GENRE AND WRITING: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

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Abstract: The paper offers the methodology of teaching English specialized written discourse to non-native speakers that involves 1) pedagogically-oriented contrastive genre analysis of source and English texts, 2) learning target genre-texts as predictable schemes and 3) their acquisition as creative processes.

Keywords: genre, discourse, writing, contrastive genre analysis, non-native speakers.

In recent years genre has become a popular category of pedagogy and educational linguistics. Current genre theory in the unity of its theoretical and applied aspects has been focused on by the groups of international researchers working in the fields of LSP and scientific discourse (Bhatia, 1993; Duszak, 1997; Swales, 1990), composition studies (Devitt, 1993; Freedman, 1993; Kay, 1994), *contrastive rhetoric and textlinguistics (Mauranen, 1993; Vassileva, 1995;* Ventola, 1992). The majority of genre-centered approaches to teaching different types of writing are based on the conception of genre as a social action and emphasize the rhetorical aspects of genres rather than their textlinguistic features. Such approaches, however, are not sufficiently adequate to the needs of non-native speakers who wish to master genres of foreign languages. Language «outsiders» usually associate generic sociorhetorical constraints with specific verbal aspects, and for them the acquisition of written genres becomes primarily a linguistic process. Therefore, possible strategies of teaching genres to non-native speakers must evolve from the understanding of genres as language restrictors that establish their own rules of linguogeneric etiquette, the acquisition of which is a necessary prerequisite of using any genre as a means of communication.

This paper offers the methodology of teaching English specialized (professional and academic) written discourse to non-native speakers based on the vision of genre as the type of a text with a specific system of verbal shaping. I proceed from Bakhtin's (1986) theory of genres who viewed them as simultaneously predictable schemes and creative processes. According to Bakhtin, speech genres are «relatively stable typical *forms of construction of the whole*« (1986:79). These forms have a normative significance for a speaker and must be fully *mastered in order to be manipulated freely (1986:80).* At the same time genres are characterized by certain (depending on the nature of a concrete genre) individuality and creativity that is revealed through (and due to) constraining borders of genre. Thus, genre is simultaneously a model (scheme) and a process. It is a model, because it serves as an example for constructing new texts of the same type. It is a process, as far as text production has always a dynamic character and, consequently, any newly constructed text inevitably changes the model, preserving nevertheless its most essential features. Such a dualistic understanding of genre leads Bakhtin to a conclusion that has direct relevance to educational needs; as he states, «to learn to speak means to learn to construct utterances» and, further, «the better our command of genres, the more freely we employ them, ... the more perfectly we implement our free speech plan» (1986:78,80).

The most important aspect of genre education is connected with raising learners' cross-cultural awareness of how genre constraints operate in different languages. As far as genre is a form of the textual realization of discourse, it possesses obvious textlinguistic features which correlate with its contextual and cultural aspects. These features may be specified in the process of pedagogically-oriented genre analysis of the texts in source and target languages. Such an analytical activity leads to the comprehension of culture-specific differences and preferences in writing and stimulates the development of learners' abilities of adequate choices. Thus, the first methodological principle of teaching professional writing in foreign languages consists in the application of contrastive genre analysis of source and target texts. The concrete procedure of this analysis extends the principles of applied genre analysis elaborated by Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993) to the area of contrastive studies with both theoretical and pedagogical purposes. It is recommended to choose for the analysis the so-called rigid genres. The degree of the «rigidity» of genre is determined by the correlation of its obligatory rhetorical and verbal features (that are predictable and play a leading role in genre identification) and optional ones (functioning within the sphere marked by obligatory elements). The domination of obligatory features makes the structure of genre less varying, more distinct and predictable and, hence, much more preferable for a pedagogically-oriented investigation or analysis.

The procedure begins with a non-linguistic step – the comparative analysis of genre-texts (homogeneous in terms of a genre and a field of knowledge) within their contextual framework, which cannot be ignored even when genres are taught as text-types. This step is aimed at defining the communicative goals of genres compared, possible author/audience relationships and socio-cultural placement of the discourse communities that produce and consume genres.

The second step is devoted to the analysis of cognitive structuring of genre-texts. The step highlights the most essential features of the conventionalized cognitive organization of texts dependent upon their communicative goals.

The third step provides learners with the knowledge of the textlinguistic strategies of the realization of genre contents and rhetoric. This is the most important for non-native learners step which throws light on the ways of textualization of basic categories of genre-texts (such as theme, reference, modality). The step must be crowned by singling out the most typical linguotextual patterns that encode the main categories of a genre-text in English.

The procedure ends with the analysis of separate lexicogrammatical features based on certain statistical data. However, the main focus here should be, as Ventola points out, on the semantic functions of grammatical phenomena and their realizations in languages contrasted (1992:232), that will help learners to make right choices in their future writing.

Contrastive genre analysis with its emphasis on textual patterning shows learners possible and adequate ways of the detailed development of their thoughts in English contrasted to the modes of expression in their native tongue.

Further teaching genres to non-native speakers may take the form of a linguocognitive pedagogical model (Yakhontova, 1997). The process of acquiring writing skills is subdivided into two stages corresponding to the dual nature of genre in the spirit of Bakhtinian genre dichotomy. The first stage is dedicated to mastering the verbal «skeletons» of English target genres. The task of learners consists in the acquisition of linguistic generic features and modeling appropriate genre-texts. Such models (meta-texts) must be based on obligatory structural elements and reflect to a certain extent possible syntactical and lexical restrictions. Although text modeling might be criticized for its schematic, prescriptive character and for ignoring the dynamic aspects of genre, I still consider it to be an unavoidable stage in genre education of non-native speakers who usually feel the lack of the linguistic resources of adequate expression.

The second stage is devoted to learning genres as processes that are shaped by socio-cultural and ideological values and beliefs of appropriate discourse communities. Learners are challenged here by the task of expressing their ideas within a generic code adequate to the communicative and cultural requirements of their potential audience/recipients. At this stage learners raise their awareness of the probabilistic ways of textualization of genre contents and rhetoric by transforming, varying and enriching the patterns (acquired at the previous stage) in the course of intensive individual writing of original texts.

The two-stage pedagogical model might be complemented by the third, optional one. At this stage the knowledge and skills of learners are enhanced and extended to the level of both non-rigid genres and genres that combine the features of different registers (e.g., popular scientific texts). The primary objective of the stage is to master the rules of variability of genre production and to develop such skills of correlating obligatory and optional generic features that would ensure the existence of genre and its proper identification.

Thus, the suggested methodology of teaching written genres to non-native speakers includes 1) preliminary contrastive analysis of source and target texts, 2) learning genres as conventional, static schemes and 3) acquiring them as creative and dynamic processes. It is currently applied to teaching fundamentals of English academic writing to Ukrainian graduate students and beginning researchers.

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