

Chapter 5

Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Summary of the Study

The objectives of this empirical study were: (1) to investigate the language features and schematic structures of an English Information Report written by the ten subjects before implementing a genre-based approach, (2) to study the language features and schematic structures of an English Information Report after implementing a genre-based approach, and (3) to discern improvements in the students' writing that could be looked upon as the result of implementing the genre-based approach to form the a basis for recommending such an approach to EFL writing. The ten subjects were first-year non-English-major students enrolled in the 1999-2000 academic year at Yunnan Institute for Nationalities, Kunming, China. The instruments employed were a pretest used to investigate the language features and schematic structures of the Report before implementing a genre-based approach. A post-test used to examine the language features and schematic structures after implementing a genre-based approach. Another instrument was a questionnaire used for obtaining personal information on the subjects and their ideas on general English writing. A genre-based approach was implemented to instruct an English Information Report genre.

The statistics employed were frequency distribution and percentage. The results were as follows:

Results regarding language features and schematic structure before a genre-based approach instruction

In terms of language features, use of generalized participants was as low as 30 (F). The students kept changing main participants or secondary participants in their writing. The consistent use of main participants was 10 (F), secondary participants was 16 (F). So the participants of the Report were not logically connected. The frequency of simple present tense use was 67. Considering verbs usage, the use of linking verbs and action verbs were relatively low (24F, 11F), and the use of mental verbs was as high as 15 (F). The use of passive voice was 4 (F). Furthermore, personal feelings or opinions were involved in writing the Report. The frequency of the use of first person pronoun "I" and "We" was 20.

The schematic structure of the subjects' report writing mostly appeared to be one description pattern (D). That is, 60% of the subjects' report writing contained this pattern. Further, 30% of the students wrote in a general statement and a description pattern (GS-D). In addition, concerning key features in the description part of the report writing, the focus distributed diversely. Out of them, only the main focus frequencies were found on location, cultural symbols and customs (6,7,6).

Results regarding the language features and schematic structure after a genre-based approach instruction

As far as language feature is concerned, the subjects' report writing turned out to be formal and objective. The use of generalized participants was as high as 90 (F). In addition, the students kept a high consistent frequency of main participant (39) and secondary participant (40). The participants are logically connected. Moreover, there was an increased use of simple present tense (87F) and passive voice (12 F). Linking verbs and action verbs were relatively high (43F, 29F), and there was a low use of mental verbs (8F). The frequency of the use of first personal pronoun and personal feeling reduced to 3 (F).

The schematic structure was distinctive in the subjects' report writing after a genre-based approach was applied. Most of the Reports contained a general classification or a general statement, followed by a description paragraph (GS-D). The frequency was as high as 70 %. No students wrote in the pattern of only description (D). 20% of the students wrote their Reports in the pattern of a general statement, description, and conclusion (GS-D-C). Further, concerning key features, in the general statement, the students described mainly on location, category, customs, date and number. Meanwhile in the description part of the their Reports, the focus was distributed condense. Out of them, the main focus frequencies were found on function (11), custom and cultural symbols (17), component (20), and step (11).

Discussion of the Results

The results of the study show a significant improvement of the ten subjects' Information Report writing after the implementation of the genre-based approach. There are two areas to be discussed: language features in the students' Reports and the schematic structures that appeared in the students' Reports.

The Language Features in the Students' Report Writing

In this study, such language features occurring in the students' report writing as generalized participants use, the choice of simple present tense, verb usage, passive voice employment and descriptive language use, which are distinctive in an English Information Report genre, were examined. The results of the study show significantly that the students Report writing tend to be formal and objective in language use. And the subject matter is clearly described in terms of appropriate verb usage, right choice of tense and passive voice employment. There are four explanations of the results.

First, there is an improvement of generalized participants application in the students' report writing after the implementation of a genre-based approach. In other words, the students concentrated more on a group of nonspecific things to be described rather than on a specific thing, which distinguished their Report writing from narrative writing. Furthermore, the students kept a consistent employment of main participants and secondary participant in their post-test instead of changing the

participants consistently. As a result, the subject matter was logically related and a high degree of the topic continuity was obtained.

Furthermore, based on the genre-based approach, the researcher shows that teachers can assist their students to create texts for different purposes, which address specific audiences conveying particular meaning. A case in point is that in an English Information Report genre, the purpose is to classify and describe the way things are. However, this study indicates that 70% of the students wrote without knowing the purpose of their writing. This fact explains the high frequency of the first person pronouns “we” and “I” and a low frequency of generalized participants in the information report writing pretest. In addition, the choice of tense was mixed. This may be the result of the lack of awareness of their purposes for writing. Thus, the researcher guided the students in focusing their writing on their purposes by making them identify the purpose of each model text (see Appendix D, p67). Moreover, it can also be inferred that the students might be influenced by the way Chinese writers begin their writing. In Chinese writing it is preferable to use a personal pronoun, especially the first person pronoun--“I” or “We” to show close relationship between the reader and the writer. However, after the implementation of the genre-based approach, the students realized the purpose of their writing. Almost all of them were aware of using a generalized participant in an English Information Report genre to present a whole range of things in our environment to the audience. And they applied simple present tense to describe the facts of the subject matter in their Report writing.

Second, linking verbs are highly used to link the subject to its larger group in a general statement, or link the subject to its characteristics such as size, color, shape, and the like. Existential verbs were used to indicate that something exists, or to introduce a major topic or locating what is being talked. Before the genre-based approach was applied, a low frequency of using linking verbs was noted, and the subject was not closely connected to its characteristics. In contrast, on post-test, the frequency of linking verbs in the report writing increased. Furthermore, the students were likely to use different kinds of linking verbs such as *seem, appear, become, and turn* in their report writing. Another distinctive feature in an Information Report is the use of action verbs to describe the behavior or habit of some animals or even customs of ethnic groups. There was a high frequency (29) of action verbs used to describe some marriage customs of some ethnic groups or the behavior of birds and the function of elephants after the genre-based approach instruction. For example, *"In a wedding, a mock capture the bride, then the bride cry loudly again and again" (S4); "They kill pest, they post letter" (S1); "It can cut the trees and carry them with its long trunk" (S5)*. So through these descriptions, a clear picture was presented to the reader. Moreover, after the instruction of the genre-based approach, the students applied less mental verbs in their report writing, which made their writing objective with less personal feelings. And in an Information Report, the passive voice is readily accepted since it allows one to write without using personal pronouns. The students increased the employment of passive voice.

Such characteristics as color, shape, qualities, and system were limited in the subjects' writing even though these characteristics are common to the Information Report. Instead they mentioned characteristics such as custom and cultural symbols, ingredients of some local food, taste, and the date of some festivals. The subjects were able to produce reports on topics like *Families; The Marriage Customs of Bai People; of Naxi People; Birds; Elephants; Cross-the –Bridge Rice Noodle; and Mid-Autumn Day.*

Schematic Structure of the subjects' report writing

A Comparison of the results of the schematic structure before and after implementing a genre-based approach shows that there was almost no certain distinctive schematic structure on the students' report writing in the pretest. Furthermore, 60% out of the students' report writing contained only description (D), which did not convey a clear topic, and the ideas were not logically related. Twenty percent (20%) of the students' report writing revealed a schematic structure of a general statement followed by a description. Yet, the students did not state the topic clearly in the general statement; the description part was not closely related to the topic. After implementing the genre-based approach, the majority of the students' reports were well organized in a distinctive schematic structure of a general statement followed by description (GS-D). Consequently, the ideas were logically organized and expressed to the reader.

In conclusion, the data show that the students should be taught, not only heuristic devices to focus on meaning, but also heuristic devices that focus on schematic or rhetorical and language features (Gibbons, 1992). Particularly, explicit modeling of typical schematic structure and language features of a single genre can provide learners “comprehensive input.” It is of great value in the teaching of English writing in an EFL setting. In addition, an awareness of the schematic structure and language features of a text makes it easier for student writers to organize their material, which allows them to concentrate on combining the elements effectively in terms of both achieving meaning and producing more well organized writing. Furthermore, a genre-based approach provides students with information that the type of genre will vary according to the purpose of writing, content, audience and channel of communication; it provides students with a means to evaluate their own writing for they already have had a framework of what they should write; it also provides EFL teachers with a practical approach to the teaching of writing.

Implications and Recommendations for teaching EFL English writing

By employing the genre-based approach, teachers can help students comprehend text structure and hence, gain proficiency in making meanings effective. (EFL teachers can implement the genre-based approach, according to the particular teaching situation and particular needs of the learners.) In the planning stage of a genre-based approach, model texts can be found from such sources as realia, or student writing, or the teacher can construct one according to the genre to be taught.

The discussion of text purpose, audience, of the structure should be put in the text of context. These models could then be discussed and exploited stage by stage to show that an essay is developed and meanings communicated in certain ways of rhetorical organization. Moreover, EFL teachers should have a clear understanding of genre. They should also prepare model texts, appropriate class activities and some related vocabulary. In addition, such preparation should include asking learners to have a fact sheet (see Appendix E, p88), in which they write some details on the topic they are writing about. Their fact sheet also contains most of the vocabulary that will be used in the writing output.

Christie (1986:123) suggested two implications for teaching practices.

1. Teachers themselves need a thorough appreciation of the kinds of structures in writing they would have their students learn to write.
2. Teachers should plan to make good models for writing available to their students.

In addition, a genre-based approach increases opportunities for group discussion. Students can help each other choose, search materials, and construct a genre jointly. However, the efficient management of group discussion is crucial. Since in an EFL setting, both the native language and the target language could be involved in the discussion, working with partners or with groups of friends should be encouraged.

As the study has only shown the benefits of a short period of a genre-based instruction on one genre, further research is recommended to determine to what extent a genre-based approach can be applied to improve EFL students' general English writing ability in a longer period of instruction.

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