

IMPROVING STRUCTURES OF STUDENTS' ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS THROUGH GENRE PEDAGOGY

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Abstract - This paper analyses the structures of argumentative texts produced by second-year students who major in English for Tourism at the Department of English for Specific Purposes, University of Foreign Language Studies – the University of Danang. It seeks to examine whether the students' text structures can be improved after they complete a ten-hour writing course informed through genre pedagogy. The article is underpinned by genre theory developed within Systemic Functional Linguistics. As the finding indicates, the students show an improvement in rhetorical structures of texts, which allows them to achieve communicative purposes in the cultural and situational contexts thanks to the adoption of genre pedagogy.

Key words - genre pedagogy; learners; teachers; argumentative writing; text structure

1. Introduction

Argumentative writing is one of the key skills in curricula at many educational levels in many countries. In Australia, the argumentative genre is foregrounded in the school curriculum where students are expected to demonstrate the ability to write effective argumentative essays and appraise diverse opinions. In EFL contexts such as Vietnam, the importance of argumentative writing is also emphasized in the curricula of many disciplines, including the English major.

Argumentative writing is prominent not only in the curricula of many countries, but is also emphasized in a range of high-stakes testing and assessment contexts. It is assessed in the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) in Australia as persuasive writing. Internationally, the ability to persuade others is privileged in the high-stakes standardized exams and is tested in both the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), both of which act as gate-keeper for admission to an English-speaking university. In China, argumentative writing is included as a major component of the college test administered upon completion of tertiary studies. Similarly, this argumentative genre is also a core requirement of three-level Vietnamese Standardized Test of English Proficiency (VSTEP) in Vietnam. Although the ability to write well-constructed arguments with persuasive supporting evidence is critical for academic success, little attention has been paid to building the capability of student writers to meet high demands of the academic world as well as to satisfy the requirements of future professions upon graduation.

On the other hand, previous traditional approaches to writing instruction do not generate significant beneficial impacts on students' writing skills. One of these approaches is product-oriented, which has been dominant in Vietnamese classrooms for years. This approach has been criticised due to the failure to prepare students with necessary linguistic resources to make meanings and raise student awareness of

text in its social context. Writing in this approach is seen just as a different way of learning about grammar and the job of the teacher is confined to designing, assigning and assessing student writing. As a response to the shortcomings of the traditional model, educational institutions have, in recent years, adopted a process-oriented approach. This approach has been long applauded for its contributions to developing cycles of planning, drafting and revising. One serious concern with this tradition, however, is its efficacy as an instructional approach in EFL classrooms to deal with the complicated nature of the writing task. This approach places an over-emphasis on ones' personal experience and one's own writing process without a theoretical base of the way language is patterned to make meanings in human interaction and underestimates the role of the teacher who should be empowered to teach rather than raise metacognitive awareness (Hyland, 2003). This approach also does not give enough attention to L2 learners, particularly struggling ones who have limited understanding of the rhetorical structures of target text (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993).

Although the above-mentioned orientations have been criticized by many scholars, genre-based tradition has been developed as an innovative pedagogy to develop knowledge of text structure for learners through explicit teaching of genre. The genre pedagogy views the social nature of language use and prototypical structures of texts as a central point to make meanings and accomplish the purposeful act of writing. The fundamental tenet of the pedagogy is based on "guidance through interaction in the context of shared experience" (Rose & Martin, 2012, p. 58). It aims to develop conscious understandings of genre and build up a repertoire of language to enable successful written performance. The pedagogy not only focuses on the writing product, but also the process of how to write to achieve communicative goals.

The genre pedagogy is developed based on the theory of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). In SFL, texts with similar social purposes and linguistic patterns are considered to be instances of the same genre (Humphrey, Droga, & Feez, 2012). Genre can be defined as 'staged, goal-oriented, social activity' (Rose & Martin, 2012, p. 53) which meet various social purposes in the cultural and situational contexts. Depending on the social purpose of a text in its cultural context, it has its own text organizations with Stages and Phases to achieve its purpose and depending on the situational context including field (topic), tenor (who is involved in the communication) and mode (written or oral), a text has its own distinctive linguistic features appropriate with the genre. Based on the purpose of persuasion, argumentative texts are classified into four distinct genres:

hortatory exposition, analytical exposition, discussion and challenge (Derewianka, 2016).

In this article, the structure of analytical exposition is chosen for research because learners often encounter this genre in important exams such as VSTEP. The structure of analytical exposition has three main Stages: Thesis, Arguments and Reiteration (Martin & Rose, 2012). In the thesis, the writer states his or her views on the topic of discussion and previews key points. In the body paragraphs, the writer analyzes and supports their arguments with persuasive and reliable evidence, explanation and counter-arguments. In the conclusion, the writer reiterates his/her position on the subject of debate to persuade readers to change their thoughts on the issue.

The following section deals with genre-based pedagogy developed within the theoretical underpinning of SFL. As seen from the figure below, the genre approach offers useful instructional cycles enabling the teacher to organize classroom sequences through three main stages: deconstruction, joint construction and independent construction. Throughout the three stages, the teacher continually provides students with knowledge about contexts: context of culture and context of situation, which aims to help them understand the social purpose of writing and linguistic characteristics typical of genres. At the same time, the teacher also builds up the subject-matter knowledge for learners through a variety of activities such as reading newspapers and magazines. Through these activities, the teacher helps students develop vocabulary and background knowledge about the subject.

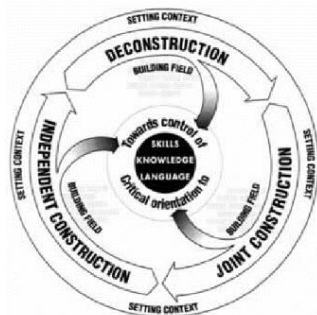


Figure 1. Instructional cycles of genre pedagogy (Rose, 2012)

In Stage 1, sample texts are analysed to help learners grasp rhetorical structure of written discourse and relevant language patterns used to achieve the social purpose of genres. During the course of analyzing model texts, stages and phases unfolded in the texts are made explicit to students and guidance is given to develop learners' deeper understanding of meaning-making choices made by competent authors at each stage and phase of sample texts. Guidance is also given to lead learners to color main linguistic features that appear in sample texts and understand the metafunctions of language including expressing ideas, connecting ideas, interacting with others, and creating a well-linked text. Before the analysis of linguistic characteristics, students are supported to increase their knowledge about field, tenor and mode, since all three register factors have significant impacts on language choices being made to fulfil communicative purposes.

In Stage 2, students are guided to write a similar text with shifted field. They are asked to negotiate meaning, discuss and give their ideas under the guidance of the teacher. While they are voicing their ideas, the teacher is writing them up on the board. During collaborative writing, the teacher helps students to select linguistic choices appropriate to field, tenor and mode and to apply the knowledge learned in the first stage to produce a new text. In Stage 3, students write a similar text on their own. Before writing, they are supported to develop knowledge of the topic and discuss with other peers about outlining of ideas. After that, they begin to write either individually or in groups. Once their texts are completed, they will be collected for feedback by the teacher.

The genre approach has been very successful in developing writing skills for learners in many countries around the world. However, little is known about the impact of this pedagogy on the writing performance of students of English for Tourism at University of Foreign Languages - University of Da Nang. In this article, an attempt is made to compare two argumentative texts written at two points in time by a full-time student. One text is written before the student partakes in a genre-based writing program and the other is produced after the program. The purpose of this paper is to determine the effect of genre pedagogy on the improvement of the discourse structure of student writing.

2. Content

2.1. Object of the study

The study examines the impact of genre pedagogy on the improvement of argumentative text structures of second-year students who major in English for Tourism at Department of English for Specific Purposes - Danang University of Foreign Language Studies. The study analyzes the structure of students' texts produced before and after they undertake a writing course underpinned by genre pedagogy. In this article, the detailed analysis of only one text written by a student from the Department - Lan will be presented. Lan's text is chosen as a case study because she has difficulty presenting her ideas during her course participation. Although Lan is a student who demonstrates spoken English fluency, intelligible pronunciation, rich vocabulary and good grammar knowledge she has great challenges in expressing herself in writing. She does not know how to arrange ideas in a logical well-sequenced manner because of her illogical and unsystematic way of thinking. She has problem seeing relationships of ideas and categorizing them into a system network. In addition, she usually makes inaccurate choices of meanings and this thus results in the production of an ambiguous or obscure text. Her text also lacks coherence and close connection between ideas, making it difficult for the reader to grasp the main ideas and supporting details of her writing; to recognize the link between the preceding and following ideas in the same paragraph and between the previous paragraph and the following paragraph in a full single text. It can be said that Lan is a typical case representing many students of English for Tourism. The students in this discipline have relatively good oral

communicative skills but have huge difficulty with the writing skills, especially text organization, arrangement of ideas, meaning-making choices and logical critical-thinking.

2.2. Procedures

Students enrolled in a five-week writing course with two hours per week. The stages and phases of the course were developed based on the above-mentioned teaching cycle with three main stages.

Stage 1 - Deconstruction - includes the following main phases. Phase 1, developing field knowledge. In this course, the topic "The Impact of Tourism on Economy, the Environment and Cultures" was selected. To develop relevant topic and vocabulary knowledge, students were guided to watch a video about the impact of tourism on local communities in the city of Cornwall, England and then to discuss it in groups. In their discussion, they were requested to relate what they had seen in the video to the current situation of tourism development in their local areas. Phase 2, analyzing sample texts. In this phase, the students were supported to understand register variables: field, tenor and mode of communication. Phase 3, the students were step-by-step guided to analyze the structures of sample texts, recognize the stages and phases of texts. They were also required to color key language features typical of the genre. These linguistic characteristics include nominalization (the process of translating verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and conjunctions into nouns) to produce abstract, formal and informative texts, contrastive conjunctions (although, however...) to help the author present his or her views and counter-arguments, Tenses (Present Simple, Present Perfect) to express temporal meanings, language used to indicate the causal relationship of ideas as well as cohesive links to connect ideas together as a whole.

Stage 2 - Joint Construction – the students were directed to collaboratively write a new text responding to a task prompt about "The Impact of Tourism on the Environment" with the teacher. Before collaborative writing, open-ended questions were asked to activate students' prior knowledge. In the following phase, the students were gradually instructed to complete the stages and phases of the new text, and to apply the knowledge they had learned in the Deconstruction stage to construct a new text. While writing, the teacher had the role of asking guiding questions, listening to the students' ideas, and writing their responses up on the board. The teacher also provided qualitative feedback on their writing product and guided the whole class to make changes to their original text in order to ensure the quality of their text.

Stage 3 - Independent Construction. In this stage, students began to write their own text on "The cultural Impact of Tourism". This stage includes the following phases. Phase 1, developing field knowledge. The students were guided to understand reading texts related to the topic. Phase 2, they were supported to outline a plan for their text. Phase 3, they began to write their own essays and submitted them. In the last phase, they received the teacher's written feedback for their texts. After receiving the feedback, students were asked to revise their essays according to comments supplied by the teacher.

2.3. Data collection

The article analyses Lan's essay collected at two points in time: before and after her participation in a writing course adopting genre pedagogy for the organization of learning activities. Prior to her involvement, Lan was assigned to a writing task asking her to express her views on the impact of tourism on local communities. As requested, she needs to demonstrate her position on whether the positive impacts of tourism on the local community are superior to the negative effects. Upon completion of the program, Lan was asked to present her views on the issue of whether "the environment and local cultures are often ignored by the tourism industry"

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Lan's text structure

3.1.1. Lan's text written before her course participation

The analysis of the structure of Lan's essay (Table 1), indicates that although the task prompt asked her to state her opinion on whether the positive impact of tourism on communities outweighs negative effects, she failed to do so at the opening paragraph. Rather than writing an analytical exposition, she decided to write a discussion text which is to discuss the benefits and drawbacks of tourism development. Thus, her essay did not meet rhetorical purposes of argumentative genre.

As she did not organize her ideas according to an analytical exposition, but in a discussion right at the beginning, she focused on developing two main parts of a discussion paper: advantages and disadvantages of tourism development in the subsequent body paragraphs. In general, she made strong attempts to explain ideas in the body sections. However, her explanation was somewhat problematic. In her presentation about the impact of tourism on security and safety in the local community, she provided an illustrative example of Hoi An case, but this example did not clarify her point. She claimed that tourism has generated detrimental impacts on Hoi An security, but her example failed to do its job.

Take Hoian ancient town as an example, that place is regarded as renowned for its old city, path, temples or some traditional crafts. This is a main cause to bring in a lot of problems about overpopulated or untouched city.

Lan did not make the relationship of a densely populated city with the security and safety of the local community clear and obvious to the reader. Therefore, the conclusion that tourism has an impact on local security drawn at the end of the paragraph is illogical.

In the last paragraph, Lan provided a conclusion. However, this conclusion was not that of a discussion paper, but of an analytical exposition. Even though she pointed out her point of view, it was just a balanced view without adopting her own position. In the next phase, she wrote her suggestion:

Besides, not only headquarters but also citizens or habitants need to put much effort into improving some drawbacks to make our countries better than ever.

At the end of the essay, she gave her personal

assessment of travelling. However, the assessment was still unclear and obscure.

Table 1. Lan's text written before her course participation

Structure	Content
Thesis, but no position	Accompanying with dominant development of technology, modernization or even industrialization, tourism renovation which plays a crucial part in growth of countries exists two specific factors: drawbacks and benefits.
Side 1: Benefits	There is no doubt that the development of tourism which is a breakthrough step all over the world not only generates a lot of job opportunities, but also promotes our countries's cultures and customs.
Evidence for job opportunities	According to statistics, the percentage of unemployed people has decreased dramatically in some recent decades thanks to tourism industry. It means that that is the first successful step to enhance the standard of life in some developing or poor countries.
Explanation	Another novel good effect, exchange experience or culture is regarded as a dominant prediction for cooperation and development of numerous countries in the world. We will have plenty of chances to promote some attractions, incredible views, some traditional crafts and so on which attracts a bunch of visitors to our fabulous countries.
Side 2: Drawbacks	It is undeniable that besides incredibly various advantages, tourism development emerges a few of bably little-known aspects such as environment or local habitants.
Environmm ental impact	More and more domestic people or foreigners have taken a trip to other countries. A lot of headquarters or environmentalists ensure that pollution is inevitable. By dint of unawareness, holiday makers from other countries who may not obey some rules or laws relating to environment may do harm to the health of local people more or less.
Impact on security	Moreover, the security of communities is more and more difficult to ensure.
Irrelevant Example	Take Hoi'an ancient town as an example, that place is regarded as a renowned for old city, path, temples or some traditional crafts. This is a main cause to bring in a lot of problems about an overpopulated or untouched city.
Link	It has a dramatical impact on a lot of inhabitants's safety in terms of enhancing development of some countries.
Conclusion	In a nutshell, tourism development has two sides: superb or even bad influences.
Position	In my view, I am mutual between two standpoints because of unpredictable conversion.
Proposal	Besides, not only headquarters but also citizens or habitants need to put much effort into improving some drawbacks to make our countries better than ever.
Evaluation	What is not a responsibility, is mission of a lot of people to go further than we have gone in tourism industry.

3.1.2. Lan's text written after her course participation

The analysis of the post-intervention text (Table 2) showed that Lan structured her text quite well to meet the requirement of the writing prompt. The prompt asked her to express an opinion on whether the local environment and culture are often ignored by the tourism industry. In the opening section, Lan introduced the topic of argumentation by acknowledging the contribution of the tourism sector to the economic development. After the introduction, she wrote a counter-argument that denies the role of the tourism sector in environmental protection and in the preservation of cultural values and immediately argued against it and adopted her position. Her position is that tourism has made great efforts in preserving cultural values

as well as contributing to an increase in state revenues used to pay for environmental protection.

Table 2. Lan's text written after her course participation

Structure ¹	Content
Orientation	Tourism is one of the most developed industries in the world that contributes to the development of an economy.
Counter-argument	Although the tourism sector puts a strain on the preservation of cultures and protection of the environment,
Position	it has been making high efforts to preserve cultural values through historical and cultural exhibits and raise the government's environmental revenues.
Counter-argument and Point 1	Some may say that the tourism industry might be the main factor that could cause the negative changes in values and customs, but it may not be the case.
Explanation	The tourism sectors heads towards to preserve local traditions and cultures by some practical ways such as organizing some historical artifacts and architecture exhibits.
Example	For example, annually, in Danang city, the tourism industry usually holds large-scale cultural heritage exhibits for local people and tourists to discover. This makes people more understand and aware of importance of cultural preservation.
Link	It is obvious that the tourism industry contributes to the preservation of cultural values.
Point 2	Another contribution is that the tourism sector helps increase the government's revenues spent on the protection of environmentally sensitive areas.
Counter-argument	Some people argue that the tourism sector rarely pays attention to these areas.
Rebuttal	In reality, this industry contributes to the government's revenues from park entrance fees and similar sources which can be spent on maintenance and management of these places.
Example	For example, the funds from those sources can be used for overall conservation programs and activities such as park ranger salaries. This leads to the improvements of park maintenance.
Link	There is no doubt that the tourism sector makes big efforts to enhance the protection of these sensitive areas through revenues.
Conclusion (Restatement of a Position)	In conclusion, although the damages of tourism industry have been emerging continuously, the tourism sector has attempted to save cultures and the environment.

In the body, Lan presented her point about culture through the use of counter-argument.

Some may say that the tourism industry might be the main factor that could cause the negative changes in values and customs, but it may not be the case.

While she wrote the travel industry as a major factor making negative changes to the local cultures and customs in the counter-argument, she immediately rejected it. Next, she gave her explanations for her argument that the tourism industry has implemented strategies to preserve cultural values through cultural exhibitions. She provided an example of tourism-related events organized in Danang and argued for the role of these events in raising public awareness and understanding of the importance of the maintenance of cultural identity. In the last sentence, she reaffirmed the contribution of tourism to the preservation of cultural values.

In the second paragraph of the body section, she

¹ Bold words in the structure column of Table 2 indicates differences in Lan's texts written before and after her course participation.

presented a point towards the role of the travel industry in raising revenues used for the protection of the environment. After presenting her argument, she recognized a counter-argument and rebuttal. In the counter-argument, she wrote:

Some people argue that the tourism sector rarely pays attention to these areas.

In the rebuttal, she wrote:

In reality, this industry contributes to the government's revenues from park entrance fees and similar sources which can be spent on maintenance and management of these places.

In the next phases, Lan provided an example of financial sources from tourism earnings allocated for conservation activities such as salaries for conservationists. She also included a conclusion about significant efforts made by the tourism industry to preserve environmentally sensitive areas.

In the iteration, she restated her position about big attempts made to protect the environment and culture.

3.2. Discussion

Through the interpretation of Lan's texts, it is found that Lan develops an understanding of text structure and is able to apply her understanding in structuring and sequencing her post-intervention text in a more persuasive and argumentative way.

Before undertaking the intervention program, Lan could not make differences between different genres such as analytical exposition and discussion and thus she structures her text in a way that does not meet communicative functions required by the writing task. Instead of organizing ideas according to analytical exposition, she decides to write a discussion. Thus, her text does not meet the requirement of the task prompt and does not achieve communicative purposes in the cultural and situational context.

After the intervention, Lan develops a better and deeper understanding of the structure of written discourse as manifested in the quality of her text. She clearly understands that an argumentative text needs to undergo major stages and phases. These stages and phases are to argue for a position supported by points followed by explanation, example and link in order to persuade the reader. She understands that an argumentative text must include the writer's position in the orientation, points, counter-arguments, rebuttal and persuasive evidence through specific illustrations and a restatement of the writer's position at the end of the text.

That the student develops knowledge about text structure is thanks to genre pedagogy. This pedagogy is advanced based on the principle of guidance through interaction in the context of shared experience. According to this principle, students are step-by-step guided to understand and apply knowledge gained through quality interaction with the teacher and other peers to complete a new task. At the beginning stage, the teacher is a knowledge transmitter and simultaneously a person who offer favorable conditions for students to absorb new

knowledge through interactions so that both the teacher and students share the same understanding. At the following stage, the teacher is a guide and a participant who collaboratively works with students to co-construct a new text. In the last stage, once new knowledge has been achieved and students demonstrates abilities to do similar task on their own, the teacher will act as a supervisor and evaluator who organizes learning activities and provides feedback and evaluation of students' performance. Genre pedagogy is a balanced approach which both focuses on the writing process and the product enabling students' success in the academic world.

4. Conclusion

The student shows a significant improvement in text structure upon completion of a writing course informed by genre pedagogy. The pedagogy is considered effective to be adopted for the delivery of writing lessons because of several reasons. This pedagogy is a balanced approach that focuses on developing the writing ability for learners which allows them to produce meaningful argumentative texts. It is also a balanced approach in terms of the role of the teacher and students. The pedagogy appreciates the controlling role of the teacher in the first stage when students need the teacher to impart new knowledge but the teacher becomes a facilitator who offers needed help at later stages. Once students become more independent, the teacher begins to hand over control to students who take full charge of completing new tasks on their own.

The genre pedagogy is regarded as useful for teaching writing skills. However, there are some considerations that need to be taken. In the process of analyzing structures of sample texts, the teacher should make learners aware that stages and phases in the samples should not be treated as a rigid formula, but as a flexible frame that can be altered or changed. If the teacher intentionally sees text structure as fixed, the teacher is reinforcing the notion of formulaic writing and restricting creativity and originality of learners in the presentation of their arguments. Only when attention to the flexibility of text structures has been drawn, can the pedagogy act as a fruitful tool enabling teachers to organize useful classroom activities and supporting the development of writing skills for learners.

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