Exploring consciousness-raising impacts of a genre-based pedagogy in the context of an Iranian university students’ academic writing

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This paper explores the consciousness-raising impact of a genre-based pedagogy which was deployed in the context of undergraduate EFL students at Tabriz as a means of improving students’ argumentative writing. The consciousness-raising impact was explored from the linguistic perspective only: generic structures at the level of genre and grammatical metaphor (GM) at the level of lexico-grammar. The communicative impact of GM deployment in making ‘a reasoned argument’ and its qualitative and quantitative complementarities with the generic structures and the type of genre were explored across the students’ texts, respectively.

This study was carried out at three stages of pre-test, exposition and discussion genres. The pre-test examined the students’ level of English language proficiency without any feedback or the teaching and learning activities. In the exposition and discussion genres a cyclical way of teaching and learning which was mainly based on modelling of text, joint construction of text, and independent construction of text (Martin and Rose 2007; Feez 1998; Christie 1999; Knapp and Watkins 2005) were deployed.

The key findings from the analysis of generic structures revealed that the selected samples indicated major reflection of the recruited genres in the post-test texts. That is, the introduction of genre-based pedagogy in this context has enabled the students to deploy the generic structures appropriately in comparison with the pre-test texts. Therefore, diverse execution of generic structures was found across the three stages of the pre-test, exposition and discussion text-types. While in the pre-test texts only some of the students’ texts complied with the Sydney genre school convention, in the exposition and discussion text-types nearly all of the students employed these features. In addition, some of the pre-test samples indicated a kind of rejection of topic in which they developed their own stories and shifted away from arguing to offering advice as an evident deviation from the standard structures in the literature. However, after the application of pedagogy the kind and frequency of rejection decreased in the post-test texts.
The analysis of GM was carried out quantitatively and qualitatively. In quantitative analysis, three distinct but interrelated statistical analyses were carried out across the selected samples. In the first step the analysis was based on Ravelli’s (1985, 1999) categorisation of GM. All of the selected texts were analysed according to this model. The second step was the analysis of subcategories of nominalisation in the pre-test, exposition and discussion genres. The last step devoted to the statistical analysis of complex processes construed as Things. It was found that nominalisation is the major kind of GM and its subcategory in the form of complex processes construed as Things co-varies with the type of genres.

The qualitative analysis was based on Halliday (1998) and Halliday and Matthiessen’s (2006) notion of realisation of GM at syntagmatic orders: element, figure, and sequence. The analysis of elemental metaphors according to Halliday and Matthiessen’s (2006) taxonomy of types of Things revealed that the students have largely developed ‘macro things’ over ‘simple things’ across the post-test texts. This finding which indicated the complexity of students’ post-test texts was also compatible with Ravelli’s (1985, 1999) distinction of ‘Macro’ metaphors. The analysis of figure and sequence also indicated the development across the students’ texts. More specifically, through the deployment of these features the students shifted the “intraclause” reasoning in the congruent realisation of figures and sequences to “inter-clause” reasoning in the metaphorical forms. This in turn enabled the students to develop ‘buried reasoning’ in their post-test texts and gain better control over the causality relationship and making arguments which correlated with the generic structures at the level of genre. However, there were also cases where the students showed the lack of control in nominalising, particularly in substituting unrelated derivational morphemes, post-positioning modifiers, using unrelated epithets and leaning back into word-to-word literal translation as an indication of the mother tongue interference.
DECLARATION

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the university of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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ABBREVIATIONS

EFL English as a Foreign Language
ESL English as a Second Language
EAP English for Academic Purposes
ESP English for Specific Purposes
FDG Functional Discourse Grammar
IELTS International English Language Testing System
SFL Systemic Functional Linguistics
HGS1 High group student 1
HGS2 High group student 2
HGS3 High group student 3
MGS1 Middle group student 1
MGS2 Middle group student 2
MGS3 Middle group student 3
LGS1 Low group student 1
LGS2 Low group student 2
LGS3 Low group student 3
LAD Language Acquisition Device
L1 First Language
L2 Second Language
MN Marked Nominalisation
VN Verbal Nouns
NMMN Non-morphologically Marked Nominalisation
NPRM Nominalisation in Pre-modifiers
NPOM Nominalisation in Post-modifiers
NT Nominalisation in Theme
NR Nominalisation in Rheme
mnT Mental processes construed as Thing
vT Verbal processes construed as Thing
mhT Material processes construed as Thing with human agency
mT Material processes construed as Thing without human agency
rT Relational processes construed as Thing
bT Behavioural processes construed as Thing
SLA Second Language Acquisition
UG Universal Grammar