

Developing Discipline-specific Discourse Competence in Academic Writing: the Need for a Pedagogy of Genre

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ملخص

هذا المقال المنتمي إلى مجال تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الأكاديمية يشير إلى أن تدريس الكتابة الأكاديمية ينبغي أن يحتل مكانا مركزيا في مناهج تدريس طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية من خلال إشراك جميع أساتذة وحدات ومواد المنهاج في مهمة مشتركة الهدف منها هو التطوير التدريجي لدى الطلاب لكفاءة كتابية متخصصة تمكنهم في النهاية من فرض أصواتهم كمؤلفين في المجالات التي يتوون التخصص فيها في النظام الجديد المبني أساسا على مبدأ التخصص المتدرج.. إن أول خطوة نحو تحقيق هذا الهدف هو اعتماد النهج القائم على النوع في تصميم و تدريس برنامج مادة الكتابة الأكاديمية .

Abstract

This article located in the field of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) argues that writing should occupy a central place in the English curriculum through engaging all the teachers of the writing course and the teachers of the content modules in a joint enterprise the aim of which is the gradual development of students 'disciplinary-specific discourse competence that enables them ultimately to assert an authorial voice in the specific academic disciplines for which they bid entry in an L.M.D. system built on the principle of gradual specialization. The first step towards achieving this goal is the adoption of the genre-based approach in the design and the teaching of the writing course. The present article reviews a number of approaches to the teaching of academic writing so as to demonstrate the relevance of this pedagogic innovation centered around the notion of genre, which provides us with a more composite picture to operationalize the different aspects of discourse competence in academic writing.

Introduction

Writing is relatively a recent development in the long archeologically proven history of mankind. But its invention around 3000 BC marked a dramatic turning point in mankind's development that has shaped the path of its progress and governed its destiny ever since. Almost two thousand years ago, the great Chinese writer ,Lu Chi realised the power of the written word-as a permanent record, as a form of expression and as a means of communication that transcends time and space. '*Behold now the utility of letters...*

It extends over a thousand miles and nothing can stop its course;

It penetrates a million years, the ferry from one to the other...'

No wonder ,then, that Allah's, the almighty, eternal miracle bearing his last message was a book ,the holy Qur'an, and that the book itself began with a revelation that raises awareness to the might of the pen, the symbol of the art of writing ,as a powerful medium for acquiring knowledge and passing it over from individual to individual, from generation to generation ,and from one cultural environment to another ,thus enabling every human being to partake in mankind's continuous accumulation of knowledge.

Read - for thy Sustainers is the Most Bountiful One

who has taught [man] [through]the use of the pen

taught man what he did not know!

The miracle worked ,as a miracle should, extraordinarily well ; it has rapidly ascended a nation of illiterates -that appreciates the magic of words and reveres good literature especially poetry to the point of worship but vastly in an oral tradition- to the leadership of human civilisation for about one thousand years before passing the torch along to Renaissance Europe. Hundreds of years later, in 1836, the English author Edward Bulwer-Lytton wrote a play about the father of the Académie Française entitled Richelieu ;Or the Conspiracy, where he coined the adage "*the pen is*

mightier than the sword". The Cardinal's line in Act II, scene II, more fully says:

True, This! --

Beneath the rule of men entirely great,

The pen is mightier than the sword. Behold

The arch-enchanters wand! — itself a nothing! —

But taking sorcery from the master-hand

To paralyse the Cæsars, and to strike

The loud earth breathless! — Take away the sword —

States can be saved without it!

Bulwer did not only write a line that would live for ages as one critic has shortly afterwards accurately predicted but it appears to have also foreseen the fate of the great empire of Queen Victoria, who attended one of the performances, because less than two centuries later, the English empire where the sun never sets has given way to the even greater and more world dominating Empire of English. The global and globalizing role that English is playing in the postcolonial post modernist era has indeed established its status as a global lingua franca.

1. The Impact of English as a Lingua Franca on English Language Teaching

This unprecedented status is both increasing the interest in English language learning/teaching and changing the nature of ELT itself. The English for Specific Purposes movement in general, and one of its branches, EAP, in particular is leading this change. The branches of ESP are developing a pragmatic pedagogy that orientates students to issues of content. This pedagogy is based on the explicit teaching of the knowledge constructs, discourse conventions, and registers of the specific disciplines in order to enable students to write effectively in their academic assignments. A variety of options have so far been proposed in order to encourage students to engage directly with the knowledge of other disciplines: linked

courses (where teachers of English collaborate with faculty from other disciplines as they tie their writing to the discipline-based assignments /curriculum),sheltered courses (where instruction is oriented toward the discourse of the student's speciality), reading /writing courses ,and content-based instruction.Many innovations that have been sharpened in EAP :needs analysis, genre approaches, critical pedagogy are now crossing over to ELT in general and ESL/EFL writing in particular, McDonough (2005).⁽¹⁾

Writing academic English with an advanced level of discourse competence that allows one to forge an identity in an academic domain is a real challenge even for native speakers; in the case of non-native speakers of English the challenges are even far greater .In the Algerian context of higher education, the implementation of the LMD system ,the increase in the number of universities offering English as a subject of study courses, together with the significant surge in the number of students majoring in those courses have contributed to the growth in the number of would-be junior researchers aspiring to prepare master and doctorate degrees in one of the fields of specialization in English study like language sciences ,applied linguistics ,or literature and civilization. This climate of great academic expectations has led to fostering a strong demand for a more effective and needs-specific writing instruction that are much beyond the potential of the writing syllabus currently in use.

The implementation of the LMD system has brought many changes ,but these changes interesting as they are have remained largely changes in form rather than in real substance with the result that, with few exceptions, the long – awaited- for reform has been reduced to a mere conversion of the content of the modules of the old curriculum into an LMD architecture; the teaching of writing in this regard is no exception .Although this important

⁽¹⁾ McDonough,J.2005,Talking Shop Perspectives on EAP An interview with Ken Hyland ELT Journal Volume 59/1 January 2005 Oxford: OUP

module which is included in the syllabus of the three levels of the license syllabus and the final year in the master's syllabus. It is characterized by a greater time volume and coefficient than in the old system especially with the recent adoption by the ministry of higher education of the common core curriculum, which has witnessed a further increase in its time volume. This increase in the time volume allotted to the writing course, however, was not accompanied by any deep reflection regarding pedagogy and syllabus design. As a result, the initiative of innovation is totally left to the writing module teachers' individual efforts to design their own courses most often than not through adopting materials from different manuals and internet sites that have not been developed to meet the specific needs of Algerian university learners of English. The situation is even worse in newly opened departments where the course in question is often taught either by part-time teachers or in the best of cases by assistant lecturers who lack the required training and expertise to design and implement academic writing courses.

The present article argues in favor of assigning the act of writing and the writing course a central place in the English curriculum. This cannot be achieved solely through increasing the time volume allotted to the writing course, but also through the adoption of a writing syllabus type, a writing pedagogy, and a unified evaluation measure across the curriculum that are more responsive to the students' "real world" needs. The most perceived-and perhaps unique-"real world" need for almost all the students of English to use their writing skills beyond the writing classroom in the Algerian context is in the content subjects within the English curriculum itself. In these content subjects, some form of written text (e.g., essay exams, short-answer essays, research papers) is used as the only measure by which these students' academic progress is evaluated. Each subject area requires that the learners be knowledgeable not only in the content, but also in their ability to write at an appropriate level using the correct genre and rhetorical forms pertaining to the discourse community. We believe, therefore, that the

main role of the writing course should be to prepare students to perform in those subjects by focusing specifically on the tasks and genres assigned in content courses. In these content modules, the principle of the university work is based on the relationship between the oral comprehension of the course and the written production which forms the object of the essential part of the evaluation of the students. These different writings produced by students constitute a very diversified whole but in each category respond to methodological requirements, to a codification of writing, to composition rules which generate genuine textual genres. The knowledge and assimilation of these rules of production constitute a discourse competence which is at the same time cultural as well as methodological necessary for students all along their academic career. The non-respect of certain rules or methodological principles, which might be aggravated by a linguistic fragility, is more often than not a source of failure. This observed failure much complained about by the content modules is due, we believe, to the gap that exists between the writing course and writing in the content modules.

Seriously tackling the problem of bridging the gap between writing in the writing course and writing in the content modules, however, is a considerably challenging enterprise, taking into consideration the diversity of the writing productions and the number of content modules concerned, the variety of tasks and text types the students are supposed to produce make it practically impossible for the writing course to prepare the students to write equally well in all the required types of texts. Moreover, the different content modules of the English curriculum such as linguistics, sociolinguistics, literature, and civilization ...etc. represent in fact different disciplinary subjects representing discourse communities that employ different discipline-specific registers.

The author of this article holds the strong belief that bridging the hiatus between writing in the writing course and writing in content modules can be achieved via making use of some pedagogical solutions that are

conducive to the promotion of the view of teaching academic writing skills as a shared responsibility among writing teachers and content area modules across the curriculum. The first step towards achieving this goal is among the adoption of a process genre-based approach that emphasizes the cognitive, social, and the linguistic demands of the specific academic subjects in the English curriculum.

The aim of this article is to set the background for the appreciation of the contribution of the genre-based approach to teaching of academic writing. The central idea around which revolve all the elements presented in this paper is that the overall aim of the teaching and evaluation of academic writing across the curriculum should be the gradual fostering in learners of a discipline-specific discursive writing competence. In order to achieve this aim, the teachers and designers of writing course should adopt a top-down model that provides for cycles of synthesis and analysis mediated by a task-based approach in which the moves, the steps, and linguistic elements of discourse are identified by analysis and reconstituted.

The first part of this article begins by a historical review of the development of approaches to the teaching of academic writing with focus on the shortcomings as well as the contribution of each approach to the multi-faceted notion of discourse competence as a concept that accounts for the knowledge elements and skills employed by expert writers, before culminating with the consideration of genre as a notion intended to operationalize in a more comprehensive way the different elements of discourse competence for the purpose of writing instruction. The second part of the article deals with the developments of the options in curriculum and syllabus design with a special emphasis on the principles and different perspectives on the task-based syllabus design paradigm especially the socio-cultural perspective. The basic aim of this discussion is to provide the background knowledge necessary for a better appreciation of the teaching/learning cycle paradigm.

2.A. Historical overview of the development of academic writing

In the context of education, writing plays a central role because most, if not all, examinations, whether they are testing foreign language abilities or other skills, require students to manifest their knowledge relying on their writing proficiency. For learners of English in an EFL context like ours, in addition to being the single yardstick used to gauge students' development, writing in the subject areas constitutes perhaps the sole real life context for these students to use this skill beyond the writing classroom. The focal point of the writing course, therefore, should be to prepare these students to perform adequately in the subject areas.

Yet despite its importance, learning to write even in one's native language is a demanding endeavour fraught with difficulties. Unlike speaking which children learn by the time they reach the school age, learning to write effectively requires a much longer time of extensive and specialized instruction. In order to write effectively in a foreign language in academic settings, EFL learners should possess four different sets of knowledge: content knowledge and context knowledge (genre); knowledge of the language system, and knowledge of appropriate writing processes, Tribble (1996: 73)⁽¹⁾. In the context of second/foreign language writing, a range of approaches borrowed mostly from the teaching of L1 writing have been used in an attempt to respond to these needs. Two of these approaches have attracted special attention namely the process and the most recent genre approach.

2.1. The Writing Across the Curriculum Movement Approach to Teaching Writing in First Language

The Writing Across the Curriculum movement (WAC) is one of the major influential movements in teaching composition in English as first

⁽¹⁾ Tribble, C. 1996. *Writing, Language Teaching: A scheme for teacher education series*. Editors: ... OUP.

language (L2) and academic writing. The movement has started and spread in the mid 1970's in North American universities where a large number of WAC programs are currently offered.

This approach emerged in order to fill a void in the teaching of academic literacy in English as an L1 especially at the university level. The basic writing needs for students majoring in philosophy, sociology, psychology, economic, etc. are related to writing "English papers" in these disciplines; yet, most of the writing that these students are required to produce in the general English course with its focus on literature failed to meet these needs. Individual attempts by some teachers to address this issue also failed to improve students' academic writing competence because of these teachers' ignorance of the conventions specific to each academic community. Writing a lab report or a business proposal, the proponents of this approach argued, is different from writing a the common English paper or the journalistic essay genres Williams, (2003) ⁽¹⁾In order to address this sensitive issue, this approach was built on a number of observations and assumptions.

Williams (2003) summarizes this observations and assumptions as follows:

- Writing is situation specific: the sets of writings skills required depends on a the target audience and purpose.
- The teaching of various discipline specific writing conventions should be the responsibility of content-area teachers.
- Writing classes at all levels are artificial because they do not address real audiences.
- Students write papers in different academic disciplines so as to 'learn more about topics in these disciplines and to master the ways of

(1) Williams, J. D.1989.**Preparing to teach writing: research, theory, and practice** / James D. Williams.—3rd ed. 2003. New Jersey :Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

knowing ,the standards of ,proof, and the language of the disciplines.’
(op.cit,69)

Criticism to lack of academic content in the general composition course generally offered in the first year in American universities is put succinctly by Fleming (2002) cited in Williams ,(op. cit.69) . ‘The intellectual “thinness” of the first-year [composition] course has become impossible to overlook. By “thin” I mean several things at once. First, the teaching of writing at the post-secondary level is undeniably modest, the entire enterprise typically contained in a single, fifteen-week course. . . . [Also,] the first-year writing class typically lacks substance, as it usually is focused on some abstract process, skill, activity, or form, and, therefore, often lacks intellectual content. . . . [A]nd perhaps most damning of all from an academic standpoint, the course is often just plain easy. . . . (pp. 116–117)’

The major goal of this approach to academic writing is to increase students ‘motivation to write through rendering writing tasks more authentic by linking them to content area courses.

The implementation of this innovative and successful approach has been subject to a strong resistance from the part of the content area teachers in American universities and colleges. The reasons for such resistance presented by Williams (op.cit.) centered around the following issues:

- Lack of time for content-area professors to be devoted to teaching and grading writing.
- Content-area teachers do not consider themselves as teachers of writing , refuse to learn writing pedagogy, and do not consider themselves adequately prepared to teach writing.

Another serious criticism to WAC came from the proponents of critical pedagogy who accuse this approach of ‘stifl[ing] individual “voice” and perpetuat[ing] what is deemed “institutional “ writing ‘ Williams (2003:78) .By so doing ,this approach is said to promote a pedagogy that perpetuates the

dominance of the values of corporate America to the detriment of a "liberation pedagogy" in line with the postmodernist ideology.

Curiously enough ,a close examination of the very points of criticism against WAC in an English as an L1 context reveals that the very points that arose antagonism mentioned above in the L1 context are themselves the aspects that make the argument of granting a central place for writing through conceiving it as a shared responsibility across the English curriculum in our context appealing and more practical. Contrary to what the well- known English proverb says, this is really a case of one man's poison is another man's meat, if we may say. The majority of the teachers who participated in this study, for example, informed that they teach the writing course along with one or more content-area modules. Accordingly, the motivation to learn writing pedagogy is not a hindrance, but rather a point of strength here. What is needed in our context is more awareness of the existence of discipline-specific writing conventions, an effective approach to address students 'needs in this regard, and even more importantly making the gradual development of a discipline-specific writing competence as the major goal orienting writing pedagogy across the English curriculum. This pedagogy will be empowering to our students because it will ultimately grant them access to full membership the academic communities they wish to enter. Given the fact then L.M.D system is built on the principle of gradual specialization and that these students are required to write research papers, dissertations ,research articles, and so on in order to become permanent faculty staff initially and to survive and get promoted in their academic careers afterwards, then, pursuing this goal becomes legitimate.

2.2 Approaches to Teaching Writing in Second /Foreign languages

Since its emergence as a distinctive area of scholarship in the 1980s,second/foreign (SL/FL) writing has underwent a major ideological shift from *product* to *process*, and now to *genre-based writing*.SL/FL

Writing research also differs from the research tradition in applied linguistics from first language (L1) writing research. Notwithstanding, it is wrong to assume that these different theories which are usually presented as 'historically evolving movements' are opposed to or replace each other. Instead, these approaches should be more accurately viewed as 'complementary and overlapping perspectives' that enable us to grasp a more comprehensive picture of 'the complex reality of writing' (Hyland (2003:2)⁽¹⁾ Although writing classrooms commonly draw on more than one approach, a theory tend to be predominant. Classroom practice is usually conceptualized with a preference for a given focus. The different approaches, in other words, should be better viewed as different 'curriculum options', where each option organizes L2 writing teaching around a different focus:

2.2.1 Product Approaches

The product teaching of writing or focus on form can be divided into two orientations :

focus on language structures and focus on text functions.

'The first is a traditional, text-based approach which is still used in many materials-as we will see in Section Two of this book. Teachers who focus on form often present authoritative texts for students to imitate or adapt and so are likely to use textbooks which give a good range of models. They will also tend to see errors as something that they have a professional obligation to correct and, where possible, eliminate. In such a context, one of the teacher's main roles will be to instil notions of correctness and conformity.'

2.2.1 .1.Focus on Language Structures

This orientation to teaching writing emerged in the 1960s as a result of the influence of then dominant structural linguistics and the behaviourist learning theories of second language teaching. Writing is

(1) Hyland ,K. 2003, *Second Language Writing*. New York; Cambridge University Press.

viewed as a rule-based arrangement of words, clauses, and sentences. Writing is, in other words, considered as merely an extension of grammar. Writing ability is developed mainly by manipulating lexis and grammar, and this is achieved through the imitation and the manipulation of models provided by the teacher. The underlying assumption is that the imitation and manipulation of models serves as a means of reinforcing language patterns through habit formation and testing learners' ability to produce well-formed sentences.

Texts that are regarded as series of appropriate grammatical structures. "slot and filler" frameworks are used to generate sentences with different meanings by varying the words in the slots. Writing is rigidly controlled through guided compositions where learners are given short texts and asked to fill in gaps, complete sentences, transform tenses or personal pronouns, and complete other exercises that focus students on achieving accuracy and avoiding errors.

This orientation has been criticised for its reliance on the presentation of formal patterns as short fragments which are not based on the analysis of authentic texts, but rather on the intuitions of materials designers. This type of instruction does not develop the students proficiency beyond the production of a few sentences and does not assist them in writing in other situations.

Moreover, grammar teaching is not necessarily conducive to better writing. Research that has indicated positive effects of such instruction has measured students' writing improvement on the basis of formal features such as relative clauses or the "syntactic complexity" of their texts. This measures alone, however, are not sufficient to judge good writing. Student may produce accurate sentence but fail to write appropriate written texts. A small number of errors may result from a student reluctance to take risks rather from writing proficiency development.

The most serious weakness of this type of instruction is its neglect of the communicative context. Written texts are always a response to a particular communicative setting. Accordingly, it is the context that determines whether a piece of writing is good or not and not the accuracy and explicitness of sentences.

For these reasons, few L2 writing teachers now see writing only as surface forms. But it is equally unhelpful to see language as irrelevant to learning to write.

2.2.1.2. Focus on Functions

This orientation generally referred to as current-traditional rhetoric or functional approach is widely used in academic settings. It is based on the belief that language forms perform different communicative functions considered to be the means to achieving the different purposes of writing. The most relevant of these functions to the students needs are selected and taught.

This focus partly aims at helping students to develop effective paragraphs through the creation of topic sentences, supporting sentences, and transitions as well as developing different types of paragraphs. To this end, a variety of activities and tasks are used: guided writing tasks, sentence-level activities and composing tasks.

2.2.1.3. Weaknesses' of the Product Approaches

Besides their neglect of students' meanings or purposes, the product approaches have been sharply criticised for their "undue emphasis on repeating patterns, for [their] emphasis on expository writing to the virtual exclusion of all other forms, for neglecting invention, for emphasising "accuracy" over "fluency", and for idealising "style" and "form" as the most important elements in writing." Chimbanda (2001:170-171)⁽¹⁾

⁽¹⁾ Chimbanda, A B. 2001. Fostering academic writing through process and task-based approaches. SAJHE/SATH VOL 15 NO2 2001.

In Badger and White's words, "product based approaches see writing as mainly concerned with knowledge about the structure of language, and writing developments as mainly the result of the imitation of input, in the form of texts provided by the teacher." Badger and White (2000:154)⁽¹⁾

In response to these weaknesses and in quest for an effective approach to the teaching of writing which takes into account all the factors involved in the production of successful writing, efforts have been made to introduce models of writing and writing teaching that highlight writers and that are generally referred to as the process approach.

2.2.2. The Process Approach

This approach the importance of which is well established in the fields of first, second or foreign language writing articulates the role of the writer as an independent producer of texts. It aims particularly at equipping novice writers with the strategies of professional writers. These strategies consist principally of a cycle of writing activities which move learners from the generation of ideas and the collection of data through to the 'publication' of a finished text. It is precisely because of this emphasis that this newly approach has often been called *the process approach* to teaching writing skills.

The process writing models have been proposed on the basis of a significant body of research which attempted to gain a better understanding of the processes of writing through examining the different processes and stages that professional writers go through while they write. These approaches "see writing primarily as the exercise of linguistic skills, and writing development as an unconscious process which happens when teachers facilitate the exercise of writing skills." Badger and White (2000:155). Writing in process approaches is seen as predominantly to do

(1)- Badger, R. and White, G. 2000. *A process genre approach to teaching writing* ELT Journal Volume 54/2 April 2000. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

with linguistic skills ,such as planning and drafting, and there is much less emphasis on linguistic knowledge, such as knowledge about grammar and text structure. Although there is no general agreement over the stages that writers go through in producing a piece of writing , “a typical model identifies four stages: prewriting; composing/drafting; revising; and editing Tribble (1996:39).It should be noted, however, that the move from one stage to another is not a linear progression ,but rather is a discursive process in which writers may return to pre-writing activities, for example, after doing some editing or revising. In order to foster fluency and free expression in students , process methods usually postpone the focus on form to the end of the writing process Hyland (2004:7)⁽¹⁾

The focus on the writer in process approaches has yielded a range of pedagogical benefits to both teachers and students. Chief among these are matching writing tasks to the learners 'needs, encouraging creativity in very practical ways and respecting the learner's cultural background .Yet, and despite its benefits ,this approach suffers from serious flaws that brought it under criticism.

Weaknesses of the Process Approach

A number of scholars and educationalists especially those working within a genre-based framework of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) have questioned the appropriateness of a methodology which focuses primarily on the writer to fully address the needs of all learners, especially if they are learning to write in a second or foreign language. Swales (1990)⁽²⁾ calls the process approach a “soft” process because ,according to him, it protects students from the rigours of external criteria for evaluating their written product ,and proposes that the approach be replaced by a

⁽¹⁾ Hyland,K.2004, *Genre and Second Language Writing*, Michigan :University of Michigan Press.

⁽²⁾Swales,J.1990. *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*. Cambridge :Cambridge University Press.

fractured process where “the emphasis is less on the cognitive relationship between the writer and the writer’s internal world and more on the relationship between the writer and on his or her ways of anticipating and countenancing the reactions of the intended readership.” Swales (1990:220)

In the same vein, Paltridge observes that : ‘...the process approach gave students a false impression of what is required of them in university settings and, in particular, its very particular socio-cultural context and expectations “He also adds that in the process approach there is “... an almost total obsession with personal meaning” and proposes “a shift from the writing process to the needs of learners and the content and demands of academic writing .’ Paltridge (2004:95)⁽¹⁾

Last ,but not least, Hyland (2002)⁽²⁾ considers it necessary to widen our perspective beyond a single approach arguing that ‘Process theories alone cannot help us to confidently advise students on their writing, and this is perhaps one reason why there is little evidence to show that process methods alone lead to significantly better writing. Quite simply, equipping novice writers with the strategies of good writers does not necessarily lead to improvement...Students not only need help in learning how to write, but also in understanding how texts are shaped by topic, audience, purpose, and cultural norms .

While these different views do not advocate that the process approach should be completely dispensed with ,they all agree on the fact that this pedagogy has failed to provide learners in foreign language writing programmes with knowledge about the conventions and constraints needed when writing for academic or non academic readership. What learners need, then, in addition to the ability to generate texts ,is knowledge about the genre in which they wish to write ,and above all a pedagogy that

⁽¹⁾ Paltridge,B.2004.Academic writing Review Article Language Teaching 37,87-105, Cambridge:Cambridge University Press.

⁽²⁾ Hyland, K. 2002. Teaching and Researching Writing. London :Longman.

ensures a rapid access to such knowledge. And it is to the discussion of this kind of pedagogy that we will turn to at this juncture. In order to appreciate the essence and the scope of this pedagogy, we should first of all deal with the concept of discourse competence, an essential component of the more englobing notion of communicative competence.

2.2.3. The Genre-based Approach

The genre-based approach to literacy teaching has been developed in the 1980's and throughout the 1990's by the Sydney-based genre theorists (J.R. Martin, Christie, Halliday, etc...) in response at least partly to discontent with the efficacy of the then prevailing process-based writing approaches. The Sydney school proponents of this approach made the interesting distinction between genres that are personal—such as recount, narrative, moral tales, myths—and those that are factual, such as procedure, description, report, explanation and argument. Genre theorists operating in an English as a first language context argued that process-based approaches by encouraging student expression and discovery process through their emphasis on personal genres deprive students of knowledge about the relationship between text structures and social functions thus resulting in the reproduction of 'social inequality by denying traditionally marginalized students access to academic and cultural texts., Barwashi and Reiff(2010:32).⁽¹⁾ The genre-based therefore aims to equip learners via their teachers 'assistance with the capacity 'to deconstruct ,examine ,and practice salient discourse features ,and to reconstruct discourses within their own particular disciplines' in both linguistically correct and socially appropriate ways so as to foster in novice writers a discursive competence that allows

⁽¹⁾ Barwashi, Anis & Mary Jo Reiff. 2010. *Genre: an introduction to history ,theory, research and pedagogy*, West Lafayette Indiana :Parlor P

them to successfully forge 'their own authorial voice within the disciplinary community to which they are bidding for entry' Bruce (2008 :169)¹¹.

This genre-based, discourse-focused top-down approach appears to be the most suitable basis for teaching writing especially at the university level because of its incorporation and articulation of the discourse and the contextual aspects of language use that are often neglected and not adequately attended to in structural approaches .Moreover, the LMD English curriculum is based on the principle of gradual specialization as students move from one level to another in different English study disciplines -such as applied linguistics ,language science and English language teaching ,and Anglo-Saxon literature and civilization which accentuates the need for the adoption of this approach in order to empower them with the necessary knowledge ,tools ,and strategies that allows them eventually to acquire authorial membership in the academic field in which they intend to specialize. Furthermore ,increasing the transferability of writing skills from the writing course to the content modules also necessitates a convergence in the views ,teaching methods and assessment measures of content module teachers across the curriculum who should no longer be viewing themselves as teaching merely a type of content knowledge but instead as stake holders in a the same shared enterprise with writing teachers: the gradual development of a discipline-specific discursive writing competence. The success of this demanding but certainly would-be fruitful synergy depends, in my view, upon the adoption of the essay as the sole teaching and evaluation measure across the curriculum following of course the principles of the genre-based approach.

The provision of an operational definition of the notion of genre which will serve as a basis unit of a genre-based ,analytic syllabus for the

¹¹⁾ Barawashi,Anis & Mary Jo Reif. 2010. *Genre: an introduction to history ,theory, research and pedagogy*, West Lafayette Indiana :Parlor P

university-level English writing course, however, is in itself a problematic and challenging issue due to the fundamental disagreement among the existing genre-specialists schools with regard to the very nature of this object of enquiry. In the literature related to genre, three theoretical and research traditions can be distinguished: Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)(known also as the Sydney School),English for Specific Purposes (ESP),and the Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS).Drawing on the richness of the different views to genre, Bruce (2008) proposes a dual social genre/cognitive genre modal as a comprehensive way of operationalizing the elements of genre knowledge that accounts for elements of both text-the overt linguistic trace of a discourse process-and discourse-the combination of the written record and the social and cognitive operations surrounding its creation and interpretation. As far as the writing course syllabus design is concerned, Bruce (2008) suggests a gradual shift from a focus on cognitive genres in the initial levels of competence to more emphasis on social genres in the more advanced level. Genre-based writing instruction begins with the purposes of communication before moving to the stages of the texts that express these purposes following the teaching-learning cycle.

2.2.3.1. Communicative Competence and Discourse Competence

Discourse competence refers to the integration of a wide range of types of knowledge that learners use when performing the processing or representation of 'complex, structured information, such as when reading a text or performing a writing task' Bruce(2013).Drawing upon the different theoretical models that have informed the different views to communicative competence such as Halliday, Canale and Swain, and the Council's of Europe Common Framework of Reference, Bruce (2013) proposes that 'the exercise of discourse competence in academic writing involves knowledge elements from several areas, including the larger social context, including the wider academic world and the specific discipline within which the text is being created; content knowledge that is being represented within a text;

socially recognized functions and patterns of organization of whole texts ;meta-cognitive knowledge employed in the internal structuring of stretches of text that relate to a general rhetorical purpose; and, systems of the language including orthography (spelling), vocabulary, syntax and grammar which support all the above.” Bruce (2013:3).

Genre as a theoretical construct, according to Bruce(2013) , offers an effective way of ‘operationalizing the different elements of discourse competence knowledge for the purpose of writing instruction. In the same vein ,Bruce (2008) proposes a dual social genre/cognitive approach syllabus model mediated by a task-based syllabus as a basis for research and course design in an EAP context.

As far as the teaching of writing is concerned and according to Bruce (2008:6),the genre-based approach has three major strengths over the atomistic approaches to language teaching a ‘focus on larger units of language’, ‘a focus on the organizational or procedural elements of written discourse’,while allowing the possibility’ to retain linguistic components as functioning features of a larger unit of discourse’. This approach therefore appears to be at least at the theoretical level a balanced approach at all three important levels of the teaching /learning process.At the level of the view towards language or input, it addresses the intricacies of the relation between the micro-and macro-levels of textual organization as well as the functioning of texts in their social contexts. At the level of language teaching/learning pedagogy, the teaching-learning cycle based on modern theories of learning that have been inspired by Vygotsky’s powerful ideas of collaboration, scaffolding and the zone of proximal development ensures a balanced, gradual move from direct teacher instruction towards greater students’ autonomy as their writing competence and control over the genre increase. And finally at the level of students’ output and assessment, the genre-based approach contributes to the demystification of the assessment process by rendering it more objective and more accessible to the learners

through the use of transparent genre-based analytical procedures, which can be advantageous to both formative and summative evaluation and increases the skills transfer across the modules of the curriculum.

2.2.3.2. Discipline-specific Competence in Academic Writing

One of the most important contributions that genre analysis has made to teaching second /foreign language writing in EAP settings is to show that ,while academic discourse is an identifiable register, language varies considerably across disciplines and sub-disciplines. An effective way to raise students awareness to the significant differences in written texts across disciplines is through focusing on authentic texts pertaining to the genres that the students are expected to write and studying the presence and use of the features typical of these differences .The genre approaches to EAP writing pedagogy is highlight the view to academic writing 'as a situated disciplinary practice' and challenging the students wrongly held ' monolithic, universal view of academic discourse' Hyland(2004:145).

2.2.3.3. The Task-based Syllabus

For a better understanding of the genre-based syllabus model that the proponents of the genre-based approach proposed to be mediated by a task-based syllabus Bruce (2008) ,we will turn now to deal with the notion of task and task-based syllabus design .An important element in this discussion is the socio-cultural- perspective on task because this perspective provides the conceptual foundations of the pedagogy of teaching /learning cycle proposed for the implementation of the genre-based approach.

In Task-based language learning (TBL),the basic and initial point of organisation is the 'task'. Classwork is organized as a sequence of tasks, and it is tasks that generate the language to be used, and not vice versa. So, in TBL what teachers ask students to do is to carry out a series of tasks. The main focus is on the tasks to be done rather than on the linguistic forms to be used. TBL, therefore, highlights the instrumental function of language .Designing a language syllabus around tasks rather than on some linguistic

elements as has traditionally been done by predominant form-focused syllabi appeared almost thirty years ago as a very new and quite unusual innovation in a remarkably unexpected setting-state secondary school classes in Bangalore, India. But surprisingly enough, the task-based syllabus has not fallen off grace as did the earlier SLA models that have motivated and justified it in the first place, but continued instead to find justification in the new SLA models that have appeared ever since. TBL, along with the concept on which it is based 'task' attracted and is till attracting the interest of many language teachers and Second Language Acquisition researchers around the world. One of the essential attractions of TBL that may explain the continuous interest in it and its ability to survive the many SLA paradigm shifts is its flexibility: this kind of teaching/learning does not completely dismiss the previous methods but seems to incorporate many of the ideas from other methods into the tasks.

In the literature, a number of theoretical perspective on tasks can be distinguished, an important model of which, as far as the genre-based approach is concerned, is that provided by socio-cultural theory. This is premised on the claim that participants co-construct the 'activity' they engage in when performing a task, in accordance with their own socio-history and locally-determined goals, and that, therefore, it is difficult to make reliable predictions concerning the kinds of language use and opportunities for learning that will arise (Lantolf (1996)).

Task from a Socio-cultural Perspective

This perspective views the activity that arises when learners perform a task in essentially social terms. The socio-cultural framework attempts to apply a general learning theory associated with the name of the Soviet developmental psychologist Lev S. Vygotsky and which has been very influential in other domains of social and educational research to the domain of language learning. This theory that has gained extra impetus in the 1990s offers a very different perspective on tasks because it assumes

that target language interaction plays a much more important role in learning than simply enhancing the 'input' to trigger the autonomous and internal mechanisms, as claimed by the psycholinguistic perspective. Interaction itself rather than any internal processing mechanisms constitutes the learning process. In Chomskyan terms, the sociocultural perspective assumes that interaction is the language acquisition device (LAD) which is external rather than internal to the learner and that learning, accordingly, is social rather than individual.

A sociocultural theory of mind provides a number of important insights for task-based research:

- The study of dialogic interactions allows us to understand the cognitive processes the learner is internalizing.
- These interactions are the best tool for researchers to understand -for example, how scaffolding creates the contingency that makes it possible for learners to perform beyond their existing developmental level.
- Tasks are not transacted in accordance with their designers' expectations, but, they are interpreted and used by learners to construct an activity in accordance with their own particular motives and goals.
- The qualitative micro-analysis of interactions directed at understanding how learning takes place-constitutes the best methodology for studying tasks.

Ellis (2000) argued that, despite its limitations, the sociocultural perspective on tasks through emphasizing the social and cultural nature of task performance helps to redress the current psycholinguistic imbalance in SLA:

Whereas researchers in the psycholinguistic tradition have emphasised the role of the inherent task properties on performance and acquisition, socio-cultural researchers have focused on how tasks are accomplished by learners and teachers and how the process of accomplishing them might contribute to language acquisition. They view the learners, the teacher and the setting in which they interact as just as

important as the task itself. They reject attempts to externally define and classify tasks on the grounds that the 'activity' that derives from the task itself. They focus instead on how task participants achieve intersubjectivity with regard to goals and procedures and on how they collaborate to scaffold each other's attempt to perform functions that lie outside their individual abilities.. Such a perspective is both persuasive and informative, as is reflected in Swain's recent adoption of socio-cultural theory in her own research. Swain (2000) argues that a constructivist account of tasks is needed to understand how learning arises out of performance. Ellis (2000:210-211).

Sequencing Tasks and the Teaching/Learning Cycle

According to Nunan (1989), 'Syllabus design is concerned with the selection, sequencing and justification of the content of the curriculum'. Accordingly, the way to organize the syllabus to form a coherent progression of tasks should be a central issue for teachers and task-based syllabus designers alike. The literature abounds with different propositions to sequence learning tasks, but research is still far from pronouncing a final answer as to the right and effective way to sequence learning tasks. The genre-based tasks that will be used in this study will be organized following an approach to sequencing tasks, influential in genre pedagogy, and which draws on Vigotsky's (1978) views of collaborative learning and Bruner's (1986) ideas of scaffolding. This approach is based on the premise that novice L2 writers are likely to require greater support during the early stages of working with an unfamiliar genre and less later. This approach builds gradually the learners confidence and abilities to write effectively through chaining tasks in such a way as to permit the simultaneous utilization and extension of the skills learned at the previous stage. The provision of the appropriate input and the interaction with the teacher enables the learners to improve their skills through performing tasks that they are initially unable to do alone. As their ability to control the new

genre increases, the teacher gradually removes the scaffold so as to allow the learners to move towards autonomy. Hyland (2003) suggests that this approach which is often represented as a cycle of teaching and learning '...offers an explicit model of how teachers can move through successive phases of classroom tasks and interaction to develop writing abilities.' Hyland (2003:137) .The teaching-writing cycle, then, offers a principled way of selecting and sequencing writing tasks that is in harmony with the assumptions of the socio-cultural theory. ' In terms of pedagogic theory, the teaching-learning cycle draws on modern theories of learning in giving considerable recognition to the importance of COLLABORATION, or peer interaction, and SCAFFOLDING, or teacher supported learning .Most obviously, it supports learners through what Vygotsky called the 'the zone of proximal development', or the gap between their current and potential performance ...as teachers move around the cycle, direct teacher instruction is reduced and students gradually get more confidence and learn to write the genre on their own. In other words, students' autonomy increases with their writing competence as they gain greater control over the genre.' Hyland (2008:559). A typical unit of work within this approach would involve a learning cycle that begins with the examination and deconstruction of examples genres (selected authentic texts or text types) in order to raise the learners 'awareness to the organization (moves and steps) and the ways these are realized in terms of constituent linguistic features (lexico-grammar) with the aim that such types of knowledge once adequately digested and acquired will enable them to produce their own examples of the genre under study in the subsequent tasks of the learning cycle. As a means of compensating for one of the most decried weaknesses in the genre approach namely—the potential danger of stifling learners 'creativity, the learning cycle has been put forward as a pedagogy that leaves a room for linguistic skills much promoted by the proponents of the process approach ,such as planning and drafting. Such a combination between the elements of the genre-based approach and the process-

based approach provides an effective way to supplement and round out the weaknesses of both approaches. Hyland (2003),(2004), Flowerdew (1993),Badger and White (2000), Feez (1998).

Conclusion

The gradual development of L.M.D. students' discipline-specific writing competence requires a synergy of efforts between the writing course teachers ,on one hand .and the content area modules teachers ,on the other. An effective way for achieving this synergy is through the adoption of a balanced approach that addresses all the aspects of academic discourse competence. In this regard, the genre-based approach appears to be the most promising.

After briefly discussing some traditional traditions in first and second /foreign language writing pedagogy, this article has attempted to outline the essential elements of genre-based pedagogy and syllabus design. The main goal of this presentation was to raise awareness to the fact that there are a different range of academic literacy practices relevant to particular academic fields and disciplines rather than a single academic literacy. Developping students 'awareness and abilities to the intricate literacy differences of academic disciplines is conducive to rendering them better academic writers.

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