The learning of genre:
Are there any favourable conditions?

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ABSTRACT

Looking at contemporary research on applied linguistics and language teaching studies, this paper starts by posing the question of how genre knowledge is acquired. We then consider how, by developing an awareness of genre in the learners, they can respond to the new discourse of communities they wish to join. Focusing on the writing context, this paper highlights the importance of fostering certain conditions in the classroom which contribute to create a supportive learning environment for genre knowledge and acquisition. The author argues that these conditions have to be actively coached to ensure that genre learning is achieved. By aiming to meet them in a formal educational context, instructors can provide a better opportunity for students to become participants into the specific values and practices of discourse communities.

Key words: genre; writing instruction; learning environment; enculturation; discourse community; classroom setting.

El aprendizaje del género: ¿hay unas condiciones favorables?

RESUMEN

Volviendo la mirada a la investigación en lingüística aplicada y a los estudios sobre enseñanza de la lengua, este artículo comienza planteando la cuestión de cómo adquirir un conocimiento del género y después considera cómo, suscitando una conciencia del género en los estudiantes, éstos pueden responder al nuevo discurso de las comunidades epistemológicas de las que desean formar parte. Centrándose en la escritura, el artículo subraya la importancia de promover condiciones en el aula que contribuyan a crear un contexto de aprendizaje que favorezca el conocimiento y aprendizaje del género. La autora sostiene que estas condiciones deben perseguirse activamente para conseguir este aprendizaje del género. Con la mirada puesta en lograr reunir estas condiciones en una situación formal de enseñanza-aprendizaje, los profesores pueden proporcionar mayores oportunidades a los estudiantes para que participen en los valores y prácticas específicas de las comunidades espistemológicas.

Palabras clave: género; enseñanza de la escritura; contexto de aprendizaje; familiarización; comunidad espistemológica; el aula.

SUMARIO: 1. Introduction. 2. Acquiring genre knowledge. 3. Creating a favourable learning environment for genre acquisition. 4. Conclusion.

1. INTRODUCTION

From the 1960s until the 1990s, writing instruction was largely influenced by 'process pedagogies', relying on the strategies used by learners to write and explore the mental procedures involved in the process of writing. Such pedagogies did not consider language structures and functions nor did they take into account how texts are constructed and used in society to achieve particular forms of expression (for a discussion of the process writing pedagogy versus the genre-based pedagogy, see the Australian systemic functional literature on this issue, particularly Cope & Kalantzis' work 1993).

As a reaction to these process methods, the genre analysis approach, first prompted by John Swales' publication in 1990 of his book *Genre Analysis*, came to highlight the importance of language forms and their intimate connection with the context they are used in. Swales' work in academic discourse as well as Bhatia's subsequent work (1993) in business, academic and legal genres has been the germ of present studies of genre analysis of an applied nature, which have been used as pedagogic material in university classrooms. Since then, there have been numerous attempts to base writing instruction on the models of generic structure presented in the work produced, some of which will be quoted in the body and references of this paper.

The main reason for this new approach to writing has been that it enhances students' rhetorical awareness of the types of texts they have to write (cf. Dudley-Evans 1995: 295). It is a truism that if students and professionals want to participate in the established activities of their professions, they need to acquire the knowledge of conventions and discourse practices of the communities they aspire to become members of. Consequently, one of the main concerns of researchers and teachers over the last fifteen years has been the analysis of various methods to teach novice writers how to master these conventions and practices of the genres within discourse communities.

The knowledge and mastery of genres is not something which is learnt in a fixed amount of time. It is an ongoing process (and sometimes a painful one as we strive to become members of discourse communities) which may take up part or the whole of one's professional career and private life. The learning[1] of genre is, in fact, part of a natural educational process which starts early in our lives by means of exposure, the initiation into the set practices conventionalized in society, the context of formal teaching and other conditions surrounding the learning experience, all of which shape the knowledge and production of generic forms.

Within the last decade, genre scholars and applied linguists have shown some interest in factors that are important in successful genre learning such as authenticity, career goals, the nature of evaluation and the sites of learning, and so on (Freedman and Adam 1996). Also, some researchers have underlined the importance of local and interpersonal factors in the enculturating process that

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[1] Here we will be using 'learning' and/or 'acquisition' interchangeably to express the process of gaining knowledge of genre.

writers go through in academic settings when they are introduced to the specific values and practices of disciplinary communities (Casanave 1995, Prior 1998). However, the study of learning conditions that can foster expertise of disciplinary genres has received little attention in research.

In this paper, we look more closely into the conditions which nurture the learning of genre in the context of the classroom, by examining how these conditions create the kind of environment needed for a useful genre-based pedagogy. We will be referring to university students (both non-native and native English speakers), by considering their need to develop awareness of generic texts in order to become competent in writing within academic and professional contexts. But before going into these conditions, let us see how this educational process for the learning of genre is achieved as part of our socialization in culture.

2. ACQUIRING GENRE KNOWLEDGE

If we are able to recognize and produce different types of communication – oral and written – it is because we have been introduced into the initial steps of the most basic genres of our childhood. Following Littlefair's thesis (1991), we learn how to read, as children, from narrative: we listen to stories, watch films and TV. At school we also become aware of other genres in the books we are given: the literary genre (e.g. folk tales, short stories, poetry); the expository genre (e.g. guide books, text books, information leaflets); the procedural genre (e.g. instructions, forms); and the reference genre (e.g. dictionaries, maps, encyclopedias). As members of our culture, we learn and begin to use all these genres in everyday life interactions. Then, we are trained in the spoken and written forms of communication typical of our culture – daily encounters taking place in our society and accepted as conventional practices. It is in this way that culture is recreated and continued (cf. Littlefair 1991: 87).

In adult life, when we use any of the genres of particular discourse communities, it is not intuition that makes us recognize certain regularities in the oral and written texts; it is the outcome of tuition and practice of such genres in the earlier stages of life. However, not all our knowledge of written or oral genres comes from a direct explication of their forms and rules. Much of what we know about genres has been learned through a process of exposure to generic features of particular texts without a conscious and defined explanation of forms, rules and conventions of particular discourse communities.

Research has shown that novice writers, exposed to school genres such as the 'narrative', have inferred the appropriate schema for writing stories without any explicit rules, only with the basis of their own reading or hearing stories told or read aloud. This schema was then internalized and became part of their tacit knowledge as they performed their writing tasks in the context of the classroom (cf. Freedman 1994: 196). The same has been shown with groups of undergraduate students that have been immersed in a definite context (e.g. Law studies) established through lectures, assigned readings, questions posed in seminars, and classroom interaction. As a result, they were able to produce a genre or subgenre typical of that discipline and "through

this writing they enacted the ways of thinking and the ways of identifying, delimiting, construing and approaching phenomena characteristic of this discipline" (Freedman 1994: 201). They wrote the assignments with no attempt to formulate the rules and with no prior formal instruction of the genre. In this way, their output was shaped by the whole context created in the classroom, which provided the right cues to enable them to learn the new genre in an unconscious, inductive way.

Other pedagogical experiences also show how graduate students came to learn specific genres in an academic setting through a process of negotiation between the teacher's sense of a given genre (e.g. the mini-review) and the student's understanding and re-working of that genre. Rather than focusing on form and models to be copied by students, lecturers provided an implicit teaching method through repeated social situations created in the classroom (discussions, impromptu writing, sequencing reading and writing activities, etc.), which helped learners to develop a particular way of reasoning and understanding within a given genre (cf. Herrington and Moran 2005: 250-2).

The question that now arises is one which has been lately raised by researchers and genre theorists regarding the acquisition of genre knowledge (Bazerman and Paradis 1991,; Williams and Colomb 1993, Fahnestock 1993, Freedman 1994): whether genres are learnt in an explicit or implicit way. It is not the purpose of this paper to go into this debate. However, it is important as background information to give a quick overview of the latest thinking on this question.

What has emerged from this controversial issue is a number of studies reported by teachers in an academic context in which genre has been presented as *situated* within specific classrooms (Pace and Middendorf 2004, Herrington and Moran 2005). These courses, centered on a genre-based approach across disciplines, have shown that the learning of genre is both an explicit and an implicit process. From these classroom studies and others reported recently on genre instruction, it can be said that explicit teaching, such as the explanation of textual features and the use of models, is crucial to learning although it is not definitive. Some genre knowledge always remains tacit (cf. Soliday 2005: 66 and 80). Implicit learning, on the other hand, is also an essential constituent of the learning process through immersion in a social situation like the examples of the narrative and the Law class described by Freedman (1994) above, in which the learning of genres was done through classroom immersion in task-analysis, sequencing assignments and providing feedback. Yet it cannot be affirmed that, through these informal methods, apprentice learners will come to master the genres essential to the particular disciplines (see Williams and Colomb's 1993 response to Freedman's brief article (1993) against the explicit teaching of genre). To what extent one of these ways – implicit or explicit – outweighs the other in genre acquisition depends upon each individual and the learning context surrounding one's experience as well as the amount of exposure to these categorised texts in the situations in which they occur in society[2]. However, we can say that both of these approaches will overlap in a teaching/learning environment (see studies in Herrington and Moran 2005).

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[2] Casanave (1995) quotes several authors whose studies deal with the local, personal and interactive nature of the learning context of undergraduate and graduate student writers. From their studies, she refers

As a teacher of written genres in an academic context, the author sees the importance of providing an explicit approach without overlooking the effectiveness of other teaching methods. These methods make students aware of key discourse features of written texts and expose them to classroom situations (e.g. lectures, assignments, discussions, etc.), which help them build their knowledge of a genre implicitly and integrate this knowledge into their own schema. This position is in line with the current pedagogy of several genre theorists and ESP practitioners (Bhatia 1993, Belcher and Braine 1995, Johns 1997, Hyland 2004), who hold that an explicit instruction of genres helps students focus on their prototypical features and, once they gain experience and acquire the prototypes, they are able to create texts that go beyond the rule-bound regularities governing those genres (e.g. writing the abstract or the introduction preceding the research paper or composing a resumé). This is carried out by providing opportunities for students to analyse and work on given models, raising their awareness of language forms and functions within a particular genre, analysing tasks of genre exemplars and repeatedly producing written texts by applying the rules and conventions of specific genres. The steps involved in this approach are the following (cf. Dudley-Evans 1994, Belcher and Braine 1995, Johns and Swales 2002):

— Identifying or exploring the genres students will need to write in an academic or workplace environment.

— Analysing the typical features of key genres in those environments (rhetorical and linguistic).

— Understanding the way these genres achieve a particular purpose – recognised by members of a discourse community – as they are addressed for a particular audience and employed in a particular culture.

— Relating this knowledge of the specific practices of discourse communities to the learners' own knowledge gathered from real-life interactions in authentic academic or professional contexts.

— Shaping their own writing skills to fit in with the discourse of a particular community in order to become participants in such a group.

This kind of analysis and awareness-raising method creates occasions for students to practise the steps involved in understanding and acquiring knowledge of particular types of texts and receive feedback in the learning process. It provides

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to the clash or gap that sometimes exist between the learners' personal voice and the ways of knowing and 'doing' in the academic world. In some of the cases presented, she calls attention to the conflict posed to learners: how they rely on general implicit learning through exposure as well as direct instruction in writing disciplinary genres to adapt their discourse as the situation requires (see studies of Berkenkotter, Huckin and Ackerman 1991 as well as Prior 1991).

them with useful information about features and conventions of communicative texts such as the abstract, the report or the job application letter, thus developing an understanding of the genres they may encounter in academic and professional settings.

But in order to raise this awareness of genre and enhance students' involvement in their learning, certain conditions have to be fostered. In the next section, we shall discuss how these conditions may be pursued in the classroom so that a favourable learning environment for genre acquisition is created.

3. CREATING A FAVOURABLE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR GENRE ACQUISITION

If students are to engage in a higher level of learning (e.g. critical thinking skills and constructing knowledge meaningfully) and if they are to respond to the new discourses within each community, they need to be involved in the learning process as 'active participants'. At the simplest level, this active participation means not just producing a piece of written work with a set of explicit rules, but increasingly developing an implicit understanding of the community and the culture in which the new forms are used. For this to occur, it is necessary to provide the space and tools for learners to explore, experiment and gradually adapt their writing to the rhetorical and linguistic features of the new commnunity's discourse.

In a genre-based approach, there are a number of factors that have to be taken into account to create this environment which engages students in the learning process. Although some of these factors have been mentioned in passing in previous studies (Ellis 1990, Freedman 1994, Adam and Artemeva 2002), it is important to actively coach them to ensure that genre learning is achieved. Therefore, we will describe them as key elements in the classroom context and see how they relate to an academic setting. They can be enumerated as follows:

1. Learning has to be situated within a culture.

2. Tasks have to be meaningful and authentic.

3. Learning style should be consonant with teaching methods.

4. Proximity with the target situation helps to accomplish learning goals.

5. Motivation plays a definite role in acquisition.

6. Instructor's knowledge and accurate descriptions of the genre taught are critical for learning.

By identifying these factors, we, as teachers, can have an insight into what brings about a supportive learning environment for genre knowledge and acquisition. It is useful here to discuss each of these points separately.

3.1. SITUATED LEARNING

This comes from the model of situated cognition proposed by Brown, Collins and Duguid, based on the notion that knowledge is contextually situated and is fundamentally influenced by the activity, context, and culture in which it is used (1996: 6). This notion has had a deep influence on learning, which is now viewed as 'context specific', accomplished through a 'process of co-participation', and set in a 'particular culture'.

— 'Context specific' means that learning cannot be dissociated from the social situation where it takes place. Nor can the acquisition of conceptual knowledge be separated from context. In fact, conceptual knowledge is also situated and developed through the individual's participation in the communicative activities of daily and professional life within a culture (cf. Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995: 7).

— A 'process of co-participation' exists between teacher and learner where the former provides support and guidance for learning to progress when necessary, gradually giving the student more responsibility in the learning process until autonomy is achieved.

— The whole social context of the classroom is shaped by the teacher in such a way that all the activities taking place (lectures, seminars, peer and teamwork, readings and assignments) are oriented towards the learner and to encourage him to learn specific material. So the 'acquisition of knowledge is made within a rich discursive context' (cf. Freedman 1997: 187) that is embedded in a larger organization or institution, which in turn is immersed in a 'particular culture'. Learners are then taught how to perform and succeed in the various disciplines of a culture by reproducing the social language and register they have been using in class, which is absorbed gradually into the formal academic written language.

Therefore, if we want our students to know and compose within a particular written genre (e.g. job application letter, resumé, abstract, etc.), we should actively engage them in authentic activities that provide the context for the learning of that genre to take place. This means allowing students to participate in simulated tasks of academic writing based on real-life tasks performed in the discourse community being studied. For example, in the context of EFL teaching, we are dealing with writing in a different culture and with different discourse conventions standardized in academic or professional communities. Our students need to know how written genres operate in this new culture and in specific communities. They need to be given enough exposure and practice of these genres within the English speaking world so that they learn how to use the L2 in composing texts intimately connected to a different culture, which requires other ways of speaking, reading and writing appropriate within each community (cf. Berkenkotter, Huckin and Ackerman 1991: 193).

This view of learning as a situated activity set in a culture has its roots in a process called by Lave & Wenger (1991: 29) 'legitimate peripheral participation', by which learners approach the discursive practices of discourse communities as apprentices and ultimately gain access to the workings of that community. But it is important to understand what this authentic activity means and entails.

3.2. MEANINGFUL AND AUTHENTIC TASKS

As defined by Brown, Collins and Duguid (1996), authentic activities are most simply defined as the ordinary practices of the culture. But when these are transferred to the context of the classroom, they are transmuted and become part of the school culture (25-26). Despite the fact that they are enclosed within such a self-contained culture, classroom tasks can be shaped in such a way that they provide the contextual features needed to give meaning and purpose to what students learn. For example, in case-based learning, students construct knowledge and develop thinking and problem-solving skills by studying cases (e.g. technical, financial, legal) and producing summaries or proposals. Here, contextual elements of the activity are important because they include descriptions of the 'actors' in the activity system (e.g. a particular business or firm), their backgrounds and goals, the structure of the organization, and the cultural constraints implicit in it (cf. Jonassen 2000: 90-91). All this makes the tasks almost real and give relevance and purpose to both the learning process and results.

As our focus is on written discourse, the main aim is to develop awareness of the rhetorical and linguistic conventions of writing in English. The best way to do that is to coach the instruction of these conventions as much as possible in the 'authentic rhetorical situation' in which writers will find themselves, that is, bringing together classroom work with work-related tasks. For example, final year students can be asked to write reports based on a problem-solving situation within a specific firm where they do their work placements or even within the School system (e.g. finding out about legislation affecting the School's change of curriculum according to the European educational framework). In this way, we as teachers can introduce new discourse forms along with practices that are standardized in specific communities before the learners, so that the latter are faced with the same tasks that are characteristic of those discourse communities.

The approach we are suggesting is similar to the instruction provided to a doctoral student to enable integration into the academic or professional discourse community the student wants to join. In an essay entitled "Social context and socially constructed texts", Berkenkotter, Huckin and Ackerman (1991) examined the acculturation process of a doctoral student in the rhetoric and composition program at Carnegie Mellon University in the United States. They showed how the student learned to use appropriate written linguistic conventions in the new research community. This was done through instruction in research methods and practice in writing introductions to papers for course assignments in addition to other reading tasks in the program, all of which was followed by feedback and reinforcement on the part of the faculty.

Although we may lack the kind of expert knowledge of the disciplines that are the main focus of our students (see Spack 1988 on this view), we can still teach them the language forms and rhetorical conventions used in particular academic or professional genres. At this point, team-teaching becomes a useful teaching method, where there is collaboration between the language teacher and the content expert in course design and checking of assignments. The language teacher can consult subject instructors about materials and tasks, and also about the thinking and reasoning processes expected in the writing of particular disciplines. Then s/he can design activities that help learners develop awareness of linguistic and rhetorical conventions of various genres. This is supervised by the content expert so that the final product conforms to standard practices within the boundaries of a particular genre. Thus, students' writing can gradually show the adoption of the new commnunity's discourse (see Dudley-Evans 1995 and 2001 for the advantages of a team-teaching approach).

Another technique for coaching instruction in the authentic rhetorical situation is asking learners to examine the communities they aspire to join with the aim of: a) finding out about the types of communication that are required from members; b) finding examples of texts they will be expected to write; and c) submiting their writing not only to the language teacher but also to the experts in communities for their assessment. For this to be effective, students would first have to pass through several coursework sessions of writing. They would be expected to analyse the genres and discuss their structuring, communicative purpose, and the valid ways of reasoning within a specialist community. After that, they would be ready to bring their writings to experts and take advantage of the latters' explicit knowledge as well as beliefs of the community through discussion and advice (see Jacoby, Leech and Holton as well as Johns, in Belcher and Braine 1995). This method may be more attuned to a small group of students in an advanced stage of their writing skills (e.g. graduate students).

3.3. LEARNING STYLE

As a rule, learning style as such refers to the individual manner in which one interacts with the learning environment. It is generally assumed that students approach a learning task in many different ways (Wenden and Rubin 1987, Ellis 1989). Some learners, for instance, will be more analytic in their approach while others will be more intuitive; some learners will prefer to use written materials because they have a good visual memory, while others will prefer to hear and put things in practice. However, most learners do not know the learning mode which personally suits them best. The teacher should facilitate the most appropriate method – or a combination of methods – in accordance with learning modes and personal learning priorities (Jones 1993).

What is generally agreed upon is that when teaching methods match the learning style of students, there is a higher probability of enhancing their ability to manage their own learning while also mastering the content specific material in a course (Pask 1976). For example, student-centered methodology demands an active role

from the learners in approaching the learning task in a committed manner, by finding ways to overcome obstacles (whether linguistic, affective or environmental), monitoring their performance, and looking for any chance of practising communication in a real-world environment.

If this is set in the context of genre, making the learner's participation and contributions the focus of the experience can help instructors choose teaching strategies that promote and enhance the individual's particular approach to learning in an autonomous and skilful way. We can take the case where final year students involved in 'writing reports of their internships' within their speciality may draw on the analysis, discussions and problem-solving activities held in class about the characteristic features of that genre. Instead of prescribing or indicating generic formal rules from the teacher's central position, this discovery approach may foster the individual learners' analytical and argumentative skills in trying to make sense of their own experiences in the new context of the workplace, such as establishing relevant and non-relevant information, testing hypotheses, evaluating arguments, negotiating solutions, and so on. Therefore, by helpful prompts and guidance from the teacher, the students can be encouraged to develop a more analytical approach, which is a distinctive characteristic of field-independent learners. The aim is to develop their research abilities in report writing (e.g. analysis, synthesis, evaluation) and to forge their own identity as writers of that genre.

When this is followed by reading model reports in a particular field, analysing rhetorical structure and linguistic aspects, this kind of inductive teaching approach can raise the students' awareness of the occurrence of generic rules and conventions and should then be reflected in the reports they write. For this to occur there must be a certain time proximity between the learning of these genre features and the context in which the students will be using them.

3.4. PROXIMITY BETWEEN GENRE INSTRUCTION AND THE TARGET SITUATION

There should be a proximity in time between the teaching of genres and the opportunity for the writers to practise the linguistic and rhetorical features of the different types of discourse in real-life situations. For example, teaching professional genres to first year undergraduate students may be ineffective. They need to be exposed to relevant contexts (e.g. in the workplace or at a tertiary level) to become aware of how a report, a memorandum or a project proposal are constructed and used in specific circumstances.

Work-based projects carried out by students in the workplace as well as seminars for writers in this situation have proved to be effective because of the closeness of the educational framework and the work context (Prior 1991, Greenwood 1994, Hill and Resnik 1995). These projects (e.g. the final year project in an engineering degree) involve both content and environmental realities of the work they will be doing in a company when they finish university. So, rather than learning conventionalized genres of professional settings away from reality, they are put into a situation where they have to use the language to meet the demands made upon

them, and hence develop rhetorical and linguistic strategies to succeed in that context. Strategies, amongst many, like negotiating, formulating and reformulating plans, establishing priorities, working with several parties at a time, managing complex situations, and also the linguistic elements needed to survive in work-related environments are the learning objectives of this type of contextualised learning. As a consequence, students' results are socially embedded not in the classroom, but in the world that lies beyond it (cf. Greenwood 1994: 239).

Similarly, seminars for students at a tertiary level or in the workplace have the same effect. Discussion and analysis of the formal features of a genre and the participants' involvement in reading and writing (that are to be submitted to an academic committee or group of experts) are so close in time that learners are more prone to recognize those generic features in authentic contexts; and from the experience they will be able to incorporate this understanding into their subsequent writings (e.g. report writing resulting from students' work placements).

Although this process of apprenticeship learning seems to be very pragmatic as it is geared to satisfy primary communicative needs in the workplace, it has the drawback that mere exposure to experts does not mean that learning of the genres is guaranteed (cf. Hill and Resnik 1995: 154). It has to be accompanied by some verbal explanation of their main features and significance in specific contexts. But it is also true that teaching the features of a particular genre in the workplace may prove useful if learners are related to situations where they will be employing those types of communication, so that they can have the appropriate motivation to learn.

3.5. MOTIVATION

There is no doubt that affective factors play an important role in the teaching/learning process. The motivation and attitude of learners will determine, to a great extent, their orientation in achieving learning goals and the amount of effort they expend in this direction (cf. Gardner 1979: 197). The effort can stem from a series of intrinsic and extrinsic factors such as social pressure, good study habits, interest in the subject, desire to please a teacher or parent, and so on, which shape the direction for motivation to operate, whereas the goals that the learner has may be considered as a stimulus that strongly influences motivational patterns sustaining, in turn, the efforts required for learning (cf. Gardner 1985: 50-51).

Of course, motivation not only lies 'outside' the individual through the influence of materials, classroom tasks, and the teaching activity itself, but can also originate from the 'inside', for example, through the learner him or herself and the success experienced in the attainment of goals (Skehan 1989). Learning a genre (as in second language learning) presupposes a certain willingness or ability on the part of the individual from one ethnolinguistic community to be ready to adopt the language itself as well as the culture implicit in it (cf. Gardner 1979: 193-4). In fact, the process of mastering the genres of any given language promotes in the learners a greater understanding of the other community's culture, thus giving them future social and professional recognition (cf. Casanave 1995: 86-88). This urge for success and recognition in a social or professional environment can be the most

powerful and realistic goal for learners to acquire genre knowledge, as it inspires them to see great value in being able to communicate in the new language and have access to a different culture. Therefore, internal factors play an important role in motivating the learner to enculturate into the discourse community.

When we come to the composition classroom, methods, techniques and activities should lead to creating a real desire to communicate in the language and culture in which learners are involved. This is partly achieved by providing them with opportunities to work on genre models by means of tasks, assignments and constructive feedback provided by the instructor, as we have already explained. But if students are immersed in authentic activities (e.g. case studies and project work involving individual and group reports, interviews with staff of a company, as well as presentations of findings), this may become a strong motivational force that influences their learning efforts and creates a positive attitude towards adopting the conventions of the culture.

Teachers also have some part to play in creating motivation. Although it is not their primary task to motivate students, they can foster positive attitudes to the learning process, to the other culture's values, and also to the discourse community's norms and beliefs. They need to perceive the approach brought by students to the classroom and also manage the type of instruction that will be optimally efficient for a group of individuals –at least, to the extent that it is within their power to influence the students' choice and perseverance (cf. McDonough 1986: 160). When the teaching approach is geared towards empowering students to develop skills and strategies needed to communicate successfully in a meaningful context, this will probably result in good motivation. In order to manage this type of instruction efficiently, teachers need to be not only facilitators of learning but also guides in the social situations created in the classroom or even outside the classroom. This implies that they will not only present activities that require students to solve the problem and discover the content, but also guide them through class discussions, lectures, and assignments in the process of construing a given genre. For example, when students are asked to compose a formal covering letter and resumé for a job offer, by using internet resources in the classroom and then in the students' private study time, the teacher's role will be to help them: 1) identify multiple resources in the web; 2) orientate them through the process of composition; and 3) assess their finished work. In this way, s/he will not only channel and support the students' efforts but also encourage them to develop successful strategies to reproduce the genres.

Finally, teachers may not be specialists in the writing in other disciplines, but they are expected to be experts in instructional methods and approaches that generate the positive attitude to learn and, to a certain extent, to adopt the other community's values. For example, we can bring students to reflect on the positive effects of acquiring a more structured style of writing, which is required in English rhetoric (e.g. when writing a research paper) as opposed to the writing style of their own native language. This could involve opening their minds to other thought patterns and textual features that are highly regarded in the Anglophone culture, and more specifically within the academic community. Hence, if teachers are not insiders of discourse communities, they should at least possess an accurate knowledge and command of the genre taught.

3.6. THE INSTRUCTOR´S COMMAND OF THE GENRE

It is a truism that the role of the teacher is crucial in creating a classroom environment which facilitates and supports the learning of genre. The teacher's job is not to present a set of norms and structures of the texts under analysis but to guide and model students' ways of reasoning and thinking into the characteristic manner of a specific discipline. At the same time, the teacher will expose them to a wide range of tasks which offer opportunities for meaningful use of their linguistic resources and that enables them to gradually acquire knowledge of various genres. Thus, the teacher "shapes 'the rich discursive context' in such a way that the students learn through doing (partly in collaboration)" (Freedman 1995: 134). This is precisely the kind of shaping characteristic of other content subjects, in which learners are immersed and then asked to respond to the appropriate formal features of those disciplines.

For instance, in an economics course, students are exposed to problem-solving and case studies which require verbal interpretation of numerical data as well as particular ways of stating claims. All this is part of the rationality and distinctive mode of argumentation of this discipline in which learners become gradually involved (cf. Bhatia 2002: 38). So when they are asked to produce a piece of work, the classroom discourse they have been hearing and practising is translated into the ways of thinking and interpreting phenomena valued in that content area, which will be reflected in their own newly adopted discourse. It is in this manner that students begin to assimilate for themselves the new generic features.

However, there is always the risk for instructors of not having an accurate knowledge of the characteristic of the genres taught, especially when they are not themselves members of the specialist community. This is the case described by Harper (1991) in a research study carried out at British Columbia University, where the writing specialists did not understand the complex rhetorical role of some features of the discourse at play, and therefore the teaching was ineffective. Instruction provided by teachers in the discourse of particular disciplines has been brought into question (see Spack 1988). Spack argues that the teaching of writing in the disciplines should be left to the teachers of those disciplines and L2 English composition teachers should concentrate on general principles of inquiry and rhetoric. This approach has been criticised on the grounds that, in a classroom setting, subject teachers do not feel inclined to teach literacy skills to students. Many of them think that academic discourse conventions are self-evident and universal and, as a consequence, they focus on the content of written work rather than on form (cf. Hyland 2002: 388).

Despite the fact that language teachers may lack the expertise to teach subject specific conventions, they can still raise students' awareness of these conventions, give them opportunities for exposure to the new discourse, encourage their analyses and critique of texts and, if possible, ask for the help of instructors in other disciplines. For genre-based instruction to be effective, it is essential that the teacher's preparation and expertise of the genres taught are well grounded on principles and practices that govern the discourse of specialist communities. In the last resort, if they cannot offer this kind of expertise, they may always liaise with members of the discourse community for consultation and supervision.

4. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have briefly considered the importance of genre in writing instruction as a way to gain knowledge and participation in the discourse practices of communities. We have also seen how students can gradually be socialized into the main genres which represent socially constructed forms of communication in a culture. This process of social participation takes place through exposure to the spoken and written forms of communication established in society and as a result of tuition and practice of such genres in a formal teaching situation. Finally, it is achieved by means of the interaction with the teacher and expert members from discourse communities at university level, and beyond in one's professional life.

Nevertheless, even if genres can be learnt and practised in the classroom and in very close proximity to members and practices of discourse communities, not all forms of instruction are destined to result in effective learning. Certain conditions have to be considered that shape the right 'discursive context' in which learners will be able to acquire the linguistic and rhetorical features of specific genres. These conditions, that we have described in this paper, provide a frame of reference for learning genres and hence students are attuned to the discourse of such disciplines.

Institutional or educational constraints may prevent us from applying some of these conditions, but we must appreciate their importance to be able to create – insofar as it is possible – and support the type of learning environment in which students can become aware of and fully grasp the genres needed to succeed in professional and social contexts.

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