Genre Analysis and Genre-based Approaches to EFL Writing: A Critical Analysis

Simon Cornelius

Brent Cotsworth

　本論文では、初級 EFL 学習者を対象にジャンル分析とジャンルに基づいた指導について議論する。ジャンル分析とはどのように言語が特定の状況の中で使用されるかを分析する方法であり、修辞のスタイルと談話のタイプなどが研究の焦点となる。本論文ではライティング指導におけるジャンル分析やジャンルに基づいたアプローチの有効性を検証する。加えて、オーストラリアの学校で活用されているジャンルに基づいた EFL 指導を特に参考にしながら、日本における大学生初級 EFL 学習者に対するジャンルに基づいた指導の活用について議論と検証を行う。

Key words: genre analysis, genre-based approaches, EFL writing, Australian School of Genre

Introduction

　Genre is a relatively new concept in the broad domain that EFL/ESL encompasses today. It is the study of how language is used within a certain setting and focuses on issues such as rhetorical styles and discourse types (Swales, 1990). Stemming from a shift towards a more contextual approach (Johns, 2002) to EFL/ESL in the 1980's and 90's, the genre approach is one that has provoked its fair share of discussion as it is a comparatively "fuzzy concept" (Swales, 1990, p.33) and has been considered by others as a rather controversial one (Kay & Dudley-Evans, 1998). This paper will provide an evaluative report on the concepts of genre analysis and genre-based approaches to writing instruction and will discuss the utilization of genre-based teaching for lower level EFL university students in Japan while focusing on the Australian schools' approach to genre-based EFL instruction.

Literature review

　Paltridge describes genre in rather pragmatic, down to earth terms as the "ways in which people get things done through their use of spoken and written discourse" (Paltridge, 2006,

p.84). Genres express the link between the social context in which text is produced (Badger & White, 2000) and the culturally marked linguistic choices made by the speaker or writer. Genre can be viewed as a conventional socio-cultural framework or schemata for discourse with a common purpose and function, although arguably, genres may vary in their "typicality" (Paltridge, 2006, p.85). Genres manifest themselves in the somewhat formulaic and structured formats such as those encountered in formal letter writing, or in a more fluid yet no less rule bound telephone conversation in which social and cultural decorums are followed.

Genres are also dynamic in nature as they respond to changes in communicative formats such as e-mail, the internet and text messaging. The term genre may be difficult to explicitly define, as it is an umbrella term for the patterns of linguistic engagement undertaken in the production of specific text. Genre analysis has become an important approach to text analysis particularly in the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Specifically, it is the analytical examination of discourse in which the underlying social and contextual factors are taken into consideration. Paltridge (2006) details a number of important concepts and steps that need to be considered when conducting genre analysis, the first of which being the initial perspective that the analysis will take either "text-first" or "context-first" (Flowerdew, 2002, cited in Paltridge, 2006, p.98).

Flowerdew and Dudley-Evans (2002) take a text-first approach in their genre analysis that describes the schematic structure and linguistic features that are represented in editorial letters. Paltridge (2006) goes on to note that genre analysis should present the relationships between the speaker/writer and the target audience. Furthermore, the selected sample of text, either broad randomly selected text or a single text for detailed analysis, should be analyzed in regards to its purpose and context (Paltridge, 2006). Genre analysis can provide learners with "procedural scaffolds" (Johnstone, 2008, p.185) as a launching pad for production of text. It seeks to discover not only similarities between genres but explores acceptable alternative configurations within a context (Hyland, 2003). Genre analysis also proves useful in providing databases for further research into the sociolinguistical changes or ideological representations of language and society (Johnstone, 2008). Genre analysis research expands beyond texts to explore relationships that can both "facilitate and constrain" (Hyland, 2003, p.23) discourse production, as Johnstone (2008) warns of a potential side effect of genre studies leading to inflexibility in text composition.

The genre-based approaches to L2 writing are in some ways an evolution of previous product approaches in which linguistic knowledge, vocabulary and syntax was the central focus (Badger & White, 2000). Hyland (2003) describes three major schools of genre theory that have

adopted this genre-based approach as The New Rhetoric approach, The ESP (English for Specific Purposes) approach and Systemic Functional Linguistics, also known as the Sydney School (Hyland, 2003) or the Australian School of Genre. Although the three schools differ to a certain degree, there are common threads that bind them together. Describing and explaining regularities of purpose, form and situated social action are common objectives of all three approaches (Hyland, 2003), of which the ESP approach has arguably the greatest impact on L2 writing. Situation and purpose are central to genre-based writing approaches whereby writers become aware of required formats, styles and conventionalities for a given writing context, such as letter writing, academic writing or newspaper articles.

Dudley-Evans (1997) presents a three stage approach to genre-based writing instruction. In the first stage, learners are exposed to the model genre. In the second stage, learners are provided with exercises to develop related language forms and in the third stage learners independently create original text resembling comparable stages in product approaches (cited in Badger & White, 2000). Moreover, genre-based pedagogies stress the social relationship between the writer, audience and context. Hyland (2003) presses further to suggest that writing cannot be seen as neutral or value-free but reflects the institutional and cultural communities of power that they are written in. Academic publications are an example of "valued text" (Hyland, 2003, p.24) that are closely linked to an institution or community of power. These publications can be difficult to not only physically access, but also difficult to linguistically utilize by those who could potentially benefit from them the most.

Critique of genre-based approaches to writing

Genre-based writing instruction attempts to provide learners with a range of writing skills that will equip them to better tackle authentic real world writing tasks. Hyland (2003) stresses that there is a need for L2 language learners to become familiar with written genres as this knowledge can potentially assist them in gaining access to professional, academic and occupational communities. The instruction of key genres will help open doors to, what Hyland refers to as "cultural capital" (Hyland, 2003, p.24). Contrarians of genre-based approaches argue that there is a need for a more critical view of such pedagogies, potentially encouraging students to resist such elitist communities of power (Johns, 2002). Academic writing is one paradigm of such a discourse community where the doors are closed to those who are not willing to adhere to the obligatory writing formats. Therefore, genre-based approaches do little to facilitate social change in dominant discourse communities. In fact, Freedman and Medway (1994) suggest that

genre-based approaches can theoretically have political and ethical implications that could possibly marginalize certain groups, such as the exclusiveness in academic genres and the inherent gendered qualities in scientific discourse (Freedman & Medway, 1994). In rebuttal, Hyland (2003) claims that by not providing learners with knowledge about socially accepted rules for writing denies students the chance to communicate effectively, analyze text critically and ultimately participate in such specific discourse communities.

Students involved in a genre-based approach to writing such as the Sydney School or Australian School of Genre follow a pedagogy that emphasizes 'purposeful, interactive, and sequential character of different genres' (Hyland, 2003, p.21). Learners are guided and supported by the teacher, initially identifying and analyzing the genre's social purposes followed by greater learner independence to develop and "negotiate text structure and content" (Johns, 2002, p.157). Such genre-based approaches have come under fire for seeing learners as being rather passive and dousing written creativity through a methodology of prescriptivism and conformity (Badger & White, 2000, Kay & Dudley-Evans, 1998). Hyland again counters this argument by stating that there is nothing inherently prescriptive in genre-based approaches, supporting this argument by suggesting that genre, like other writing instruction, only empowers learners by providing them with the necessary expertise to "participate effectively in target situations" (Hyland, 2003, p.27).

The pedagogical value of genre teaching comes under question from Badger and White (2000) who claim that genre-based approaches possibly underrate the skills required for learners to produce text. However, Kay and Dudley-Evans' (1998) report that canvassed teachers' views on the use of genre-based approaches, would seem to suggest the contrary. According to this study, teachers felt that genre-based approaches are "particularly suitable" (Kay & Dudley-Evans, 1998, p.310) for low level learners as this approach builds confidence by offering models for inexperienced writers. Additionally, genre-based approaches to writing offer clear and explicit outcomes for learners and provide "cycles of activity" (Hyland, 2007, p.152) that allow learners to build on existing knowledge as writing skills are developed.

Discussion

Advocates of genre-based approaches to writing such as Hyland, put forward a persuasive argument, promoting genre pedagogies that 'promise very real benefits for learners' (Hyland, 2007, p.150) by providing frameworks for the study of both language and its context.

In the Japanese university context for example, novice writers may find the conventionalities

of EFL academic writing problematic due largely to the fact that the often utilized Swales' approach might be more suited to high level academic English students. A suggested alternative that could possibly be more effective in teaching lower level learners is the previously discussed Australian School of Genre approach (known as the teaching/learning cycle). This method is considered to be more holistic in its approach as it combines the teaching of more basic genres with a system which keeps the teacher responsible for explaining the text's purpose, organizational features and linguistic markers (Paltridge, 2001). The students are responsible for output and interaction. Students respond first in discussion with the teacher and or with fellow students, and then put the knowledge to use by gaining skills by developing their own genre texts both as a group and individually (see the teaching and learning cycle Hammond et al, 1992).

According to genre theory as interpreted by the Australian School of Genre, it is argued that students learn to write after first listening to and or reading actual samples of the target language/text. After this, they will then see how the purpose is conveyed in the overall organization and features of the text (Hammond et al, 1992). Therefore, and importantly, the grammar and vocabulary are related to the meaning of the genre and not viewed as separate aspects. It is argued that this helps the students write their own text effectively. It is widely recognized that if students are expected to write in a particular genre, they first need to become familiar with its purpose and features through exposure to that genre and the explanation of sample texts.

Therefore, we consider this familiarization and exposure method will lay a solid basis for the students to develop writing skills. In addition to the benefits of this method, the genre approach gives students a particular purpose for their writing and presents learners with salient goals we believe would benefit novice EFL writers in Japan. Badger and White (2000) also argue that the genre approach increases student awareness of the social context in which the discourse is written in. Furthermore, they suggest that EFL learners need to be aware of the differences between the casual nature of e-mail compared to the more formal style used in writing business letters.

Genre-based teaching has been accused of spoon-feeding language to learners which could stifle creative thinking and personal expression. Alternatives to genre-based approaches may provide a more creative approach to writing in which writing is "learned, not taught" (Hyland, 2003, p.9) and puts the learners' voice first with the teachers being one of a positive supporter. Badger and White offer an alternative to L2 writing instruction in their "process genre" (2000, p.153) approach which amalgamates key aspects of product, process and genre approaches.

The very socio-cultural nature of genre presents a number of pedagogical challenges for adoption into the EFL/ESL classroom, to such an extent that Johns questions whether or not genre can be "captured, taught and acquired in the classroom" (2002, p.4). Questions remain as to what and whose "key genres" (Hyland, 2003, p.24) should be adopted especially with L2 English communities in Asia. Genre-based approaches need to avoid over prescriptivism to remain truly learner-centered by encouraging self-expression and risk taking underpinned by an understanding of social and contextual boundaries.

Conclusion

Within the limitations of this paper an attempt has been made to critique the pros and cons of genre-based approaches and give an overview of genre analysis and genre itself. Raising learner awareness of genre appears to have its benefits as learners acquire appropriate social and cultural knowledge that will assist their interaction within a variety of discourse communities. Genre-based approaches to writing will have to overcome the inherent limitations and apparent restrictiveness, but can clearly provide learners with salient goals and an explicit pedagogy that doesn't make assumptions about learners' prior knowledge and cultural practices (Hyland, 2003).

The debate surrounding the practical use of genre in classroom instruction of L2 writing will likely be on going and may keep the concept of genre in perpetual pedagogical limbo as it is so closely tied with socio-cultural ideologies. This paper should provide a springboard for further research into the effectiveness of genre-based approaches, such as the Australia School of Genre, and how they may benefit lower level L2 English writers.

References

Badger, R and White, G. (2000). A process of genre approach to teaching writing. *ELT Journal. 54* (2) 153-160.

Flowerdew, J. and Dudley-Evans, T. (2002). Genre analysis of editorial letters to international journal contributors. *Applied Linguistics* 23(4), 463-489.

Freedman, A. and Medway, P. (1994). *Genre in the New Rhetoric.* Taylor & Francis Ltd.

Hammond, J. et al (1992). *English for social purposes: A handbook for teachers of adult literacy.* Sydney: NCELTR, Macquarie University.

Hyland, K. (2007). Genre pedagogy: Language, literacy and L2 writing instruction. *Journal of Second Language Writing 16* (3), 148-164.

Hyland, K. (2003). *Writing and teaching writing in Second language writing.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hyland, K. (2003). Genre-based pedagogies: A social response to process. *Journal of Second Language Writing.* **12** (3), 17-29.

Johns, A. (2002). Introduction: Genre in the Classroom. In A. Johns, (Ed.), *Genre in the classroom.* Hillsdale, NJ.

Johnstone, B. (2008). *Discourse Analysis.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Kay, H and Dudley- Evans, T. (1998). Genre: what teachers think. *ELT Journal.* **52** (4) 308-314.

Paltridge, B. (2006). *Discourse Analysis: an introduction.* London: Continuum.

Swales, J. (1990). *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings.* Cambridge University Press.