Using Genres and Persuasive Genre Analysis as an Effective ESL Teaching Module in Sales Contexts

INTRODUCTION

India entered the 21st century with ever expanding opportunities for its business community and challenges for its sector of education. International economic conditions include the role of the European community, the expansion of US commercial relations with Asian countries, India’s entry into the World Trade Organization, and a growing number of India based multinational corporations engaging in international trade with the burgeoning international business sectors come higher requirements for qualified human resources. In response to this, Business English courses flourish in India and are offered by a large number of institutions. However, the art of teaching of Business English emphasis inflexible text book examples and memorization formulaic structures. Application to the communication in workplace has, to a great extent, been quite limited (Nguyen, 2008).

Need for training Sales Language:

Primary aim of persuasive writing in sales contexts is to convey a particular piece of information to particular audience for particular purpose. It is often exposition about workplace communication especially sales and various business related subjects with behaviour of buyer. The organizations which have to meet the challenge in the world market look for not only competent Engineers but also candidates with very high caliber in Business communication skills to improve company performance. IdrusUsu et al, (2014) affirmed that the company performance measurement in quality management practices can be measured by three performance measures namely financial performance, product quality and operational performance. In other words, these performance skillsimply effective use of language (discourse) which would bring a change in the attitude of the business people. There is plenty of scope for engineering and other students in the field of sales.

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents selective findings from an ongoing study that investigates persuasive writing skills of undergraduate students of Engineering taking Technical English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course in Tamil Nadu, India. ESP is an integral part of English Language Teaching. The aim of this study is to analyze and compare the discourse structures of Business promotion paragraph written by ESL students with Bhatia’s move scheme analysis based on an integrated theoretical framework of social discourse analysis and analysis of genre (Swales, 1990 and Bhatia, 1993). Communication is a field of study that has its roots in the study of persuasion. From ancient time to present day scholars, we have centered our attention on the required skills and abilities necessary to change attitudes and behaviours. Recent years have seen increased attention being given to the notion of genre in the area of English Language Teaching (ELT). At the tertiary level, Indian Students of English (ESL) face a significant transition in shifting their attention and the mode of their learning from the rudimentary tools of their new language to the larger components of language by which native English speakers communicate with one another. One such component is the use of genre in English discourse and the conventions and constraints these impose on communication to enhance persuasive skills especially in sales contexts. This paper addresses the issue.

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In order to mould the students as successful employees, it is necessary to give them adequate training in effective use of language in sales contexts. It is the need of the hour that language teachers to develop suitable training modules to equip and enrich students’ persuasive skills in sales contexts. Hence, the researcher has preferred to take up an analysis on persuasive writing skills especially in sales contexts.

**English for Specific Purposes and Communicative Language Teaching:**

English for Specific Purpose (ESP) evolved out of the need to learn a language for purely utility purposes. This utilitarian purpose is generally connected to performance in work. Pauline Robinson quotes Mackay’s definition of English for specific purposes as “The teaching of English, not so much as an end in itself but as essential means to a clearly identifiable goal”.

The basic principle behind in whole ESP approach is that learners for whom English is not a mother tongue nor the language of social communication and who yet require the language for extensive use in their work, need not learn the whole corpus of the language. It is possible to isolate those elements of the language that will immediately make use of at work. It is not advisable to burden on second-language learner (ESL) with aspects of language superfluous to his needs. Hence, methods should be devised to facilitate a quick mastery of those features of language, which he would find immediately useful.

Economy and direct usefulness to the learners will have a high surrender value i.e., Relevance to the immediate needs of the students (Wilkins, 1972). Systematic exposure to authentic models of language and assimilation of the common characteristics of particular areas of discourse and relating this to the schematic frame work of his subject of specialization would help the students to apply him self / herself better to the task of developing his/her competence.

Restriction and selection based on the needs of purposes of the learner are the focal points of the ESP approach. Restriction implies that only those skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing be included which are required for the learner’s purposes. Selection involves the inclusion of only those items of vocabulary, patterns of grammar and functions of language required for the learner’s purposes. The topics are subject specific skill of planning to cope with the demands of the special subjects and or future job requirements are developed. The process of restriction and selection makes relevant whatever is learnt. It motivates and encourages the school learning needs of his/her chosen carrier and who seeks the maximum relevance and specificity for his/her language study with the minimum of lost effort and time.

**Design of Syllabus for ESL Class room:**

The idea of specific purposes implies that there is a limit to the time that the learners can spend on English and accordingly it becomes necessary to select those aspects of the language that are to be given special prominence in the syllabus. Once communicative needs defined, teaching can be highly specific and the learners can concentrate only on those needs actually identified, instead of diffusing efforts on some vague, general kind of competence.

ESP is not meant for beginners but is built upon a ‘Common code’ of the language that has already been acquired by the learner. It is, in essence, a remedial course. The emphasis shifts from the general to the very specific, relating it to the purpose.

The learner and his needs are the crucial elements in the ESP approach. The role of English in the community, the learners need to use it, in learning the language, his/her level of achievement, the target level he/she expects to attain, the time that can be devoted to language learning are the factors determining the design of ESP module. These issues lead to an accurate background of the learner in terms of his/her age, the learning situation he/she is in and his/her motivation to learn the language.

Motivation in learning a language can be intrinsic or instrumental. In ESP motivation is mainly instrumental. This is directly related to the target level. A description of the target level defines the needs of the learner. The functions he/she will have to function in his/her future job and the kind of language he/she will have to use for his/her work determine his/her needs which should be well defined. The motivated learner is thus the starting-point in an ESP Programme.

Needs-Analysis of the participant thus becomes central to the ESP approach. Munby’s elaboration of his communicative syllabus design is based on the contention that, “when the purpose for which the target language is required can be identified the syllabus specification is directly derivable from the prior identification of the communicative needs of that particular participant or participant type”.

ESP is closely related to communicative language teaching. The thrust now is on how to equip the student not only with the lexical and grammatical repertoire of this sphere of activity but the strategic ability to communicate effectively in his/her situation which he may chance to encounter in his/her work, i.e., not merely the surface features but the ‘underlying competence’ required to negotiate what Hutchinson and Waters in their paper, “ESP at the cross roads” call the “Target performance Repertoire” (Hutchinson and Waters, 1985).

Special purpose language Teaching is directly related to syllabus design. Innovations in syllabus-designing have to be accompanied by adequate changes in classroom methodology. ESP demands a change in the traditional methods of teaching language. The focus is on the learner, the skills
he/she requires and the process by which he/she reaches his/her target. There is no room for rote learning. The shifts in emphasis will effect drastic changes in the process of teaching and learning English, giving it a direction far-removed from the conventional approaches to English language teaching still followed in most classes in India.

ESP has a very rigorous approach to frame syllabus. It makes use of insights and findings obtained from socio linguistics, discourse analysis, and the communicative approach to language learning. It is a discipline that is open-ended incorporating conclusions and improvements made through an ongoing process of research, experimentation and invention.

**ESP and the Communicative Approach to Language Teaching:**

The communicative approach to language teaching (CLT) is the most recent development in ELT. Though not exclusive to ESP, the communicative approach has contributed to broadening the perspective of ESP Programme. CLT and ESP have much in common. CLT too, like ESP, concerns itself with learners’ purposes in using language, rather than knowledge about language. It involves the use of authentic or near authentic materials and a study of learners’ needs.

The communicative approach has emerged from the concept of teaching language as a tool of social. It starts with communicative requirements of the learner. All communicative teaching is student-centered. Identification of communicative needs could make teaching highly efficient by concentrating only on those needs really identified. The linguistic forms, which have to be studied in order to fulfils these needs will have to be then derived from this instead of starting with forms. “Grammatical competence remains in a perpetual state of potentiality unless it is realized as communication” (Widdowson, 1984).

Traditional ESP material cannot be regarded as communicative because of the emphasis on formal syntax and vocabulary. They relate to specialist subject areas only in their themes and content. Wilkins introduced the concept of communicative function. Language teaching courses should be defined in terms of ‘notions’ and not of formal element of syntax and lexis. The notional approach takes the communicative facts of language into account without losing sight of grammatical and contexts of situation. “The whole basis of a notional method to language teaching derives from the conviction that what people want to do through language is more important than mastery of the language as an unapplied system” (Wilkins, 1976).

Widdowson, however is not satisfied with the theory that an inventory of notions can contribute much to communicative competence. According to him, “communication does not take place through linguistic exponence of concepts and functions as self-contained units of meaning. It takes place as discourse, whereby meanings are negotiated through interaction..

There is a need to take discourse into account in language teaching. Discourse is identified by Widdowson as ‘the use of sentences in combination’. He distinguishes between ‘Grammatical cohesion’ which refers to the way sentences and part of sentences combine so as to ensure that there is prepositional development and ‘rhetorical coherence’ which refers to the way utterances combines in the performance of acts of communication. In other words he differentiates between language seen as ‘text’ and language seen as discourse.

Analysis of discourse is the investigations into the way sentences are put to communicative use in the performing of social action. ESP has to include in it not only register analysis comprising lexis and syntax but discourse analysis as well, the discourse being related to the subject under consideration.

Having identified the selected discourse in terms of its essential theoretical conventions, the problem of ESP is how to prepare material in such a way as to guide the learners to an awareness of the communicative conventions operating in the kind of discourse. Texts in comon topics can be composed and presented in the most effective way. Thus, ESP has to be modified by current theories in the communicative approach to language teaching.

It is felt that the language learning environment of the under graduate Engineering classes demand innovation and application of pedagogical theories. This level is appropriate to effect a transition from learning language as a grammatical system to learning language as communication. It is necessary to specify the aim of English learning more precisely in the auxiliary role than it performs at the higher level of education. English teaching has to provide students with the basic ability to use the language in their subject areas. Hitherto no attempt has been made to identify learner needs and target level of performance or examine the appropriacy materials and methodology used.

**Theoretical Background:**

**The Business Writing Genre:**

According to Swale’s 1990 definition, a business letter cannot be seen as a genre science there is insufficient indication of purpose realized in the letter, although it performs a communicative function. However, Van Nus (1999) argue that the purpose of a genre should not be restricted to a communicator’s intention. Rather, genres should be understood as away through which a discourse community’s tasks are performed and individual purposes achieved through language. Members of the same discourse community (buyers and sellers) will recognize genres through culturally shares aspects of language use. If we add the term business to letter or
Review of Genre Accepted Definitions and Viewpoints: 

**Persuasive Genre in rhetoric:**

Ever since Aristotle, rhetorical inquiry and criticism has been interested in classifying discourse. One common approach has been to proceed deductively, in a top-down manner, and construct a closed system of categories. A prominent modern example and one of the many is Kinneavy’s A Theory of Discourse: The aim of Discourse (1971). Kinneavy classifies discourse into four main types: expressive, persuasive, literary and referential. A discourse will be classified into a particular type according to which component in the communication process receives the primary focus. If the focus or aim is on the sender, the discourse will be expressive; if on the receiver, persuasive; If on the linguistic form or code, it will be literary; and if the aim is to represent the realities of the world, it will be referential. The detail is graphically shown in Figure 1. A useful definition of genre in contrastive rhetoric is offered by Swales (1990), who claims that a relationship exists between the purpose realized through the genre and the schematic structure of the genre, the text and the language used. Swales writes,

"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 there by constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style."

In this definition, Swales suggests that unless the participants in a communicative activity share a common focus and are homogeneous in their preference for structure, style, content, and intended audience, their communicative activity does not typify a genre. Genre is an integral part of every speech or every piece of writing. In short human communication is persuasive.

Finally the linguist Vijay K. Bhatia contributes the following:

A genre is a recognizable communicative event characterized by a set of communicative purpose(s) identified and mutually understood by the members of the professional or academic community in which it regularly occurs. Most often it is highly structured and conventionalized with constraints on allowable contributions in terms of their intent, positioning, form, and functional value. These constraints, however, are often exploited by the expert members of the community to achieve private intentions within the frame work of socially recognized purpose(s) (Bhatia, 1993 as cited in Holland and Lewis, 2000).

In his definition, Bhatia focuses on discourse within the academic community and on the genre characteristics, conventions and constraints that are recognized and understood by its professional members. Bhatia’s approach differs from Martin’s
emphasis on cultural constructs and from Swale’s focus on the discourse community as a whole (Holland & Lewis, 2000).

Methodology:

Data Analysis:

Move structure analysis was used to analyze the data. A move in a text is a meaningful unit presented in lexical-grammatical form and related to its communicative purposes (Miller, 1984; Swales, 1990). As pointed out by Swales, if two texts are said to belong to the same genre, they should share the same communicative purpose, and the schematic structure of a given genre is the result of the conventions and activities of the discourse community established and developed in response to recurrent rhetorical needs. For the examination and schematic structure of a genre, Swales proposes the move structure analysis framework. Applying this, Bhatia (1993) specifies the seven move structure of sales promotion letters. Rhetorical analysis of the sales promotion persuasive paragraph writing in this study covers investigation in to both move structure and linguistic realization of move using Bhatia’s move scheme is shown in Table 1.

Based on Bhatia’s move scheme the ESL students were taught to write persuasive paragraph writing. The tasks were performed to achieve purposes through the template formulated by the researcher specified in the following section as shown in Table 2.

Findings And Discussion:

The Study and Scenario Persuasive Paragraph writing:

Scenario sales promotion paragraph writings were scanned according to the selection criteria to make sure that they all belonged to the proposed persuasive genre. Each persuasive paragraph was analyzed based on the formulated template showing all conventional moves and typical linguistic items of the selected genre. The total number of analyzed moves and steps in each paragraph was counted, with the frequency moves in each scenario aggregated.

The study collected and analyzed data sets one of which reported in this paper. The scenario–based sales promotion paragraph samples were provided by 56 students. These students were taking an English for specific purpose course, “Technical English” in the first semester of a 4-year Bachelor of Electronic and communication Engineering course in K S Rangasamy College of Technology, affiliated to Anna University Chennai, India. This course focuses on writing technical communication (ie) business letters in English for business transactions. Students took part in this study during the course of Programme, when they were free in the academic schedule. The experiment lasted for two month duration of thirty hour instructions and data were collected but not used in their examination. Based on the persuasive paragraph writing template taught to the students, a writing task with a scenario was designed, namely persuasive paragraph writing (Routine request for order). Student participants were given a task describing a situation from a business environment, which required them to write a business promotion paragraph in order to solve the problems stated. This type of persuasive paragraph represented a familiar task and persuasive genre in their technical English course. Details of the data sources are presented and a summary of linguistic realization of move is presented in table 3.

Implication for Future Practice:

The teaching of persuasive genre and can have important implications and offer considerable opportunity for language learners particularly here in India. The study of genres and persuasive genre analysis in sales contexts could be used, I believe, to change things. If ESL learners are exposed to such concept as genres and persuasive genre especially in sales context to those that have significant for their lives, their motivation to learn will undoubtedly be increased, as well their ability to use their second language correctly. Such change however will require more teachers to take the needs of their students into consideration and find ways of motivating them to express themselves in activities involving goal oriented persuasive tasks. Eventually, I believe that such a change will occur. Business communication is a subject which is learnt more by practice and less by theory. Students may be given internship training that should be related to their chosen specialization such as Marketing, Finance, HR, International Business, Retail Purchase and Sales etc. So that he/she gets practical exposure of the course in a company for one day and classroom exposure for four days. The weight age of marks may be given in internal assessment at a time during the academic programme that is appropriate for both students and business professionals.

Conclusion:

It is assumed that scenario persuasive paragraph writings written by ESL students and Bhatias move scheme business promotion paragraph writing belong to the same genre due to the perceived similarities in their communicative purpose and social function. This study is based on the notion of the persuasive genre in sales context which predicts that texts return for similar communicate purpose will display similarities in discourse structure across languages, setting aside grammatical constraints. It is therefore expected that the findings of move analysis is similar across the ESL students’ scenario business promotion paragraph writings with Bhatia’s move structure analysis. I believe my review and analysis has enabled me to meet the objectives outlined at the beginning of the paper. It has enlightened me as to how genre and persuasive genre analysis might play
a role in the teaching of language. It has persuaded me that persuasive writing skill will play an important role into the present needs (academic) as well as the future needs (work place) of the students.

Table 1: Bhatia moves scheme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Move</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Sales promotion letter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Move 1</td>
<td>Establishing credentials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 2</td>
<td>Introducing offer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 3</td>
<td>Offering incentives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 4</td>
<td>Enclosing documents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 5</td>
<td>Soliciting response</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 6</td>
<td>Using pressure tactics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 7</td>
<td>Ending politely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Persuasive Paragraph Template.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Move</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Linguistic Realisations</th>
<th>Student score for each move</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Includes a hook to get the reader’s/ buyers attention and background information of the company</td>
<td>4...3…2…1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Salient feature of the product</td>
<td>Topic sentence states the reasons for buying</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Rebate/discount and add on benefits</td>
<td>Elaboration to back the reason is clear and persuasive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Comparison/reference</td>
<td>Justification for the request</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Answering questions of the buyer/audience</td>
<td>Claim or prove that something is true or false</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Soliciting response</td>
<td>Pressure tactics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Praying for action/order</td>
<td>Call for specific action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Move Occurrences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Move</th>
<th>No. of scenario sales promotion paragraphs,N=56</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: To get the buyer attention and background of the company</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Salient features of the product</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Discount and add on benefits</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Justification for request</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Claim or prove that something is true or false</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: Using pressure tactics</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7: Praying for order / specific action</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 1: Aim/Focus of discourse in sales promotion writing.

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Fig. 2: An example of scenario sales promotion paragraph writing (routine request for order).

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