INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

3. The value of genre in academic writing

Before we look at a definition of genre, it is important to know and understand the differences between written and spoken texts.

Written or spoken text?

Look at the following texts and decide if they are written or spoken.

Text 1

Uhm, I think the sessions were very useful because we did specific work on specific themes, like, for example, uhm, how to use linking words, when to use them with like with examples and uhm and I think compared to the normal EAP classes this was more detailed, and more focused on well, specific themes.

Text 2

I bought the above iron from The Electrical Store in Newford on 10 October. On using it for the first time, I found that the temperature control was faulty; it was not possible to set it for any temperature apart from the highest (cotton).

Text 3

It is evident that the financial crisis is having a negative impact on the environment in many developing countries.

Text 4

Ok, well, I can see a girl and a dog. Er the dog is black and has a long ears. Hhhm, I think it's an old English sheep dog. The girl is, I think, about 10 years old.

What are the differences?

Spoken language production	Written language production

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Linguistic differences

Syntactic intricacy / lexical density

- Spoken production is typically syntactically intricate

- Written production is typically lexically dense (Halliday MAK 1989)

Lexical density

This term was first used by Halliday (1985b) to explain the difference between a written and spoken text. Halliday (1985b:62) states "relative to each other written language is dense, spoken language is sparse". According to Halliday (ibid), you can discover a text's lexical density by dividing the total number of content words which appear in a text with the total number of clauses. Typically, the lexical density score of written English is between 3 and 6 (Halliday 1985a), with the higher end of the spectrum being adopted by more formal levels of writing (Clerehan & Buchbinder 2006). (Mansfield 2012).

Analysis

Look at the texts below and work out their lexical density scores.

Step 1: Count the clauses in each text

Step 2: Count the content words

Step 3: Divide the total number of content words by the number of clauses

Text 1

How much is too much?

It's important not to drink too much in a single day.

- Men should not drink more than 4 units in any one day, and drinking 4 units or more a day every day increases the risk of harm;

- Women should not drink more than 3 units in a day, and drinking 3 units or more a day every day increases the risk of harm.

For more on units visit www.knowyourlimits.info

(extract taken from 'Focus on alcohol: a guide to drinking and health' 2008)

Text 2

Historically, the first pension scheme to benefit people over 70 was introduced in Prussia, in 1889. After19 years, Lloyd George introduced it in England. The life expectancy during these periods was about 45 and 50 years respectively (Wells, 2005). Nowadays, a large number of elderly people rely on retirement pension to live, what increases the government expenses. Moreover, `In a "no-change" scenario public expenditure on health would also rise steeply…` (Slater, 2008, 82). This means that the government is already spending a lot of money on the health sector. Therefore, drastic measures must be taken immediately, in turn, the government could honour their responsibilities. (Student essay)

Time to reflect

- What do the lexical density scores tell you about the two texts?

- How could you use your findings to help students improve their written work?

General thought

Although focusing on lexical density can improve a student's lexical richness, Engberg (1995) maintains that "the percentage of lexical words has little, if any relationship to quality" (1995:148). In other words, by introducing students to this strategy, it is not expected that the students will improve their writing considerably. What is hoped, is that they will think more cautiously about their choice of lexis and the correctness of lexical form which will, in turn, unquestionably have a positive effect on the reader (Mansfield 2012).

Linguistic contrasts between speaking and writing

Whatever the level of the students we are working with, there are some fundamental language facts that teachers have to take into account when preparing materials to support EAP writing development. The most important of these is the difference between spoken and written language. Over time, these two modes have changed as a response to their contrasting social purposes. The writing system has become our preferred medium for recording permanent account of what people own, what is legal, what is held to be scientifically true. Speaking, in contrast, has been at the heart of our human relationships, our need to persuade, to move, to entertain (Tribble 2010)

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Defining Genre

Discuss with a partner.
- How do <u>you</u> define genre?

Statement 1

Read Swales' definition of genre and answer the questions.

"A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes" (Swales 1990:58).

What do you think Swales means by 'communicative events' and 'communicative purposes'?

Read the following communicative events:

- A company wants to confirm the appointment of a new member of staff.

- A parent wishes to inform a teacher why their child was absent from school yesterday.

- A company would like to apologise to a client for the bad service they have received.

In each case, what type of genre are we dealing with? What is the purpose in each case?

University genres

Hyland (2006:47) lists a number of university genre structures:

Genre	Genre purpose	Stage	Stage purpose
Recount	To reconstruct past experiences by retelling events in original sequence	Orientation Record of events (Reorientation)	Provides information about a situation Presents events in temporal sequence Brings events into the present
Narrative	To entertain and instruct via reflection on experience	Orientation Complication (Evaluation) Resolution	Information about characters' situation Problems for characters to solve The major events for the characters Sorts out the problems for the characters
Explanation	To explain how and	Identification	Stages the topic of

	why things happen		the text

Think of three other genres that you teach and complete the table below.

Genre	Genre purpose	Stage	Stage purpose

Statement 2

"A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. *These purposes are recognised by the expert members of the parent discourse community and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre*" (Swales 1990:58).
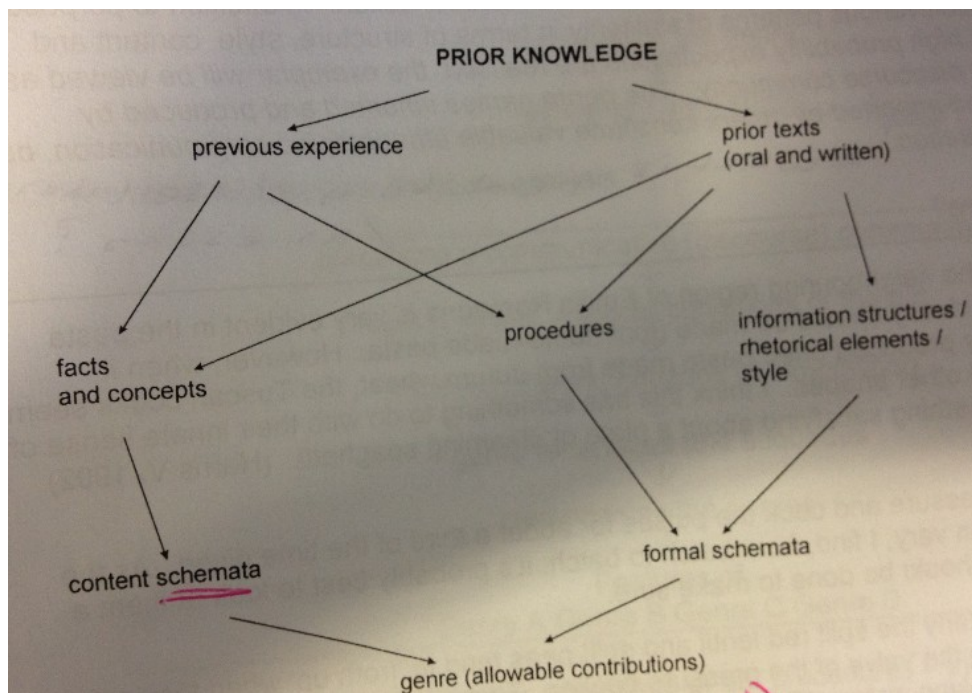
Discuss with a partner

- What is meant by discourse community?

- How can the expert members recognise the purposes? (Can you think of what shapes a genre?)

Statement 3

"A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognised by the expert members of the parent discourse community and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. *This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the genre and influences and constraints choice of content and style* (Swales 1990:58).

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Schematic structure

> • Think about some of the genres we have looked at so far, what schematic knowledge would you need to know to be an owner of the genre?
>
> **Discuss with a partner.**

Statement 4

"A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognised by the expert members of the parent discourse community and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the genre and influences and constraints choice of content and style. *Communicative purpose is both a privileged criterion and one which operates to keep the scope of a genre as here conceived narrowly focused on comparable rhetorical action. In addition to purpose, exemplars of a genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience"* (Swales 1990:58).

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Exemplar of a genre

1. Cut deep incisions into the chicken flesh with a small, sharp knife. Place the chicken into a bowl and sprinkle over the salt and the juice of two lemons, massaging into the chicken until well coated.

2. Whisk the yoghurt and tandoori spice mix in a bowl until well combined. Pour the marinade onto the chicken and massage into the flesh. Cover with clingfilm and chill in the fridge overnight.

3. Preheat the grill to high.

4. Lift the drumsticks from the tandoori mixture and gently shake off any excess. Place a wire rack over a roasting tin and lay the drumsticks upon it. Grill for 20 minutes, turning regularly, or until richly burnished and the chicken is cooked through. Add more lemon juice to taste.

5. For the dip, place all of the ingredients into a food processor and blend until smooth. Serve alongside the chicken drumsticks.

(BBC Good Food 2013)

Read the example and answer the questions:

- What is this genre? How did you know?

- How is this genre typically structured?

- What style is typically used?

- Who is the intended audience?

Time to reflect

- Having looked at Swales' definition of genre, how can it help you with teaching academic writing?

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