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A STUDY OF GENRE-BASED

ENGLISH BUSINESS REPORT WRITING

基于体裁的
英语商务报告写作研究

杨军/著

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Abstract

The present study discusses how the genre-based approach is conducted in the teaching of business English report writing. Genre approach is the one that is based on the theory of genre analysis, applying genre and genre analysis to classroom teaching. It aims to help learners command writing skills of business English report with different communicative purposes and text structures in accordance with different genres and thus improve their business English report writing proficiency. At the same time, genre approach makes learners realize that discourses are not only linguistic constructs but also socially meaningful constructs.

The book consists of 17 chapters. Chapter One states the present situation in college business English report writing and points out the significance of the study. Chapter Two is the review of relevant literature on this topic. This chapter begins with the definition of genre. In the area of linguistics, genre is a confusing concept. Among the different notions, those of Swales (1990) and John S. Martin (1984) are influential. Swales defined the genre as a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. Next, the development of genre analysis is discussed. Genre analysis is an important branch of discourse analysis. The most striking characteristic of genre analysis is its explanatoriness. Thus, genre analysis does not only employ linguistic analysis but also integrate the analysis from the aspects of psychology and sociology. It aims to study the communicative purposes and language using strategies.

There are three schools which have applied the theory of genre analysis to language teaching. One of these schools is the ESP. ESP researchers believe that English for special fields must have restrictive discourse structures, stylistic features and social functions. In the ESP, learners are taught to learn how to compose a specific discourse by analyzing the generic features of the discourse. Swales, the representative of the ESP, has used move analyses to describe organizational patterns in genres.

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Another school is New Rhetoric. In this field, genre researchers have been more concerned with the situational context in which genres occur. Sunny Hyon (1996) conducted a teaching experiment which included five procedures and gained a satisfying result of teaching practice. The last school is Australian school which is largely characterized by systemic functional theory. This school has proposed several practical models in teaching writing. Cope and Kalantzis (1993:11) put forward a wheel model which has three phases: modeling, joint negotiation of text and independent construction. They believe that the teacher can begin from any phase if it is necessary because writing isn't a linear process from their view points.

Based on the genre analysis and the three schools, the author puts forward a practical genre-based model in the teaching of business English report writing to prove its effectiveness in improving learners' writing proficiency in the very beginning of the third chapter. Six teaching procedures are involved: modeling, group discussion, imitating, drafting, revising and final drafting.

Then the results of pre-test and post-test are analyzed by T-test to investigate whether there is a significant difference in writing performance between the experimental class and the control class.

The experiment was carried out from September of 2013 to January of 2014, lasting one academic semester. The participants are 60 non-business English major sophomores who come from two classes of Hainan Normal University in Haikou City. One class was chosen at random as the experimental class, the other as the control class. It was the same teacher who taught the two classes. A pre-test was conducted before the teaching treatment to see whether the learners in the two classes were at the same level of writing competence. Besides, a questionnaire was given to all the subjects to find out their attitudes towards business English report writing. The results showed that most subjects held a negative attitude towards business English report writing and the two classes were at the same linguistic level. In the teaching experiments, the product approach was implemented in the control class, while genre-based approach was conducted in the experimental class. After one term's teaching treatment, a post-test was taken in both classes to examine the two classes' writing ability. Another questionnaire and an interview were conducted in order to make further analysis of genre approach.

The results of the post-test are as follows: on word selection, collocation, content

and organization, the learners in the experimental class outperformed those in the control class, but on grammar, the control class outperformed the experimental class; learners in the experimental class significantly improved their overall writing quality. It can be inferred that genre approach is more effective than product approach in improving learners' business writing competence, especially on word selection, collocation, organization and content. Although product approach is less effective than genre approach, we can not neglect its effect on improving learners' grammar accuracy which genre approach failed to do. In Chapter Three, it also analyzes the data and discusses briefly the results of the empirical study.

Chapter Four defines what a business report is and identifies the types and uses of business reports. Chapter Five outlines the structure of a report. Chapter Six identifies the readers of business reports. Chapter Seven studies the usual procedures in composing a report. Chapter Eight focuses on ways of research for supporting data used in a business report. Chapter Nine contributes to questionnaire-designing. From Chapter Ten to Chapter Twelve, the three main parts of a business report (introduction, findings, conclusions and recommendations) are being explicitly explained and discussed. Concerning the technical devices in a business report, such as resources in Chinese, formatting, language issues and types of visuals, the next four chapters put forward some suggestions. Chapter Seventeen is the conclusion of the whole book, summarizing what have been found in the present study. The major findings are: genre-based approach helps learners develop their interest in business English report writing; genre-based approach enables learners to enhance their audience awareness as well as genre awareness. Subsequently, the teaching implications are as follows: 1. Teachers should be encouraged to play multiple roles in business English report writing teaching. 2. Teachers should advocate learners' cooperative learning. 3. More exercises should be prepared at the modeling stage. 4. Teachers should look for more various and authentic texts of certain genres. 5. Genre approach requires teachers to constantly equip themselves with comprehensive knowledge. 6. Teachers should integrate genre approach with product approach. However limitations are taken into consideration as well. For instance, genre-based approach has little influence on learners' grammar accuracy, the teacher was not able to provide sufficient texts of different genres in the teaching experiment, and the raters might have a subjective change.

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Chapter 1

Overview of the Study

1.1 Background of the Study

In most Chinese colleges, of the four basic skills of business English learning (reading, writing, listening and speaking), writing receives the least attention. For the business English majors, business English report writing course is given only 4 periods per week on average for two semesters at the most. The situation is much worse for non-business English majors in Chinese colleges, for there is no special business English report writing course designed for them.

Since BEC (Business English Certificate) was carried out in 1993, students' overall business English competence has been improved. Nevertheless, writing is still a weak point in business English report writing. For English teachers, it seems significant for them to find an effective approach improving this course. Unfortunately, there is no well-developed business English report writing pedagogy in China. Therefore, it is important and necessary for researchers and teachers in China to study foreign advanced teaching methodologies so as to help learners improve their business English report writing competence.

Research in L2 (Second Language) writing has gone through the past few decades. Since the early 1970s, product approach had dominated much of the writing teaching in

EFL (English as a Foreign Language). It focused on the final product of writing: the essay, the report, the story and what that product should "look" like. Students were required to produce writing according to the models, which were paid much attention under product-based class. A list of criteria were taken into consideration when students' compositions were marked by teachers. Since the product approach emphasized correctness in the text, there was no enough attention paid to social context in which the texts were produced (Badger, 2002). In the mid-1970s, the process approach became a focus due to the limitations of the product approach. Unlike product approach, process approach viewed writing as a process not a product. It explored the nature of writing, which enabled students to know how a piece of good writing was produced. Process approach placed its emphasis on the composing process such as prewriting, drafting and revising. It led to a shift in perspective from a view of writing as a linear process to the recognition of its recursive nature. Nevertheless, people found the weaknesses of process approach as well, and then began to explore new findings.

Compared with the two approaches mentioned above, genre approach is relatively a new concept. Genre approach has been pretty popular in Australia and North America in the past 20 years. Under genre approach, the teacher begins to present the situation of a certain genre of writing and then instructs learners to compose compositions with the help of model texts, teachers and their peers.

1.2 Aim and Significance of the Study

The present study targeting 60 non-business English major seniors attempts to prove the effectiveness of genre approach to writing competence. An experiment has been conducted through several procedures like questionnaire, pre-test, post-test, interview and teaching experiment. In view of theoretical significance of the study, it is supposed to provide a pedagogical theory relevant to the genre-based teaching of business English report writing. With regard to the practical significance of the study, the study makes an effort to solve EFL learners' report writing problems and enhance their writing competence.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Genre-based Writing

2.1.1 Definition of Genre

The concept of genre, which has been so prevalent in literature, sociology, and rhetoric for a long time, starts assuming importance in linguistics only recently. "Genre analysis requires inputs from a variety of disciplines to describe, interpret, and explain the rationale underlying various professional and academic genres." (Bhatia, 1993:13) But the question of what is a genre has to be answered first in order to proceed to analyze a specific genre. A number of definitions have been influential: for Martin (1984, cited in Fang Yan, 1998), he described that "genre is a staged purposeful social process through which a culture is realized in a language". According to Swales (1990), "Genre is a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences the constraints

choice of content and style".

There are several features in the above-mentioned definitions, which are highly distinctive and relevant in characterizing a genre. Bhatia (1993: 13–15) elaborated on them in the following aspects:

Firstly, a genre has a set of communicative purposes. Although there are a number of other factors, like content, medium or channel, audience and so on, that influence the nature and construction of a genre, it is primarily characterized by the communicative purposes that it is intended to fulfill.

Secondly, a genre is a highly structured and conventionalized communicative event. Specialist members of any professional or academic community are generally credited with the knowledge of not only the communicative goals of their community but also the genre structure in which they regularly participate as part of their daily work. It is the cumulative result of their long experience and/or training within the specialist community that shapes the genre and gives it a conventionalized internal structure.

Thirdly, a genre displays constraints on allowable contributions of the participants. This means that although the user of a genre has a lot of freedom to use linguistic resources in any way he or she likes, the user must conform to certain standard practices within the boundaries of a particular genre.

To sum up, each genre is an instance of successful achievement of specific communicative purpose using conventionalized knowledge of linguistic and discourse resources. Correspondingly, the primary concern of genre analysis consists of two parts: "first, to characterize typical or conventional textual features of any genre-specific text; and second, to explain such a characterization in the context of the social-cultural as well as the cognitive constraints operating in the relevant area of specialization, whether professional or academic." (Bhatia, 1993:16) With these as its primary objectives to achieve, genre analysis shall inevitably draw upon insights from other disciplines, which, as a result, make genre analysis a multi-disciplinary activity.

2.1.2 Genre Analysis

Any study of language, or to be more specific, text at a level above the sentence is a discourse study. This may involve the study of cohesive links between sentences, of

paragraph structure of the whole text. The results of this type of analysis make statements about how texts work. However, the focus of this text analysis is on the regularities of structure that distinguish one type of text from another. Regarding business written discourse going to be discussed later, studying the regularities of structure and features of English used in professional settings turns out to be at this level. This is genre analysis and its results focus on the differences between text types, or genres, like business letters with different communicative purposes.

Bhatia (1993) distinguished two broad types of discourse analysis, i.e. discourse analysis as description, and discourse analysis as explanation. "Discourse analysis as description typically concentrates on the linguistic aspects of genre construction and interpretation, in an attempt to answer the question: Why do members of a specialist community write the way they do?"

Seen from this point of view, discourse analysis as description seems to bear its own limits. Firstly, it lacks adequate information about the rationale underlying various discourse types, which means insufficient explanation of social-cultural, institutional and organizational constraints and expectations that influence the nature of a particular discourse-type. Secondly, it pays little attention to the conventionalized regularities in the organization of various communicative events. For this reason, we need another model of discourse analysis, particularly in the field of ESP, which is rich in social-cultural, institutional and organizational explanation, and can highlight variation between different discourse types rather than uniformity in functional language use; a model which is "not seen as an extension of grammatical formalism but is truly applied in nature, in this sense that it requires minimum the conventional aspects of language use." (ibid.) One such model which is called "Genre analysis" has been proposed by Swales.

Genre analysis as an insightful description and explanation of academic and professional texts has become a powerful and useful tool to arrive at significant form-function correlations that can be utilized for a number of applied linguistic purposes, including the teaching of business report writing.

2.1.3 Development of Genre Analysis

During the past decades, discourse analysis has steadily progressed from the

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