

An Investigation into the Regenring Act in an ESP Reading and Writing Course

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Abstract:

Focusing on instruction of schematic structures and generic models are the primary characteristics of traditional genre pedagogy. What demands to be explored is how a particular knowledge structure could be reconfigured into a new genre. As a result, in this paper the effect of regenring in an ESP reading and writing course was investigated. For this purpose, two hundred and forty regenred annotations of writing were collected from twenty EFL participants in an ESP reading and writing course. It was found that regenring brought about genre awareness and changed the participants' attitudes toward their disciplinary topics and fields of study. Consequently, it may be assumed that regenring will contribute to awareness of how reconfiguration of knowledge in a new genre illuminates affordances and possibilities of a fresh experience and a new outlook on the subject matter. Due to its great potentiality, it is recommended to use regenring technique in writing pedagogy.

Keywords: *Genre Affordances; Genre Awareness; Regenring; Semiotic Orientation*

1. INTRODUCTION

'Type' in French is referred to as 'Genre', but the meaning it has acquired in English goes beyond what can be captured by the word 'type' because it comes to be how we conceptualize meanings. Also, during the early days of its arrival, the term was

used only in literary studies (such as types of novel or short story). Genres can be described as a classifier. An example of that could be poetry genres like sonnet, haiku, or ode. The social focus in linguistics (Halliday, 1978; Hymes, 1974) turned the attention to linguistic aspects of genre. The social framing of genre in this case makes the participants to shape their texts in a particular way. In this sense, genre is socially determined and experienced. This particular frame makes the text recognizable as belonging to a communicative event and gives an identity to the text (e.g., every day greetings, service encounter). As a pedagogical concern, genre is used in university courses, school education, and composition scholarships.

However, discussion of genre in relation to students' writing has followed different traditions, which have led to different approaches. The first strand is English for Academic Purpose, which was largely developed out of an applied linguistic background (e.g., Hyland, 2007; Jordan, 1997). ESP movement focused on developing teaching procedures appropriate to learners whose main objective is learning English for purposes other than learning the language itself. One of the main advantages of ESP genre teaching is its efficacy in identifying the text the learners will need to write in a particular context and the rationale it provides for sequencing and grouping texts (Hyland, 2004).

Another strand is the genre studies from Australia (e.g., Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Mathiessen, 2004; Martin, 1992; Mathiessen, 1995) which brings together pedagogical debates on genre as both social and linguistic practice. The Australian school has been successful for reasons such as focusing upon different types of English texts and providing a framework for learning grammar and discourse, offering generic models regularly encountered in the English-speaking culture, helping students to understand meaning making in an English-speaking culture, and finally forming a basis for reflecting on and criticizing the ways in which knowledge and information are organized in the English language.

Finally, the New Rhetoricians draw on postmodern and literary theories, L1 rhetoric, and composition (Freedman & Medway, 1994). New Rhetoric movement is interested in how contextual factors and power relations may influence the practitioners of genre and their ways of thinking. The New Rhetoric movement has attempted to raise students' awareness of the social context that shapes their writing.

There is still a considerable diversity of views about genre categorization, their similarities, and differences which raise questions about which genres should be selected and how they should be used for the teaching of writing. For some (Grabe, 2002; Martin, 1997; Swales, 1990), discourse classification is largely a social phenomenon, something directly reflected in purpose and organization of texts: for example, editorials, postcards, or research articles. The Sydney school emphasizes empowerment through genre knowledge: "Learning new genres gives one the linguistic potential to join new realms of social activity and social power" (Cope &

Kalantzis, 1993, p. 20). For others (Biber, 1989; Feez, 2002; Flowerdew, 2002), text classification is a communicatively-oriented, cognitive phenomenon: for example, discourse categories may include argumentation, explanation, recounting and description.

Bruce (2008) proposed that existing approaches to discourse classification generally fall into two categories, either the category of social genre or that of cognitive genre. Pilegaard & Frandsen (1996) referred to socially recognized constructs according to which whole texts are classified in terms of their overall social purpose. Personal letters, novels and academic articles are examples of different social genres. The term cognitive genre refers to the cognitive orientation of a piece of writing in terms of its realization of a particular rhetorical purpose reflected in how information is internally organized and related. As examples, Pilegaard & Frandsen (1996) refer to narrative, expository, descriptive, argumentative or instructional text types.

Beside the social vs. cognitive genre dichotomy, which is present in the genre movements explained above, the three genre schools seem to agree at least on the following principles (Hyland, 2004; Hyland, 2007):

1. Writing and learning to write is a social activity. Therefore, genres develop as a result of recurrent way people get things done. So, students need to engage in a variety of relevant writing experiences which focus on a purpose, a context, and an intended audience.
2. Genre teaching not only helps learners to write, but to also see how vocabulary and grammar choices create meanings; that is, language and structure should be in line with the purpose of the text and the norms and conventions of the discourse community they serve.
3. Some genres are valued more within a community than others and it is important to have the knowledge of their text characteristics, of their social power, and critical reflection on these genres should form part of the writing instruction.
4. Besides recognizing the wants, prior learning, and current proficiencies of students, genre-based courses incorporate the needs of students.
5. Genres develop identifiable characteristics at the level of discourse structure and language. This helps the teacher to be explicit about what is being studied, why it is being studied, and what will be expected of students at the end of the course.

Those theories mentioned above, integrate the concept of discourse as an essential part of their discussion. The intersection of genre and discourse emerged out of social-cultural practices. Genres demand certain discourses. For example, pedagogic discourse gave rise to textbook genre. In turn, pedagogic discourse will be typified by certain linguistic functions and resources (Hyland, 2000). However, discourse is associated with two main points: linguistic pragmatics (Brown & Yule, 1983) and ideological position (Blommaert, 2005; Hodge & Kress, 1988). The former refers to

language in use and textual materials while the latter points toward ideological meanings associated with social semiotics and social linguistics (Gee, 1999).

This brief review of approaches to genre makes the concept of genre awareness an essential need for students in order to be able to deal with genres they will encounter in life, career, and education. Genre awareness also fulfills their need for the awareness of affordances different genres provide as a social semiotic encoding rather than interpretive category used for classification and explanatory purposes. In the next section, we shall turn to the concept of genre awareness and regenring to pave the way for the illumination of the purpose of the study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of genre awareness has been defined as developing students' "rhetorical flexibility necessary for adapting their soci-cognitive genre knowledge to ever-changing contexts" (Johns, 2008, p.238). Genre awareness is like passing through a portal or a gateway that opens new ways of thinking. Genre awareness is not the same as explicit teaching of genre. It is the understanding of how genre fulfills its rhetorical purposes in relation to text, context, and audience (Devitt, 2004). Beaufort (2007) underscored the fact that genre awareness is a mean to transfer knowledge of familiar writing context to another less familiar one.

Regenring refers to the change of the text in a particular genre to other genres (English, 2011). For instance, one can change an argumentative essay to a role-play. Regenring contributes to the cycle of design, production, distribution, and redesign of the resources available for a creation of a new genre (English, 2011). Regenring has a great effect on the whole process of text production especially the producer. Furthermore, it emphasizes the affordances of genres; i.e. to give choice to the participants in the communicative event about how to express their meanings. It results from the semiotic resources that are related to each genre such as context, thematic organization, identity, meanings, mode, and textual materials (English, 2011). Such a great potentiality of regenring demands investigation of its effect on genre awareness and its impact on the subject matter of writing and the discipline of study.

As for the studies done in the realm of genre awareness, Yayli (2011) followed the key elements in writing activities proposed by Hyland (2007) and aimed to capture how the participants' genre awareness would become embedded in their viewpoint through genre-based writing instruction in an EFL context. The findings indicated that besides having genre awareness participants re-contextualized their genre awareness while engaged in another genre.

Drawing on multiple sources of data and based on systematic functional linguistics (SFL), Yasuda (2011) examined students' changes as FL writers in carefully designed genre-based tasks. Data were collected using a survey, interviews, and the emails written at the beginning and at the end of the semester. The results showed

that the students made progress in their genre awareness and perceptions, and that changes in their awareness of writing as a social action, goals of genre, linguistic resources, awareness of context, and move functions were apparent in their actual written products. In a rather similar vein, Wang (2013) in SFL-based genre approach examined the effectiveness of promoting EFL writers' genre awareness. The findings of the study indicated that the genre approach excelled the product approach in promoting the writers' genre awareness, enhancing holistic writing quality and lexical density.

However, there is no study done regarding the effect of regenring on genre awareness, attitude toward the topic, and field of study in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing classroom particularly in Iranian EFL context. In order to fill this gap in the literature, the following research questions guide the study:

- 1) What is the effect of regenring on genre awareness?
- 2) What impact does regenring have on the topic and the field of study?

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Context

ESP reading and writing course for the students of theology and seminary was held in one of the English language institutes in Shiraz, Iran. The main aims of the course were to expose participants to their specific disciplinary reading materials and practice writing drawing on the knowledge gained from reading. The course was taught for one semester (twenty-two sessions). Instruction of writing focused on paragraph development for exposition and summary writing.

3.2 Participants

The twenty study participants represented a group of Iranian students homogenous in their English proficiency. They passed general English courses offered in English institutes and reached advanced levels. In order to ascertain that the participants were proficient enough for the enrollment in the course, they were required to bring a summary sheet of their grades with stamp and signature of the English institutes they attended to. Their native language was Persian and they shared the same cultural background. Half of the participants studied theology and the other half attended seminary.

3.3 Data Collection

The qualitative data for the present study came from the participants' annotations of their regenred works. Two hundred and forty regenred annotations of writing were collected. Every student wrote six expository essays and six summaries. After the completion of each task, participants were asked to regenre their paper in format of a story for a child and a role-play. Along the regenred assignment, the students were asked to hand in annotations reflecting on the regenring process they went through including their understanding of the topic, their feelings, and differences between

their experiences of writings in different genres. Sometimes participants read the regenred papers for the whole class or did the role play in front of the class.

3.4 Data Analysis

To answer the research questions, the main themes that is genre awareness, the attitudes toward the topic of the essays, and any reference to the field of study were specified and highlighted in all annotations. Then the works were classified based on the regenred works, namely, a story for a child and a role-play. After the first phase of familiarization, the researcher interpreted the annotations' statements in terms of what aspects of regenring process gave rise to each particular statement. Three months after the data analysis, 15 percent (n=36) of the annotations were chosen randomly and the researcher used code-recode strategy to ascertain the intra-rater reliability by comparing the former analysis with reanalyzed annotations. It is important to note that the researcher approached data analysis with no prior imposition on the annotations.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Genre Awareness in a Regenred Works: Short Stories and Role Plays

The analysis of the annotations revealed that participants did a kind of comparison between the original essays and their regenred works from the beginning. However, their awareness of genre features gradually flourished to a more explicit type. For the child stories, the categories participants referred to were the purpose, process, identity, role, organization, and linguistic orientation of the child stories' genre features. The summary of the aspects they mentioned for each category was presented in the table 1.

Table 1: Awareness of genre features for short story

Purpose	Teach, Inform, Entertain
Process	Recontextualize, Synthesize, Inform, Create
Identity	Story teller as a parent; Hearer as a young child
Role	Parent- Children
Organization	Stage and sequence of events, Dialogues, Interactions between characters
Linguistic orientation	Colloquial expressions, Dialogic moves (question and answer), Interruptions, Didactic statements

For the role-play, participants frequently articulated their concern for organization, modes, and textual materials when they were engaged in regenring. The subcategories of the genre features related to the role-play were represented in table 2.

Table 2: Awareness of genre features for role play

Organization	Organization into scenes, Dialogues, Movement in space, time frame
Modes	Scripted conversations, Speech, Gestures, Actions, Voice, Tone, Material objects, Location, Real and fictional characters
Textual materials	Direct speech and questions, Exclamations, Colloquial language, Frequent use of active sentences

What is presented in the tables from the participants' annotations demonstrated how regenring contributed to the awareness of how to configure the disciplinary topics in a new genre.

4.2 The Impact of Regenring on the Topic and Field of Study

The analysis of the data indicated that regenring assisted the students to contextualize the topics around events and activities of "real life" (student 19). This kind of conceptualization made the original essays a "lived experience" (student 16). They expressed that reconfiguration helped them to "put themselves in new roles, change their point of view, and language of expression" (student 14).

Furthermore, participants wrote about broadening of vision or "illumination" (student 8, 15) of the essence of the topics they regenred. They had gained a fresh perspective regarding their own approach to the disciplinary topics. Student (1) explained:

"I have comprehended that what is important in my field of study is to know how to convey scholarly materials in everyday language so that a child or an older person can understand it."

Moreover, regenring helped the participants to fill the gap between the real selves and academic selves. Regenring lowered their inhibitions since they wrote that "we are so preoccupied with our discipline that this kind of writing acts like a relief to what I think as objectivity and seriousness" (student 20) or "I feel happier now that I could express myself in everyday language" (student 11).

On the other hand, some of the other participants referred to how regenring promote a sense of their own identity:

"I am really surprised and contended that it is me that created these role plays and stories." (Student 4)

"My own identity is illuminated through the role of a parent in a story and a wayfarer in role-play." (Student 17)

Equally important, regenring afforded them the opportunity to realize how their objective view toward their discipline could be changed into a subjective and dynamic one. These extracts clearly exemplified this point:

“I believe regenring is the way that we should learn how to transfer our thought in a way appropriate for each person and place.” (Student 6)

“During the time that I wrote stories and role plays I feel that actually I am doing a practical work. For example, I am teaching.” (Student 3)

5. DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to focus on how regenring contributed to genre awareness, attitude toward the topic and field of study. The results showed that regenring promoted participants' awareness and sensitiveness toward the new genres despite the fact that they didn't receive any instruction for writing stories for children and role plays. Meanwhile, participants acquired a positive attitude and new perspectives toward their own discipline and comprehended that how disciplinary topics can be realized and reconfigured for an everyday dynamic experience.

In the present study the concept of genre was not treated as an analytical tool but the social semiotic orientation was taken as a focal point in the act of regenring. In a similar vein, annotations suggested that semiotic orientation was clearly recognized by learners since they not only referred to thematic organization but they also oriented towards particular meaning, modes, and media in the process of regenring. These ensembles have a double function, meaning making of knowledge and communication (Moro, Mortimer, & Tiberghien, 2019). Martin (1993) indicated that genres "achieve their social purpose" (p.121) by configuring and expressing information in a particular way.

Likewise, writers were not only the producer but also designer of communicative interactions which gave them a sense of achievement with regard to their discipline and topic. This finding is aptly explained by the expression “communicative flow” (English, 2011, p.83). Communicative flow is a process of making and remaking of meaning in an interaction. Relying on more than one genre can help us to ponder more effectively on the knowledge of the subject matter (English, 2018).

It was evident that regenring had a profound effect on the producer and his/her sense of agency and identity because the writers had to constantly move between social orientation (i.e., context and discourse) and the material orientation (i.e., theme and semiotics) of genres (Volosinov, 1986). The study suggested that the writers constructed a discursive identity with every act of regenring.

Furthermore, the present study found that the writers came to the conclusion that genres afford particular possibility in specific circumstances. Gibson (1979) referred to the term “affordance” (p.127) to illuminate the fact that not only we perceive things as they are but also, we look at our environment in a meaningful way, that is

what things can do, provide, or mean. Understanding what a genre can afford the user to do, make the learners changed their viewpoint toward their discipline and how with creation and recreation of information they could extract the dynamic nature of the topic so that a fresh light was glinted upon the subject matter.

Finally, the action of regenring had the same focus and capacity as Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS). RGS considers genres as “symbolic actions which allow for dynamism and change, given the inherent fluidity of the socio-historical context to which genres respond” (Artemeva & Freedman, 2001, p.166). An RGS approach to writing does not start with linguistic concerns. Practitioners of RGS begin with scene and social-contextual considerations (Bawarshi& Reiff, 2010). Students’ prior knowledge as well as text analysis based on contextual elements and reflection on outcomes of writing is the crucial steps in RGS (Johns, 2008). Also, intra-systematicity of a particular text is based, semiotically, on various correlations with extra-textual realities (Kroo, 2018) which are realized by the participants of the study in the process of regenring.

6. CONCLUSION

This study contributed a new discussion to the genre approach. Most of the studies focused on the schematic structure of the genres or how they fulfilled their purposes. Regenring offers a fresh outlook for approaching the genre features. The focal point of this outlook is the social semiotic aspects of genres as well as genre affordances. Additionally, regenring process can be a rich source to promote genre awareness and development in one’s disciplinary knowledge. By exploring the possibility of how objective disciplinary information can be realized in different genres, students may benefit from applying their knowledge in everyday experience and career. It must be remembered that regenring also create a positive attitude and heighten the self-efficacy of students by emphasizing exploration of meaning and semiotic aspects of their knowledge from a new perspective.

Due to the great potential of regenring, it is advised to incorporate this process in writing courses and ESP programs in which the focus is on reading and writing. It is recommended to do a need analysis before choosing the genres for the regenring so that the ones chosen will fit the career needs of students to enable them to transfer their knowledge into other kinds of context and experience. Furthermore, analysis of students’ regenred works along their original essays can open new doors to specific moves, stages the students go through, how they assert their identities, and negotiate meaning. It will also contribute to the dependability and trustworthiness of findings. In particular, including annotations as a self-exploration tool will encourage reflectivity and greater awareness of the effect of regenring.

Owing to some practical constraints, the study had some shortcomings. First of all, collecting data from greater number of writers from different disciplines may indicate additional effects of regenring. Future studies could focus on the effect of

regenring on academic essay writing. Finally, other data collection methods such as interviews, questionnaires, observation, and even analysis of regenring group work will add to the robustness of the study.

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