

Genre Analysis and Reading Comprehension: The Potentials of Genre Analysis to Faster the Literacy Skills of Iraqi EFL Students

Jihad Hassan Aziz Al Gurkosh

Department of English, College of Education, University of Samarra, Iraq

Abstract—This study tried to utilize genre analysis with the focus on pedagogical matters and in this case reading comprehension. Effectively, genre as one of the factors which influence the process of reading comprehension is considered in this study especially in terms of schemata theory. To this end, 50 homogenous Iraqi EFL students were selected as the subjects of the study based on a version of TOEFL test. In fact, the selected subjects were 29 females and 21 males. The subjects were randomly divided into two groups of experimental and control—each with 25 subjects. Likewise, both groups went under a ten-hour instruction in which five reading passages were instructed—the experimental group through a blended approach based on the tenets of genre analysis and the control group through a traditional model. It is worth mentioning that the two groups took the same reading comprehension test before and after instruction. Finally, their gain scores were computed and analyzed in SPSS which resulted into supremacy of experimental group.

Index Terms—reading comprehension, genre analysis, schemata theory, TOEFL, experimental group, control group

I. BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

English language as an international language has attracted the attention of many researchers among them literacy skills has received the paramount attention especially in the countries in which English is considered a foreign language. In effect, English as a foreign language was coined to address English in this type of countries like Iraq. Considering the fact that EFL students have little chance, if any, for using English in oral communication, the importance of literacy skills becomes clear. Hence, literacy skill has composed of two macro skills of reading and writing and this study deals with reading comprehension with the point of view of genre analysis.

Genre analysis, however a notion emerged in 1990s, recently has been considered to be implemented in the context of teaching language especially reading comprehension. Swales (1990) as a main figure in the domain of genre analysis views genre as "a collection of communicative events (which have) a shared set of communicative purposes" (p. 46). Hence, communicative purposes is a crucial issue in dealing with genre analysis. Bhatia (1993) underpins that "communicative purpose(s) determine the structure of the genre; should the purpose(s) change in a significant way, the genre would be different" (p. 14).

As far as the review of literature is concerned the notion of genre is fundamental in the process of reading comprehension, for example, students seem to do much better with the genres they are exposed and familiar with (Ammon, 1987; Carrell, 1981; Johnson, 1981, 1982; Langer, Barolome, Vasquez, & Lucas, 1990; Shimoda, 1989). Hence, one of the issues interfaces reading comprehension and genre analysis is schemata. The concept of schemata emphasizes on the reader's prior knowledge as well as on the active role played by the reader in the process of reading comprehension (Toledo, 2005).

In dealing with schemata, three types are considered, namely, thematic, linguistic, and formal (Carrell, 1983; Levine & Reves, 1994). Formal schema, which is the focus of the present study, deals with the knowledge about the formal characteristics of texts, structure and sequence of the text, genre types (e.g. expository, argumentative, etc.). In line with this dimension of schemata which is in harmony with genre analysis, Swales (1990) explicates that

A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constraints choice of content and style. Communicative purpose is both a privileged criterion and one that operates to keep the scope of a genre as here conceived narrowly focused on comparable rhetorical action. In addition to purpose, exemplars of a genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience. If all high expectations are realized, the exemplar will be viewed as prototypical by the parent discourse community (p. 58).

Considering the aforementioned issues, the significance of the present study becomes clear. Considering the crucial emphasis put on the literacy skills in the countries like Iraq in which English is considered a foreign language; the

researcher endeavors to make a study in order to investigate the influence of teaching reading comprehension to Iraqi EFL students by a genre-based approach. The next section deals with the background knowledge of the study.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This part of the study deals with the review of literature in order to explicate the notions fundamental in doing this study.

A. Genre Analysis

Genre, according to Swales (1990), "comprises a class of communicative events" (p. 58). In Swales' (1990) perspective, genre is "a communicative event is one in which language plays both a significant and an indispensable role" (45). Communicative event, in effect, is a complicated concept which is composed of the discourse along with "the role of the discourse and the environment and culture surrounding it" (Swales, 1990, p. 46).

Swales (1990) considers genre as "a collection of communicative events (with) a shared set of communicative purposes" (p. 46). In fact, genre emphasizes on the "shared purpose rather than on similarities of form or some other criterion" (Swales, 1990, p.46). Accordingly, "exemplars or instances of genres vary in their prototypicality" (Swales, 1990, p. 49), which "what holds shared membership together [may not be] a shared list of defining features, but inter-relationships of a somewhat looser kind" (Swales, 1990, pp. 49-50).

It is worth mentioning that existence of some particular conditions and contexts are crucial. In fact "the rationale behind a genre establishes constraints on allowable contributions in terms of their content, positioning and form" (Swales, 1990, p. 52). It means that these rationales "provide limitations and constraints to the specific form of the genre" (Swales, 1990, p. 52).

Bhatia (1993) in dealing with genre, points out that the essence of a genre "is primarily characterized by the communicative purpose(s) that it is intended to fulfil" (p. 13). For Bhatia (1993) "communicative purpose(s) determine the structure of the genre; should the purpose(s) change in a significant way, the genre would be different" (p. 14).

Bhatia (1993) undermines that "although the writer has a lot of freedom to use linguistic resources ..., he must conform to certain standard practices within the boundaries of a particular genre" (Bhatia, 1993, p. 14). It means that there are certain differences between different genres like poems, news articles, discourses of movies or advertisements which "enables the reader to distinguish between genres which may seem to be related, e.g. a newspaper editorial and a news report (Bhatia, 1993, p. 14). Bhatia (1993) illustrates that "each genre is an instance of a successful achievement of a specific communicative purpose using conventionalized knowledge of linguistic and discursal resources." (p. 15).

Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995), on the other hand, argue that "genres are intimately linked to a discipline's methodology, and they package information in ways that conform to a discipline's norms, values, and ideology" (p. 1). Bhatia (2004). In a similar vein, clarifies that

In more recent years, genre analysis has developed further in the direction of a more comprehensive exploration of social space to raise a number of other interesting issues, in particular those that question some of the basic assumptions about the integrity of generic descriptions.' (p. 22)

In a nutshell, genre is a notion, which according to Bhatia (2004), refers to language use in a conventionalized communicative setting in order to give expression to a specific set of communicative goals of a disciplinary or social institution, which give rise to stable structural forms by imposing constraints on the use of lexico-grammatical as well as discursal resources.' (p. 23).

So far, the concept of genre was clarified; but what does genre analysis mean? The following sheds light on the genre analysis in details.

Genre analysis, in particular, deals with analyzing and investigating the linguistic and non-linguistic features and elements of different discourses. Bhatia's (1993), for example, follows a "multidisciplinary activity" (p. 16) which "from the point of view of the analysis of functional variation in language, one envisages at least three different kinds of orientation, depending upon the nature of background knowledge and the motivating purpose the researcher brings to genre analysis" (pp. 16-17).

Multidisciplinary approaches to genre analysis, according to Bhatia (1993) "tend to associate certain specific features of language with certain types of writing or styles. However, very few of them distinguished a variety (or register) from a genre" (p. 17). It should be pointed out that "analyses of varieties or registers on their own reveal very little about the true nature of genres and about the way social purposes are accomplished in and through them in settings in which they are used." (Bhatia, 1993, p. 18)

Generally, for Bhatia (1993), genre analysis is multilayered composed of different levels including linguistic, social, or psychological. It is clear that genre analysis, in Bhatia (1993) perspective, needs to be considered within the constraints of social frame. Which implicitly denotes that "text by itself is not a complete object possessing meaning on its own; it is to be regarded as an ongoing process of negotiation" (Bhatia, 1993, p. 18).

Bhatia states that "the sociological aspect of genre analysis focuses on the conventional and often standardized features of genre construction" (Bhatia, 1993, p.19).

Psychological level of genre analysis, according to Bhatia (1993), has composed of two sub-categories, namely, psychological and tactical. whereas, "the psycholinguistic aspect of genre analysis reveals the cognitive structuring,

typical of particular areas of enquiry, the tactical aspect of genre description highlights the individual strategic choices made by the writer in order to execute his or her intention.' (Bhatia, 1993, p. 19). Tactical choices which are utilized by the writer attempt "to make the writing more effective, keeping in mind any special reader requirements" (Bhatia, 1993, p. 20).

In a nutshell, genre is an obscure concept which means that it is nearly "impossible to draw up clearly defined criteria to make a satisfactory distinction between genres and sub-genres" (Bhatia, 1993, p. 21).

B. Reading Comprehension

Clarifying the concept of reading comprehension is also crucial for this study. Goodman (1967) states that "skill in reading involves not greater precision [of the graphic input], but more accurate first guesses based on better sampling techniques, greater control over language structure, broadened experiences and increased conceptual development" (p. 132). One of the issues which clarifies the relation between reading comprehension and genre analysis is the notion of cognitive structures which demands three elements of the readers, the text, and the interaction between the text and the readers (Rumelhart, 1977).

Cognitive constructs, according to Cook (1989), refers to the knowledge stored in mind in different large structures. In this regard, Cook (1989) explicates that "the mind, stimulated by key words or phrases in the text or by the context, activates a knowledge schema" (p. 69). In fact, schemata is a crucial element in the process of reading comprehension (Bartlett, 1932).

Bartlett (1932) argues that schema "active organizations of past reactions and experiences which are always operating in any well-developed organism" (P.201). Likewise, schemata sheds light on world knowledge, linguistic knowledge, as well as knowledge of texts and forms, i.e. genre are, in effect, the domains which highlight the relationships between genre and reading comprehension (Widdowson, 1983; Cook, 1989).

Rumelhart (1980), in a similar vein, states that structures play as "a network of interrelations that is believed to normally hold among the constituents of the concept in question" (p.34). These structures, in effect, are "the generic concept (which) stored in memory" (p. 171).

It should be noted that there are different types of schemata and content schema which refers to the background knowledge the readers bring with themselves lighten the role of genre through rhetoric, language structures, lexical resources, or grammatical features (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Carrell, Pharis, & Liberto, 1989).

Fowler (1989) points out that "readers learn genres gradually, usually through unconscious familiarization" (Fowler, 1989, p. 215) which makes "possible the communication of content" (Fowler, 1989, p.215). it means that the notion of genre makes a comparison between the text and the readers "which set up expectations on each side for the form of the communication..., its functions..., its epistemology..., and the communicative frame (e.g. the participants, the power of the viewer, the openness of the text, and the role of the reader)" (Livingstone, 1994, pp. 252-3).

Livingstone (1994), in a similar vein, shows that different genres demands different types of interaction between text and reader which, in turn, lead to different types of involvement, i.e. "critical or accepting, resisting or validating, casual or concentrated, apathetic or motivated" (Livingstone, 1994, p. 253).

Scott (2009) argues that there are "considerable variability regarding what counts as reading comprehension instruction", "fundamental disjuncture between how leading literacy scholars define reading comprehension and how reading comprehension is conceptualized in other resources" as well as superficial ways of "teaching reading comprehension" (p. xi).

Toledo (2005), also, emphasizes on the relation between the process of reading comprehension and the notion of genre. He argues that "the comprehension of textual macrostructure does not necessarily imply comprehension along essential dimensions such as the text's communicative or pragmatic function" (Toledo, 2005, p. 1). Toledo (2005) explicates that reading comprehension is highly influenced by different types of typology the students are exposed with and are familiar with along with their background knowledge which is heavily influenced by genre analysis.

Furthermore, Wolfe (2009) considers "understanding of technical communication practice by analyzing the organizational and social context in which writing takes place" (p. 292) as crucial for the process of reading comprehension.

The next section clarifies the characteristics of the participants, model, and statistical procedures on data analysis.

III. METHODOLOGY

This part of the paper deals with the methodology based on which this study is conducted.

A. Participants

The participants of the study were 45 Iraqi EFL students who were studying English language in the University of Samarra. The 45 selected subjects were homogenous in terms of their native language, i.e. Arabic, the credit hours they have passed, with the age range between 19 and 24. In order to guarantee wider generalization the genre was also considered as a variable.

B. Procedure

In order to select the most homogenous Iraqi EFL students, a version of TOEFL test was administered among 60 ones out of them 45 ones whose scores were one standard deviation above and below the mean score were included. The selected subjects were randomly divided into two groups of experimental and control. All subjects in the both groups took a reading comprehension test which composed of 50 questions and the same reading comprehension test after they went under a thirty-hour instruction during 3 months, two sessions for a week. The subjects' scores in the pretest and posttest were subtracted which resulted into the gain scores based on which t-test statistic was administered to determine the significant or non-significant differences between the two groups of experimental who was instructed based on the principles of genre analysis and the control group who was instructed by a traditional approach to reading comprehension.

C. Teaching Method

Teaching reading comprehension to the both groups composed of three phases of pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading. The both groups were similar in terms of teaching however the experimental group received some instruction regarding the moves which occlude in the reading passages like description, sequence, comparison, cause and effect, as well as problem and solution. For example, the experimental group was instructed that the expressions like *for example, for instance, such as, including, to illustrate* describe the text; or the expressions like *first, second, next* deal with the sequence in the text; or the expressions *however, on the other hand, also, yet* make a comparison in the text; furthermore, the expressions of *if then, therefore, as a result, because* illustrate cause and effect in the text; finally, the expressions of *problem is, dilemma is, so that* are related to problem and solution.

IV. RESULTS

This part of the study deals with the results obtained. It was mentioned that 60 Iraqi EFL students participated in the study out of them the homogenous ones whose scores from the proficiency test were one standard deviation above and below the mean score were included. As table 1 sheds light on.

The sixty participants took the proficiency test which resulted into the mean score of 37.30 and the standard deviation of 0.64.

TABLE 1
PROFICIENCY TEST AND THE PERFORMANCE OF THE SUBJECTS

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
proficiency	60	36.00	39.00	37.3000	.64572
Valid N	60				

Hence, the 45 participants whose scores were between one standard deviation above and below the mean score were included. They were randomly divided into two groups of experimental and control as table 2 shows:

TABLE 2
PROFICIENCY TEST AND THE PERFORMANCES OF THE TWO GROUPS: EXPERIMENTAL VS. CONTROL

group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
proficiency =exp.	22	37.1364	.56023	.11944
=ctrl	23	37.3913	.78272	.16321

As table 2 shows the experimental group composed of 22 students with the mean score of 37.13 and the standard deviation of 0.56. Whereas, the control group had the mean score of 37.39 and the standard deviation of 0.78. To determine whether the differences between the two groups is non-significant at the start of the study, t-test statistic was administered on the data achieved by the proficiency test as table 3 shows:

TABLE 3
T-TEST AND PROFICIENCY TEST: EXPERIMENTAL VS. CONTROL

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
proficiency	Equal variances assumed	5.800	.020	-1.251	43	.218	-.25494	.20373	-.66581	.15593
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.261	39.889	.215	-.25494	.20224	-.66373	.15385

As table 3 shows the sig-value is quite above 0.05 which indicated to the non-significant differences between the performance of the two groups of experimental and control on the proficiency test. The following tables (table 4) shed light on the descriptive statistics of the performance of the two groups on pre-test.

TABLE 4

POST-TEST: EXPERIMENTAL VS. CONTROL					
	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post-test	=exp.	22	24.4545	.59580	.12703
	=ctrl	23	24.4783	.59311	.12367

As the table shows the experimental group had the mean score of 22.24 and the standard deviation of 0.59. Furthermore, the mean score of the control group was 24.47 and their standard deviation is 0.59.

TABLE 5

POST-TEST: EXPERIMENTAL VS. CONTROL					
	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post-test	=exp.	22	38.6364	.49237	.10497
	=ctrl	23	33.5652	.50687	.10569

Moreover, the experimental group and the control group had the mean scores of 38.63 and 33.56 on the post-test respectively. In order to determine whether the differences between the two groups after going under instruction is significant or not, t-test statistic was administered on the gain scores which were achieved by extracting the pre-scores from the post-scores as table 6 shows:

TABLE 6

T-TEST AND GAIN SCORE: EXPERIMENTAL VS. CONTROL										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Gain score	Equal variances assumed	.616	.437	21.521	43	.000	5.09486	.23674	4.61743	5.57229
	Equal variances not assumed			21.520	42.900	.000	5.09486	.23676	4.61737	5.57236

As table 6 shows the p-value is 0.00 which is quite below the cut score of 0.05 which indicated to the significant differences between the performances of the two groups. Considering the statistical differences in which the mean score of the experimental group is higher shed light on the positive influence of genre analysis on the reading comprehension of Iraqi EFL students.

TABLE 7

GAIN SCORE: EXPERIMENTAL VS. CONTROL					
	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
gain score	=exp.	23	14.1818	.79501	.16950
	=ctrl	22	9.0870	.79275	.16530

Finally, the gain scores were analyzed in terms of gender as table 8 shows.

TABLE 8

T-TEST AND POST-TEST: FEMALE VS. MALE										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Gain score	Equal variances assumed	5.669	.022	-.141	43	.888	-.11462	.81204	-1.75226	1.52301
	Equal variances not assumed			-.142	42.074	.888	-.11462	.80848	-1.74612	1.51687

As table 3 shows the sig-value is quite above 0.05 which indicated to the non-significant differences between the performances of the two genders. Table 9 shows the descriptive statistics of the two genders:

TABLE 9

GAIN SCORE: FEMALE VS. MALE					
	gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Gain score	=female	23	11.5217	2.96755	.61878
	=male	22	11.6364	2.44064	.52035

According to table 9, females had the mean for the gain scores of 11.52 and the males showed the mean score for the gain scores of 11.63 which is similar.

V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

This study concluded that genre-based instruction influences the students' reading comprehension. It seems that genre instruction influences the process of reading comprehension positively because of the consciousness raising provides for the students when expose to reading passages. Furthermore, the results of the study showed that gender is not playing any role because the performances of the two genders were almost similar.

Hence, the results of this study are beneficial for language learners, language teachers, as well as course designers. For example, genre instruction helps the students to have a more comprehensive reading comprehension by accessing to the deeper meaning and reason for vocabulary selection and design.

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Jihad Hassan Aziz Al Gurkosh was born in Iraq in 1971. He holds an MA in TEFL from College of Education in Tikrit University in 2013. He has three years' experience in teaching English as a foreign language in Language at University of Samarra in Iraq. He is currently one member of the department of English language in University of Samarra. His major interests as well as his published papers' themes include Discourse Analysis, semantics and pragmatics.