3rd World Conference on Psychology, Counselling and Guidance (WCPCG-2012)

# Genre-Based Approach and Second Language Syllabus Design

## Zahra Abbaszadeh [a] *

[a] MA student in EFL at Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch, Hamedan, Iran

## Abstract

There have been two developments in language description in the recent years that allow for a much more precise account of language of different domains of use, and so provide for a more exact specification of ESP course objectives. One of these is genre analysis (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004). Therefore, attempts have been made to place genre more centrally in the development of language curricula and syllabus design, particularly in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) (Swales, 1990). The purpose of this article is also an attempt to provide an account of genre studies at the present time and discuss its possible applications in language teaching. In so doing, it compares the definitions of the term 'genre', reviews its different types, discusses a model for genre-based pedagogy by Hammond et al. (1992), and points to some of the criticisms directed to the approach.

## 1. Introduction

Over the past ten years or so, there have been two developments in language description that allow for a much more precise account of language of different domains of use, and so provide for a more exact specification of ESP course objectives. One of these is genre analysis (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004). The value of focussing on genres in various areas of the profession has been convincingly demonstrated by scholars such as Swales (1990), Bhatia (1993), Paltridge (2001), Hyland (2003, 2004), and others. Paltridge (2001), citing Swales (1990) points to the benefits of giving genre a more central classroom role when we teach language: a genre-based perspective focuses on language at the level of the whole text while at same time taking into account the social and cultural context in which it is used (Paltridge, 2001, p. 4, citing Dudley-Evans, 1987). In addition to such arguments for using genre-based approaches in daily classroom practice (see also McCarthy and Carter, 1994), attempts have been made to place genre more centrally in the development of language curricula and syllabus design, particularly in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) (Swales, 1990).

Corresponding author name: * Zahra Abbaszadeh. Tel: +24 847695345

E-mail address: sahar_queen1977@yahoo.com

The reason for this is that a focus on genre enables  curriculum designers to group together texts that are similar in terms of purpose, organization, and audience (Paltridge, 2001,p. 4).

## 1.1. What is Genre?

Richards, Platt and Platt (1993) define genre as follows:
A particular class of speech events [ written  texts included] which are  considered by the speech community as being of the same type, e.g., prayers, sermons, conversations, songs, speeches, poems,  letters and novels. (p. 125)

A genre is usually characterized by its communicative purpose(s) in general, associated themes, conventions (rhetorical structure, lexico-grammar and other  textual features), the channel of communication (e.g., spoken, electronic, hardcopy, etc.) audience types, and sometimes the roles of the writer and readers.

According to Swales (1990),

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. Communicative purpose is both a privileged criterion and one that operates to keep the scope of a genre as here conceived narrowly focused on comparable  rhetorical action. In addition to purpose, exemplars of a genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience. If all high probability expectations are realized, the exemplar will be  viewed as prototypical by the parent discourse community. (p. 58)

Hyland (2003) suggests that genre simply refers to socially recognized ways of  using language. It is a term we all use for grouping texts together and representing how writers typically use language to respond to and construct texts for recurring situations.

## 1.2. Genre Analysis

Genre analysis is a developing multi-disciplinary approach to the study of texts, both verbal and written, drawing from studies in Linguistics, Anthropology, Sociology and Psychology. Genre analysts look for the common patterns of grammar  usage, key vocabulary, and text structure in particular text types (Bradford-Watts, 2003).

During the last ten years, there has been a considerable interest in genre based analysis of different sorts of texts. This approach has been derived directly from  discourse and text analysis and has been extensively used in the field of English for  Specific Purposes (ESP).

Applied linguists agree that the author's purpose is of primary importance in creating a certain genre. However, genre analysis does not look only at the influence of purpose on the choice of grammatical forms, but also takes into consideration rhetorical functions. Robinson (1991) says that the "author's purpose is explained with reference to the wider professional culture to which the author  belongs". Thus, genre does not mean only a text-type but also the role of the text in the community within which it has been created. This, in turn, leads to the research of  institutional culture.

Dudley-Evans (1987) claims that its principal aim is pedagogical as it  provides "a flexible prescription based on analysis that makes suggestions about the  layout, ordering and language appropriate to a particular writing or speaking task". Hopkins and Dudley-Evans (1987) say that the starting assumption of genre analysis  is "an explicit description of the way in which texts are organised". Hyland (1992)  says that "genre analysis is the study of how language is used within a particular  context. Bhatia (1991) sees genre analysis as an "analytical framework which reveals  not only the utilizable form-function correlations but also contributes significantly to our understanding of the cognitive structuring of information in specific areas of  language use, which may help the ESP practitioners to

devise appropriate activities  potentially significant for the achievement of desired communicative outcomes inspecialized academic or occupation areas."

It this sense, genre analysis does not have only pedagogical potential but  can also illuminate the process of communication in a given genre. Genre analysis  thus combines grammatical insights with corresponding socio-cognitive and cultural  explanations. It aims at explaining language in use rather than linguistic forms on the  surface level (Bhatia, 1993).

## 1.3. Application of the Idea of Genre in Syllabus Design

Drawing on previous communicative competence models developed for language  learning purposes, Clece-Murcia et al.'s (2000) model arrived with highly explicit and specific details covering what language learners need to attain if they want to develop communicative competence. Celce-Murcia et al. 's model suggests that the ultimate competence is discourse competence. To attain this competence, learners need the  supporting competence including linguistic competence, actional competence, socio- cultural competence, and strategic competence.

However, discourse is something abstract that comes into being through texts. In other words, communicative events are realised in texts: spoken and written. A text is  a semantic unit, a unit of language that makes sense. A conversation, talk or a piece of  writing can be called a text only when it makes sense. When it does not make sense, it  is not a text; it is not communication. Communication happens only when we make  sensible texts. Therefore, if our main goal is to develop communicative competence or  the ability to communicate, we need to develop a curriculum or a syllabus that is text- based. This kind of curriculum states explicitly what kinds of texts are targeted by certain level of schooling based on the learners' communication needs (Flowrdew,2005).

In a text-based syllabus, as its name suggests, the content is based on whole texts. Another key element of this type of syllabus is that this content  is selected in relation to learner needs and the social contexts which learners wish to access" (Feez, 2002, p. 3). This approach to syllabus design draws on the Australian tradition of genre, which emphasizes the social contexts in which genres are  constructed, and how language is used in these contexts. The text-based syllabus alsohas aspects in common with the task-based approach in that it sees language as a functional rather than formal artefact, to be used as a resource for meaning-making and for achieving purposeful goals. In fact, proponents of this type of syllabus are  keen to point out that it can be considered as a type of mixed syllabus (Flowerdew, 2005) .

## 1.4. Implementing the Genre-Based Syllabus

### 1.4.1. Hammond et al.'s (1992) model

To implement the genre-based syllabus, Hammond et al. (1992) propose a model  which is presented in the diagram 1. The model includes two cycles and four stages:
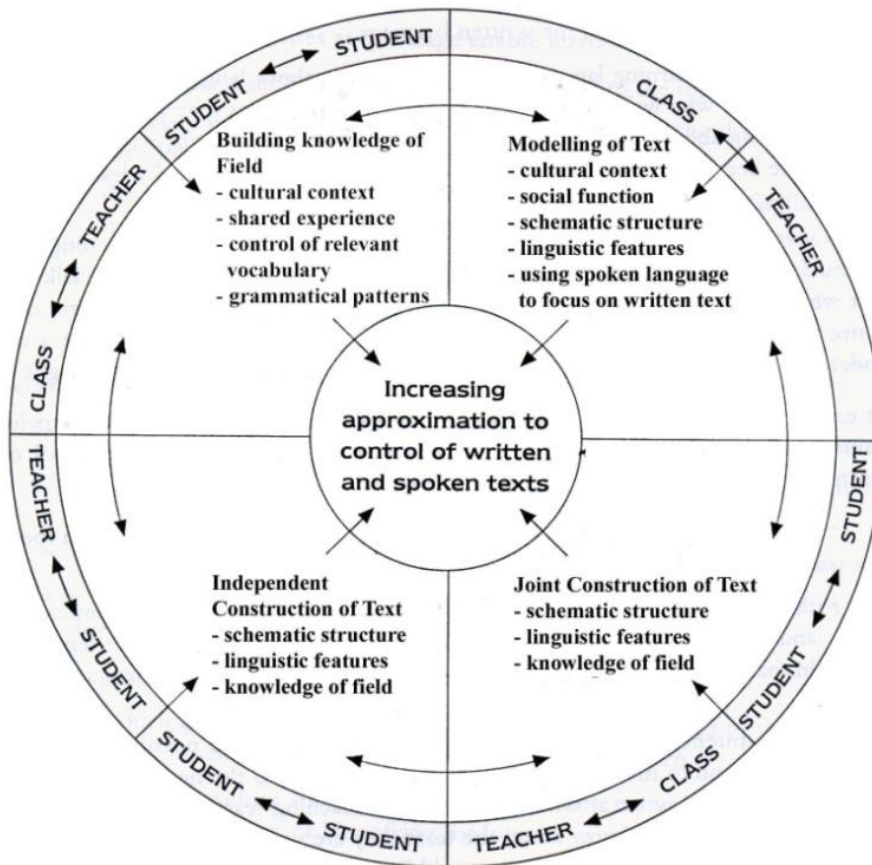
In planning the lessons in foreign language education context, teachers need to go around the cycle twice. In the first cycle, they start from the first stage called Building Knowledge of the Field (BKOF) where teachers and students build cultural context, share experiences, discuss vocabulary, grammatical patterns and so on. All of these are geared around the types of spoken texts and topics they are going to deal with at the second stage.

The second stage is called Modeling of Text (MOT) where students listen to statements of short functional texts, conversations, and monologues that are geared around a certain communicative purpose. For example, if students are expected to produce procedural texts, then, the short functional texts, conversations, and the monologues are developed with one main communicative purpose, that is, giving instruction or direction. In short, at the second stage, students listen and respond to various texts with similar communicative purposes.

After listening, students enter the third stage called Joint Construction of Text (JCT). At this stage they try to develop spoken texts with their peers and with the help from the teachers. They can create different announcements, conversations on showing how to do things, monologues on how to make something and so on. They need to demonstrate their speaking ability and to show confidence to speak.

After having the experience of collaborating with friends, they enter stage four called Independent Construction of Text (ICT). At this stage, students are expected to be able to speak spontaneously or to carry our monologues that are aimed at giving directions or showing ways to do things such as how to make a kite, how to make a paper cap, and so on. Thus, the first cycle integrates the development of speaking and listening skills.

The second cycle is aimed at developing the ability to use written language. The teachers and students go through all the four stages, but in MOT students are exposed to written texts. Here students develop reading skills, followed by joint construction in writing texts, and finally they write texts independently. Like the strategies employed in the first cycle, activities in this cycle are also geared around the same communicative purpose. Students read short functional texts and procedural texts, and then they write texts similar to what they have read. In this way, the integration of the four skills is created by the communicative purpose(s) of texts. Students speak what they have heard, read what they have talked about, and write what they have read.

Feeze and Joyce (2002) also suggests a fifth stage that can be applied in foreign language contexts especially if there are bright students in the class or those who born writers" who are able to link related texts together. The pulling together different genres or texts to create a new larger text relates us to the concept of intertextuality which refers to —the web of texts against which each new text is placed or places itself, explicitly or implicitly" (Bazerman 1994:20).

Knowledge on intertextuality can help students understand how genres change, developed and are transformed for new contexts and purposes (Hayland, 2004).

To carry out activities at all stages, teachers need to use various teaching techniques they have already learned, known and used. Those techniques are still needed and relevant to this approach. What needs to be remembered when teachers prepare their lessons is that every activity they design has to be aimed at providing learning experiences to use language and, thus, to achieve communicative competence. **Criticisms**

Ggenre-based pedagogical approaches have been criticized for removing genres from the complex, dynamic sociocultural contexts that give rise to them (Freedman 1993), and for locating the study of genres outside of the — living situations" of their use, and for limiting the understanding of genres to discursive features that writers already recognize (Bazerman 2004 cited in Flowerdew, 2005).

For some critics, however, providing L2 students with more effective access to the ominant genres of our culture does nothing to change the power structures that support them, or to challenge the social inequalities which are maintained through exclusion from them. Luke (1996 cited in Hyland 2003), for example,writes:

A salient criticism of the "genre model' is that its emphasis on the direct transmission of text types does not necessarily lead on to a critical reappraisal of that disciplinary corpus, its field or its related institutions, but rather may lend itself to an uncritical reproduction of discipline. Thus, teaching genres may only reproduce the dominant discourses of the powerful and the social relations which they construct and maintain (p. 314).

## 2. Conclusion

The Genre approach to second language pedagogy has opened new horizons in front of course designers, materials developers and language teachers. In line with the principles of a learning-centered pedagogy and with a huge potential to enhance second language learners' discourse competence and hence contributing to the much needed communicative competence through involving learners with real samples of language, that is, different types of texts, spoken or written, genre analysis and genre- based pedagogy have a lot to offer to all those involved in second language education in general and language teachers and learners in particular. Certainly there is much more to the notion of genre than a discrete set of text types.

## References

Agustien, H. I. R. (2005). Genre-Based Approach and the 2004 English curriculum. Retrieved March 26, 2009

　from:http://exchanges.state.gov/education/ engteaching/pubs/BR/functionalsec4_10.htm

Bax, S. (2006).The role of genre in language syllabus design: The case of Bahrain. International Journal of Educational Development, 26, 315œ328.

Bhatia, V. (1991). A genre-based approach to ESP materials. World Englishes,10 (2), 153-166.

Bhatia, V. (1997). Applied genre analysis and ESP. In T. Miller (Ed.) Functional approach to written text: Classroom applications. Washington D.C.: United State Information Agency. Retrieved March 29, 2009 from: http://exchanges.state.gov/ education/engteaching/pubs/BR/functionalsec4_10.htm

Bradford-watts, K. (2003). What is genre and why is it useful for language teachers? JALT Journal. Retrieved from: publications.org/tlt/articles/2003/05/index

Breure, L. (2001). Development of the genre concept. Available at:http://people.cs.uu.nl/leen/GenreDev/.htm

Celce-Murcia, M., & Olshtain, E. (2000). Discourse and context in languag teaching. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dudley-Evans, A. (1987). Introduction to genre analysis and ESP. ELR Journal, 1, 27-39.

Feez, S. (2002). Text-based syllabus design. Sydney: NCELTR, Macquarie University.

Feez, S., & Joyce, H. (2002). Text-Based Syllabus Design. Sydney: NCELTR, Macquarie University.

Flowerdew, L. (2000). Using a genre-based framework to teach organizational structure in academic writing. ELT Journal, 54 (4), 369-378.

Flowerdew, L. (2005). Integrating traditional and critical approaches to syllabus design: The "what', the "how' and the "why?' Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 4, 135-147.

Hopkins, A., & Dudley-Evans, A. (1988). A genre-based investigations of the discussions sections in articles and dissertation. English for Specific Purposes, 7 (2), 113-122.

Howatt, A. P. R., & Widdowson, H.G. (2004). A history of English language teaching. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hyland, K. (1992).Genre analysis: Just another fad? Forum,30 (2), 14-17.

Hyland, K. (2003). Genre-based pedagogies: A social response to process. Journal of Second Language Writing, 12 (1), 17-29.

Hyland, K. (2004). Genre and second language writing. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

McCarthy, M., & Carter, R. (1994). Language as discourse: Perspectives for language teaching. London: Longman.

Paltridge, B. (2001). Genre and the language learning classroom. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Richards, J. C., Platt, J., & Platt, H. (1993). Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics. New York: Longman.

Swales, J. (1990). Genre analysis. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.