

THE EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF THE GENRE OF HOTEL BROCHURE

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Bio statement

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Abstract

In this essay, genre-based pedagogy in the teaching of writing is reviewed and discussed in the context of product vs. process approach, genre-based approach, process genre approach, and teaching-learning cycle. The review and discussion of the pedagogy are then related to English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The classroom pedagogy in terms of teaching hotel brochure (HB) as a genre is presented, which is based on the integration of teaching-learning cycle and process genre approach.

1. Genre-based pedagogy

In ESP world, genre is considered as a sociolinguistic activity through which members of certain discourse community achieve their communicative purposes (Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993). Genre is defined by its shared communicative purposes and manifested by its particular structural and linguistic features. The teaching of genre goes beyond the adoption of product or process approach to writing and finds its own genre-based pedagogy in terms of genre-based approach (GA) and process genre approach (PGA). Genre-based pedagogy covers both the contextual and linguistic dimensions of genre, i.e. its social function and textual/linguistic form. Below is a review and discussion of this transformation.

1.1. Product vs. process approach

Two approaches, namely, product and process, used to dominate the teaching of writing. Product approach focuses on language structures and modeled texts, and process approach personal expression and composing process (Hyland 2003). In product approach, learning to write is seen as gradually gaining control of complex linguistic knowledge and skills, which are demonstrated in final writing products (Badger & White 2000). Great emphasis is put on the grammar, vocabulary and sentence structure. The assessment focuses on whether the grammar is accurate enough and whether sentence patterns are complex enough comparing with modeled samples. In teaching, learners are expected to have repeated “assisted imitation”, which includes strict imitation of inputs and manipulation of linguistic rules (e.g. substitution drills and model-text replication) (Pincas 1982:24; Hamp-Lyons & Heasley 1987). Product approach is criticized as prescriptive with exclusive concern on surface forms. As Silva (1990:13) comments, the activity of writing is seen as “an exercise in habit formation”. Students tend to avoid complex forms to attain grammatical correctness, but they often find it difficult to deal with the writing in the real world (Hyland 2003).

Process approach emphasizes a learner’s own creative self-discovery in dynamic and reflective way (Flower 1989). It centers on continuous exploration and reformulation of one’s ideas in writing. To accomplish this, a learner needs to do brainstorming, multiple-drafting, revising and editing, and teachers and students need to provide responses. The treatment of linguistic forms is postponed to final stage (Raimes 1992). For example, in teaching research paper writing, Hirose (2001) asked students to choose their own topics and do journal writing and peer review. The writing process is not straightforward and once-for-all, but interactive and recursive (Zamel 1983). The elements in the process interact with each other and the process repeats itself. Meanwhile, learners make constant self-reflections and receive constant feedbacks (Holst 1995; Hyland 2003). The process approach is criticized as ambiguous in terms of pedagogy, lacking social dimensions, and undermining the teacher’s role. Little

conclusive research is available on how writing is actually taught and explicitly assessed in a systematic way in process approach (Hyland 2003). It also overlooks sociocultural constraints placed on writers by not to consider how differences in class, gender, and ethnicity influence their writing process (Hyland 2002). It denies non-proficient L2 learners the access to hidden values that inform the judgment of good writing by not making them explicit (Li 1996; Ramanathan & Atkinson 1999). Obviously, the two approaches have different orientations. Product approach expects tangible and immediate outcomes, whereas process approach promotes wider educational aims. But they are not mutually exclusive in classrooms – half of TESOL teachers in a survey reported to adopt a combined “process and product” approach (Caudery 1995). Therefore, with the increasing sociolinguistic concern of genre, pedagogical applications would defy a clear-cut dichotomy of process vs. product approach (Grabe & Kaplan 1996; Furneaux 1998).

1.2 Genre-based approach

Genre-based approach (GA) is seen as product-oriented, and characterized by a clear consciousness of the functional relationship between the text and context (Hyland 2004). The teaching of writing is based on the results of genre analysis, i.e. structural and linguistic patterns. The teacher explicitly presents discourse structure and linguistic features of the model text, and explains to learners why writers choose specific strategies and linguistic forms to achieve their communicative purposes (Hyland 2003). Generally speaking, the following procedure is followed:

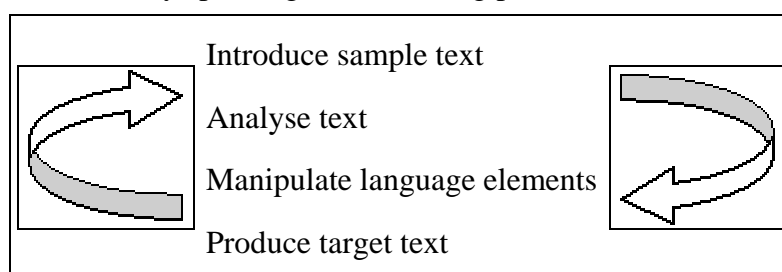


Figure 1: Procedure in genre-based approach (Badger 2002 online)

Such explicitness makes GA a “visible pedagogy” (Feez 2002), demystifying the deep-rooted norms of certain disciplines and professions (Dudley-Evans 1994). But a

misuse of GA results in a “static, decontextualised pedagogy”, in which genre is taught as linguistic forms and a how-do-do list, not dynamic language uses (Kay & Dudley-Evans 1998; Hyland 2003:26). It imposes prescriptive formulas that learners have to conform to, inhibiting learners’ creativity (Freedman & Medway 1994). In ESP classrooms, the correct use of GA in professional writing goes through four interlinking stages of genre learning, covering the following four areas of genre competence (Bhatia 1997, 1999):

- understanding of the code and (b) acquisition of genre knowledge, which concerns the familiarity with genre's form/content and its specific ways of thinking/doing things. (a) and (b) are taught by linking institutional values , expectations and recognizable linguistic conventions.
- (c) genre practice, which involves the sensitivity to genre's cognitive structures by dynamic application of structural/linguistic patterns to respond to emerging contexts; (d) genre ownership, which is about the exploitation and manipulation of genres to perform professional tasks and develop new generic forms. (c) and (d) are taught through variations and choices in linguistic realizations, genre-mixing and genre-embedding (Bhatia 1999)

1.3. Process genre approach

Bhatia (1999) asserts that it is over-simplified to treat GA as either a product or process approach, because GA needs to integrate not only product and process, but purpose and participants. Hyland (2004) claims process approach can be combined with GA, enabling learners to understand and control the processes and purposes of text creation, and contexts where the texts are composed and read. An attempt is made to integrate the input and linguistic knowledge (product and genre approaches), context and purpose of writing (GA), and writing skill and creativity (process approach) (Badger & White 2000). Named as “process genre approach” (PGA), it enables learners to do planning/drafting/publishing within a product-oriented framework, which is characterized by real-world concerns of purpose and audience (Badger & White 2000: 159, see Figure 2). In PGA, grammar is treated as dynamic

meaning-making resources. Learners are scaffolded to develop their autonomy, and receive meaningful feedback from peers and teachers (Kim & Kim 2005).

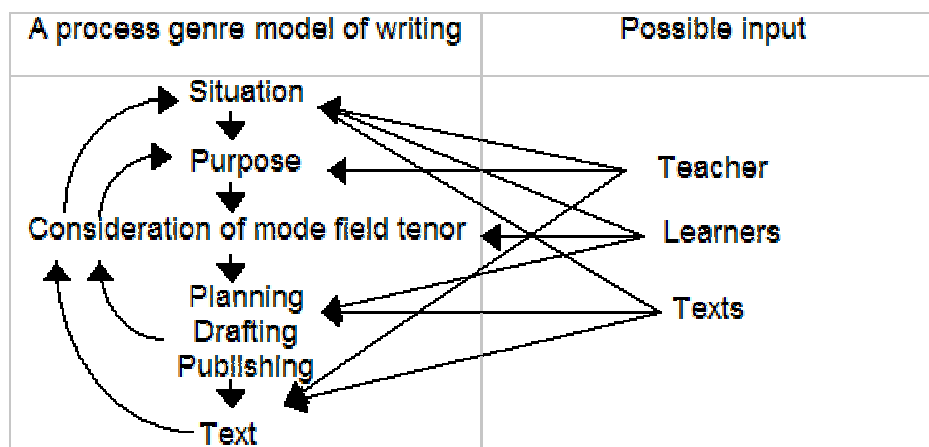


Figure 2: A process genre model of writing (Badger & White 2000: 159)

1.4. Teaching-learning Cycle

In the teaching of genre, providing systematic guidance and support to "scaffold" learners in achieving their potential level of performance is vital. With scaffolding, i.e. the interaction and assistance from experienced others (teachers and peers), learners can finally achieve their potential by completing the task alone (Vygotsky 1978). Based on scaffolding, a teaching-learning cycle is proposed to teach genre. The cycle has five stages (Feez & Joyce 1998; Hyland 2004):

- (a) Context building: experiencing and exploring the purpose, context and audience of the genre;
- (b) Modelling: analyzing the genre to reveal structural patterns and linguistic features;
- (c) Joint construction: guided, teacher-supported practice of genre;
- (d) Independent writing: independent writing monitored by the teacher;
- (e) Comparing; linking what is learned to other genres and contexts.

In early stages of (a) and (b), learners receive scaffolding in explicit instructions on generic conventions. In later stages, scaffolding gradually declines as learners gain greater control of the genre. Finally, learners are able to critique and exploit the

linguistic possibilities of the genre (Macken-Horarik 2002).

Based on the teaching-learning cycle (Feez & Joyce 1998) and four areas of genre competence (Bhatia 1997), I summarize their links in Table 1.

Teaching-learning cycle	4 areas of competence	Teaching method	Teacher's role
(a) Context building (b) Modelling	(i): Understanding of the codes; (ii): Acquisition of genre knowledge.	Explicit teaching of textual/linguistic patterns	Interventionist
(c) Joint construction (d) Independent construction (e) Comparing	(iii): Genre practice; (iv): Genre ownership.	Teacher-learner and peer collaboration; Planning, drafting, revising, publishing	Facilitator

Table 1: Links between teaching-learning cycle and genre competence

2. Pedagogy for hotel brochure (HB) writing

My pedagogy and lesson plan is based on the integration of teaching-learning cycle (Feez & Joyce 1998) and process genre approach (Badger & White 2000), which scaffolds students from acquiring genre knowledge, practicing genre construction to claiming genre ownership (Bhatia 1997, 1999).

Levels:

The students are advanced learners. Specifically, they are final-year Bachelor of Arts (BA) students majoring English with specialization in Tourism and Hospitality or Professional Communication in China. They are expected to write HB in the future. The class size is about 20.

Objectives:

At the end of the teaching, students shall be able to:

1. understand how HB is conventionally structured by its moves and steps.
2. familiarize with typical linguistic features that realize each step and move.

3. evaluate the impacts of context, purpose, audience on genre conventions of (1) and (2).
4. conduct genre analysis on sample HB and assess the variations.
5. critically evaluate the writings by peers and authentic samples.
6. complete an authentic task independently for a local hotel and publish it in internet (www.virtualtourist.com/hotels/).
7. appreciate how HB is embedded in other generic forms (e.g. personal letters).

Class Time:

- There are 6 sessions. Each session takes 50 minutes. Two sessions are held for each time. All sessions focus on the authentic task described below.
- The 6 sessions are a component of the course of *Writing for Tourism and Hospitality* or *Promotional Writing*, which also teaches other genres.

Resources:

- Computer projector and screen.
- A course website is established where teaching materials, students' works and discussions can be posted.

Task:

Access the official websites of Nanjing International Conference Hotel and Nanjing Shanshui Grand Hotel respectively, analyze their online English-version ‘hotel brochure’ (titled as ‘description’ and ‘introduction’ by them) and explore the whole array of relevant information of their informative websites (please see the website address as listed in the references). Both hotels are ranked as 4-star. Discuss the defects and insufficiencies in the online HBs. Write an authentic HB for both hotels. The best writings from the students will be published and sent to the marketing departments of both hotels.

Procedure

(i). Context building

Before Session 1:

- (a): Exposure to the model of the target genre - one sample HB is distributed and read by students.
- (b): Experience authentic context of hotel services - in a pre-arranged site visit, sales staff lead students to tour hotel facilities.
- (c): Understand the institutional practices in hotel services and marketing - students are given the following questions to think about and ask the staff. The questions will be discussed in Session 1.
- What is unique about hotel services comparing with a tangible product (e.g. a microwave)?
 - What hotel services do people/organizations use? Why do they use them?
 - What do people/organizations expect from a hotel?
 - Why people/organizations read HB, and how they get them and use them?
 - What is the relationship between the writer and reader and what shared knowledge is assumed?

(d): Students post their answers in course website.

Session 1:

- (e): Hold a discussion on the questions and relate them to students' personal experience
- (f): Introduce the concepts of move and step in genre analysis.

(ii). Modeling

Session 2

- (a): Provide detailed explanation on the moves of HB and present the examples of the moves of 2 samples.
- (b): Give the other 6 samples to students. Divide students in 6 groups. Each group labels the moves of one sample and presents them to the class.
- (c): Using tables to compare similarities and differences of different samples in terms

of the discourse structure

- (d): Discuss the rationale and appeal in persuasion and promotion of each move
- (e): Repeat the same procedure of (a) – (d) for steps (strategies). The goal is enable students to conduct genre analysis by themselves.
- (f): Explain how benefits and features are presented in description and evaluation (Bhatia 2004)
- (g): Divide students into 2 groups. Each lists benefits and features of one sample and present them to the class.

Homework:

- Ask students to list and explain linguistic features in samples after class.

Session 3

- (a): Present typical linguistic features of *location* and *evaluation* moves and explain their form-function relationships (Zhao, forthcoming).
- (b): Divide students in 3 groups. Each identifies typical linguistic features of typical steps in *promotion* move (Zhao, forthcoming). Give each group the corpora of texts in two steps, and each group has different corpora. Each group presents the results to the class.
- (c): To address form-function relationships, discuss appeal in persuasion and promotion of the features in (b).
- (d): To address content issues, discuss and list features and corresponding benefits for the two hotels in the “task”.
- (e): To address structural and rhetorical patterns and experience collaborative writing, divide students in 6. Each group prepares a brief that illustrates move-step structure with the distribution of benefits and features for the two hotels in the “task”.
- (f): Distribute linguistic feature summary of typical HBs to students

(iii). Joint Construction

Session 4

- (a): Discuss with students to evaluate and choose a brief.

(b): Facilitate a whole-class construction of writing based on the brief, feature-benefit table.

(c): Discuss how to balance the dual-purpose of information and promotion, and emotional and logical aspects of persuasion in HB (Zhao, forthcoming).

Homework:

- Ask students to submit their first drafts in course website.

(iv) Independent Writing/Comparing

Session 5:

(a): Comment on common problems in structural, linguistic, content, and rhetorical aspects in the first drafts.

(b): Take an authentic sample beyond the corpus, and present only the factual features in terms of amenities and facilities. Ask students to write a HB independently for genre practice. Present the sample, and compare students' writing and the sample.

(c): To have a peer review, ask students to evaluate and edit the writing of the partner.

Session 6:

(a): Comparing HB with typical advertisements (Bhatia 2004) and sales letters (Bhatia 1993), B2B brochures (Sobhie, 2003).

(b): Appreciate how HB can be embedded or modified into other related genres, e.g. advertorial, soft news, etc.

Homework:

- Ask student revise his/her first draft and submit in course website after class. Have students vote the best one.
- Ask students to publish his/her writing at www.virtualtourist.com/hotels/, which features reviews of hotels in English.

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