

Genre and the Merits of Genre-Based Approaches

Zahra Jamaledin¹

Anita Lashkarian²

^{1,2}Department of English, Maybod Branch, Islamic Azad University, Maybod, Yazd, Iran

Introduction

Every different kind of discourse that happens in a specific context which contains its own particular pattern, style, register, structure and is representative of a certain community is called a genre. Before writing, a writer should consider using only certain features of the text based on the particular genre and a reader expects specific features of a text in accordance with the genre expectation. (Richards and Schmidt, 2010, p.245). A specific type or class of language use that belongs to certain communities is called a genre (Allison, 1999, cited in Basturkman, 2006, p.52). Genre analysis compares and contrasts these different kinds of texts in order to find the similarities and differences between genres. Genre analysis is going to analyze the linguistic characteristics, the social setting, culture, ideology, and organization of certain discourse community (Luzon, 2005). Genre is an expression that can be applied in many disciplines and fields such as literature, film, art theory, and cultural studies (Huang, 2005). Since there were a lot of controversies over the concept of genre, a workshop was organized and a lot of participants from Australia, Fiji, Germany, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand took part in it. They aimed at sharing their knowledge and arrived at a consistent meaning. Most of them agreed on two definitions by Martin (1984) and Swales (1990). Martin claims that a genre is "a staged, goal-oriented purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture." Swales defines genre as "a genre comprises a class of communicative events the members of which share some set of communicative purposes ". Both of them agree on a common term "communicative purpose" that results in creating a genre. (Kay and Dudley-Evans, 1998, p. 308). A lot of varieties of genres can be found in every day communicative and in every ordinary day of our life "buying vegetable, telling a story, writing a letter to the editor, inviting someone to dinner"(Martin,1984). As mentioned earlier, Martin defined genre as goal oriented staging structure of genres. For example, "after entering a shop, a customer greets a salesperson, he states his needs, and he asks how much it costs. Then he pays and says goodbye and leaves. (Using ^ to indicate sequence):

"Greeting ^ Service bid ^ Statement of need ^ Compliance ^ Decision to buy ^ Payment ^ leave" (Martin, 1984). Based on different cultures some stages may be added, Hasan (1999), for example argues " to describe the nature of human language we need to place it in its social environment; that this environment - call it context- must be taken as an integral part of linguistic theory (cited in Adolphs, 2002). In Iran stages such as "bargain, complaint, and compliment" are sometimes inserted. Our people believe that the prices of the goods are not fixed and real so they have to bargain. Compliment means the shopkeeper admires and praises the buyers and says polite phrases and sentences such as " this shop belongs to you, you can take it without money." Most people complain to the shopkeeper about the prices that are changeable. This example was a kind of spoken text that showed how texts are conducted based on cultural contexts.

Three Major Genre Studies

Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL) or Sydney school of genre analysis is an approach that its principles and techniques can be used to analyze spoken and written texts in a pedagogical setting. SFL is going to answer two questions: how people use language and how language is structured for use. This approach has originated in Halliday's lexico- grammar level of language that language has not only systematic dimensions of grammar such as phonology and semantics but also functional dimensions such as interpersonal or ideational ones (Huang, 2005). This approach aims to teach and educate students so that they can focus on literacy and also social processes such as how to explain, to describe and to argue and so on (Bawarshi and Reif, 2010). The approaches of these schools are genre-based approaches. If learners aspire to master a language to some extent they need to be familiar with different genres. Although it is impossible for learners to master and acquire all different kinds of genres, because it is impossible even for native speakers, it is possible and useful to express some levels of genres, that is, description, narration, argumentation, and persuasion. Bazerman claims that the main purpose of learning a language for a person is to be able to express oneself. So in a society a person is more successful when s/he is able to make her/himself understood in different ways by using different genres in different communities. (cited in Bakhtin, 1986. P. 62).

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is another major that uses genres and studies genre analysis, it focuses on domain of activities and language in use, that is, language that is going to be applied in

future. For example, English for medicine, English for nursing, English for business and the concepts and terms that are used by the members of each community (Bawarshi and Reif, 2010).

Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS) consider genres as some social actions that happen in accordance with social settings and contexts. This approach has originated in Miller's essay "Genre as social action". There will be some misunderstanding if we consider genres as some lists and classifications, whereas we know people interact and communicate with one another within these genres every day and our life is a flow of different genres. Every genre that is used in every context performs a certain function. We conclude that members of each society have an understating of how to take part in the action of the community. In a class students know to raise their hands if they want to speak and this action is correct because they have learnt to speak in turn but in a friend meeting when eating lunch, the persons do not raise their hands to speak "so social actions are the responses to understanding how to participate in the action of a community" (Miller, 1984).

Characteristics of Discourse Community and Genre Analysis

Swales argues (1990) that different genres develop over time because of rhetorical needs. Genres that are defined as different types of texts are distinguishable by the members of their communities so discourse communities use specific genres that sometimes outsiders of those communities also can recognize that kind of genre. The members of each community are committed to some conventions which are developed by the members that are in accordance with their purposes. These conventions and genres are changeable if the group membership or ends change (Swales, 1990. P.467). Swales discusses six characteristics that can be considered as criteria for distinguishing a group of members as a discourse community.

1. The individuals of the group develop a set of goals that can be as documental forms.
2. The individuals have some ways of communication. The participatory mechanisms will vary according to the community: meeting, telecommunications, correspondence, newsletters, and conversation.
3. They get feedback from one another, if they do not interact and communicate with each other it cannot be said that they belong to certain community. The feedback can progress their performance, for example in a football team feedback can improve their performace.
4. Each community can apply more than one kind of genre.
5. They can own some specific lexis and

registers like "highly technical terminology as in medical communities." 6. Each community should keep a balance between new members and experts because members join the community as unexperienced ones and may leave by death.

Berkenkotter and Huckin (1993) discuss a set of principles for genres. 1. Dynamism: genres develop and change again and again based on needs. 2. Situatedness: in some situations and culture norms genres may change, in other words the genres used in certain setting are in correlation with actions we need to achieve them. 3. Form and content: based on appropriateness the participants of a community select specific content and form. 4. Duality of structure: a genre is arisen because the members of the community need it for interactions so it helps to continue social structure and to make these structure. 5. Community ownership: every community has, genre conventions that belong to that certain community such as community's norms, ideology, and philosophy (cited in Basturkman, 2006, p.55-6).

Studies on Genre Analysis

Following Swales' work (1981) on genre analysis, some researchers have paid attention to genre analysis fields such as textual, social, structure of the community analysis. Hayati et al. (2011) compared and contrasted to find the similarities and differences of reprint request e-mail messages by postgraduates of two fields of study, physics and EFL learners, they found out that the texts were similar at the levels of moves but the differences were in strategies and microstructural features. They used Swales' model (1990) that suggested the following move patterns for request of reprint of an article " opening, salutation, request statement, expression of thanks, closing". Mehrpour et al. (2013) investigated the differences between English and Iranian business e-mails with the same purpose. They concluded the generic structure were similar to exchange information but Iranian emails contained lexico-grammatical terms that showed more respect but English emails revealed a kindly and intimate setting. Imtiaz et al. (2014) analyzed argumentative genre of Pakistani English foreign language learners to find rhetorical patterns of this genre based on Hyland's model (1990). The model has three stages " thesis, arguments, conclusion , and each move or stage has subcategories. The results showed that the learners had added two moves, " contradiction and suggestion", which were not part of the model to the main stages. Bhatia (1993) discusses that the goal of genre analysis is not just to distinguish moves or linguistic features but

the aim is how these combined linguistics satisfy the communicative purposes. (cited in Imtiaz et al.,2014,p.96)

Genre and its Importance in Pedagogical Setting

Nowadays a lot of interest has been given to genre and its importance in pedagogical contexts. Because of a paradigm shift from linguistic forms to language use and the importance of how to arrive at social purposes in certain setting. Hyland believes that learning how to write means learning how to use language and claims that genre-based writing helps learners to grasp how target texts are constructed explicitly and why they should write in those ways. So the learners learn how these written texts are samples of communication (Hyland, 2007). He suggests that learners not only need to learn the stages of writing that is, planning, drafting, reviewing, and revising but need to understand how to write in different contexts. He defines genre as " abstract, socially, recognized ways of using language for particular purposes" (Hyland, 2003, p. 8).What are the merits of genre curriculum or genre based teaching? Findings show that learners have opportunities to be familiar with different linguistic forms (text analysis), they understand generic features of texts, social communicative events, their purposes. This kind of approach helps them to understand the world around them better (Kay and Dudley-Evans, 1998, p. 309). Tang (2008) in an article expresses that she is going to teach her students how they relate linguistic study to their everyday lives. She is going to open the students' eyes to the wider relevance of text analysis to their lives. She continues " one way in which I have tried to accomplish this has been to pull into the classroom texts from their everyday lives including advertisements, road signs, movie posters, newspaper and magazine articles, comic strips, conversations they had with friends during lunch, emails, online shopping and transaction." At the end of the year the students reflected on this genre analysis , for example one of the students said " how the news reported can help shape our view on the world through the manipulation of linguistic features , now I am very careful in reading news reports I question myself when I am reading them : why are certain words used? Who is portrayed as the active participant and who is passive? Do the passive sentences serve the purpose of hiding agents?" As mentioned earlier, in a country like Australia the different kinds of genres are taught in primary school in order to enable the learners to function properly in society. This approach helps them to gain confidence because they can express their purposes and themselves by different texts and can feel that they are the member of a particular community for a short time since by

writing the special genre of that community they can enter that community. I think it is a good feeling when people can distinguish different written and spoken forms or genres of different communities. They can enjoy reading different kinds of poems, watching different films with different genres. Different kinds of stories have different kinds of points. A fable is going to express an explicit moral point, a parable may teach spiritual lesson, a recount reviews activities, and a narrative entertains. Although they may have some structures in common, each of them is different in the stages that they perform. Different genres have their own registers and sometimes their own fixed significant terms, for example narrative genres are beginning with "Once upon a time" and closing with "And they lived happily ever after." (Martin, 1984). As in other countries genre based approaches have been employed for teaching academic writing, syllabus designers and material providers in Iran should pay attention to this point too. Since this method is going to be taught to non-native speakers it needs a lot training and research. So our teachers must have a better understanding of these approaches and need a lot of education. Unfortunately we know that in Iran our students are not familiar even with different genres of their mother tongue.

Conclusion

Genre-based approaches give a lot of chances to learners to become aware of and familiar with different kinds of communicative events and real language uses that lead to learners' creativities. Learners grow not only to grasp comprehension of different text types such as narrative, recount, exposition, explanation, and imaginative recount but to reconstruct them too. Learners encounter authentic materials, that is, natural speech and writing that have been taken from real world sources. If we had a genre based approach in Iran, in secondary school, the teachers and students would face these varieties of texts more and the teachers would have to bring different newspapers, magazines or tapes of natural speech from radio, television to the classroom that were representative of language use what applied linguistics puts emphasis on it. Since the duty of applied linguistics is to gather data from other disciplines such as sociology, psychology in order to enhance theoretical and practical models of language teaching and learning and language use. These genres can provide some authentic sources of linguistic knowledge and also cultural knowledge that is crucial to learn a second language because culture is a part of language and language is a part of culture, they cannot be separated if we do this each part loses its significance (Brown, 2004). As Schmitt (2002, p. 55) discusses that different contexts construct the culture of

every society. Our learners should be empowered to become sensitive to and aware of understanding a piece of text, its conventions, and its pragmatic aspect.

References

- Adolphs, S. (2002). Genre and spoken discourse: Probabilities and predictions. *Journal of pragmatics* 25, 561-568.
- Bakhtin, M. (1986). The Problem of Speech Genres, in C. Emerson & Holquist, M. (eds.): *Speech genres and Other Late Essays*. Trans. McGhee, (V.W.). Austin: University of Texas Press, 60-102.
- Basturkmen, H. (2006). *Ideas and options in English for specific purpose*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Bawarshi, A., and Jo Reif, M. (2010). *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy*. Colorado: Parlor Press and WAC Clearinghouse.
- Brown, H. D. (2006). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. New York, NY: Pearson education.
- Hayati, A. Shokuhi, H., & Hadadi, F. (2011). A genre analysis of reprint request e-mail written by EFL and physics professional. *The journal of teaching language skills (JTLS)*, 3(3), 21-42.
- Huang, G. (2005). *An introduction to systemic functional linguistics*. Bloomsburg publishing.
- Hyland, K. (2003). *Second Language Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hyland, K. (2007). Genre pedagogy: Language, literacy and L2 writing instruction. *Journal of second language writing*, 16, 148-164.
- Imtiaz, Z., & Mahmood, M. A. (2014). Genre analysis of argumentative essays of Pakistani EFL learners. *Journal of education and practice*, 5(30), 95-101.
- Kay, H., & Dudley-Evans, T. (1998). Genre: What teachers think. *ELT Journal*, 52(4), 308-314.
- Luzon, M.J. (2005). Genre analysis in technical communication. *IEEE Transactions on professional communication*, 48(3), 285-296.

Martin, J.R. (1984). Language, register and genre, In F. Christie, ed. *Children Writing: A reader*. Geelong Vic: Deakin University Press, 21-29.

Mehrpour,S., & Mehrzad, M. (2013). A comparative genre analysis of English business e-mail written by Iranians and native English speakers. *Theory and practice in language studies*, 3(120).

Miller, C. (1984). Genre as social action. *Quarterly journal of speech*. 70 (2), 151-67

Richards, J.C., & Schmidt, R. (2010). *Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics*. UK: Pearson Education Limited.

Schmitt, N. (2002). *An introduction to applied linguistics*. London, Oxford University Press.

Swales, J. M. (1990). *Genre Analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Tang, R. (2008). Studying discourse analysis: Does it have an impact on trainee English language teachers? *English language teacher education and development (ELTED)* 11(4), 27-32.