

The Impact of Genre-awareness Raising in the EFL Essay Writing Classes on Their First Language Writing

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Abstract. The current study tends to investigate whether the genre-awareness raising in the EFL essay writing classes will affect the EFL learner's L1 essay writing. There have been 40 undergraduate junior students in two EFL classes who have all been passing a course in Essay Writing at the Islamic Azad University – Islamshahr. They have been homogenized by performing a TOEFL proficiency test and have been asked to write a composition both in English and Persian on a specified topic at the beginning of the class as a pretest. They have all attended 8 sessions of treatment to raise their awareness of the genre structure of a 5-paragraph essay in English. Then, a post-test similar to the pre-test has been administered. The T-test run between the pretests and post-tests in English and Persian indicates the fact that the EFL learners' essay writing has improved regarding the genre structure of their 5-paragraph essays (sig. = .006, $p < .01$ & sig. = .032, $p < .05$). The correlation between the English and Persian post-tests (0.85), on the other hand, demonstrates a high relationship between the two variables. Since there has been no other variables involved in the improvement of the EFL learners' use of genre structures in their Persian essays – mostly based on the subjects' negligence of such structures in their pre-test in their native language, we can conclude that the genre-awareness writing process in English essay writing has significantly influenced the EFL learners' Persian essay writing. That is, unlike other features of a foreign language, the genre structures as a sort of IDFs are transferable from one language to another through awareness raising.

Key words: Genre, Genre awareness, Awareness raising, IDF

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Purpose

Genre, as a superior level of language that impacts on the other layers of language, has become of great concern since last decade. Despite many successful research in this regard, the nature of genre is still under question due to its abstract essence. That is, it is still vaguely obscure whether genre structures are parts of the language itself or indeed components of the interlocutors' rationale to achieve their communicative purposes.

On the other hand, Fairclough (1992) states that the Critical Language Studies (CLS) deals with "how language conventions and language practices are invested, with power relations and ideological processes which people are often unaware of." He further views social institutions as containing diverse 'ideological-discourse formation' (IDF's) associated with different groups within the institution. Each IDF is a sort of speech community (or in case of genres, discourse community) with its own discourse norms, embedded within and symbolized by its own "ideological norms." Institutions are constructed in accordance with the norms of an IDF. A dominant IDF, on the other hand, has the ability to 'naturalize' ideologies, that is, to win acceptance for them as non-ideological "common sense". Moreover, "orderliness of interactions depends in part upon such naturalized ideologies." (Fairclough, 1995, p. 27) To 'denaturalize' them is the objective of a discourse analysis

which adopts critical goals, such as genre analysis. In his view, ‘denaturalization’ involves showing how social structures determine properties of discourse and how discourse in turn determines social structures.

The main problem attacked by the current research is whether such genre structures are in fact transferable from one language into another language within some awareness raising procedures. That is, if the Iranian EFL learners are familiarized with the genres structures within a specific genre, say an ordinary five-paragraph essay, will they follow the same structure in the same genre in their native language as well. And can we probably conclude that such awareness of genre structures (as a sort of IDF) affects the way people think, most freely in their own mother tongue?

1.2. Research Questions

The present study is going to investigate the following question to find out whether discourse properties can manipulate social ideologies and institutions or not:

Are the genre structures (as a sort of IDF) transferable from one language to another language? That is, does the genre awareness raising in the EFL classes impact on the EFL learners’ native language genres as well?

1.3. Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

The subjects of the present study have all passed a paragraph development course but are assumed not to be familiar with the structure of a five-paragraph essay neither in English nor in Persian, which has been checked through pre-testing. It has been assumed that gender and age are not intervening factors in the genre structure awareness. Moreover, the present study focuses on a single genre, which is practically written and more thought-provoking in nature, leaving out the possibility of the replication of the study for other forms of genres as well.

2. Genre

2.1. Genre Definition

On the basis of the concept of the discourse community, the definition of genre is specified by Swales (1990). He observes the following characteristics necessary for every genre in professional and academic settings:

A genre comprises 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 a rationale for the genre. . . . In addition to purpose, exemplars of a genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content, and intended audience. If all high probability expectations are realized, the exemplars will be viewed as prototypical by the parent discourse community. The genre names inherited and produced by the discourse community and imported by others constitute valuable ethnographic communication ... (p. 58)

In this research, we are mainly dealing with the genre structure of a 5-paragraph essay. Figure 1 illustrates the moves and steps which have to be considered while writing a 5-paragraph essay in English. These moves and steps are to be taken into consideration in every kind of 5-paragraph essays in English, based on Baily and Powel (1989).

Introduction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivator (can be broad statements, contrasting ideas, relevant ideas, anecdotes, questions, or quotations) • Thesis (contains the main idea of the whole essay) • Blueprint (a preview of what will appear in the body paragraphs)
First central paragraph
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic sentence (includes a transition, a reminder of thesis, a main idea) • Some supporting sentences (can be in form of examples, details, facts, statistics, anecdotes, etc.)
Second central paragraph
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic sentence • Some supporting sentences
Third central paragraph
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic sentence • Some supporting sentences
Concluding paragraph
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reworded thesis • Clincher

Fig1. The genre structure of a five-paragraph essay (adapted from Baily & Powel, 1989, pp. 60-65)

2.2. Genre Analysis

The main purpose of genre analysis is to describe the functional and/or conventional moves the authors utilize to perform appropriately in their discourse community since it is believed that “the description of form tends to become the prescription of norms” (Ongstad, 1992).

On applying the genre awareness raising in the EFL/ESL classrooms, Flowerdew (1993) suggests six types of activities to contribute to a process approach to the teaching of genres:

- Using the results of genre analysis.
- Metacommunication (talking about instances of genre).
- Learners doing their own genre analysis.
- Concordancing.
- ‘On-line’ genre analysis by learners as an aid in creating their own texts.
- Translation based on a sample of instances of a given genre.

(p. 309)

3. Method

3.1 Subjects

There are 40 undergraduate junior students in an EFL class who are all passing a course in Essay Writing at the Islamic Azad University – Islamshahr. They have all passed a TOEFL proficiency test in order to make sure they are homogeneous ($r = 0.78$). They have all attended a pretest which includes writing two five-paragraph essays, one in English and one in Persian (their native language), on two given topics from IELTS sample exams. After about 8 sessions of instruction, which involves some genre-awareness raising activities on the genre structure of an ordinary five-paragraph essay, the subjects have attended a post-test which demands them to write two five-paragraph essays again, both in English and in Persian on two other given topics.

3.2 Instrumentation

A standardized proficiency test of TOEFL has been applied in order to test the homogeneity of the class and subjects ($r = 0.78$). Also, there are a pre-test and a post-test in the current study. The pre-test includes writing two five-paragraph essays, one in English and one in Persian, on two specified topics in a limited time. The topics in English are chosen from a general IELTS writing task

and almost close to the Persian ones in orientation. The post-test consists of writing two five-paragraph essays again both in English and in Persian on two given topics, chosen from some almost identical IELTS writing tasks.

3.3 Procedure

The subjects all attend 8 sessions of instruction which raises their awareness of the genre structure in an English five-paragraph essay. Before the instruction, their writings in English and in Persian have been tested to discover whether they observe the genre structure either in English or in Persian. Their essays are scored by two raters having a correlation of 0.71 based on the moves and steps undertaken in a 5-paragraph essay both in English and in Persian. (Figure 1)

During the treatment, the subjects have performed some useful tasks, counted by Flowerdew (1993) in order to raise their awareness of the genre structure of a five-paragraph essay in English. They have performed some descriptive, comparative, and productive genre analysis as well as some typological studies of the same genre in various forms, such as expository, argumentative, comparison-contrast, and cause-result. Their writings have been corrected and given feedback by the instructor, especially on observing the genre structure in English, but nothing has been mentioned about the genre structures in Persian.

After the 8-session instruction, their writings on the post-test topics are assessed by the two independent raters again based on the genre structure of a five-paragraph essay in order to find out whether they have applied those genre moves and steps either in English or in Persian. (Figure 1) The question is whether the genre-awareness in English has influenced the Persian writing of the EFL learners or not.

3.4 Data analysis and results

The results of the descriptive statistics on the English Pretest and Post-test as well as the Persian Pretest and Post-test have been paired and indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Paired Samples Descriptive Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	English Pretest	14.0000	20	2.67542	.59824
	English Post test	14.5500	20	2.35025	.52553
Pair 2	Persian Pretest	14.7500	20	2.29129	.51235
	Persian Post test	15.1500	20	2.28323	.51055

A paired T-test has been applied in order to find out if there is any statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pretests and post-tests as well as between the means of the English and Persian post-tests. The low standard deviation and SEM adds up to the reliability of our subjective tests. Table 2 demonstrates the results of the T-test run between the paired groups.

Table 2. Paired Samples T-test

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	English Pretest - English Post test	-.5500	.79306	.17733	-.9212	-.1788	-3.101	19	.006
Pair 2	Persian Pretest - Persian Post test	-.4000	.77119	.17244	-.7609	-.0391	-2.320	19	.032

As it has been indicated in Table 2, since the significance between the English Pretests and Post-tests have been .006, we can say that the difference between the mean scores of the two tests before and after treatment has been statistically significant ($p < .01$), signifying the fact that the genre-awareness raising has significantly influenced the EFL learners' essay writing, at least as far as genre structures are concerned. The significance degree between the Persian Pretest and Post-test (.032) illustrates that the difference between the two tests before and after the treatment is also statistically significant ($p < .05$). It proves that the Persian speakers have observed the English genre structure in their Persian essays to some 95% extent after the genre-awareness raising.

Later, the correlations between the scores obtained from the pretests and post-tests have been calculated. Mainly the correlation between the English Post-test and Persian Post-test has been computed in order to illustrate the relationship between the scores obtained from the two tests. Tables 3, 4, and 5 clearly illustrate the correlation between the pretests and post-tests as well as the English and Persian post-tests in Table 5.

Table 3. Correlation between the English Pretest and Post-test

		English Pretest	English Post test
English Pretest	Pearson Correlation	1	.958(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	20	20
English Post test	Pearson Correlation	.958(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	20	20

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4. Correlation between the Persian Pretest and Post-test

		Persian Pretest	Persian Post test
Persian Pretest	Pearson Correlation	1	.843(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	20	20
Persian Post test	Pearson Correlation	.843(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	20	20

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5. Correlation between the English and Persian post-tests

		English Post test	Persian Post test
English Post test	Pearson Correlation	1	.852(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	20	20
Persian Post test	Pearson Correlation	.852(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	20	20

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The highly significant correlation between the English and Persian post-tests demonstrates the very fact that there is a relationship between the scores obtained from the Persian and English essays;

that is, since there has been no treatment on Persian genre structure, which has been considered as a dependent variable in this experiment, the only effect which seems accountable is the genre-awareness raised by the treatment on the English genre structures. In other words, the awareness-raising process in the English essay writing classes positively and significantly affects the EFL learners' essay writing in their native language.

4. Conclusion

The results of the current study demonstrates that genre awareness in one language can be transferred to another language; that is, raising the EFL learners' awareness of the genre structures (as a sort of IDF, in Fairclough's terminology) can indirectly impact genre structures (IDFs) in their native language. According to Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, "each language imposes on its speakers a particular world view" (Brown, 2005, p. 38), learning a foreign/second language can affect the world views (IDFs) of the first language based on the outcomes of the current research. Therefore, genre awareness – and possibly any kind of awareness at the higher suprasentential levels – are transferable from one language to another language, organizing and influencing the L1 speakers' thoughts, ideas and world views (what does not occur at the lower levels of language such as sentence level). We can then conclude that learning a foreign/second language is indeed constructing a new window or world view in the language learners' souls and thoughts rather than their native views and attitudes. In other words, a new language is a new world.

5. References

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