

Genre Analysis and its Potential Application for the EFL Classroom

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ABSTRACT

ジャンル分析は特定の文脈の中で言語がどのように使用されているかを追求する研究である。文脈とは、ビジネス場面での対応、論文の執筆、会議、そして日常の場面で使用される言語を含むが、それらに限定されるものではない。言語学、人類学、社会学、そして心理学の分野からの口語、筆記、そして絵や写真の内容から考察する複合的研究方法である。ジャンル分析は使用される文法、語彙の共通のパターンと、一定の文の組み立てに注目する。過度に規定的であると批判的な指摘があるが、実用的な記述を提供することができるモデルとして、第二言語としての英語教育の場面では重要な役割を果たしている。原本に対するジャンル分析を述べた後、今後の発展の可能性のある教授法として検討する。この論文は日本の大学で writing クラスの教育法としてジャンル分析の使用の考察である。

1 Genre analysis and language education

Genre analysis has been used as an educational tool for language for both native and non-native speakers. There are two schools of genre analysts. One based on the work of Halliday, the functional systemic school (or Sydney School) was developed to help both native and non-native speakers within the Australian school system. An example of this is that of J. Martin and his work on written genres in the secondary school setting in Australia. The other school, known as the ESP or EAP school (English for Specific Purposes and English for Academic Purposes), is interested in the using genre analysis in the field of TEFL or TESL. Work in the ESP school has been done by Dudley Evans, Swales, and Bhatia. Both schools were developed to cater to student writers. Brown(2001: 302-03) provides a list of 25 different written genres and argues that part of the job of a teacher is to 'enlighten...students on features of these genres and to help them to develop strategies for extracting necessary meaning from each'.

2 Authentic Texts and EFL teaching

For this paper a letter to the editor published in the Readers in Council section of the Japan Times, one of the four major English newspapers in Japan, was chosen to be analyzed. As a text letters to the editor are usually written by readers of the newspaper, addressed to the editor, and signed and delivered, by post or e-mail, to the paper. According to the definition of an authentic text, one "not originally developed for pedagogical purposes"(Richards and Schmidt, 2002: 42), a letter to the editor clearly qualifies.

2.1 General Characteristics of the text

Letters to the editor, in general, have the same layout. The author's name and the city they reside in at the top followed by the text and a note from the editor at the bottom stating that the views of the letter are that

of the writer and not that of the newspaper. The chosen text, Text 1, is notably short, under 200 words, and shares many of the same characteristics of other letters to the editor found in the Japan Times. An extensive review of letters to the editor in the Japan Times revealed a variety of reasons for writing by the authors. Found in a review of the letters over a six month period were comments on an article published in the paper or a past letter to the editor, on issues a reader wished to bring to the attention of other readers, and on local events, happenings, and experiences.

In addition to the text analyzed in this paper another letter to the editor to be used in a proposed lesson plan to be discussed later in the paper was also analyzed. Due to the scope of this paper a detailed analysis of this text could not be included. This text, Text 2, is also notably short, 192 words and shares many of the characteristics of Text 1.

A letter to the editor fits under the categories of non-fiction and letters in Browns list of 25 genres. However, it can be argued that the category of letters is not suitable as a genre, but rather as a mode. Genre can be seen as the purpose of a text while mode is the way in which it is transmitted. Letters are written for all kinds of reasons and can be used to transmit all kinds of different genres. Letters to the editor are usually expositions, which would fit under the category of non-fiction listed by Brown. It is important not to confuse these terms, mode and genre.

2.2 Communicative purpose

As stated above the communicative purpose of a letter to the editor could be many things. The communicative purpose of the text chosen is two-fold. Firstly the author wishes to express his opinion on a matter he feels is an important one, the investment in next-generation technologies in the field of energy. Secondly the author is writing to persuade others to share his opinion and act on it. In particular he seems to be calling on the Japanese government, industry, and citizens to act on and support it. The second text also has two purposes. Like the author of the first text the author wishes to express his opinion on a matter he feels is important, the implementing of a language test for long term residents. Secondly the author wants to simply draw attention to the proposition made by the government and the negative effects it may have. Although the author doesn't explicitly state this in the text the author's choice of structure and vocabulary relates this purpose to the reader.

3 Text 1

3.1 Exposition

The purpose of the text is that of an expository text -what Butt describes as one that is used to justify an argument or put forward a point of view. At a glance the section title Readers in Council, the name of the author, and the city he resides in tells us that this is a letter written by a reader. Without these features it would be difficult to discern whether this was a letter or not. Within the text the author makes no mention or reference to the fact he is writing a letter and does not explicitly address the letter to the reader.

The structure of the letter places it under the specific genre of exposition, as defined by Martin. Although it is

relatively short, 182 words, the text has an introduction with a thesis, a body with arguments and counter-arguments, and a conclusion explicitly stating the authors opinion on the thesis. The conclusion may also be seen as an extension of the authors arguments made in the body. The overall structure of Text 1 is as follows:

1. Introduction of Topic (General: the world economy, Specific: problem in the world, carbon dioxide dilemma)
2. Thesis or Position Statement (Now is the time for Japan to take the lead and promote energy independence through research into next-generation technologies.)
3. Counter Argument (Energy technology development is expensive, requires a lot of education, and has a long time frame for returns on investment)
4. Argument 1 (Japan will have to purchase large amounts of carbon offsets anyway...why not spend that money on future investments instead)
5. Argument 2 (Japan has already begun to take the global lead in energy technology with cars like the Toyota Prius)
6. Argument 3 (Japan should invest in the future because the world will buy into it)
7. Conclusion or Argument 4 (The author believes that Japanese consumers will support this investment.)

The author has clearly chosen to make the maximum number of arguments for the investment into next-generation technologies within the allotted space, 300 words or less. It is clear the author could have better organized the text to highlight his arguments in a more effective fashion. For example he could have provided specific examples highlighting arguments 3 and/or 4 thus making his argument stronger. He could have limited himself to 1 or 2 arguments and expanded on them. In a more mature exposition, or one with more allotted space, the author would more clearly specify or signal the move from thesis to counter argument, counter argument to argument, or argument to argument through, for example, the employment of transition words such as first, second, etc.. In a more mature exposition each argument and counter-argument, as well as the conclusion, would each form its own paragraph. It should be noted that though the author was limited in space he could have organized the text in a number of different ways.

Butt(1990:147) defines exposition as a text that is used to justify an argument or put forward a point of view. This text clearly fits under the genre of exposition. According to Butt this genre exhibits very specific structural and grammatical features. There are some common grammatical features of exposition texts found in this text that help justify an argument or allow a point of view to be expressed effectively. Participants are identified through the nominal groups as human or non-human. The piece takes place in the present tense, much like a spoken narrative, “We all can agree that the world economy has entered”, “Now is the time”. This brings the text and argument to life; it is real and important. We also see examples of modality in the exposition text, “Japan may soon have”, or “Japanese government and industry should invest”. These terms of modality are an important part of the exposition text. In the latter example, “Japanese government and industry should invest in the future”, the author avoids a direct imperative. This modulation of obligation and necessity helps turn the direct request being made by the writer into a more

objective assertion of obligation. The author is appealing to a sense of right and wrong. This hides the subjectivity of the writers own preference. This use of modality also hides the hypothetical nature of his argument. Argument 3:

Japanese government and industry should invest in the future. The world will naturally buy into high-technology products that solve problems related to energy.

When spoken this argument would result in something like this:

If the Japanese government and industry invest in the future the world will naturally buy into high technology products that solve problems related to energy.

The hypothetical nature of the argument carried by modality(should) is made explicit through the conjunction if. The use of if in this case would make the argument more accessible to argumentation and easier to refute.

The text further demonstrates itself as a written text through its high lexical density. This is illustrated through the nominalization of words such as mitigation of problems in the second paragraph. These are some of the most significant grammatical features in the exposition text as identified by Butt. From here we can further categorize the text as to whether it is an analytical or hortatory exposition.

3.2 Analytical or Hortatory

Expositions in which the thesis recommends or persuades a reader/audience/organization to do something are called hortatory, and are common in editorials, letters to the editor, sermons, political speeches and debates. Expositions on the other side of this are analytical in nature, seen as persuading 'that' something is the way it is and defending it rather than to do something about it, and are more commonly found in lectures, scholarly papers, and essay writing among other texts. This is an important distinction to make as it effects the lexical and grammatical choices made in the writing process. We can distinguish the purpose of the exposition, whether it is 'persuading to' or 'persuading that', by its thesis statement.

Now is the time for the government to promote energy independence and a platform for Japan to increase its global influence through the aggressive pursuit of research into next generation technologies such as fuel cells, hydrogen power stations, solar power, tidal power and nano-capacitor power storage.

In this thesis the author is clearly calling for the government to do something. In fact, it can almost be seen as commanding the government to do something. The entirety of this text actually reads like a speech. One could imagine a lawmaker or a representative using this text as a speech.

Expositions are revealed to be hortatory through personality, reasoning, and metaphor. Examining the text closer reveals its hortatory nature. The author's use of reasoning and metaphor were already discussed in the previous section. Personality in writing can be seen through feelings and attitudes found in the text. In the introduction the

author immediately is appealing to the reader by assuming that there is a common ground between he and the reader through the use of the plural pronoun 'we', "We all can agree", "We also know". The writer is projecting his feelings onto the audience by making the readers and his feelings explicit through this usage. In the conclusion the author makes his own positive feelings explicit about the Japanese people through his use of the personal pronoun, I:

And I believe the Japanese consumer will support an intelligent well thought out plan and buy into next generation energy products.

The writer's attitudes can be discerned through his choice of lexis. The author expresses his attitude through words such as aggressive, naturally, believe, and enthusiastically.

4 Letter to the Editor as a classroom material

Using this text in the EFL classroom would present its own pedagogical challenges and opportunities. There are many aspects of the text which are potentially useful to teachers and learners. In an EFL reading class a comprehension exercise based on text reconstruction could be useful. Although the text is, at first glance, lacking in obvious chronological related lexical terms there are markers within the sentences which students could use to reconstruct the text. In addition to these markers student's attention would be drawn to the movement of the text, one which moves from general to specific.

In an EFL composition class there are many aspects of the text which could be useful. On a textual level it could be used as a model for their own composition. Highlighting the common structure of expositions students could begin to construct their own. Through a discussion of the personality, reasoning, and grammatical metaphors students could be made aware of the choices, whether they be conscious or unconscious, that writers make. A compare and contrast exercise with an analytical exposition would aid in highlighting these features.

The strength, or lack thereof, of the argument also has potential use in the classroom. After examining the text students could be asked how the text could be expanded on and/or strengthened. As mentioned earlier the author was limited to 300 words and only used 182 of them. A class discussion and subsequent assignment could examine how the text might be strengthened with or without the word limit. Another approach might be to compare the aspect of letters to the editor in English to those written in their L1. In addition the text presents a rich supply of vocabulary, especially in the fields of economics and energy development, which could be a valuable resource for the learner.

4.1 Genre in the classroom

I will now provide a detailed two unit lesson plan designed around the text analysed above in order to highlight the potential for genre analyses in a composition class at a Japanese university. This two unit lesson plan is designed under the idea that the composition class would be focused on genre analysis throughout the course. It is important to note that the unit relies heavily upon a sequence of language events in previous and future units.

Before being asked to tackle an exposition students in the class would be presented with an introduction to the genre of letter writing worksheet featuring authentic texts taken from a variety of letters: for example, a letter to the editor, a business letter, a personal letter, a job application letter, etc. . The names of the different letters are written underneath and are to be matched with the correct text. After the answers are checked the students would have to write a brief explanation of their reasons for attributing texts to a particular genre. This exercise would highlight the large differences between a letter to the editor and other forms of letter writing. An in-depth discussion of genre would not be required as students in the class will have already done this. In a more advanced class another way to perform this kind of activity would be to compare the different genres present in newspapers.

After a discussion on the various forms that letters can take Text 1 would be read as a class, highlighting what they think is the main opinion and purpose of the text. The next step would be to examine the structure of the text, introduction, body, and conclusion. This would include a discussion about how the author expressed his opinion highlighting the general to specific movement of the text. This would be followed by a short analysis of the vocabulary terms useful in this field, words such as “carbon dioxide”, “next generation technologies”, and “energy”. Next an outline of what an exposition text is and a focus on some of the more common grammatical and lexical features involved would be discussed. Students would then identify for themselves examples in Text 1 of these vocabulary and grammatical features.

In the second unit students would be presented with another letter to the editor, one that is in response to an article written in the newspaper, to analyse. Though this paper does not include an analysis of this letter, Text 2 , a quick glance will reveal the emotional nature of the text and the different grammatical choices made to present an opinion. Next a comparison of the two texts highlighting the personality and reasoning used in each text would follow. Students would then be asked to evaluate and write a short piece about which commentary they feel is more effective and why. Finally, using the two texts as models, students would be asked to write their own letter to the editor either responding to one of the two texts evaluated in class or about another issue they feel is important.

4.2 Genre analysis as a pedagogical tool in a Japanese university setting

As a teacher working in a language university in Japan the potential applications of genre analysis to the teaching of reading and writing is substantial. Students at the university are in general interested in language studies, studying abroad, working in international fields(business, education, journalism, etc..), and, in general, communicating with foreigners. In following these interests students will be exposed to various genres and a background of knowledge about them will help facilitate their success with them. Genre analysis can be seen as a tool for teaching related grammar and lexis as well as an exercise in raising students consciousness of the conventions of written texts. As seen in the lesson plan outlined above genre analysis can also be seen as a useful model for students own writing in a variety of genres. Genre analysis of authentic texts may also serve as a valuable motivating tool for students, creating an opportunity to view target language items in the kind of context that they naturally occur rather than a concocted text(i.e. Textbook, workbook).

It should be noted however that some students/classes may not be advanced and that careful consideration to students and their level be done before proceeding with genre analysis in the classroom. Students who may be classified as beginner or intermediate may have difficulty with less distinctive genres. One could imagine the difficulties in comparing a novel and a biography. Texts that are more easily contrastable and comparable would be more suitable to the classroom. Texts such as letters, plays, and interview transcripts would be more manageable. Interview transcripts, in particular, would provide a great resource in highlighting the difference between spoken and written English. In a university composition course genre analysis could provide a useful basis for a whole course. This being said, attention must be given to not making these models overly prescriptive. The ability to creatively work within and outside of these genres and their models should also be brought to the students attention.

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Appendix 1

Text 1

READERS IN COUNCIL

Next-generation energy technologies

By ROBERT HIGGINS

Zushi, Kanagawa

We all can agree that the world economy has entered uncharted territories. We also know that one of the largest problems facing the world, including Japan, is the carbon dioxide dilemma. Now is the time for the government to promote energy independence and a platform for Japan to increase its global influence through the aggressive pursuit of research into next-generation technologies such as fuel cells, hydrogen power stations, solar power, tidal power and nano-capacitor power storage.

Energy technology development is expensive, requires lots of education and has a long time frame for returns on investment. Japan may soon have to purchase massive amounts of carbon offsets with money that could be better spent on future investments rather than on mitigation of problems.

Cars like the Toyota Prius have already established Japan as a global leader in energy technologies. Japanese government and industry should invest in the future. The world will naturally buy into high-technology products that solve problems related to energy. And I believe the Japanese consumer will support an intelligent well thought out plan and buy into next-generation energy products enthusiastically.

The opinions expressed in this letter to the editor are the writer's own and do not necessarily reflect the policies of The Japan Times.

Appendix II**Text 2**

READERS IN COUNCIL

Raising the bar for foreigners

By ROLF WIETLISBACH-KOBAYASHI

Narashino City, Chiba

Regarding the Jan. 16 article "Long-term residents may face language test": The government seems to be intent on keeping new foreigners out of this country and making life increasingly harder for those already living here. Only weeks after the law subjecting us to fingerprinting on each re-entry took effect, the Foreign Ministry announces that they are planning to implement a language test for long-term residents.

I thought the headline must be a joke. But apparently they are quite serious about this. The argumentation seems to be that such a requirement will "improve the lives of foreign residents." How "thoughtful" of the government. It goes without saying that speaking the language of the country one lives in will make daily life easier, but shouldn't it be left to each individual to decide what level of proficiency they aim to achieve?

And what is the Foreign Ministry going to propose in the event that a permanent resident doesn't pass the test? Will he or she be cordially asked to leave the country, or to take up language lessons to earn their right to reside here? The whole idea of such a requirement is preposterous!

The opinions expressed in this letter to the editor are the writer's own and do not necessarily reflect the policies of The Japan Times.

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