

Synergizing Process and Genre: Nurturing Proficiency in L2 Writing Through Advanced ESL Instruction

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Abstract: This essay explores the synergy between the process-based and genre-based approaches in instructing advanced ESL writing, particularly focusing on the book review genre. The study delves into the distinctive features, pedagogical outcomes, and applications of both methodologies. The book review of "Being Mortal" by Atul Gawande serves as a case study, unraveling its purpose, audience, structure, and linguistic attributes. The analysis further outlines a classroom strategy where elements of both approaches are integrated to facilitate effective writing instruction for advanced ESL students.

Keywords: Writing Instruction; Process-based Approach; Genre-based Approach; Book Review Genre.

1. Introduction

Writing is a complex skill that requires careful instruction to foster proficiency, especially among advanced ESL learners. This essay delves into two prominent instructional approaches for teaching writing: the process-based approach and the genre-based approach. By examining their distinctive characteristics, focal points, and pedagogical outcomes, this essay aims to establish the merit of both strategies in ESL writing instruction. Additionally, it will spotlight the book review genre as the focus of instruction for advanced L2 students. Specifically, this analysis centers on a book review of "Being Mortal" by Atul Gawande, scrutinizing its purpose, intended audience, organizational structure, and linguistic attributes. Furthermore, this essay will elucidate how elements of the process approach can be synergistically integrated into the instruction of this genre for advanced ESL classes.

2. Approaches to L2 Writing Instruction

2.1. Process

The process approach allows students to benefit from the writing process. Key processes include pre-writing, drafting, revising and editing, in addition to which students are asked to familiarise themselves with the texts they will produce. Specifically, in a classroom, some students work independently on writing tasks and some work in teams. What all of these students go through is drafting or rewriting, and some students tend to revise and re-edit their starting essays through peer-review. The expressiveness that comes from the process approach enables learners to establish an emotional connection with the subject matter and begin to grasp the writing process.

This approach is recognised as a good one for promoting a L2 learner's writing literacy, because first of all this is considered as subversion of "expressivism and cognitivism" (Ferris, 2018: 2). This approach enables second language learners to raise their own cognition about the matter of writing as well as to enhance their linguistic expression, and thus it is considered to be able to contribute more to the writers' own improvement of their writing skills. Secondly,

process-oriented pedagogy focuses on the writers themselves (Manchon, 2013), and hence more teachers are being encouraged to develop student-centred classrooms. A "student-centred" writing classroom, in which students are more productive in discovering knowledge about writing, creating knowledge, and expanding their expressive and literacy skills through their own subjectivity, agency and independence, is largely accepted as a desirable pedagogical concept and approach (Barton et al., 2023). The process approach to writing instruction, according to Hyland (2003), maintains a focus on the writer as an independent producer of text while also addressing the issue of what the teacher should do to assist students with the writing task. As a consequence, this approach boosts the probability that teachers will encourage L2 students to compose works about their own ideas and experiences. In particular teaching methods, teachers might encourage students to brainstorm and conceptualise their ideas first, then write drafts before revising them. This step-by-step process enables students to understand and master the process of writing, to develop an awareness of writing, and to improve their expressive skills in the process of constant revision. One can acknowledge from Hyland (2003)'s article that this approach entails the repetition of "composing" and "revising" (11). The vast majority instructional settings nowadays employ pedagogical strategies developed to formulate process goals, with the vast majority of teachers providing writing instruction in the classroom with teacher-student seminars, problem-based projects, diary entries, conversations in small groups, or portfolio evaluations. This approach to teaching writing, which places more emphasis on the intervention process than the final text, fully exploits the essential functions that peer interaction and teacher support play in the teaching of second language writing and is viewed as an effective means to fulfil the aspirations of second language learners to learn to write.

2.2. Genre

Genre-based approaches are a language-centered paradigm for teaching writing that assumes that writing is concerned with making choices that adequately express a message for particular audiences. In terms of writing educators, genre-based techniques can help pre-service and in-service writing teachers support their students to compose productive texts.

Therefore, genre theory and research place teacher educators at the center of preparing people to teach second language writing and confidently directing them on the development of writing course materials and practices.

This pedagogical approach is one of the post-process approaches, as defined by Johns (2002a), where the term 'genre' refers to the complex verbal or written response of a speaker or writer to the demands of a social context (cited in Manchon, 2013). Most of the classes of this type are demand and goal orientated and therefore the classroom is organised in an explicit manner. To enable L2 learners to attain clarity, teachers commonly go over the traits and organisational structures of different types of writing with the class. They then devise steps for students to follow in order to master a particular type of writing based on their needs and eventually be able to work independently on this type of text. Myskow and Gordon (2009) suggest that the genre approach seeks to impart an in-depth understanding of the writing traditions, particularly those traditions that exist in "academic communities" (291). Therefore, in addition to teaching students to write, teachers are expected to be observers and investigators of the social and written contexts of the text through the application of this approach.

When an L2 student is able to efficiently observe social phenomena and understand the context of writing, they can be independent storytellers. Hence, as Hyland (2003) puts it, teachers frequently talk about the characteristics and organisational patterns of various styles of writing with the class in an effort to assist L2 learners gain clarity. Based on their requests, students then construct a series of steps for students to take in to master a certain writing style and ultimately be able to work independently on this type of content. Such teaching can therefore fulfil the needs of L2 students to write specific texts for their specific readers.

3. Genre Analysis

3.1. Brief Introduction of the Text

The genre that will be presented in this essay is the book review of "Being Mortal," which was published in 2014. This book was composed by Atul Gawande, one of the youngest and most influential health policy advisers in the White House. The overall book review is rather terse, consisting of only four short paragraphs. While each paragraph seems to cover something on its own, they as a whole give the reader a more profound understanding of both the book and the author nonetheless.

3.2. Purpose / Audience of this Genre

In accordance with Principles, every writing genre exists for a specific purpose (Lecture 2: 21). It is crucial for every competent writer to build "rhetorical and genre awareness" (Ferris, 2018: 4). The primary purpose of a writing genre, such as writing a book review is to provide an outlet for the author to express his or her opinions about a particular book, either briefly or specifically to state how interesting the book is. Furthermore, a book review serves to suggest to readers interested in the book whether or not further reading is necessary for them. Therefore, a book review should contain a basic statement of the book's story and examples of what makes the book worthwhile for those with an interest in it. Plus, other information such as the author's background and credentials, the gist of the story, the book's strengths and weaknesses, and so on.

3.3. Analysis of Moves (Text Analysis)

1st communicative move: This book review refers to the keywords: illness, suffering, aging, death and morality in the first section. The delivery of these keywords can enable readers with interest to acquire a general understanding of the book's subject matter.

2nd communicative move: The book reviewer's choice of adjectives such as "eye-opening" and "gripping" makes this review a subjective account of the author's views. The reviewer subsequently created a set of conflicts, namely the nursing home's control of patients' diets and the patients' struggles with their own food choices, to further introduce the book, and this conflict may be a key point of attraction for the target readers. The reviewer then presented a theme of the book's point of view, which was that for these people on death's doorstep, the treatment of them might be causing them more suffering on some moral level, essentially shortening the individual's life. This point of view served as the main theme of the book and one that readers with different life experiences may either agree or disagree with. By directly and clearly presenting these key messages that Atul Gawande sought to provoke in the general public through the writing and publication of this book, the reader's perception of the book will undergo a qualitative leap.

3rd communicative move: The reviewer concentrates this paragraph on the description of the author Atul Gawande, informing the reader bluntly about the author's identity as a professional doctor in real life, thus indirectly conveying the message that the author's writing is based on his own professional experience and from the experience of caring for his own father who is seriously bed-ridden. Therefore, the narrative/personal account was used to recount these stories and this social phenomenon, and such genre made this book more appealing.

4th communicative move: The concluding paragraph of the book review succinctly articulated the main idea of the article and the book reviewer's personal insights.

3.4. Any Notable Linguistic Features (Grammatical/Lexical)

Grammatical: "Doctors, uncomfortable discussing patients' anxieties about death, fall back on....," the reviewer uses the '-ing participle' to function as the additional remarks of the sentence when he attempts to convey the suffering experienced by the doctors in this scenario.

Lexical: the reviewer composes a series of adjectives, riveting, honest, and humane, at the end of the paragraph to describe the overall remarks held by him towards the book.

4. Teaching - Primarily Genre Based

4.1. Target of Instruction

The principal aim of this lesson is to train advanced-level class of ESL learners to write review writing from a third-person perspective. This is a genre based on the co-existence of subjectivity and objectivity, and as such, it necessitates that the writer be able to objectively state the content of the book they have chosen to review, including the author's background, the social phenomena and themes that the author intends to reflect, and at the same time, assess the book from their subjective point of view in terms of its interesting points, its worthiness and its inadequacies. Therefore, these students are required to possess the literary ability to

independently write book reviews based on their mastery of the genre-based approach and their proficiency in using the process-based approach.

4.2. Activities in the Classroom

To start with, I would consider a number of instructional activities, including imitation, reordering, and so forth, to prepare students with a fundamental and thorough understanding of this particular type of academic writing. Also, I would assign the students to read the same book a few days before the task and initiate an in-class debate on why the book is or is not worth recommending, which I believe will be helpful for these students to practice and enhance their cognitive abilities in writing.

More than that, I will form groups of 2-4 students and use group discussion to inspire them to decide on the book they want to write, this activity is designed to stimulate brainstorming among students. After that, I will systematically introduce the content and framework of a complete book review to the students, and then ask them to write the outline and draft independently. After the draft is completed, I will continue to organize a peer-review activity, encouraging the other members of the group of 2-4 to give each other their comments, including both positive and negative feedback. Students will then be prompted to revise and reconstruct, and the peer-review activity will be repeated if they feel it is necessary, until all students have produced a structurally and contentually complete review of the book. Throughout this series of activities, I will make extensive use of process-based approach, in order to achieve the ultimate pedagogical goal.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this essay underscores the value of both the process-based and genre-based approaches in ESL writing instruction, recognizing their distinctive advantages. The genre-based approach cultivates genre awareness and purpose-driven writing, exemplified by the analysis of the book review genre in the context of "Being Mortal." Meanwhile, the process-based approach fosters a structured writing process through iterative stages, enhancing both writing skills and genre-specific conventions. By merging these approaches in a practical classroom strategy for teaching book review writing to advanced ESL students, educators can empower learners to produce thoughtful and well-crafted pieces while honing their writing abilities.

Book Review Source

<https://atulgawande.com/book/being-mortal/>

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