

THE INFLUENCE OF GENRE-BASED ACTIVITIES ON STUDENTS' FOREIGN LANGUAGE WRITING

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Abstract: The findings from recent studies of genres and genre-related issues reveal that learners' genre awareness could enhance their linguistic knowledge and their language skills as well (Cheng, 2006; Johns, 2015). Students' awareness of various genres may allow them to produce texts of different genres, many of which would potentially appear in their future job contexts. In this study, genre-based activities were employed in an English linguistic class. During seven weeks, the students, after being lectured on linguistic contents, practiced the linguistic knowledge and skills they learned through genre analysis activities and then follow-up activities. In the mid-term and end-term assignments, students were required to produce two texts of one and the same genre. The texts that students produced were then compared in terms of the agreement between language choices and communicative purposes to specify the changes in their English writing; observations and informal discussion were also conducted. The possible influences of genre-based activities on students' English writing were then discussed.

Key words: Genre, genre analysis, genre-based activities, language teaching, writing skills

1. Introduction

Genres are staged, goal-oriented social processes (Martin, 1985). Genre analysis, which emerged in the 1980s and blossomed in the 1990s, is the study of naturally occurring written discourse, focusing, in particular, on analysis beyond the sentence level (Bhatia, 2004). Studies of genres and genre analysis are more and more welcomed nowadays as the findings from recent studies reveals that developing students' awareness of various genres is essential in promoting students' language skills (Barwashi & Reiff, 2010; Cheng, 2006, 2015; Yasuda, 2011). This paper reports the findings of a research conducted with 21 English learners in a linguistic class, in which genre analysis activities and follow-up activities (the combination of these two types here after called genre-based activities) were employed to seek the answer to the research question: "How could genre analysis activities in a linguistic class influence Vietnamese students' writing competence in specific genres in English?"

The paper starts with a brief overview of genre and genre analysis and the interrelation between genre analysis and writing skill development. Next, the action research design and instrumentation are elaborated. The findings are then presented and discussed so that the influence of genre-based activities on students' English writing can be seen.

2. Literature review

2.1. Genre and genre analysis: an overview

Genres are how things get done, when language is used to accomplish them (Martin, 1985). In Martin's perspective (1992, 1997, 2000) on genre analysis, which is grounded on systemic functional linguistics, genre is defined as "a system structured in parts, with specific means to specific ends" (Vian Jr. & Lima-Lopes, 2005, p. 29, as cited in Figueiredo, 2010, p.127). For Swales (1990), genres constitute a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These

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purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. In functional linguistics, genres are defined as a recurrent configuration of meaning, which enacts the social practices of a culture (Martin & Rose, 2008, p.6). To be more specific, genres can be characterized by recurrent global patterns, and the organization of each genre can be distinguished by recurrent local patterns. A genre is a highly structured and conventionalized discourse which occurs among the members of a community (Bonyadi, 2012).

In functional view, the basis for classifying texts into genre could be the social processes that the texts enact. Any linguistic analysis should start with the communicative purposes to be realized by the texts, and language only serves as the input bank for any linguistic choices in order to realize different communicative purposes, as language is a meaning making resource (Halliday, 1970). Taking Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) approach in their study on genres and teaching genres, Knapp and Watkins (1994) define genres as a useful way to classify the social processes that are realized through the use of language (p.25). In Knapp and Watkins' (1994) perspective, genres are perceived at two levels. At a higher level, genres are defined and classified according to the general social processes that they are doing: describing, explaining, instructing, arguing, or narrating. At a lower level, genres are defined and classified according to the types of specific products such as personal recounts, manuals, recipes, and debates. In this paper, the term "genre" is used to refer to a *group of texts in the same subject area, of with the same communicative purpose, used in similar situations, and in the same mode.*

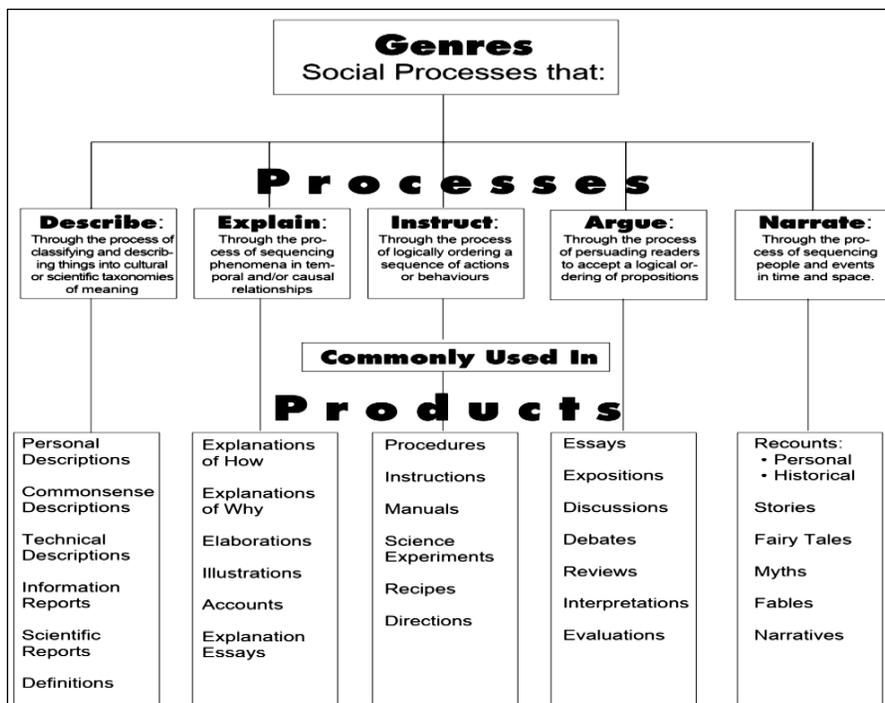


Figure 1. Classification of genres (Knapp & Watkins, 1994, p.26)

Genre analysis is the study of naturally occurring written discourse focusing, in particular, on analysis beyond the sentence level (Bhatia, 2004). Any genre analysis starts with identifying the communicative purpose(s) of the texts or genres under investigation and the use of language in institutionalized settings controlled by communicative conventions existing in and created by a group of participants in a defined discourse community (Martin, 1985); but the key step in genre analysis is the identification of the key

features of a text (which is based on the conventions set by the discourse community). In other words, an investigation into how the text producers organize the information throughout the text could facilitate understanding of a text and evaluating its function(s) fulfillment - to what extent could the text perform the communicative purpose(s) it was aimed to perform.

2.2. Genre analysis and writing skill development

Research in genre teaching and learning has shown an existence of the relationship between genre analysis activities and the promotion of students' language skills (Devitt, Reiff & Bawarshi, 2004; Cheng, 2006; Yasuda, 2011). However, as language is often taught in the confined foreign language classroom with unreal contexts, the emphasis is often laid on activities in which language is only a medium for grammar practice or vocabulary exercises (Sakari & Hirose, 1996), students tend to be more aware of grammatical issues than pragmatic issues (Alcon, 2005; Koike & Pearson, 2005). Accordingly, many foreign language writers tend to approach the writing task with the belief that such texts are autonomous and context free (Yasuda, 2011), which may prevent them from seeing writing as a social action that is performed in mutual interaction with purpose, audience, and linguistic choices.

In a foreign language classroom, the discussion of the relation of lexis, grammar, and discourse structure to genre is crucial so that students are conscious of prototypical linguistic features of different genres (Martin, 2009). The explicit analysis of prototypical texts of genres contributed to raising students' genre awareness and developing their ability to better contextualizing the genre of their writing (Cheng, 2011). Foreign language students' awareness of the relationship between the genre goals and the linguistic resources that realize them may serve as a springboard for students - the inexperienced writers - to develop both writing competence and linguistic knowledge (Yasuda, 2011). Therefore, explicit focus on how different resources could be involved in meaning-making processes might help language learners become aware of the types of choices available at various strata of the language system, and the contexts of various situations (Caffarel, 2006). Such a focus is expected to enable learners to be explicitly aware of what they must know to achieve concrete goals of the genres in which they are writing (Yasuda, 2011). Explicit instruction in the varieties of social functions one may encounter in a genre may provide novice writers a chance to see "language as a meaning-making system" (Martin, 2009, p.11). From this observation, students will learn how to moderate the language choices in their own writings, so that the functions of their writings could be best fulfilled.

In other words, genre analysis activities could possibly be a good preparation for students to grow up in their writing performance. Genre analysis activities are where student's genre awareness and linguistic competence are both scaffolded, so that they get ready to produce better texts - the ones both well contextualized and well articulated to effectively support the communicative purposes of the texts and the goals of the genres. In addition, the follow-up activities, in which students evaluate and revise the texts to better their harmony between the text language and the genre goals and features, could be good chances for students to reflect on their genre knowledge in relation to the writing quality of the texts. In this paper, *the term "genre-based activities" is used to denote genre analysis activities in combination with their follow-up activities.*

3. Methodology

3.1. Research question

How could genre-based activities in a linguistic class influence Vietnamese students' writing competence in specific genres?

3.2. Research design and instrumentation

The research was initiated with the hypothesis that language and writing are in a reciprocally supportive relationship (Ortega, 2010), so when students are facilitated with linguistic knowledge and language analyzing skills, and when they are aware of the possible effects of language choices on the accomplishment of the communicative purposes of the texts, they would be able to make better language choices in their production of texts, so that their writing competence could be enhanced.

The context of the study

The research was conducted in a course of English linguistics in which students learned linguistic concepts and aspects and developed their language skills at the same time. The three major expected learning outcomes of this course are: (i) students are able to understand the linguistic contents introduced in the course, then analyze the different linguistic aspects of the texts; (ii) students are able to evaluate the texts based on the linguistic knowledge and skills they learn, and (iii) students are able to apply the linguistic knowledge and skills in their own text production and comprehension, which means students' language skills are expected to be developed along side linguistic knowledge and skills.

The linguistic concepts and aspects introduced in the course included text, context, field, mode, tenor, transitivity, mood, modality, theme, and cohesion, which are the inherent features of any texts. During the action research, I specifically centered students' learning on genre analysis activities in which the systems of transitivity, mood, modality, theme, and cohesion of the texts were analyzed. In the follow-up activities, the language choices were evaluated according to their agreement with the genre features and text purposes, and then all revisions needed to enhance this agreement were made.

The participants

Genre-based activities were used in a class of 21 third-year students in an English linguistics course. During their first two years, these students took language proficiency courses in which they learned to speak, listen, read, and write in different genres, ranging from social to academic. At the time they started this linguistic course, many of them have reached C1 level (CEFR), others were at B2 (CEFR). The writing courses were both theme-based and task-based, which means students had already have experience in writing different topics and genres. They started from letters, emails, and simple descriptive essays to argumentative essays, book/film reviews and research proposals.

The intervention

The action research was conducted from March to May 2019 in Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) model with four steps: planning the intervention, implementing the intervention, observing the intervention, and reflecting the results. By the time this paper was written, the action research had finished its first cycle.

The aim of using genre-based activities in the intervention was to explore the influence of linguistic knowledge and skills and genre awareness on students' writing skills development. This aim was then broken down into three objectives, including: (i) raising students' awareness about the typical textual features of specific genres; (ii) giving students chances to do meticulous linguistic analyses on textual features of specific genres, so that they fully understand and evaluate how language choices could influence the communicative purpose of the texts; and (iii) applying the linguistic knowledge and skills they learned from the lectures and

the genre awareness which they accumulated through genre analysis activities in improving their own writings - making language choices appropriate to the purposes in their writings and to the genre goals.

The intervention lasted for seven class sessions with three lectures, three whole-class tutorials, and a mid-term project presentation sessions in the second half of the 15-week course, followed by two post-course weeks for take-home assignment completion.

Table 1. What the students and the teacher did during 7 weeks of intervention

Week	Session	What the students did	What the teacher did
0	What students learned before the intervention: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language, Context and Function - Functional labels and ranks - Overview of functional grammar and the metafunctions - Contextual aspects of the texts (Field, Mode, Tenor) 		
1	Lecture 1: Interpersonal meaning: Mood & modality	Learning the concepts, the classification, and the realization of mood and modality; Learning the analyzing skills.	Introducing the key concepts of mood and modality, their classification and realization; Modeling the analysis of mood and modality in sample texts
2	Tutorial 1 Practice with genre-based activities	Analyzing the interpersonal aspect of 3 texts, which were all information signs; Evaluating the agreement of all these textual features and the communicative purposes of the texts/ genre. Suggesting the possible revision of language to enhance the communicative effectiveness of the texts.	Providing the input texts, which are information sign; Facilitating students in their analysis; Facilitating Q&A; Observing how much students are aware of the genre features and the relation between language choices and the communicative purposes of the genre.
3	Lecture 2: Representational meaning: transitivity	Learning the concepts, the classification, and the realization of processes, participants, and circumstances; Learning the analyzing skills.	Introducing the key concepts of processes, participants, and circumstances, their classification and realization; Modeling the transitivity analysis in sample texts.
4	Tutorial 2 Practice with genre-based activitiesA	Analyzing transitivity realization of the of website entries introducing the touristic spots. Evaluating the agreement between transitivity realization in the texts and text communicative purposes as well as the genre goals; Converting these written texts into the spoken commentaries to tourists, specifying all the changes/ modifications	Providing the input texts and assigning the groups with the texts (2 texts for each group); Facilitating students in their analysis; Facilitating Q&A; Observing the changes in students' awareness of the genre features and the relation

Week	Session	What the students did	What the teacher did
		<p>in terms of interpersonal meaning and representational meaning to fit the new contextual features;</p> <p>Acting as tour guides delivering the commentaries to the tourists.</p>	<p>between language choices and the communicative purposes of the genre.</p>
5	Lecture 3: Textual meaning: cohesive devices and thematic structure	<p>Learning the concepts, the classification, and the realization of cohesive devices, theme and rheme;</p> <p>Learning the analyzing skills.</p>	<p>Introducing the key concepts of cohesive devices, theme and rheme, their classification and realization;</p> <p>Modeling the analysis of cohesive devices, theme and rheme in sample texts</p>
6	Tutorial 3	<p>Analyzing the cohesive devices and thematic structure of texts of the a familiar genre (each group chose 3 texts of one among the following genres: blog posts, product manuals, course information leaflets, travel brochures, book introductions, academic compositions);</p> <p>Evaluating the agreement between cohesion and thematic structures of the texts and text communicative purposes as well as the genre goals;</p> <p>Revising the language choices for best achievement of writing purposes.</p>	<p>Checking for approval the input texts that groups of students collected;</p> <p>Facilitating students in their analysis;</p> <p>Facilitating Q&A;</p> <p>Observing the changes in students' awareness of the genre features and the relation between language choices and the communicative purposes of the genre.</p>
7	Mid-term project with genre-based activities	<p>Analyzing the realization of transitivity, mood, and thematic in 3 - 5 texts of the same genre (each group chose among the sample academic compositions of one of the following types: narrative, expository, or argumentative);</p> <p>Evaluating the relations between all the textual features analyzed and the communicative purposes of the genre;</p> <p>Revising the language choices for best achievement of writing purposes.</p>	<p>Checking for approval the input texts that groups of students collected from English learning websites and other sources;</p> <p>Facilitating students in figuring out how to do the mid-term project;</p> <p>Facilitating Q&A;</p> <p>Observing the changes in students' awareness of the genre features and the relation between language choices and the communicative purposes of the genre.</p>
00	Final assignment with genre-based activities	<p>Analyzing students' own writings (the same type as the one chosen in the mid-term project) to see how much the language choices they made supported their writing purpose accomplishment;</p> <p>Revising the language choices for best achievement of writing purposes;</p>	<p>Through online tutorials, facilitating students in figuring out how to do the final assignment.</p> <p>Comparing the original and the revised versions of students</p>

Week	Session	What the students did	What the teacher did
		Reflecting on how all the revision they made might have improved the harmony between language choices and writing purposes.	writing to see how their writings had been improved.

As presented in Table 1, during the lectures, students learned the linguistic knowledge and skills and participated in teacher-led genre analysis activities in which they observed how the teacher applied the linguistic knowledge and skills from the lectures in text analysis. During the tutorials, genre analysis practice activities were chances for students to practice extensively the skills of analyzing texts in terms of different concepts and aspects they learned in the lectures. As the input texts had been selected from specific genres, these practice activities allowed students to generalize the common textual features of the texts of the same genre and to have a broad view of how the language choices in each text supported the communicative purposes of the text. The mid-term project was where students demonstrated the results of their group work in evaluating the concord between the language choices and the communicative goals of the texts/genre and suggesting language modifications to better achieve the communicative purposes. A follow-up discussion was initiated by the teachers and circulated among students after each group finished their group work or mid-term project presentation. These discussions were where the students more clearly shaped their awareness of how language choices could support the communicative purposes of the texts/the genres. The take-home assignment was for individual students to demonstrate how their writing skills had possibly been influenced by the knowledge, skills, and awareness that they gained from genre analysis activities - the awareness of typical textual features of the genres and how language choices help in achieving the communicative purposes in the texts. To say it another way, the tutorials and the assignment, with online tutorials attached to it, functions as a three-step staircase to facilitate students in moving upwards in both linguistic knowledge and skills, and writing skills development.

Table 2. The summarized intervention

HYPOTHESIS: Language and writing are in a reciprocally supportive relationship (Ortega, 2010), and genre analysis activities, which focus students’ attention on the typical textual features of specific genres, and follow-up activities could help students produce better texts in those genres.				
LECTURES	IN-CLASS TUTORIALS AND MID-TERM ASSIGNMENT		ONLINE TUTORIALS AND TAKE-HOME FINAL ASSIGNMENT	
	Practice with GA	Mid-term project with GA		
Ss accumulated linguistic knowledge and skills through the lectures Ss generalized the common mechanisms of how linguistic resources could contribute to achieving the	Ss investigated texts of familiar genres to generalize comments on the typical textual features of these genres. Ss’ analyzed how the language choices in each text supported the communicative	Ss analyzed the textual features of 3-5 texts of the same genre. Ss evaluated how effective the language choices in those texts were in supporting the communicative purposes. Ss suggested the possible revision so that the language choices could best support the communicative purposes of the texts/ the genres.	Ss analyzed their own writings to see how much the language choices supported the writing purpose accomplishment. Ss evaluated how much the language choices supported the writing purposes	Ss reflected on how all the revision they made might have improved the harmony between language choices and writing purposes.

communicative purposes of texts.	purposes and suggested revision.	Ss presented the revision and discussed for the best way(s) to revise the texts.	Ss revised the language choices for best achievement of writing purposes.	
	Whole class and group	Group	Individual	
AIM: The linguistic knowledge, skills and genre awareness support students' writing skills development				

As presented in Table 2, during the intervention weeks, students' learning started from learning linguistics knowledge and analyzing texts in the linguistic aspects they learned, then becoming aware of the typical linguistic features of texts of specific genres, then generalizing the reciprocal bondage between language choices in texts and the communicative purposes of the genre, and finally, and finally, improving their writing competence in the sense that the language choices they make support the purposes of their writing in a more efficient way.

The observation

The observation was conducted intensively during the lectures, the whole-class tutorials, and also extensively during break time, office-hour meetings with students, and online tutorials with individual students via emails during the time students conducted their group work projects and their individual take-home assignments.

My *interaction* with students, which happened during practice activities, post-presentation Q&A, office-hour meetings and via email, functioned as a means of teacher giving facilitation to students' learning, and also as an instrument for collecting data of how students' awareness about the genre goals, the common features of texts in the same genre and about the intertwining relationship between the language choices and the communicative purposes were scaffolded during the intervention. The information retrieved from each class session was then summarized in my *teaching journal*.

My *analysis of students' assignments* in terms of the modifications they made to their own writings and their justification of how necessary the modifications were to the improvement of their writings brought about informative details related to the impact of genre activities on students' writing competence.

In addition, through *informal talks* with students during break time, I could retrieve students' reflection on how the genre analysis activities helped them in understanding the importance of language choices in supporting their writing purposes, and how such understanding might help in enhancing their writing competence.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Findings

The sources of data brought about raw input for the findings, which could be analyzed into four major themes.

Theme 1: Inadequate genre awareness hindered students' ability to identify the writing problems related to communicative purpose achievement.

It was noticed from observing and interacting with students in tutorial 1 that most students lacked adequate attention to the genre goals, the shared features of texts in the same genre and the relationship between the goals of a genre and the linguistic resources.

Task: How much does the realization of mood and modality in the information signs given support the communicative effectiveness of the signs? What modifications would you make to enhance the communicative effectiveness?

Figure 2. Tutorial 1 genre analysis task requirement

In response to the task requirement, most of the group discussions centered on the grammatical accuracy of mood structures and modal verbs. From my observation of students' group work, I could see how successful students were basing themselves on the theoretical framework they learned in lecture 1 to identify the different mood types and modal devices. However, they made no attempts to investigate how the mood and modality realization supported to the communicative purposes of the each text and the goals of the genre. When I jumped in the discussion and asked the group about the shared goals of the input texts, it took students a few seconds to think of the answers. When asked how appropriate the distribution of mood types and modal devices was to the text communicative purposes, most students answered in a quite unanticipated manner: "Well, I haven't thought of that. Let me see..." It then took the students more than ten minutes to look back on the texts to discuss the appropriateness between the mood and modality realization and text purposes, and their identification of the possible mismatch between the mood, modality and these purposes.

The analysis of the groups' comments and revision of the input texts to enhance the communicative effectiveness of the texts also revealed students' inadequate genre awareness. The comments were mostly about grammatical accuracy of the mood structures and modal verbs, not about the choices of mood types or degree of modality in accordance with the genre goals and the communicative purposes of each text. In the performance of three out of four groups, the modifications for enhancing the communicative effectiveness of the texts were scanty and defectively developed. These facts were unsatisfactory in terms of task fulfillment, but were understandable since they had almost no genre analysis activities before.

My informal talks with students during break time expanded my understanding about how much students were aware of the genre goals and features, and why that was the case. The student elaborated that although they had chances to listen, speak, read and write in different genres ranging from social to academic, they had never been assigned with tasks in which the genre goals and features were the focus, and the language choices were required to align to these goals and features. In their writings, therefore, the alignment of language choices to the genre goals and features had never received much consideration.

Theme 2: Genre analysis activities enabled students to link the contextual features with the language choices

In tutorial 2 and 3, the goals of the genre and the share features of texts in the same genre were all mentioned in any group discussion on the language choices in terms of transitivity realization.

In tutorial 2, students were asked not only to evaluate the synchronization between linguistic resources and the genre goals, identify any possible conflicts between the language choices and the communicative purposes to resolve them, but also give recommendation on how the language would change to match different contextual features – audience and mode – as the written entries on tourism websites were converted into spoken commentaries delivered by tour guides during the tours. According to genre pedagogy, the purpose and audience of the texts are two important variables that writers must consider to perform social actions (Pasquarelli, 2006). Accordingly, the fact that students paid adequate attention to the changes of language to match the contextual features would positively signal the potential that their writing competence could be improved.

Task: How much does the realization of transitivity in the tourism website entries(as provided) support the communicative effectiveness of thesetexts? Supposing that you are a tour guide introducing the places to the tourists, how would you change the texts into your tour commentaries with the contents? What modification would you make and why?
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Figure 3. Tutorial 2 genre analysis task requirement

It was observed from this tutorial that students' genre awareness had been noticeably enhanced in the sense that students managed to link most of their comments on language choices with the genre features, the text purposes, and the contexts where the texts appeared, and the audience of the texts. The suggested conversion of the written entries into the tour commentaries and the demonstration of the commentaries were quite successful with two out of four groups. For the other two groups, the commentaries did not sound very natural for spoken language, which might be due to students' English proficiency levels, but students' efforts in evaluating the transitivity realization in relation to the genre features and the text purposes could be clearly observed through the comments and language revision they gave.

Hoa Binh is a popular destination in Vietnam. This highland is home to many must-visit places. A trip to Hoa Binh is a trip back to nature, promising to bring unforgettable memories. An example is "Dam Da", which is actually a vast area of pagodas, temples and caves, including "Trinh" temple, "Mau" temple, "Tien" pagoda, whose origin are related to many old tales of Vietnam. In "Tien" cave and "Ho" cave (Old people cave - Dong Ngnoi Xua), archeologists even found clues of ancient people living here. "Mai Chau", a very beautiful town to relax and get rid of tension of the busy city life.

The most well-known feature of Hoa Binh is Hoa Binh Dam for hydro-electric purposes. Construction on the rockfill dam started in November 1979 and it took nearly 10 years to complete. The dam is now one of the largest and most important dams in Viet Nam. It is 128m in height and 970 m in length. Power is generated by utilizing eight turbines with a capacity of 240 MW, making up the total capacity to about 1,920 MW. The annual power is approximately 8,160 GWh. The reservoir which was formed when the Da river was dammed runs through Hoa Binh's center. Right here 168 workers died during the construction of the Dam and there is now a monument to their memory at the dam site.

The Hoa Binh Dam plays an indispensable part in preventing flood, producing electricity, irrigation and transportation. This is a meaningful construction to the process of industrialization and modernization of the country. It is the symbol of unshakable friendship between Soviet Union and Viet Nam, too. Moreover, this place is a source of tourism. Annually it attracts a quite great number of tourists because of the majesty and grandeur of the architecture, the surface area of which is so large that it creates an impressive architectural, cultural and social complex.

Comment 1: There should be a more direct lead-in here. Fewer existential processes, more material processes instead

Comment 2: Clarification about "Dam Da", "Trinh" temple, "Mau" temple, etc. should be added. Otherwise, just omit this part

Comment 3: A guiding phrase needed

Comment 4: Connective construction should be added

Comment 5: No need for too specific number

Comment 6: A guiding phrase needed

Comment 7: Markers like first, second, third is needed for making the information clearer

Comment 8: A closing needed

Figure 4. An example of students' comments on the texts

As could be seen in Figure 4, suggestions of adding new elements/details to the texts, or adding lead-in parts were popular. Many clauses of existential processes were changed into material processes. Many mental process clauses were changed from the "like" types to the "please" types. Verbal processes were inserted with projecting/quotation clauses. Some declarative mood clauses were converted into interrogative mood clauses (into rhetorical questions) for the sake of engaging the audience in the commentaries.

In tutorial 3, students chose the texts of one genre among, but not limited to, those in the suggested list. The texts were chosen at their preference and convenience, so students seemed to be more confident and interested in the task than in the other two tutorials.

Task: How much does the realization of thematic structure and cohesive devices in the blog posts/product manuals/ course information leaflets / travel brochures / book introductions / academic compositions support the communicative effectiveness of these texts? What modifications would you make to enhance the communicative effectiveness?

Figure 5. Tutorial 3 genre analysis task requirement

With their experience in genre analysis activities in the previous tutorials, most groups became more confident in their analysis. Students not only modified the small details at clause levels (use another cohesive devices or change the thematic structures of the clauses), but they became more ambitious in their attempts to rewrite the texts, with major revision suggested to above-clause level in the texts. The language choices were revised in a much more creative way including changing the thematic progression in the texts or employing grammatical metaphors to enhance the cohesion of the texts. Almost no teacher-student interaction was needed in this tutorial, but students' task fulfillment was remarkably productive.

In my informal talks with students, I found that once students become aware of the possible influence of language choices in fulfilling the functions of the texts, they became more critical about all details related

to the interpersonal, ideational, and textual aspects of the texts. As they accumulated more and more understanding of the linguistic features through the lectures, and more experience of applying those linguistic contents through genre analysis activities, the amount of modification they made and the level of complexity of the modification gradually increased.

Theme 3: Genre-based assignments enable students to be more sensitive to the mismatch between language and the writing purposes, to self-assess and thus enhance their own writings.

In the mid-term assignment, groups of students were required to analyze 3 to 5 sample academic compositions in one academic genre in terms of their mood, transitivity, and theme system. In the final assignment, individual students were required to choose one of their own writing of the identical genres that they analyzed in the mid-term assignment to analyze and revise. Students also had to reflect on the problems of the original writing and how much the revision changed their own writings.

The analysis of the assignment disclosed a remarkable improvement in students' writings in all three aspects: interpersonal, ideational, and textual. More than 90% of the rewritten texts (19 out of 21) were much improved in cohesion, communicative effectiveness, and tone. There seemed to be a detailed analysis of all the factors of audience, purpose, and genre features of the writings so that the revision could resolve most of the conflicts between the language and those factors in the original writings.

The modifications that students made to their own writing mostly enhanced the communicative effectiveness, the tone, and the cohesion of the texts; and students were happy about what they did to improve their own writings.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Prior to all these changes, this writing lacked an intelligible idea arrangement. There used to be misuses of cohesive devices and some ideas were not suitably placed, resulting in poor modality and coherence. Also, it was biased to my personal view with little explanation to certain points. After applying the aforementioned modifications in my writing, the overall flow of the essay is now established more coherently. In particular, various thematic developments such as Constant or Linear play an important role in shaping a comprehensible idea development. In addition, the causality and inclusion relationship between sentences is reinforced by utilizing transitivity and adding cohesive devices.

III. CONCLUSION

Upon revision, modifications in terms of cohesive devices, transitivity, and thematic progression were made. Firstly, modifications in terms of cohesive devices were the most dominant and included the addition of conjunction as well as changes in reference and substitution. These changes contribute to the improved cohesion between sentences in each paragraph and less repetitive word use. Secondly, modification in terms of transitivity serves to put emphasis on the inner thoughts and feelings of the writer, which was a requirement for the assignment (course reflection). Finally, Modification in terms of theme progression plays a vital role in highlighting the theme of the paragraph and establishing the connection between the topic sentence and the supporting ideas.

Figure 6. Samples of students' reflection

Such reflections as shown in Figure 6 above demonstrate that students were able to self-assess their writing, point out the problems, and make meaningful improvement. Although two out of 21 students did not achieve good improvement in their revised version, the constructive impact of genre-based activities on their writing skill development was visible.

4.2. Discussion

From the findings above, it is evident that after being aware of the reciprocal relation between language choices and communicative purposes in the genre analysis activities, students were able to link the genre features and contextual features with the language choices - making language choices appropriate to the purposes in their writings and to the genre goals. The follow-up activities of genre analysis were the chances for students to apply their understanding of the features of different genres in text evaluating -

spotting out the mismatch between the language choices and the communicative purposes and seeking better way to enhance the concordance between them. In other words, genre-based assignments provided students chances to reflect on the overall quality of their own writing, so the constructive impacts of genre-based activities on students writing skill development were observed. This finding echoes the reports by Cheng (2015) that genre analysis activities could facilitate learners' noticing and learning genre-specific features and the underpinning purposes of those features.

As seen through students' task completion during the tutorials, the mid-term and end-term assignments, the complexity level of students' linguistic features analyses and their text modification suggestions increased. What could be inferred from this observation is: genre-based activities were a good preparation for students in revising the existing texts and producing good texts of their own. This finding also supports Yasuda's (2011) conclusion that genre-based tasks in foreign language classrooms could result in clear gains in some aspect of their writing performance, as well as their genre knowledge development.

In addition, the analysis of students' assignment papers demonstrated a quite remarkable improvement in students' writings in different aspects of texts, which entailed that: once students' genre awareness was emphasized, students' ability to identify the writing problems related to communicative purpose achievement was improved, their ability to self-assess and better their own writings could be enhanced.

5. Conclusion

The genre-based activities were used in a linguistic class of third-year English-major students to explore the influence of linguistic knowledge and skills and genre awareness on students' writing skills development. After the lectures and tutorials in which genre analysis activities, followed by writing evaluation and revision activities as follow-up activities, were employed, students were found to gradually build up their capability of applying their linguistic understanding of different genres in evaluating and revising texts. There was evidence that student's ability to self-assess their writings was improved, and the enhancement of their writing skills followed. In conclusion, genre-based activities could have good impact on students' writing skills. As this study was conducted with English-major students at a Vietnamese university, the results of it could somehow be applicable to similar Vietnamese contexts. The researcher suggests genre-based approach be an appropriate choice for teaching and learning foreign language writing in Vietnamese foreign language specializing tertiary institutions.

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ẢNH HƯỞNG CỦA HOẠT ĐỘNG KHAI THÁC THỂ LOẠI NGÔN BẢN TRONG PHÁT TRIỂN KỸ NĂNG VIẾT NGOẠI NGỮ CHO SINH VIÊN VIỆT NAM

Tóm tắt: Kết quả của một số nghiên cứu về đặc điểm thể loại ngôn bản và các vấn đề liên quan đến thể loại ngôn bản cho thấy rằng khi người học có hiểu biết tốt về thể loại, họ không chỉ cải thiện kiến thức ngôn ngữ học mà còn cải thiện cả kỹ năng sử dụng ngôn ngữ cho bản thân (Cheng 2006; Johns, 2015). Nếu người học có hiểu biết về các thể loại ngôn bản đa dạng, họ có khả năng ứng dụng những hiểu biết này để sản sinh các ngôn bản với đặc điểm tương tự trong môi trường công việc trong tương lai. Trong nghiên cứu này, chúng tôi sử dụng hoạt động phân tích thể loại ngôn bản và tiếp nối là các hoạt động đánh giá, điều chỉnh ngôn bản trong một lớp học phần Ngôn ngữ Anh. Trong bài giữa kỳ và cuối kỳ của học phần - đều dưới dạng sản sinh ngôn bản viết - sinh viên được yêu cầu viết các ngôn bản thuộc cùng một thể loại. Qua việc so sánh chất lượng các ngôn bản trong bài viết của sinh viên, quan sát quá trình phân tích, đánh giá ngôn bản và trao đổi với sinh viên, chúng tôi phát hiện những thay đổi trong kỹ năng viết của sinh viên và thảo luận những thay đổi này trong mối quan hệ với hoạt động khai thác thể loại ngôn bản đã được sử dụng.

Từ khóa: Thể loại ngôn bản, phân tích thể loại, hoạt động khai thác thể loại, giảng dạy ngôn ngữ, kỹ năng viết

APPENDIX: Samples of students' reflection

III. CONCLUSION

Upon revision, modifications in terms of cohesive devices, transitivity, and thematic progression were made. Firstly, modifications in terms of cohesive devices were the most dominant and included the addition of conjunction as well as changes in reference and substitution. These changes contribute to the improved cohesion between sentences in each paragraph and less repetitive word use. Secondly, modification in terms of transitivity serves to put emphasis on the inner thoughts and feelings of the writer, which was a requirement for the assignment (course reflection). Finally, Modification in terms of theme progression plays a vital role in highlighting the theme of the paragraph and establishing the connection between the topic sentence and the supporting ideas.