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Nuevas variaciones del género epistolar: Estrategias para el uso de corpus literarios en el aula ILE

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Nuevas variaciones del género epistolar: Estrategias para el uso de corpus literarios en el aula ILE

New Variations of the Epistolary Genre: Strategizing the Use of Literary Corpora in the EFL Classroom

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Contents

Abstract

This work proposes a genre pedagogy for incorporating literature into the teaching instruction through a compilation of teaching materials inspired by the epistolary novel. The literary corpus is a useful tool for language learning; its collection of texts can provide learners with authentic data about language structure, lexis and functions. In this specific case, the exposure to the epistolary genre brings endless possibilities for introducing topic discussions and practice reading and writing in an English Foreign Language setting. By delving into the variety of text types present in the epistolary novel, learners discover how the genre unfolds through multiple forms of communication that have descended from the letter. The instructional focus will be on the deconstruction of the original text and piecing it back together according to the schematic moves on the personal recount. The aim is to provide students with a strategy for writing their own story in the epistolary style. To achieve this, they must follow a series of steps meant to facilitate their creation process and produce a good-quality piece of writing in English.

Keywords: *literary corpus, genre pedagogy, epistolary, writing strategy, personal recount, schematic moves*

Resumen

Este trabajo propone una pedagogía del género literario para incorporar la literatura a la enseñanza mediante una recopilación de materiales didácticos inspirados en la novela epistolar. El corpus literario es una herramienta útil para el aprendizaje de lenguas; su colección de textos puede proporcionar a los alumnos datos auténticos sobre la estructura, el léxico y las funciones de la lengua. En este caso concreto, la exposición al género epistolar aporta un sinfín de posibilidades para introducir debates temáticos y practicar las destrezas de lectura y escritura en el ámbito de la lengua extranjera inglesa. Al profundizar en la variedad de tipos de texto presentes en la novela epistolar, los alumnos descubren cómo el género se manifiesta a través de múltiples formas de comunicación que han descendido de la carta. La enseñanza se centrará en la deconstrucción del texto original y en su recomposición según sus movimientos esquemáticos. El objetivo es proporcionar a los alumnos una estrategia para escribir su propio relato personal en estilo epistolar. Para ello, deberán seguir una serie de pasos destinados a facilitar su proceso de creación y producir un escrito de buena calidad en inglés.

Palabras clave: *corpus literario, pedagogía de género literario, epistolario, estrategia de escritura, relato personal, movimientos esquemáticos*

1. Introduction

This project draws on the need of consciously incorporating literary pieces into teaching materials for the purpose of providing an integral approach to the learning of English as a Foreign Language. At the core of this innovative proposal lies the necessity of supplementing the contents from coursebooks with a variety of learner-centred, teacher-made materials. Too often, teachers practice has been conditioned by the pre-ordained forms from pre-selected syllabus of English textbooks. The way literature is presented in these publications is through abridged versions of literary works where language features are normally taught in the form of gap-fill and true or false exercises. This kind of restricted treatment of literary texts does not allow students to discover alternative forms of text exploration and, furthermore, comes at the expense of communicative activities in the classroom.

By creating a literary corpus we bring forward an independent teaching resource that is collaborative and free, contains authentic materials and is not limited to one distinct methodology. The corpus is presented in the form of a collection of texts to which teachers from the English department can make contributions. The collection contains a number of extracts belonging to four literary works written in the epistolary style: the classic novel *Dracula* (1897) by Bram Stoker, Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl* (1952) and two more recent novels, *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* (2008) by Mary Ann Shaffer and *Dear Rachel Maddow* (2018) by Adrienne Kisner. Although the last two works are less known by the readers, the quality of their works is no less valuable. They have won plaudits for their fictional work, especially for the humour in their narrative and the choice of topics which resonates greatly with younger readers.

Here, the epistolary novel lends itself to the teaching of different genres as it is made up of a series of documents which include letters, telegrams, journals, newspaper clipping, blog posts, emails and video diaries. The exposure to genre texts brings considerable benefits to the language development. Firstly, it encourages the study of the functional purposes of the genres. Secondly, working with genre sets can spark great ideas for producing creative writing. Thirdly,

literary correspondence can help develop student's written communicative competence which, in turn, leads to authentic communicative events within the classroom walls.

The selection of literary texts as the means by which English will be taught has not been haphazardly chosen but was, rather, considered thoroughly. Among the great variety of epistolary works, factors like syllabus compatibility, exploitability of texts and student interest served to narrow down the options. The resulting samples serve to model and provide a context for different purposes of writing an epistolary story.

As observed in the pre-service training, many students struggle with writing a longer piece of text in English. They get frustrated with the requirements of the writing as they do not have the necessary technique or vocabulary and end up spending the entire class stuck on the first paragraph. Because the writing assignment is often seen as a stressful and lone activity, many students finish Compulsory Education without being able to write a medium-sized text in the target language. One possible solution to this problem is to strategize their writing by following a step-by-step model to building a recount text based on one of the samples of the epistolary genre.

In an effort to provide a clear framework that will help explain genre use to students of Secondary Education, we propose the implementation of the Genre Approach. Each lesson unit or cycle has its central focus on a chosen text type or genre and consists of a sequence of stages also known as the text-based cycle. Apart from the standard procedures of the cycle, other creative writing practices will be adopted as a means of achieving the specified end which is, the creation of an original epistolary story.

The project has been divided in two parts. In the first part, the general objectives of this paper are presented followed by an outline of the current methodologies and concepts on which the proposal takes its premises. In this section, genre pedagogies and the sociocultural principles are discussed based on the research of some scholars (Carter, 1986; Collie and Slater, 1987; Hyland, 2002, 2003, 2007; Kramsch, 1985; Lazar, 1993; Nunan, 2004; Van, 2009; etc.). In the State of the Art we will take a closer look at some of the cases of classroom

practice with epistles and review the most recent studies on the new variations of the epistolary genre.

The second part of this work offers details about the teaching intervention and the strategies employed for writing a personal recount. The product, a story written in the epistolary style, will be submitted to peer revision and showcased by the end of the last session. In the Discussion section, some remarks on the benefits and shortcomings of the proposal will be made in line with the literature review and initial postulates. Then, a short summary together with some personal annotations will be provided in the Conclusions. In the remainder of this paper appendixes will include: a list of the criteria to be taken into account when selecting a literary text, the collection of texts from the epistolary novels (the literary corpus), plus other materials designed for the pedagogical intervention and students' activities.

2. Theoretical Framework

There are two theoretical bases used for this teaching proposal, the sociocultural key principles that appear in Vygotsky's work and the Genre-based approach.

To begin with, the principles of sociocultural theory served to inform the Genre-based approach about the social practices that support the learning of English as a Foreign Language. In other words, the approach adheres to the practice of scaffolded learning and peer interaction proposed by the sociocultural theory. Our teaching plan will be factoring in the *zone of proximal development* and *instructional scaffolding* in the instructional design.

Genre-based approach was chosen as the frame of reference for teaching of the epistolary genre because it emphasises both product and process. It helps learners focus on the overall pattern of a whole genre text as well as on the language patterns at the sentence-level so that in the end they are able to produce a successful piece of writing.

The last segment offers some background information about the epistolary genre. In this wise, definitions of the epistle and the epistolary novel are provided, followed by an outline of the evolution of epistolary literature and a presentation of the main characteristics of the epistolary genre.

2.1. Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory and the approach outlined in this paper take great account of the roles that social relations, community and culture play in the learning of languages. Initiated by Vygotsky in 1978, the sociocultural theory describes learning and language development as being embedded within social events and occurring as a learner interacts with other people, objects, and events in the collaborative environment.

In this section, sociocultural theory is discussed in relation to two aspects of the cognitive development, namely *zone of proximal development (ZPD)* and *instructional scaffolding*.

The first one, *zone proximal development (ZPD)* implies that, during a learning activity, a student's performance improves exponentially through interaction with the classmates, the teacher or any other expert adult with whom they engage in helpful conversations.

This principle was defined as: "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86).

ZDP has also permeated into the language classroom. As it happens, students who are proficient in a foreign language are arranged in groups to support other members who struggle with the language or lack confidence in their capacities. During activities, students help one another by repeating instructions, explaining the meaning of words or remedying erroneous grammatical structures.

The *text-based teaching cycle* forwarded in the framework contemplates the activation of this support mechanism throughout all stages of the project. Nonetheless, principles of ZDP are made more evident in the phase of joint construction of texts where students are encouraged to interact, clear misunderstandings and negotiate the best strategies for the completion of the writing task. Luu (2011, p.123) contends that learning writing in this way removes the feeling of isolation which bothers many learners and, at the same time, helps student writers have positive reinforcements about the knowledge of composing texts.

The second key concept derived from Vygotsky's work is *instructional scaffolding*. Closely related to ZDP, this kind of supported learning refers to the transition of responsibility for the task to the student. In their practice, teachers step by step provide the students with adequate instruction so that the students can learn the procedure, and the teachers eventually give up the help of the students in order to pass the responsibility to the learners to complete the assignment (Faraj, 2015).

To illustrate this process, the curriculum cycle for teaching the epistolary writing is formulated on instructional scaffolding. The framework provided in the genre approach (see 3.2. *Genre pedagogies*) is summarised by Feez and Joyce (1998) in five stages as displayed in the diagram from next page.

Figure 1. Text-based
teaching cycle

(Feez & Joyce, 1998)
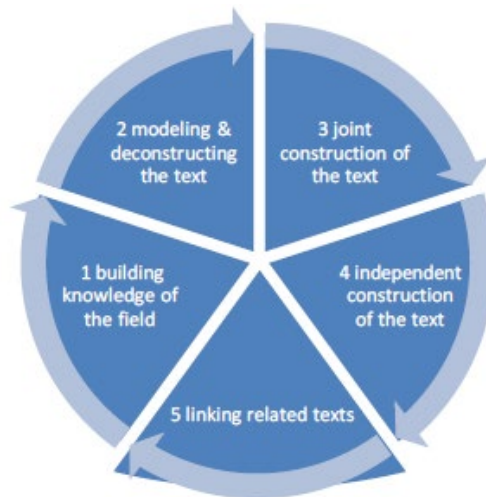
The first stage, *field building*, is the first crucial step in which students' prior knowledge is activated. Students know more about genres than they think they know and can recognize them with relative ease. Before expanding awareness by reading and writing, it is possible to share experience through a prompted preview or a set of warm-up questions.

The next step, *modelling*, refers to the step of describing, analysing, and discussing the text model. The third stage is *collaborative construction*, step in which the students and the teachers jointly compose a specific text. The fourth stage is *independent writing*, which refers to the stage where scaffolding is taken off.

In contrast to the original scheme proposed by Hammond et al. (1992), Feez and Joyce managed to advance a fifth stage where students create a new larger text. The addition of another task is very welcomed as in the final stage of the project, students are required to create a story in documents containing different genres.

2.2. Genre-based pedagogies

Genre has been an important category in writing pedagogy for many years but has taken different forms depending on different theoretical frames of reference. Previous to its application to language teaching, the term *genre* has been referenced by many scholars in their socio-cultural studies and linguistic theories.

A definition of *genre* can be elaborated regarding its social aspect. Hyland (2003) suggests that genre simply refers to socially recognized ways of using language and that it is a concept we all use for grouping texts together. Similarly, Biber (2006, p.11) understands genre as a culturally recognized "message type" with a conventional internal structure which in the field of linguistics is largely known as *schematic structure*. This suggests that the genre perspective of language is a social and cultural manifestation which "involves variations in the way we use language and not universal rules" (Halliday, 1994).

According to Swales:

> A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style. (1990, p.58)

In practice, genres may be approached in quite different ways as genre pedagogies do not represent a single set of techniques (Hyland, 2007). The two most influential orientations in L2 classrooms worldwide, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), for example, have different views of genre and different scopes. In this paper, SFL approach was chosen as it has the most complete framework of reference for language development. Nonetheless, throughout this paper, SFL approach it will be referred to by its popular name, *Genre-based approach*.

A definition for the genre approach, adapted from the "Routledge Encyclopedia of Language Teaching and Learning" (2000), would be:

> A framework for language instruction based on examples of a particular genre aimed to support students' writing with generalized, systematic guiding principles about how to produce meaningful passages.

Genre approach is currently being used more flexibly than in the past. Two decades ago, the more traditional variant focused primarily on the products of learning rather than the processes involved. Richards (2006) pointed out that an emphasis on individual creativity and personal expression was often missing from the approach. The endeavour of this proposal is to remedy such aspects by

introducing a second module based on writing strategies for creative writing that allow students to understand the process of writing without adding major constraints in style and format so that they express freely in their writing.

Another aspect of the genre approach that Richards (2006) warned about is that teaching within this framework can become repetitive and tedious over time since the teaching cycle of English language is applied to the teaching of all four skills. However, the core units of planning in genre approach can easily be integrated into other types of practices. Moreover, the study of text types can be added as a strand to any English syllabus together with specifications about other language areas, topics or functions.

Because genre-based approach to language teaching can be effective in a variety of settings, frameworks may also vary. For instance, Paltridge (2001) proposes a design that involves investigating the texts and contexts of students' target situations, exploiting texts from different types of genres and creating mixed genre portfolios. On a similar note, Wu and Dong (2009) provides a teacher's practical guide to composing an essay through the study of narrative text types. To complete those studies, Mickan (2011) provided a practical guide for teaching not only written texts, but also spoken texts, something unusual because, as Bagher (2014, p.40) contends, "genre studies have predominantly addressed writing instruction".

In our case, the genre approach fits the purpose of strategizing the use of the literary corpus in the EFL classroom. By describing the typical stages and features of valued genres, students are provided with clear options for writing so their texts seem well-formed and appropriate to readers. Furthermore, the new variations of the epistolary story, where traditional genres (notes, letters and diary entries) mix with modern elements (emails, text messages, conversation transcripts, blog posts, and other ephemera), serve writer students to come up a variety of ways to express their creativity and preferences. Although the task of writing a longer piece of text may be perceived by students as hard or confusing, the focus on the writing strategies promises to facilitate the creation process to the extent that it becomes an enjoyable activity for all participants.

Teaching writing through recount texts

The choice of recount text as a pedagogical genre in this project is justified by the fact that it encompasses the study of text types that are predominant in the epistolary genre.

Recount is a piece of writing which retells events or experiences in the past, and it can focus on a specific section of an event or retell the entire story. Its goal is to entertain or to inform the audiences (Hyland, 2007, p. 3).

According to Rusdin (2018), there are five types of recounts with a range of genres to consider: *personal recount* (e.g. anecdote, diary, journal, personal letter or email); *factual recount* (e.g. police reconstruction of an accident, historical recount, biographical and autobiographical recount); *imaginative recount* (e.g. "A Day in the Life of the American President", "The time I lost my keys"); procedural recounts (e.g. scientific experiment, food recipe); and *literary recount* (e.g. fables, myths, legends).

In the implementation of the text-based teaching cycle, the schematic structure of the recount text serves as a basis for the modelling, joint construction of text and independent composition of a text (basically, any of the epistolary texts).

The schematic structure of a prototypical recount text has two main rhetorical moves[1], *orientation* and *events* to which other two optional moves can be added, *abstract* and *re-orientation*. Since the moves of composing a recount can be reorganised, changing the order is always an option although not recommendable for novice writers.

I. Abstract (optional)	It signals the retelling of unusual, uncommon or amusing incident. Typically used with anecdotes.	Rhetorical questions Verbs in past simple

[1] A rhetorical move is used to describe a particular rhetorical or linguistic pattern, stage, or structure conventionally found in a text or in a segment of a text. Throughout the paper, the concept is also being referred to as "schematic move".

II. Orientation	It gives the readers the background information to understand the text, such as who was involved, where it happened, and when it happened.	Proper nouns and pronouns Descriptive words/ phrases (whom, when, where, how) Adverbs and adverbial phrases
III. Events	A series of events ordered in a chronological sequence. This move can be divided into two subparts - *crisis* and *reaction*.	Conjunctions Action verbs Descriptive words/ phrases (whom, when, where, how)
IV. Re-orientation (optional)	It offers a reflection on or evaluation of the incident.	Verbs in past simple Evaluative language

Table 1. The prototypical schematic moves and linguistic features of recount texts.

Prepared by the author.

In view of working with recount material, Chairena (2016) proposes several guidelines for the writers:

1) Map your ideas of "Whom? What? When? Why?"; 2) Start with an orientation paragraph that informs the reader about the content of the recount; 3) Draw a flow of chart to help sequence events; 4) Use connectives that signal time, e.g. *then, next, meanwhile, finally*, etc.; 5) Write as if you are telling the story but always use the past tense; 6) End with a closing statement/ comment on the events.

2.3. The epistolary novel

The word "epistle" is the basis of the word epistolary. Broadly speaking, the epistolary novel is fiction in which the author conveys the story through documents[2]. In the most traditional understanding, epistolary novels are series of letters. According to Elizabeth Campbell (Denkova, 2015, p.7), the epistolary novel is "a novel written in the form of letters, exchange of letters between two or

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[2] Although the epistolary genre may contain texts of different genres (e.g. a recipe, an article, a text message), these may sometimes be referred to a "epistolary text" as they are presented as documents integrated in the epistolary story.

more correspondents, one or more letters sent by a correspondent to one or more recipients". Indeed, it comprises correspondence between characters meant to "replicate the authenticity of actual letters and re-create a supposedly intimate private realm for the reader to observe other lives" (Nelson, 2016, p. 1).

In consonance with the definitions above, the Encyclopaedia Britannica offers a broader description of the literary genre:

> An epistolary novel is 'a novel told through the medium of letters written by one or more of the characters […] It was one of the earliest forms of novel to be developed and remained one of the most popular up to the 19th century. The epistolary novel's reliance on subjective points of view makes it the forerunner of the modern psychological novel.

Before delving into the features of the genre, it is important to trace a brief outline of the development of the epistolary fiction novel a series of collated epistolary texts.

The earliest works present a higher degree of complexity of the plot, frequent use of dramatic literary device and richness of vocabulary. The narrative is dominated by letters, personal diaries, travel journals, illustrations, maps, notes and telegrams, the latter being introduced in 19th century texts. Since then, the modern epistolary novel has gone through major changes that affected the topics and language structure. Owing to the significant influence of Web 2.0., epistolary works present a broad array of digital documents and visual aids that support the plot. Likewise, the language displayed in epistolary novels for teenagers and young adults is generally informal, populated by phrasal verbs and neologisms especially in the parts that contain personal recounts. More information on modern variations of the genre and the effect of multimodal texts on the readers can be found in the section *State of the Art* (4).

An attempt to define the genre

The most important characteristic of the epistolary as a literary or a semi-literary genre is its *dialogical nature*. Regardless of whether the text is a letter or a diary, if it is meant to be read or not, the writer normally expresses himself as if he were in a conversation with another character. When three or more

characters/points of view are involved, the epistolary novel becomes *polylogical*. According to Denkova (2015, p.8): "a crucial element in polylogical epistolary novels is the dramatic procedure known as *contrary to reason*: the simultaneous but separate correspondence of the characters - villains that create dramatic tension."

This kind of epistolary relationship can only be sustained in written communication when there is an element of *distance* between the parties. To illustrate this, Altman (1982) makes a quick comparison of the epistolary exchange to other types of dialogue to help remember this particular trait of epistolary discourse.
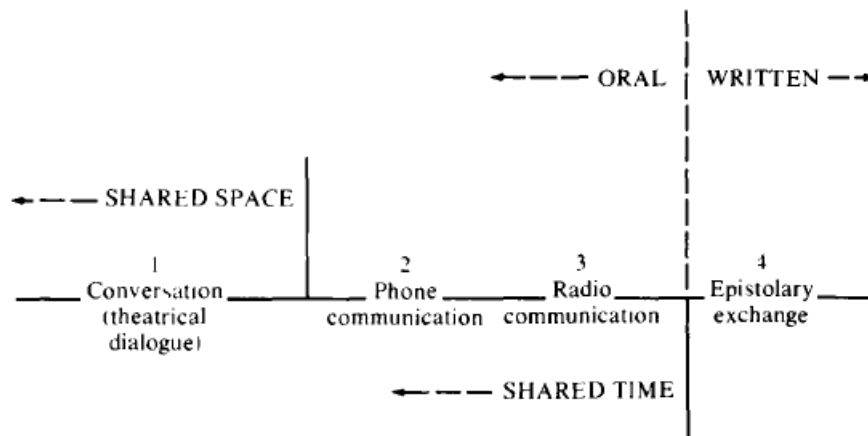
Figure 2. Distance in the epistolary dialogue as it appears in Altman's
Epistolarity (1982)

The author gives details on each of the four points in the diagram:

1. Communication between two or more parties who share the same time and space is extraverbal as well as verbal; tones and gestures play a role.
2. When space is no longer shared, tones still play a part in communication, but gestures are lost. Phone conversations already involve that sense of absence inherent to the letter exchange.
3. The comparison with radio communication is parallel to phone communication (shared time, different space, tones are still important) but participants in a radio conversation cannot interrupt each other; each

speaker completes his speech as a discrete unit and signs off before the other begins.

4. The letter is an even more discrete unit than the radio message. Writer and reader share neither time nor space. The written exchange not only introduces the time lag between message transmission and message reception; it also widens the interval between message reception and response. The writer has more time to meditate, to measure and correct his words, to polish his style.

Another concept tied to the genre that Altman discusses is the existence of an "an epistolary mosaic". This title implies more characteristics of the epistolary genre - multiple plots, impaired timeline due to non-chronological sorting of letters, multiple correspondents, each giving an individual tone to the letter and intervals that exist between letters and may contribute to the structure of the narration.

Out of all types of (non) fictional prose, probably none has been so often subjected to critical definition and categorization than the epistolary genre. Pursuant to Denkova (2015, p.6), the difference between the epistolary genre and other realistic-autobiographical fiction is the desire or demand for exchange. Accordingly, the epistolary text must include a sender and a recipient of the letter and demonstrate a clear intention for that letter to be read. However, there are many nuances to this thought. As stated before, in some private letters, writers establish a conversation with someone absent and their motivation is not based on a response, hence, there is no real exchange. Undoubtedly, defining the epistolary genre in terms of *correspondence* would be to limit the form to letters, notes, telegrams, etc., as diaries, journals and other ephemera included also belong to the epistolary form.

A further contradiction tied to the genre, as reported by Patch (2014, p.11), is that the epistolary novels are viewed as *the female genre* because in the past they were presented by women, in the feminine style of writing. The author explains that early epistolary fiction was limited to topics such as love stories, emphasizing distance, confidentiality, and secrecy but that since the progress made in women's authorial rights, females voices gained freedom to tackle in their writing other issues like society, history or philosophy. Patch wonders for a

moment if in the modern forms of the epistolary novel integrating electronic communication can nowadays assign a specific writing style to a gender (e.g. emails are normally considered gender neutral) though later adds that gender associations in literature and cinema continue to be made until this day.

3. State of the art

3.1. Cases of classroom practice with epistles

Over the last years, teachers and educators have been putting forward their teaching ideas in regard to exploring the epistolary genre in the language classroom. Most of these proposals were directed towards working with correspondence for improving students' reading skills, creative writing and communicative skills. For the purpose of finding a connection with the current proposal, this segment focuses mainly on the reported teaching practices in Secondary Education, excepting Hall's proposal for Primary School. As stated by the authors, the language levels observed in the target groups vary between low, intermediate and advanced.

The first reference is Banegas' proposal to "Using Letters to Tell Stories in the EFL Classroom" (2011). Grounded on the notion of *tapestry writing*, this technique refers to composing a piece of text out of several seemingly unrelated threads at the beginning of a story that end up being woven together in an "intricate tapestry" (Locke, 2015). One of the tasks designed by the educator aims to create an *epistolary story* in four steps through the practice of letter exchange. In this wise, each student must write a real or imagined story addressed to "Dear You" and share it anonymously with another classmate. The receiver of the letter is instructed to respond to the letter and finish the letter by asking "And then what happened?". After swapping letters four times, the stories are wrapped up. Banegas manages to depict an integral intervention based on student interaction, including clear instructions, writing techniques and possible variations to the activities based on a text sample from the epistolary novel *The Color Purple* (Alice Walker).

Another proposal of letter exchange is that of Figueiredo et al. (2016). Inspired by the epistolary novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Stephen Chbosky), this teaching plan entails watching the movie adaptation of the novel, carrying out discussions on the topic of the novel, doing grammar and vocabulary exercises followed by the letter exchange. Despite the fact that the proposal does not mention any writing strategy nor does specify how to deal with the issue of

profane language in the novel, it does however include activities for language improvement and a varied input display through the use of videos.

Some years before, Sianjina (1994) suggested a more classic approach to teaching the epistolary form through Fanny Burney's novel *Evelina*. Sianjina has taught Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* to eighth and ninth graders. She then discovered a woman writer of the eighteenth century whose novel could be taught using the same format used to teach Dickens's novel. According to her, "the *Evelina* is effective not only for teaching the epistolary novel form, but also for teaching etiquette, teenage relationships, the *rites of passage* theme, and London's society". The first task includes a journal writing assignment based on a series of prompts meant to help the students understand the struggles of the female protagonist. Because subsequent sessions are also dedicated to class discussions about the socio-historical background of the novel, Siajina's proposal is perhaps too limited in terms of scope and learning outcomes.

Similarly, Hall (n.d.) creates a writing activity focused on the story elements of the epistolary novel *Dear Mr. Blueberry*. This book is made up of a series of letters between a little girl named Emily and her teacher, Mr. Blueberry, over a summer vacation. In short, students are presented with four letters extracted from the novel and work with a story plan worksheet. The main activity is dedicated to writing an outline about whales, thus using one of the books' topics to create a text. Even though the teaching plan includes an overview of the epistolary structure, the final writing activity has no apparent ties to the epistolary style nor provides students with a strategy for developing their writing skills.

A teaching proposal at a more advanced level is the epistle-centric course Bishop (2018) developed under the heading of *Topics in American Literature*. The purpose of this three-unit course is to learn about the history and culture of the United States through the epistolary legacy of Bret Harte, Mark Twain, Alice Walker and Martin Luther King Jr., among others. Selected artifacts include travel letters, epistolary poems, fictional letters and open letters published in newspapers. The last unit is dedicated to the experimental forms of letters such as those from the *Dear Data* project, a year-long exchange of postcard infographics between two friends.

Lastly, one of the most innovative teaching ideas involving the epistolary genre is probably Corbett's story project (2012). His writing tasks are based on

four mentor texts[3] belonging to the novels *Flowers of Algernon* (Daniel Keyes), *Ordeal by cheque* (Wuther Crue), *The river between us* (Richard Peck) and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Harriet Jacobs). Corbett's design features a step-by-step process of creating an epistolary story with attached texts belonging to several sub-genres. To this end, he shares a vocabulary collection resource, the excerpts from the novels, together with samples of student recounts in the epistolary style. The latter comprise epistolary summaries and epistolary writing projects presented in the form of phone messages, messages on post-its, tweets, Instagram stories, diary entries, cancelled check and tea-stained journals.

Looking at these proposals, it becomes evident that scaffolded learning is a shared characteristic between all six settings. Conversely, the nature of the writing tasks varies in each procedure; while in Banegas and Figueiredo, the epistolary text is developed through collaborative writing, in Hall, Sianjina, Bishop and Corbett, the writing activities are performed independently. The focus on the common language patterns of the epistolary texts is treated rather superficially in all five proposals, probably because of the time limitations. Moreover, it seems that little detail is offered on the schematic structure of the epistolary genre except for the cases where the original texts are used as a model for a new writing. Ideally, a holistic approach to epistolary creation should include good samples of text with information about the structure of the genre, allow time for scrutinising language patterns and, most importantly, introduce students to a writing technique to facilitate their creation process.

3.2. Focus on new epistolary variations

The following lines present the most recent expert publications about the latest trends of the epistolary genre. In the absence of studies that connect directly with the teaching of the epistolary novel in the classroom, we will try to compile those characteristics of the genre that need to be considered when working with epistolary texts.

Undoubtedly, the epistolary novel is one of the most flexible and adaptable literary genres. Although for a moment the epistolary tradition seemed to be

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[3] In the genre approach, the concept of "mentor text" is synonym to model text or set text.

fading away, the genre managed to open a niche in the contemporary literature through the increasing popularity of the epistolary juvenile novels.

One recent work that examines the revival of the epistolary form in the late twentieth and the early twenty-first century is the *Epistolary Renaissance* (Löschnigg & Schuh, 2018). This book addresses several aspects of the modern epistolary such as the multiple forms of communication that descended from letters and the upsurge of the epistolary short story. The former is described as a narration told in one letter (or a few letters) or through a limited number of journal entries, easily adaptable to emails or vlogs. According to Löschnigg, this new variation of the epistolary so far received no critical echo in discussions about the genre. Nonetheless, she argues that the epistolary short story has lots of experimental appeal and that an epistolary short story can render aspects of historicity and subjectivity in a briefer and rounder form.

In another chapter of the book, Schuh reflects on "the power of letters to viscerally affect the lives of the protagonists". The emotional implications are thus expressed in a metalanguage referred to "the writing, reading, or finding of letters, on the excitement upon the arrival of a letter or the disappointment upon not receiving a letter, on the opening of letters, the first reaction upon read and so on and so forth". What has been named "epistolary illusion" by the author, identifies as a necessary aesthetic device that continues to be used in today's epistolary fictions. Furthermore, these comments made by the writer probably constitute the introduction or ending in almost every letter.

With the advent of the new technologies, the epistolary novel has transformed into a hybrid form of writing, where the epistolary voice is no longer limited to the letter but "unfolds through multiple forms of communication that have descended from the letter" (Bowers, 2009, p.56). The shift to a more modern variant of the novel implies supplementing letters and journal entries with audio-visual aids embedded in the text. Still, this relatively new practice does not break entirely with the past. In many traditional epistolary works, the authors would also expand their novels to include newspaper clippings, articles, recipes and maps which required the reader to stop and analyse.

In his study *Role of interruption in the epistolary novels* (2015), Herzhauser addresses the impact of multimodal texts on the reading fluency by examining samples from several epistolary novels. Among many aspects, Herzhauser

noticed that the presence of new text structures forces the readers to stop and interpret the message. Thereby, the author infers that the relationship between reader and text exhibits new patterns of interaction. In the same vein, when analysing the effect of using input enhancement in the text he discovered that "the reader may create specific interpretations (meanings) presented by the signs of the text used" (p.16) and legitimizes the use of alternative text structures as a form of social practice where readers interpret "text messaging, email, Twitter" and "co-create(s) meaning using social experience and identity" (p.17).

The continuous interruptions in the reading flow reflect the reality of oral communication in which speakers are interrupted by instant messages or tweets. This proves that the integration of alternative texts and visuals in the epistolary novel is a stimulating factor for the readers. It also shows that, in a way, the epistolary genre is adapting well to the new trends in literature.

In this line, Așci (2020, p.10) posits: "In modern period, epistolary novel is absolutely a possible literary form. Even though this form is composed from a series of epistles that are regarded as different materials, it has unity and consistency as a whole".

To summarise, the epistolary genre is making a comeback into the world of literature. We discovered that the epistolary short story is an experimental form of narration which, like the epistolary novel, can be written in the form of letter, journal or email. Because of its reduced length, the interruptions in the narrative are not so noticeable as in the case of the epistolary novel. The inclusion of multimodal texts in the modern novels is a form of social practice where readers must stop to interpret the meaning of the message. Young readers adapt quickly to any disruptions in the story as they are already used to the daily distractions caused by technology. Both studies agree on the fact that the multimodality of texts does not necessarily break from tradition as older texts would use a variety of artifices such as notes, telegrams, checks and other types of memorabilia.

4. Teaching Proposal

4.1. Objectives

This innovative teaching proposal encourages foreign language students to learn more about the genres present in the epistolary novel and improve their creative writing skills. By exploring the contents and structure of four of the epistolary works, students get familiarised with a wide range of genres such as journal entries, correspondence between several persons, letters attached to a diary and emails. Through scaffolded learning, they discover the functional and discursive purpose of texts after which they move towards a joint construction of a text within a specific genre. In the final step of the project students are expected to become autonomous learners, capable of creating a good-quality story in the epistolary style with modern elements of the genre such as visual aids or instant messages embedded in the text.

4.1.1. Specific objectives

- To practice close reading through the exploration of set texts.
- To familiarise students with the literary works of the epistolary genre.
- To enhance students' writing skills through the study of the schematic moves of the recount text.
- To create a new variation of the epistolary novel by incorporating text types from modern media.

4.2. Context and legal framework

4.2.1. Characteristics of the target group

The following proposal is designed for a target group of students in the 4th year of CSE who study English as a first foreign language. At this point, they have gone over the basic vocabulary and grammar contents specified in the curriculum, so they should be able to understand the language featured in the texts. It is not uncommon for students in this stage to have deficits in their writing

skills. It is also implied that they are in need of positive reinforcement about the knowledge of linguistics, content and ideas in the composing of texts. Another hypothesis is that students have a limited experience in working with literary texts in English. They tend to view literature as irrelevant to their language development or discard it for being too ambiguous. Therefore, we will try to remedy some of these issues by strategizing the use of the epistolary novel so that by the end of the intervention they are able to produce a good-quality piece of writing that will motivate them to further explore the genre.

4.2.2. Contents

The declarative, procedural, and behavioural components relating to CSE are in alignment with the thematic blocks from the Decree 236/2015. The selected contents are those particularly applicable to this proposal:

Block 1. Contents linked to the key cross-curricular competences
- Identifying, collecting and retrieving information.
- Understanding (comparing, sequencing and synthesising), memorising and expressing oneself (describing, summarising).
- Carrying out a plan and, if necessary, making adjustments.
- Collaboration and cooperation in group learning tasks.
- Development of interpersonal relations and communication.
- Verbal, nonverbal, and digital communication self-regulating.

Block 2. Oral communication: listening and speaking
- Producing of utterances with the learned vocabulary.
- Giving/receiving instructions and explanations, making suggestions, carrying out discussions.
- Expressing interest, approval, appreciation, trust, surprise, and their opposites.
- Adjusting the message to the addressee, context and channel by applying the appropriate register and structure.
- Listening to an audio/video related to the topic.

Block 3. Written communication: reading and writing

- Practicing intensive and extensive reading.
- Using the sound, accentual, rhythmic and intonation patterns of letters.
- Following the sequence order of events in a story.
- Description of what the characters do or experience in the story.
- Description of a real or imagined anecdote or experience.
- Using the new vocabulary in the production of a new text.
- Carrying out of a writing task: rewriting a text, creating a short story, etc.

Block 4. Literary education

- Reading a number of excerpts from epistolary novels.
- Exposure to the schematic structure of a recount text.
- Identifying vocabulary and frequent grammar structures in the genre.
- Writing a short story in the epistolary style.

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Block 5. Reflection on the language and its uses

- Use and interiorization of learned vocabulary related to reading.
- Use and interiorization of the syntactic-discursive structures to ask and
- answer questions and narrate past events.
- Use of metalanguage to talk about the tasks and learning strategies.

Block 6. Social dimension of language

- Reflecting on the language used in a specific socio-historical context.
- Reflecting of the language used in correspondence and journals due to social distancing.
- Interpreting the meaning of additional texts such as notes, telegrams, cheques, instant messages.
- Requesting and offering opinions and points of view during classroom interaction.

4.2.3. Key competences

This segment provides an outline of the key competences and their application into the planning and execution of the project. The key competences covered here were drawn from the *Decree 236/2015* that introduces the curriculum for Compulsory Education in the Basque Country.

The key competences relevant to the teaching proposal are:

Verbal, non-verbal and digital communication

This competence is defined as the use of verbal, non-verbal and digital communication in a complementary way to communicate effectively and appropriately in personal, social and academic situations.

In support of the verbal competence, students learn to communicate effectively to express agreement/disagreement, negotiate meanings, express opinions or emotions in the oral and in the written form. The enhancement of their digital competence entails getting acquainted with the wealth of resources which can be easily accessed on the Internet: newspapers, magazines, articles, videos, dictionaries, etc.

Learning to learn and to think

This competence purports having at one's disposal study and work habits, learning strategies and rigorous thinking, mobilizing and transferring what has been learned to other contexts and situations, in order to be able to autonomously organize one's own learning.

One way in which this competence is addressed is by learning how to use of the literary corpus as a tool for signalling language features common in the epistolary writing. Another way this competence is developed is through the instructional design of the project that is built around the principle of scaffolded learning (e.g. modelling a text – joint construction of a text – independent construction of a text) and contemplates the use of writing strategies from students' part.

Learning to be

This competence requires reflecting on one's own feelings, thoughts and actions that are produced in the different areas and situations of life, reinforcing them or adjusting them, according to their assessment, in order to be oriented, through continuous improvement, towards the self-realization of the person in all his dimensions.

This competence is developed by means of practicing reading and writing personal recounts. This enables students to reflect on their own experiences and those of others as well as to adjust their register and style to the person they are addressing to. Likewise, all forms of interaction during activities can contribute to developing the competence because they require students to adjust to the realities of their classroom setting.

Linguistic and literary communication

This competence refers to using oral and written texts in English to communicate in an appropriate, effective and respectful way with linguistic diversity, in situations typical of different areas of life. Likewise, to develop a literary education that helps to know oneself and the world around one better.

To acquire the linguistic competence, students learn about the nuance of meanings and the steps of developing rhetoric in written texts, particularly narratives and recounts. Interaction in the target language is integrated in most of the stages of the project with the intention to make students practice their oral fluency and work on their pronunciation. In regard to the literary competence, introducing literature in the EFL classroom motivates students to broaden their reading habits and, as a consequence, to acquire certain comprehension and production strategies and techniques.

4.3. Innovative teaching tool: Literary corpus

The literary corpus was created to approach the provision of language features of recount texts through the study of epistolary texts. The tool is of substantial help in improving learners' writing as it ca be used to peruse letters, journal entries, diaries or email in search of language features and structures common of the epistolary genre.

Strictly speaking, a corpus is a digital collection or body of writings organised by a single author or on a specific topic. It is normally run through a software and its entries are organised according to frequency of words. By comparing texts, the program will highlight those words which are key in the target corpus; that is, words which are statistically more or less frequent than in the reference corpus.

Nonetheless, the present literary corpus is made available in a simpler digital format for a direct application in the EFL classroom. Because it is meant to be used as a reference resource by the learners, many of the teaching and learning practices revolve around it. The goal is to expose students to as many samples of epistolary creations so that they may compare and contrast the way language is displayed at a textual and sentence level.

Besides the linguistic purposes, the corpus also serves to familiarise students with the topics present in the epistolary works. The samples contained within this collection display information about the historical and social setting in which the writers decided to tell their experience. Such details may again offer students a variety of examples about the way words are used in context.

Samples in the corpus belong to four epistolary works: *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank, *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* by Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows, and *Dear Rachel Maddow* by Adrienne Kisner. Each of these texts reflect the conventions of the genre employed. The excerpt [1] from *Dracula* is made up of journal entries while the excerpt [2] from *Diary of a Young Girl* is a letter contained within a diary. Another letter [3], though in correspondence with another person, is the one taken from Shaffer's novel. The last excerpt [4] in the corpus is from the novel *Dear Rachel Maddow* and is a confession in the form of emails.

4.4. Methodology

The strategy for the iteration of the epistolary genre in the EFL classroom is based on *a backward design*, meaning that the learning outcomes were set prior to the selection of epistolary texts and description of the tasks.

In order to provide an integral treatment of the texts, three lines of action have been established.

The first is to explore the schematic structure present in a text belonging to the epistolary genre. The second is to identify the grammar patterns and vocabulary that appear in the epistolary samples and practise them in the classroom. The third entails building a "story in documents" in the epistolary style.

Planned tasks are linked around the concept of a story embedded in a letter (also a journal entry, a diary and an email). The story is explored through a number of related sequences, each repeating the genre and providing opportunities to practice with FonF[4].

In addition, the teacher keeps the language of instruction tight and consistent, utilizing an approach associated with *scaffolded instruction*. This type of instruction entails activities of repetition of relevant vocabulary, a review schematic structure of the recount text and a reinforcement of linguistic patterns.

Each session begins with a specific task that has a sample text at its core except for the last two sessions. To avoid the risk of a monotonous implementation of the text-based cycle, in the last stage of the project no set text is provided. Instead, through the technique of *tapestry writing* students will first create a draft and then write the plot of their personal recount by gathering pieces of texts such as newspaper clippings, tweets, blog entries and Instagram pictures. The storyline will unfold as they bring more samples to sustain their main story.

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[4] Focus on form (FonF) is an approach to language education in which learners are made aware of the grammatical form of language features that they are already able to use communicatively.

The diagram below depicts the instructional sequence that was used for the tasks.
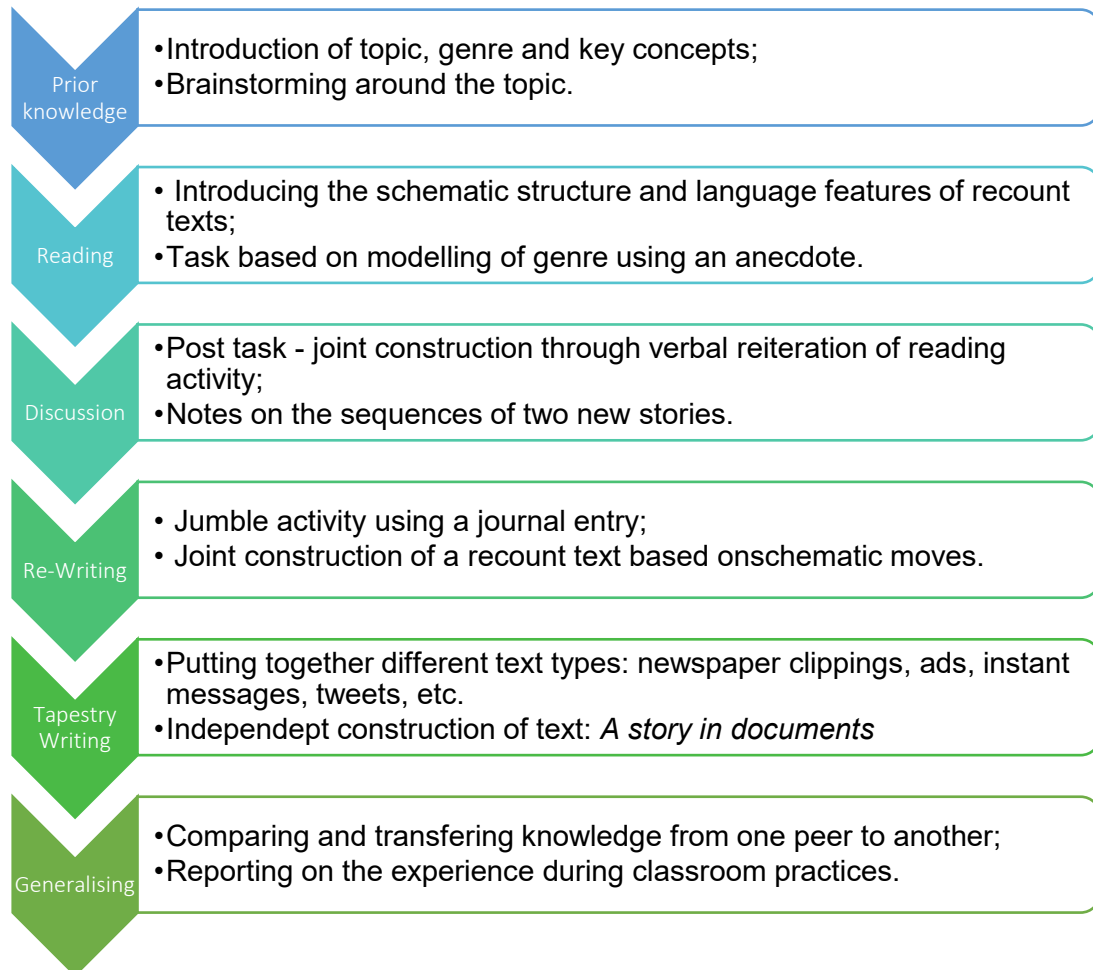
Prior knowledge	• Introduction of topic, genre and key concepts; • Brainstorming around the topic.
Reading	• Introducing the schematic structure and language features of recount texts; • Task based on modelling of genre using an anecdote.
Discussion	• Post task - joint construction through verbal reiteration of reading activity; • Notes on the sequences of two new stories.
Re-Writing	• Jumble activity using a journal entry; • Joint construction of a recount text based onschematic moves.
Tapestry Writing	• Putting together different text types: newspaper clippings, ads, instant messages, tweets, etc. • Independept construction of text: *A story in documents*
Generalising	• Comparing and transfering knowledge from one peer to another; • Reporting on the experience during classroom practices.

Figure 3. Model of instructional sequence. Prepared by the author.

4.4.1. Text-based teaching cycle

The pedagogical intervention is structured around the implementation of text-based teaching cycle (see figure 3). An outline of the application of the four stages is therefore presented with reference to one instructional sequence.

Stage 1 > *Building the Field*

In the first stage, students are introduced to the concept of "text genre", "epistles" and "epistolary". The teacher elicits information about correspondence by considering several general questions such as "Under what condition do we need to write a letter?" "What's the purpose of doing this?" "How do we write a

letter?" and, based on their personal learning experience with functional texts, they are required to give concrete examples in support of their answers. Students are expected to reply to the questions as if they were reading a letter, inferring the procedure used by skilled writers to create argumentation. They are encouraged to think about these questions during the learning process and in their composing process.

Next, the teacher informs students about the epistolary project and briefly explains the stages they must go through in order to create an original story in documents. Then, introduces the topic of the epistolary novel and explains that this type of (non)fictional prose can take many forms (letters, journals, notes, diaries, emails, etc.). Some examples of epistolary novels are displayed on the smartboard to see if students recognise any of the literary works (appendix 2).

Stage 2 > *Modelling a text*

At this stage, students are instructed to do a specific reading and detailed analysis on the features of the target genre. The main purpose is to present the schematic moves while also recognising the situational context and functions of each action. The mentor text is the excerpt [3] from the epistolary novel *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* written by Mary Ann Shafer. On the first page, background information is rendered about the characters, setting, plot and film adaptations of the book. The letter sent by Dawsey Adams to Juliet Ashton is an anecdote about the creation of an unconventional literary society in the Channel Island of Guernsey. Students use this letter to practice close reading and delve into the way language is used by the character. They also jot down any unknown phrases they encounter and look up their meaning (see appendix 3).

The recount text is also introduced in this stage. The teacher presents the schematic structure and the common language features of recount texts (appendix 4) and then models the anecdote contained in Dawsey's letter (appendix 5).

Following this, students make inferences about the communicative purposes of two other epistolary texts, namely, the excerpts from *Diary of a Young Girl* [2] and *Dear Rachel Maddow* [4] (see appendix 10 *Literary corpus*).

They read the background information about the novels and compare the structure and language features with those form the previous excerpts.

Stage 3 > *Collaborative Construction*

In this stage students jointly construct a recount text, revise vocabulary and language patterns. Since the structure of the epistolary novel involves many sub-genres, this time the target text comes in the form of a journal entry (appendix 6A), belonging to the novel *Dracula*. In order to practice with the text, students do a jumble activity; after dividing the class into groups, the teacher hands them over a worksheet with the rhetorical moves of personal recount: *Orientation, Events* and *Re-orientation* (appendix 6B). At the same time, the groups receive strands of text (appendix 6C) from the original story that need to be rearranged. Upon finishing the activity, each group tries to re-write the story and shares it with the class. The teacher leads post discussions of how the writing task went by asking students to recall and discuss the steps. During discussions, participants use metalanguage to refer to the schematic structure and linguistic features of the genre.

Stage 4 > *Independent Writing*

On completion of the tasks presented above, students independently construct a short story in the epistolary style. That is, they must apply what they have learned to their own texts, step by step, in terms of their own goals as writers. In order to build a modern variation of the epistolary genre, students try to put together pieces of text from instant messages, blog posts, digital newspaper articles, and the like. To this end, they must do research based on a topic of their choice e.g. look for digital ephemera or use an online newspaper generator to add an extra visual to the writing piece. After selecting the complementary texts they start writing a story in the form of letters, emails, diary entries, or whatever epistolary form fits best. During the writing task, students receive oral and written feedback from their peers and teachers on their multiple drafts; in case they need help with the word choice for their composition, the teacher may display on the smartboard an infographic with useful vocabulary (see appendix 9). They conclude the stage by making generalisations about the macro-task and write a report about the process.

4.4.2. Chronogram

The teaching proposal is to be carried out during the final term and consists of 6 sessions of classwork with the literary corpus, 2 sessions dedicated to the epistolary writing task plus another session dedicated to the conclusions.

Timing	Stages	Tasks
WEEK 1	Building the field & Modelling of text	Topic introduction
WEEK 2	Modelling of text	Text analysis [3] Quick comparisons [2] [4]
WEEK 3	Collaborative construction	Guided practice [1]
WEEK 4	Independent writing	Text composition
WEEK 5	Generalisations	Report

Table 2. Chronogram for the teaching proposal

4.4.3. Tactics and strategies

4.4.3.1. Instructional scaffolding

The types of scaffolding used involved:

⊕ developing contextual and metacognitive awareness (schema building), e.g. drawing on the student's existing background knowledge.

⊕ using authentic texts as a model, some of which are familiar to students in their daily lives.

⊕ introducing and reiterating a meta discourse, e.g. providing students with a language they could use to talk about language.

⊕ linking texts (intertextuality) by explicitly discussing similarities found in the epistolary genre, e.g. the types of linguistic features which were commonly found in procedural texts.

4.4.3.2. SAF writing strategy

One the things students struggle the most with is building their first paragraph, especially those who do not feel confident about their writing skills. To fix this problem, teachers can use SAF (Settings-Action-Feelings) strategy to facilitate students´ writing in the first person. This writing strategy (see appendix 7 for more information), coined by Steve Peha, helps students begin their journal entries or blog posts in an easier manner.

SAF is a great tool for creating pieces of writing in English particularly when there is only a limited time in the classroom for students to complete the task.

Every personal recount or free writing follows a certain structure divided into scenes. Readers, either real or imagined audience, need to understand the actions, feeling and setting information in order to enjoy and make sense of the written text.

4.4.4. Feedback

Bearing in mind the intrinsic characteristics of adolescents, and the requirements for a successful uptake, a combination of cognitive and affective feedback is proposed for its inclusion in the teaching practice.

The ideal way to provide students with extensive feedback is to guide them as they work on their assignments. During the writing activities, the instructor may choose to use metalinguistic feedback and explicit correction to help learners focus on specific aspects of the language and provide them with tools to edit and self-correct their pieces of writing. Likewise, when students read a text, the teacher may use repetitions and recasts to highlight possible errors.

Another potential source of corrective feedback is the other learners feedback. Peer feedback, also known as peer-response, provides learners with authentic discussions that lead to discovery (Freedman, 1992). In this wise, learners should receive constant peer feedback regarding their writing, especially throughout the stage of collaborative writing.

Positive and negative affective feedback can be provided in a balanced manner so to encourage continued communication but without letting crucial

errors go unnoticed (Douglas Brown, 1994, p. 220). Personalized affective feedback may help overcome some of the frustrations students experience while performing a complex task, as long as this type of feedback is supplemented with an articulate learning strategy.

4.5. Resources

Teacher self-prepared:

- o Famous epistolary novels (appendix 2)
- o Reading comprehension (appendix 3)
- o Language features of recount (appendix 4)
- o Text analysis: *The story of the roast pig* (appendix 5)
- o Journal jumble activity (appendix 6)
- o SAF strategy (appendix 7)
- o Infographic *Being more descriptive* (appendix 8)
- o Assessment rubrics (appendix 9)
- o Literary corpus (appendix 10)

Videos:

- o Summary of the novel *Dracula*:
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oglWUgJ_TYg&t=2s&ab_channel=CourseHero
- o The *Guernsey Literary Society* official trailer:
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTDNGv61-Dk&ab_channel=StudiocanalUK

Documents:

- o Criteria for selecting a text [(Lazar, 1993, p.56) appendix 1]

ICT tool for a "Story in documents"

- o Lucidpress

4.6. Assessment

In terms of student learning appraisal, two types of assessment will be implemented: formative and summative.

Formative assessment is not limited to a single focus on a students' outcomes, but instead provides continuous monitoring as the sessions advance. For instance, in the stage of collaborative construction of a text, students' skills and attitudes toward the task are evaluated. The teacher makes notes on the degree in which learners interact with a group and their ability to communicative their reasoning. Because the assessment criteria in this section might be subjected to teachers' personal impressions or beliefs, students' performance in the task will weight 10% of the overall score (appendix 9B).

Summative assessment is based on the independent writing task, to which 70% of the grade is allocated, and the final report which has a value of 20% of the grade. The rubric for the writing task (appendix 9A) encompasses information about the layout and cohesion of the text, as well as the presence of significant linguistic features of a recount text. The final report (appendix 9C) will include students reflections on their learning process and the knowledge, skills and abilities they acquired. Depending on the comments and the way students self-assess their work, the instructor will assign the appropriate grade for this rubric.

All assessment strategies are consistent with the belief that learning assessment should be progressive and consistent throughout the cycle of the project; only in this way will students become aware of their strengths and weaknesses, allowing them to adapt their learning techniques to improve and gain knowledge of their own learning process.

Naturally, grammatical errors will be pondered, but they will be less crucial than in tasks where delivering a creative piece of writing is also a goal. Taking risks while writing will also be considered, because when students take risks, they are attempting to refine their output. This type of error does not have to be harmful to the students but it should rather encourage learners to improve. When learners take a chance but write a sentence incorrectly, they should be taught how to do better (by teachers and/or peers) and encouraged to keep working, because if we chastise the mistake, students will only write those utterances they are familiar with.

5. Discussion

In revising the plan for the proposal, several important points have surfaced.

The first point refers to the expectations about students' performance in the individual writing task.

In terms of organisation, students should be able to incorporate the obligatory rhetorical moves in their creations. However, this does not imply that students will learn right away how to make effortless transitions between moves. Normally, a cohesive piece of writing, where writers use the schematic move in a flexible way, is achieved by going through the text-based cycle several times.

Another difficulty we anticipate is students' lack of sufficient linguistic knowledge in English to convey meaning in each of the schematic moves. In a scenario where students have a low to intermediate level of English, their writing production might show less syntactic diversity and reflect a minimal control of action verbs. These deficits in language use can be partially repaired by raising learners' awareness on the linguistic features that appear in personal recounts and practice them on as many occasions as possible.

On a similar note, much of the sentence beginnings are rough for novice writers. Most of them report feeling uneasy when trying to write the first paragraph. When students get stuck on their writing, they develop negative emotions around the entire writing process. Our hope is that SAF strategy will help them diversify the variety of beginnings so that they may overcome the feeling of writer's block.

The second point under debate is the successful implementation of the genre pedagogies.

Critical theorists have attacked genre teaching by saying that its emphasis on the direct transmission of text types does not necessarily lead on to an effective reappraisal of the disciplinary corpus, but rather may lend itself to an uncritical reproduction of discipline (Hyland, 2007). This objection, however, may be directed at nearly any teaching approach. Other than that, the genre approach addresses many of the language aspects that are relevant to the study of the epistolary novel in Secondary Education. Moreover, understanding the structure

and communicative purpose of a genre should be a prerequisite for engagement with any type of literary material.

A salient criticism of the genre model appearing in Ragawanti (2019) is that it is difficult to find texts that meet the criteria of length, familiarity or clear structure. Although we admit that the search for appropriate texts is not exactly the easiest task, contributors to ESP/EAP courses do it all the time. In our case, because the proposal is rooted on the idea that the epistolary genre has great pedagogical potential, the selection of texts has been considered more of an exploratory process than a problematic in the project.

Yet, another concern expressed by Ragawanti that refers to the ignorance of fun activities could become an issue for us, especially in the stage of *Modelling a text*. Because the teacher's scaffolding diminishes from the next stage onward, tasks in the modelling stage are still performed in a controlled setting. In consequence, students might start to feel impatient or even lose interest in the strategy. To prevent the danger of falling into a routine, there will be a gap in the project's calendar for every third class of the week until the end of the fifth week.

The last point of discussion rests on the possibility of sharing the practice with other teachers in the English department.

The epistolary works in the literary corpus have received international appraisal and are more or less familiar to all language teachers. In Spain, many secondary schools have included in their curriculum the study of Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. The issue lies with the genre approach underpinning the application of the corpus as the method is relatively new to educators in this part of the world. Whereas the teachers are likely to be interested in teaching writing through epistles, they might also display insufficient knowledge of the approach and how it is supposed to be practically executed. Divergent interpretations of the stages in the text-based cycle could be a serious drawback in the implementation of the project.

What this means is that, provided with sufficient information about the approach, teachers might gain interest in making contributions to the literary corpus and use it in their own classroom to practice reader response and FonF.

6. Conclusions

Throughout the paper, multiple evidence was offered of how good writing correlates highly with enhancement in learners' awareness of discourse and language features of a specific genre. The epistolary novel has been specifically chosen to teach about genres as it provides a great variety of texts in the form of letters, journal entries, diaries, newspapers clippings or emails.

The innovative property of the project implies the use of a literary corpus containing excerpts from four epistolary works that were previously selected by the teacher. This pedagogical tool offers rich information about the linguistic features and structures of the epistolary genre. Students can check the corpus to see how words and expressions are used in context and then report their findings to their classmates.

Following the decision to focus on strategies to enhance writing skills, the genre approach was selected to provide students with clear options for writing a personal recount. What is appealing about this approach is that it displays a systematic framework which enables the teacher to present explicit instruction in a logical manner. Scaffolded learning paves the path for understanding the language choices to be made, which for many students is not only facilitating, but reassuring too. Another interesting feature of the instruction is that it contemplates the activation of peer support mechanisms during the writing process so that students no longer feel isolated when attempting to write in English.

However, not all of the teaching cycle consists of guided practice. By the end of the project students are expected to become autonomous learners, capable of creating a good-quality piece of writing. Their stories written in the epistolary style will give us an insight about the topics they are interested in and the form in which they prefer to communicate it.

In the hope that the story in documents will be one of the many epistolary writing projects, we will continue to explore new methods to teach writing proficiency in view of preparing students for the upcoming writing challenges in the baccalaureate stage.

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8. Appendixes