GENRE FOR TEACHING ESP

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‘I have proved by actual trial that a letter, that takes an hour to write, takes only 3 minutes to read!’

Lewis Carroll

ABSTRACT

Teaching an ESP class in comparison to General English class requires different strategies where emphasis lies more on particular parts of the course rather than on skills. In an ESP course, we are mostly concerned with the application of skills that is getting students to show mastery of a skill by applying it to new and unknown material. Even though the learners are well-prepared in their subject area, most of them are third or fourth year students, they have to acquire new specialized knowledge of preparing and recording podcasts, persuasive writing in forms of leaflets, sales letters and brochures, compiling professional reports such as conducting researches by devising questionnaires, surveys and interviews.

In this paper, I would like to look at outcomes of teaching/learning sales letters and podcasts by an application of a correlation-al research, which aims to find writing and speaking relationships/characteristics and to answer the question: “Are students with good writing skills also those who have good speaking skills?” Research has been done on samples of writing skills (sales letters and reports) and speaking skills (podcasting) by evaluating students’ assignments with rubrics. After analyzing the evidences, I have tried to identify the problem area and to provide solutions to learner’s self-assessment by means of genre analysis.

Key words: genre analysis; correlation-al research, speaking, listening and writing skills; ESP; Marketing English

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to identify the problem area in teaching a genre analysis of writing and speaking texts for subject-specific ESP courses, an application of a genre-based approach, particularly, using a text analysis approach in an ESP class. Teaching an ESP class in comparison to General English class requires different strategies where emphasis lies more on particular parts of the course rather than in skills. For instance, in the syllabi of ENG321 ‘Marketing English’ the course goal has been stated as ‘to equip students with marketing English required for their future work in business environment.’ From a recent survey on business/marketing environment it can be seen that most communication in English involves writing (11%), speaking (45%), listening (35%) and reading (9%). The main problem centered on the question of what can be done to improve
the students’ speaking, listening and writing abilities throughout the course of 64 hours.

Furthermore, the description of the course suggests that ‘this course is for students wishing to gain knowledge, vocabulary and skills specific to a business environment. Throughout this program, students will develop the necessary skills to conduct business style meetings, write formal business reports and give presentations, while achieving a more sophisticated business vocabulary.’ Thus in this course we are mostly concerned with the application of skills that is getting students to show mastery of a skill by applying it to new and unknown material. Even though the learners are well-prepared in their subject area, most of them are third or fourth year students, they have to acquire new specialized knowledge of preparing and recording podcasts, persuading writing in forms of leaflets, sales letters and brochures, compiling professional reports such as conducting researches by devising questionnaires, surveys and interviews.

The list of objectives was developed at the beginning of the course in autumn, 2011. To start with, this was knowledge and skills outcomes: ‘at the end of the course the students are expected to do (or reveal) the following: use appropriate vocabulary related to business and marketing; and make podcasts presentations; and write marketing reports and promotional plans; and participate in job interviews and conduct interviews; and develop the analytical and critical thinking; and read business articles and understand the vocabulary; and use grammar structures used in business’. After teaching the course for one term, I am concerned with the idea of extending the first three key statements by a specific objective that is analyzing genre of specialist documents and texts.

In this paper, I would like to look at outcomes of teaching/learning sales letters and podcasting by an application of a correlational research, which aims to find writing and speaking relationships/characteristics and to answer the question: ‘Are students with good writing skills also those who have good speaking skills?’ The research will be done on samples of writing skills (sales letters and reports) and speaking skills (podcasting) by using assessment rubrics. After analyzing the evidence, I will try to identify the problem area and provide solutions to learner’s self-assessment by means of genre analysis.

I.

The word ‘genre’ derived from Latin/French and means ‘kind’/’class’ – a distinctive type of a text. Learning genres of fiction, poetry and science-fiction through tales and stories, poems and sonnets in a native language is an unconscious, implicit process. What is more, lectures, seminars and other forms of teaching and learning enable students to write their academic assignments by acquisitions of critical thinking, discussions, presentations and debates at the university settings. Students can even question their teachers on standards/genres of writing and speaking in their subject-specific areas. Mittel (2001) points out that ‘every aspect of TV exhibits a reliance on genre’, he also indicates that ‘most texts have some generic identity, fitting into well-entrenched generic categories or incorporating genre mixing (as in “dramedies,” such as Ally McBeal, or blends, such as Make Me Laugh a comedy/game show).’

Teaching genre in a foreign language class can be seen as a completely different task in comparison to a native language setting. Genre analysis in English teaching became popular with an advance of an ESP movement, when learners were faced with time constraints and to a lack of exposure of professional settings. ESP teachers started to use a genre-based approach for assisting students to understand not only discursal and
register components of the text but also to extend it to non-linguistic analysis of professional materials by using genre analysis. Lee (2001) suggests ‘it is fruitful to start by looking at genres (categories of texts), and end up by generalising (through induction) about the existence of registers (linguistic characteristics) or even “text types” in Biber’s sense (categories of texts empirically based on linguistic characteristics). The work by Carne (1996), Cope & Kalantzis (1993), Flowerdew (1993), Hopkins & Dudley-Evans (1988), Hyland (1996), Lee (in press), McCarthy (1998a, 1998b), Thompson (in press), and Tribble (1998, 2000), to name but a few, show how a genre-based approach to analysing texts can yield interesting linguistic insights and may be pedagogically rewarding as well.’

Richards et al. (1985) defined the term genre as ‘a particular class of speech event which has certain features common to that particular event’. Swales (1990) introduced a genre analysis, which comprises a set of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes (Swales, 1990). On one hand, Hyland (2004) claims ‘Genre is a term for grouping texts together, representing how writers typically use language to respond to recurring situations. A genre analysis is a process of looking at several samples of a particular genre to analyze their similarities and differences in terms of their purposes, macrostructure and language choice.’ On the other hand, Cranney-Francis (1993) points out ‘a concept of genre allows the critic or analyst to explore [the] complex relationships in which a text is involved, relationships which ultimately relate back to what a text means. This is because what a text says and how it says it cannot be separated; this is fundamental to our notion of genre. Because of this, genre provides the link between text and context; between the formal and semantic properties of texts; between the text and the inter-textual, disciplinary and technological practices in which it is embedded.’ (pp.111-113)

In comparison to General English, ESP Learners need to develop understanding of the specific code, familiarity with the dynamics of specialist genres, rhetorical forms and content and proficiency in manipulation of specialist genres. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987) stated learners don’t learn language in isolation from specialist contents; therefore it helps to develop a desire to participate consciously in the professional community. Genre provides an opportunity to learn in a meaningful context by integrating of product, process and communicative purpose. Flowerdew (1993) advises to use in a genre analysis ‘a Hallidayan (1997) parameters: field (what the text is about), tenor (the relation between text framework producer and text recipient) and mode (the type and purpose of the text - written to be read, written to be spoken, etc.). The three contextual parameters of field, tenor, and mode together determine discourse structure and choice of linguistic realization. Genre analysis, according to this view, is the study of how the contextual parameters, discourse structure, and language interrelate.’ Furthermore, Flowerdew (1993) describes some examples of genre usage in an ESP class ‘given a corpus of sales letters, students …would …discover that a preferred verb form in sales letters is the imperative, and that its function is either to draw the attention of the reader/customer to some feature of the product for sale or to request some action on the part of the reader/customer.’ What is more, he recommends to agree the word ‘please’, which is ‘typically used with imperatives in requesting action on the part of the reader/customer. Having done these analyses of verb forms and of ‘please’ in the sales letter corpus, learners might then be instructed to do the same activity for another corpus, to compare the results from the two corpora which, of course, are likely to vary, and to account for any difference in terms of contextual constraints.’

ESP reflects the developments in all three areas of language, pedagogy and content studies. As a result, changing interpretations of ESP over the years and in different parts of
the world have incorporated the changing relationships between, and changing fashions in, these three areas of knowledge. These developments are apparent in particular approaches of methodology (e.g. the audio-lingual method), sometimes in a technique (e.g. programmed workbooks) or through a type of equipment (e.g. language labs). However, some course-organizers tend to label their courses as ‘special-purpose’ in order to attract people, but in reality there is ‘a professional … teaching to be offered in those cases, leading to a reasoned change from general to special-purpose teaching’ (Strevens, 1977:149).

Although, the definition of special-purpose language contains some contradictory issues, it is possible to outline the main characteristics of ESP courses. Munby (in Donough, 1984:2) states that ‘ESP courses are those where the syllabus and materials are determined in all essentials by the prior analysis of the communication needs of the learner’. Furthermore, Stervens (1977:150) identifies the following criteria: ‘restriction, selection, themes and topics and communicative needs.’ Thus, it can be understood that the content of ESP language courses is determined only by the learner’s purpose and depends on his/her requirements. For example, restriction relates to ‘only those basic skills’ (understanding speech, speaking, reading, writing) … which are required by the learner’s purposes; selection involves ‘only those items of vocabulary, patterns of grammar, functions of language, … which are required by the learner’s purposes’, and so on.

II.

Many learners all over the world are studying or acquiring their job qualifications through the medium of English. Many other people use English in order to carry out their jobs. These two types of English are known as EAP (English for Academic Purpose) when learning English aims at gaining access to knowledge, and EOP (English for Occupational Purposes) when learners want to express in English the knowledge they already have (Kennedy and Bolitho, 1984). Coffey (1984:3) states that the purpose of EAP is to satisfy a student’s need for a ‘quick and economic use of the English language to pursue a course of academic study’ In contrast, EOP has been described as an area ‘…where the participant needs English to perform all or part of his occupational duties’ (Munby, 1979:55).

Furthermore, Coffey (1984:4) claims that ‘EAP may be either common core or subject-specific. This statement can be explained by the fact that common core is concerned with general academic language and focuses on study skills, whereas if it subject-specific it examines the language features of particular academic disciplines or subjects, e.g. social sciences, business, or economics.

Strevens (1988:5) gives a table of a various types of ESP courses. Any ESP course can be described in terms of four levels and any combination of the characteristics is possible as follows:
Characteristics of ESP courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Purpose/Pedagogy</th>
<th>Specialist content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructional</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Science</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Technology</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Simultaneous</td>
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<td>Business</td>
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<td>Occupational</td>
<td>Law</td>
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<td>Tourism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Operational</td>
<td>Post</td>
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<td>Etc.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen from the table that the purpose of an ESP course is closely related to the pedagogical methods applied in the classroom, for example, through study skills practice in EAP courses and oral communication activities in the case of EOP. Then, how are these components used and incorporated in teaching practice?

On the one hand, study skills of EAP courses focuses on ‘…how to study through the medium of English, regardless of the subject matter of the studies’ (Robinson, 1980:7). Study skills needed by university students studying from English language textbooks include: adjusting reading speeds according to the type of material being read, using dictionary, guessing word meanings from context, interpreting graphs, diagrams and symbols, note-taking and summarizing (Richard, Platt & Weber, 1985:277). Heaton’s definitions (1975) can be added to this list: the organization of study, learning and remembering, and research techniques.

Teachers should guide students by introducing the target genre, encouraging them to analyse the structural patterns of the genre, practicing to construct the genres and constructing independently of the genres. For example, teaching genre of Sales Letters can be seen as ‘all persuasive communication builds a relationship between the sender & the receiver of a message which is mutually gratifying’. (Limaye M:1983) Communicative purpose of sales letters is to persuade to buy and elicit a specific response, it should capture attention, it should be short even if product/service are not needed and it should initiate relations & encourage further contact - it is ‘a communicative vehicle’ that opens up business opportunities.

RESEARCH

The aim of this research is to present the findings of correlation-al analysis/research in which students’ written and spoken assignments were analysed with rubrics. The samples included in this report were obtained from a random selection of work and the rubrics have been adopted by a subject teacher.
SUMMARIES

Two sales letters were evaluated by referring to the topics of the rubric such as ‘content, organization and accuracy’, ‘word choice’, ‘sentence fluency and paragraph mechanics’. Of these, the first letter of student A has met all requirements of the highest grade (12 points or 100%) as it is organized appropriately to the writer’s purpose; the message is complete and correct, the student uses many active verbs; many complete sentences of varying length, the number of paragraphs fits suggested formats and there are no punctuation, spelling or grammar errors. Another sample shows learner’s B lack of understanding the genre of sales letters by having incorrect information to be ineffective in meeting the writer’s goal. In addition, the word choice is unprofessional, the message is lost in poor construction and spelling/grammar errors have made the message unclear. As a result, student B has scored only 3 points out of 12, which is 25% out of 100%.

Next, the samples of podcasting have been marked with the special rubric on podcasting (see the attachments). Even though the first podcast from student A mentions who is speaking, the date the podcast was produced, it employs an irrelevant topic for recording, Although accurate information is provided succinctly, the delivery is hesitant, and choppy and sounds like the presenter is reading. Thus, an overall mark is 3 out of 12 points (25%) for student A and the same grade/comments (25%) go to student’s B performance.

The result of this survey demonstrates that although writing is perceived as one of the most challenging skills in a professional setting, student A could produce a well-written sample, which can be a result of studying in depth sales letters or copying it from the net or other sources. Learner B’s letter indicates a complete failure to understand the specific genre and produce an appropriate piece of writing. Moreover, the analysis of podcasts has clearly shown the student with excellent writing skills do not demonstrate the same speaking outcomes in recorded podcasts. Obviously, it can be explained by a spontaneous choice of topics in recording of podcasts, and also it can indicate a lack of genre understanding of this type of speaking. My recommendation, therefore, is that students should practice writing sales letters by comparing and contrasting many different types of sales letters and other business letters by means of the genre analysis.

First, as Bhatia (1991) suggests establishing genre and communicative purposes will help establish moves that are communicative intentions and then, establish language functions. Communicative purpose of sales letters is to persuade to buy and elicit a specific response, should capture attention, should be short (even if product/service not needed) and initiate relations by encouraging further contact. It is ‘a communicative vehicle’ that opens up business opportunities. Possible Structure of Sales Letters must include the following parts such as: establishing credentials, introducing the offer, offering the product, detailing of offer, indicating value of offer, offering incentives, enclosing documents, soliciting response, using pressure tactics and ending politely.

Student B’s letter has not established credentials as you-oriented and we-oriented; therefore, it has failed to identify the right tone and a style of the letter.

Similarly, the genre of podcasting must be taught. A genre of product/service presentation, a professional diary or a radio slot/advertisement can be presented in the form of a podcast. Students must enhance their vocabulary, public speaking skills, and oral presentation skills and improve their listening skills by revising their podcasts. Furthermore, recording of the podcasts must include three stages such as preproduction, production and postproduction processes. It would involve outlining the story, choosing any sound effects, recording the segment in
short segments, reviewing the completed recording and publishing the final piece.

CONCLUSION

One must acquaint oneself with the communication goal-oriented purposes associated with specific appropriate rhetorical procedures and conventions typically associated with the specialist discourse community that they are aspiring to join. The intent is to help learners use language more effectively in academic and professional settings and to bring much needed psychological reality and relevance to the learning task. In other words, learners need to develop the understanding of code, the acquisition of genre knowledge associated with the specialist culture, sensitivity. Then, and only then, can they hope to exploit generic knowledge of a repertoire of specialist genres by becoming informed users of the discourse of their chosen field. As Dudley-Evans’s (2000) comments imply that learners in EFL situations ‘will not have the high proficiency levels in English that most students have in a first or second language situation and will need… a much more straightforwardly linguistic approach based on the actual texts they use…They need to see how the Moves and Steps work in the genres they use and how they are expressed in English.’

BIBLIOGRAPHY


SAMPLE 1

Dear Customer,

Selling your property and want to maximise the price? Who doesn't!?

It's a numbers game. The more people that see your property advertised, the more you are likely to get through an open house inspection, the more interest you can generate and hopefully the higher price you will achieve.

So how do you maximise the number of people who know your house is on the market? This is the million dollar question. One answer is for sure however and it doesn't cost a million dollars. You need to ensure your property is the most visible in the place where most people are looking. With almost 90% of buyers preferring to use the internet as their main tool for searching for property you need to be there. And not just 'be there' but have the best presence possible online.

Realestate.com.au has the largest online property audience with over 7.5 million unique browsers searching for and researching the property market each month. So it makes sense your property needs to be listed here. However, how do you get it to stand out from other similar properties on the market?

The answer is Premiere Property. Quite simply it is the premium position on the realestate.com.au site in any given suburb and will make your property stand out from the rest. Your property will appear at the top of the search results with larger photos and much more space than that of other listings, thereby attracting more attention and generating more enquiry. When a prospective buyer clicks through to view all the details of your property, they will be able to view your photos via an image carousel and there will be no other third party advertising on the page for distraction.

Sincerely
Sample 2

Tone
587 East Street, Anytown, MI 45123

Music

November 15, 2011

Guitars and

784 Peach

Yourtown, MI 45126

Dear Mrs. Goodman:

I will be in Your town on November 5, 2011 and would like to meet with you at your office to discuss the new guitar models that you may be interested in for the upcoming year.

I have enclosed our latest catalogue. Please note the items in light blue highlights. They are the new guitar models to come in and are now on a special to preferred clients.

I will contact you later this week to schedule an appointment. If you need to get in touch with me, please call me at 1-888-457-7896. I look forward to talk with you. Thank you for your business.

Sincerely Yours,

xxxxx

Sales Representative
## Podcast Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Partially Proficient</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
<th>POINTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>4 points</td>
<td>3 points</td>
<td>2 points</td>
<td>1 point</td>
<td>___/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catchy and clever introduction. Provides relevant information and establishes a clear purpose engaging the listener immediately.</td>
<td>Describes the topic and engages the audience as the introduction proceeds.</td>
<td>Somewhat engaging (covers well-known topic), and provides a vague purpose.</td>
<td>Irrelevant or inappropriate topic that minimally engages listener. Does not include an introduction or the purpose is vague and unclear.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tells who is speaking, date the podcast was produced, and where the speaker is located.</td>
<td>Tells most of the following: who is speaking, date of the podcast, and location of speaker.</td>
<td>Alludes to who is speaking, date of the podcast, and location of speaker.</td>
<td>Speaker is not identified. No production date or location of the speaker is provided.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content</strong></td>
<td>4 points</td>
<td>3 points</td>
<td>2 points</td>
<td>1 point</td>
<td>___/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity and original content enhance the purpose of the podcast in an innovative way. Accurate information and succinct concepts are presented.</td>
<td>Accurate information is provided succinctly.</td>
<td>Some information is inaccurate or long-winded.</td>
<td>Information is inaccurate.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary enhances content.</td>
<td>Vocabulary is appropriate.</td>
<td>Vocabulary is adequate.</td>
<td>Vocabulary is inappropriate for the audience.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes a wide variety of appropriate, well-researched and informative sources and has well-edited quotes from “expert” sources. Quotes and sources of information are credited appropriately.</td>
<td>Includes appropriate and informative quotes from “expert” sources. Source quotes are credited appropriately.</td>
<td>Includes some variety of informative quotes from some “expert” sources. Source quotes need some editing and some credits are missing.</td>
<td>Includes no source quotes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keeps focus on the topic.</td>
<td>Stays on the topic.</td>
<td>Occasionally strays from the topic.</td>
<td>Does not stay on topic.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conclusion clearly summarizes key information.</td>
<td>Conclusion summarizes information.</td>
<td>Conclusion vaguely summarizes key information</td>
<td>No conclusion is provided.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 points</td>
<td>3 points</td>
<td>2 points</td>
<td>1 point</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well rehearsed, smooth delivery in a conversational style.</td>
<td>Rehearsed, smooth delivery.</td>
<td>Appears unrehearsed with uneven delivery.</td>
<td>Delivery is hesitant, and choppy and sounds like the presenter is reading.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly effective enunciation, expression, and rhythm keep the audience listening.</td>
<td>Enunciation, expression, pacing are effective.</td>
<td>Enunciation, expression, rhythm are sometimes distracting.</td>
<td>Enunciation of spoken word is not clearly understandable or expression, and rhythm are distracting throughout the podcast.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correct grammar is used throughout the podcast.</td>
<td>Correct grammar is used during the podcast.</td>
<td>Occasionally incorrect grammar is used during the podcast.</td>
<td>Poor grammar is used throughout the podcast.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open ended questions and follow-up are used that draw interesting and relevant information from the interviewee.</td>
<td>Open ended questions and follow-up questions are used appropriately.</td>
<td>Open ended questions and follow-up questions are occasionally irrelevant to the topic.</td>
<td>Only yes-or-no questions are used. No follow-up questions are asked.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL POINTS**

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175