attention even more.”

In the same vein of thought, another student, Özge, stated that genre-based writing classes helped to develop her organizational skills in writing. In her words:

“Step by step, it became easier to express my thoughts in both speaking and writing. I do not have any difficulties in writing essays as I used to because now I can write more organized essays. I know what I want to write. I plan it out and then submit it to the teacher.”

As inferred from the lines above, with the genre analysis and writing in class, students have adopted a more organized structure. They are more aware of the genre applied in the material they use, and as they are cognitively engaged in the structures of the genre, they learn about the organization of the genre and they apply it in their writing.

Interaction patterns

In this study, two basic interaction modes during my classroom observation were noted. The first one, taking place between Zeynep and the students when she lectures, has teacher-fronted modes and the second one, which exists among students when they engage in individual work, peer work or group work, is student-elicited modes. Zeynep tried to make a constant connection between her and the whole class when she taught a genre. She started the interaction by asking students to remember the *previous knowledge* (“Do you remember from your previous classes what is important when writing critiques to a text?”; “As you know from poetry analysis, creativity and style are very important elements to look at”). She also used *directives* to initiate interaction between the students. She kindly ordered the students “to fill in the blank”, “to take notes” and so forth. Another medium that Zeynep used was *meaning quest*. She asked questions to clarify the points she was talking about (“What do we mean by metaphors?”) How do we plan to write comparison essays?”) She used *re-counts* to summarize the lesson or give a brief summary of the topic before the students were asked to do a task. She asked questions to the students (“Can you tell me what we

have learned today?"; "What have we just talked about is to take a strong position in defending your ideas but in a respectful and logical manner."). Zeynep used *affirmatives* to make sure that her students comprehended what she had said, ("Are you with me?" "Is the concept clear for you?"). Zeynep also shared her *personal experience* as a university student who forgot once to submit the assignment on time along with *her worldview* when she talked about refuting or reacting strongly; she said, "Whatever doesn't kill me makes me strong". Another way the students maintained interaction with the teacher was at the time when the teacher gave *oral feedback* to the students' comments, assignments or reactions in the form of boosters such as "Great!, Very creative work!" or in the form of criticism such as "You could have mentioned the reason for your communication with the reader".

When it comes to the student-elicited interaction patterns, students generally started interactions with Zeynep by sharing their *personal experience or reactions* to what the sample written texts say. This counts as interaction but with a more individual sense. The other way the students communicate with the teacher is when they request for subject *clarification*. Apart from individual or peer work, students engage in *discussions* for interaction when Zeynep assigned a task to read and asked them to discuss the major themes followed by the entire class telling their personal ideas one by one. The students generally started to interact by talking about their personal accounts or asking questions for clarification, and this interaction was generally directed to the teacher. As for students' favorite interaction patterns, they agreed during the interview that individual work is preferable during the interview.

Mahmut said:

"Group work is enjoyable but individual work is better. You express your opinion more comfortably without arguing with anybody."

Özge said:

"In a group-work setting, one works, the others get credit at that person's performance (expense); however, in individual work, it is apparent and clear what one thinks."

Both Mahmut and Özge appreciated the group work, but they regarded individual work as being more comfortable, personal and clear.

Elif also talked about her preference to work on an individual basis in genre-based writing classes saying:

“I know when we work with other people, it is useful, but sometimes it is not. For example, if I have some ideas in my mind and I want to write them, my other friends can say “No! Let’s not state it like that”. Sometimes we cannot find a common ground.”

Students discovered the individual work was more favorable. It allowed them to concentrate on the work better and present a clear and apparent voice for the reader. During the interview with Zeynep, she highlighted individual interaction patterns between students and the teacher in writing classes in a one-way direction, as she believed that pair work or group work is not efficient for the university students at the undergraduate level since they need to work individually to be creative.

Discussion

In genre-based writing classes, teaching and learning focus on understanding, analyzing and producing the genres of text. Through the genre-based writing, the social purpose of communication plays a role in the various genres such as narratives, descriptions, persuasion and comparison (Lin, 2006). The teacher is regarded as a practitioner of certain stages such as “context exploration, text exploration based on the model texts, joint construction of the text and individual application” (Derewianka, 2003, p. 144). These stages present teaching context, for the practicing routines of teachers, content knowledge, and classroom tasks. In this study, only two out of four stages are clearly observed in the practice of teacher genre-based writing pedagogy where the information and large fragments of knowledge are presented explicitly and a model text is given to work on. The other stage observed is to let students produce their own genres of text as a product of teaching a certain genre. Students generally produce a piece of writing after the analysis of the genre model in the class or outside the class as an assignment.

Zeynep’s practice of genre-based writing shows us that the social goal of communication within the teaching context is not satisfied. This practice may be due to external factors such as syllabus design and lack of time. The syllabus of the genre-based writing class focuses on the basic guidelines and related linguistic forms and assesses the product as an outcome, giving corrections. The way Zeynep employs

genre-based writing leads to interaction patterns between teacher and students, at most, as due to the fact that Zeynep lectures in the class and gives little space for peer work or group work. However, she creates interaction through a certain mechanism such as previous knowledge, directives, meaning quest, recounts, affirmatives, humor, experience, worldview and feedback. As Zeynep focuses on lecturing, modeling, and asking for the product from the students in her practice, the students carry out mostly individual work and prefer to work alone rather than to work in a group. In such context, the establishment of the actual development through social learning is missing in the classroom setting, which was emphasized as necessary for students' potential level of performance in writing (Myles, 2002; Hyland, 2003).

The other stage ignored is the students' joint construction of the text. As observed, students worked on their own and pair work or group work was rare. Teacher-fronted lecturing and teacher-student interaction lead the students to focus on their own personal production of text. The absence of genre joint-construction might influence the classroom interaction patterns in a way that students opt for individual study and do not prefer to work in a group setting, for fear of failing to negotiate or lose their own identity in a group-work-setting, which can be a drawback for learning the social code of writing in a classroom setting.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have seen the practice of a non-native EFL writing teacher's practice of genre-based writing pedagogy. Research on the genre-based approach indicates that genre has social recognition as a text, since through certain conventionalized forms, writers express their opinion, develop a relationship in the surrounding context and establish communities of the audience (Hyland, 2003). Teaching within the classroom setting highlights explicit information in the genre, analysis of sample models, and the emergence or creation of genres with other learners (peers) in context with strong emphasis on the social acknowledgment of the genre and responsibility towards a social community. However, in some teaching contexts, the social function of the genre-based writing classes may not be present mostly due to the teacher-fronted lecturing. Students may accept the teacher as a fundamental source of learning and may not feel a need to work with others. Teachers assuming the social functions

of the genres and lecturing for explicit instructions can result in the absence of multiple interaction patterns such as peer work and group work in writing classes.

A possible implication of this study is that in genre-based writing classes, the social function of the genre construction should be taken into consideration along with the presentation of contextual knowledge in which the genre is created. The other implication is that genre must not be a format only, but a medium for fulfilling a social function, delivering the text message to the community audience around us through negotiation and collaboration. To practice this in genre-based writing classes, classroom interaction patterns such as peer-work and group-work should be encouraged since students can practice exchanging ideas, negotiating them and finding a commonality. This interaction might as well serve effectively for scaffolding (i.e., peer editing and input building) and supporting learners to improve their level of performance in genre writing classes. Another point is the curriculum developers and classroom teachers should give importance to audience-specific writing and help students develop their understanding and tolerance for other people's opinions and assume their posture while communicating with others through genre analysis.

Notes on the contributor

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