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Genre-based Instruction in a Graduate-Level English Academic Writing Course

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Introduction

With the dominance of English for research and publication purposes, there has been intense pressure for graduate students and junior researchers to acquire advanced research writing skills in English. Although Hyland (2016) comments that academic writing for publication is a specialized skill that both first language (L1) and second language (L2) English writers must learn, L2 writers need additional time and efforts to acquire highly advanced and specialized skills of academic writing. In order to pursue this goal, graduate students' education plays a vital role. While graduate students may receive individualized assistance with writing in English for research from their advisors and senior graduate students, they can benefit from classroom instruction, where they obtain systematic knowledge about advanced academic writing in their fields of research and learn ways to become independent in writing their research findings in English.

In the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), genre approach or genre-based instruction has been extensively discussed and increasingly adopted for assisting graduate level L2 English writers in learning to write for research purposes. The genre approach, derived from a dynamic concept of genre, has permeated in ESP and L2 writing studies for almost the past three decades. More specifically, genre is understood as social action (Miller, 1984), comprising "a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes" (Swales, 1990, p. 58). Moreover, the members under the shared communicative purposes belong to a specific discourse community (Swales, 1990). Taking the writing of scientific research papers, for example, writers are the members of scientific discourse communities in which they operate under the shared communicative purposes (e.g., presenting scientific findings to the community members and receiving evaluations and feedback) through shared conventions (e.g., making knowledge claim by testing hypotheses through experimental inquiry). A larger level of scientific discourse communities consist of a number of smaller discourse

communities based on disciplines and subdisciplines, which share specific communicative purposes and conventions in various fields of science.

As a way to show how a specific discourse community's communicative goals and purposes are linguistically realized in a particular genre, Swales (1990, 2004) presented an analysis of the introduction section of a research article, using analytic units of rhetorical moves and steps (see more details in the next section). Since Swales's seminal work on the genre analysis of research article introductions, extensive work has followed in the genre analysis of the other sections of research articles, namely, the method, result, and discussion, in various disciplines (see Lin & Evans, 2012 for an overview of those research articles).

Genre approach or genre-based instruction is an application of the results of genre analysis to the teaching of target genres to students. Hyland (2004b, 2007) has discussed the advantages of adopting genre-based instruction from both students' and teachers' perspectives. For example, the most important advantage that genre-based instruction offers for students is that they can gain "an explicit understanding of how target texts are structured and why they are written in the ways they are" (Hyland, 2007, p. 151). Likewise, genre-based instruction helps teachers' professional development; by understanding typical structures and the purposes of those structures of target texts, teachers can successfully help students with their writing by providing informed feedback, and decide effective teaching methods and materials to adopt (Hyland, 2007).

Although the previous studies' discussion and research findings on ESP genre-based instruction help instructors shape and organize a course to teach L2 students how to read and write an advanced academic text in English in their chosen fields of disciplines, the most important consideration to make in implementing such a course is to take the teaching context or the pedagogical realities into consideration. Those pedagogical realities include the size of the class, students' majoring fields, the sequence of the course in program of study, and the instructor's academic background and teaching philosophy.

The purpose of this paper is to describe a graduate level course on English academic writing that was newly offered at Osaka Prefecture University. By presenting the details of the course, I illustrate how I, as the instructor of the course, adapted genre-based pedagogy to the instructional context and the realities of the classroom as the course progressed during a semester.

The Course on English Academic Writing for Graduate Students

Overview

The focal course in this paper, Academic Writing A,[1] was offered as an elective as part of the common curricula for graduate students at Osaka Prefecture University. The common curricula across different graduate schools at the university started in April, 2016. The Academic Writing (AW) course mainly focused on helping science students because of the university's urgent need to provide science students with assistance in advanced English academic writing for future publication purposes. The course was offered for 15 weeks from early April to the end of July, 2016.

The course enrollment dropped precipitously as the semester progressed. Initially it started with 40 students, the maximum number for the classroom capacity. However, only 25 students stayed in the course to the end of the semester and submitted the final writing assignment as part of the requirement to obtain the grade for the course. Out of 15 students who dropped out of the course, several informed me of their time constraints due to the need to devote their time to research.

The 25 students came from three different graduate schools; the majority of whom were from the Graduate School of Engineering (20 students). Out of the remaining five students, four of them came from the Graduate School of Science, and one from the Graduate School of Life and Environmental Sciences. All 25 students were first-year master's students.

The target genre in this course was scientific research papers. Out of the 15 weekly class sessions, the first 10 mainly focused on increasing students' understanding of structural and linguistic features of scientific research papers in English. The remaining five sessions were devoted to students' engagement in writing one section of a research paper. The following three key principles helped implement the genre-based instruction.

1. Published literature as a source/basis of instruction
2. Relegation of disciplinary expertise to students
3. Promotion of dialogue between the instructor and students

The three principles were interrelated to each other. In the following, details of the course activities are described under each principle, with the specific focus and/or the names of those activities presented with relevant examples.

Principle 1: Published literature as a source/basis of instruction

One of the biggest challenges in teaching the AW course was how to deal with differences in the various fields of science represented in the class. Although sciences are generally characterized as emphasizing empirical and objective perspectives and "reporting experimental findings" (Hyland, 2011, p. 12), there are differences among different disciplines in science, with different expectations and conventions in their discourse communities.

In order to deal with this challenge, published studies on genre analysis of scientific research papers were utilized because of their reference to both common features and variations among different fields of science. This body of knowledge in the published literature helped me select the content and emphasis of the course. The first 10 weeks of instruction evolved with the following content[2]:

Week 1:	Orientation of the course
Week 2:	Basic principles of academic English
Week 3:	Structural patterns in empirical research papers
Week 4 and 5:	Introduction section, lexical bundles
Week 6:	Method or experimental section
Week 7:	Results, discussion, and conclusion section
Week 8:	Boosters and hedges[3]
Week 9 and 10:	Abstract

In the following, descriptions of the sessions on the introduction and abstract are highlighted because more emphasis was placed on these two sections due to students' desire to submit the writing of either of these sections as a final writing assignment. An additional topic, lexical bundles, the concept of which is explained below, was also presented in the sessions on the introduction. In the descriptions below, the published literature on which the instruction was based is introduced, along with brief descriptions of the activities in which students engaged.

Introduction section, lexical bundles

The organizational patterns of introduction are extensively discussed in the published literature, thanks to Swales's (1990) ground-breaking work on genre analysis. As briefly mentioned in the introduction of this paper, Swales (1990) presented how the communicative goals of the introduction section of a research article are realized, using the analytical units of rhetorical moves and steps, and he later modified his analysis (2004). For example, Swales (1990, 2004)

presented the typical structure of research article introductions starting with the conceptual move of establishing a research territory (Move 1), under which three steps were included: claiming the importance of the topic of a study, making the generalizations of the topic, and reviewing previous studies under the topic. Move 2 concerns what needs to be done by the present study to fill a gap from previous studies, realized by the steps of indicating the gap and/or presenting a justification of the study. Finally, Move 3, presenting the present work, consists of several steps, including the purpose, research question or hypotheses, and the outline of the study.

The concept of lexical bundles, defined as "the most frequently occurring sequences of words" (Biber, 2006, p. 134, as cited in Cortes, 2013, p. 34), is more easily understood as fixed or formulaic expressions. Typical examples of lexical bundles in academic writing include "*as a result of*," "*in the case of*," "*on the other hand*" (Cortes, 2013, p. 34), "*it should be noted that*" or "*as can be seen*" (Hyland, 2008, p. 5). There is an increasing body of work on lexical bundles in academic writing (e.g., Cortes, 2004, 2006, 2013; Hyland, 2008, 2011). An important implication from these studies is that lexical bundles constitute a highly important component of scientific academic writing and that L2 English students need to learn frequently used lexical bundles in their disciplines and become able to use them appropriately in their academic writing. Out of the previous studies on lexical bundles, two (Cortes, 2013; Hyland, 2008) were selected for the AW course based on their strong relevance to the course content.

In Week 4 session of the course, students were introduced to the concept of lexical bundles, along with a list of 30 most frequently used four-word lexical bundles in the field of biology and electrical engineering taken from Hyland (2008). Then students engaged in exercises in which they had to think about how some lexical bundles were used in a particular section of a research article, including *the size of the, in the presence of, as shown in Fig.*, or *these results suggest that*.

Also in Week 4 session, further examples of lexical bundles were incorporated in the structural analysis of research article introductions. Students were presented with a chart based on Cortes (2013), which showed frequently occurring lexical bundles under each step of the three moves of introductions presented by Swales (1990, 2004). Portions of the chart used in the course are shown below[4]:

Move 1 Establishing a territory
Step 1 Claiming the importance of the topic of study
In the field of, one of the most important, play an important role in the

Step 2 Making topic generalization(s) (presenting the overview)
It has been shown that, it is well known that

Step 3 Reviewing items of previous research
Studies have shown that, it has been suggested that

Move 2 Establishing a niche
  Step 1A Indicating a gap
  Little is known about the, it is necessary to

Move 3 Presenting the present work
  Step 1 Announcing the purpose of the present study
  The purpose of the present study was to

  Step 2 to 6 omitted

  Step 7 Outlining the structure of the paper
  This paper is organized as follows
  The remainder of the paper is organized as follows
  The rest of this paper is organized as follows

After the presentation of the chart above, students were provided with a second chart in which key phrases for the three moves and their respective steps were listed with examples of lexical bundles removed. For a homework assignment, they selected one published research article in their own disciplines and analyzed the organizational patterns of the introduction by checking the moves and steps listed in the chart. They also wrote down important lexical bundles used under each move and step from their articles. In the following class session, they discussed the results of the structural patterns and the use of lexical bundles in small groups and then reported out to the class.

Abstracts

Abstracts were the focal topic in Week 9 and 10, after the individual sections of research papers from the introduction to the conclusion were introduced. Hyland (2004a) presented different patterns of abstract move structures based on the analysis of 800 abstracts from journal articles. One of them is the pattern of Introduction-Purpose-Method-Product-Conclusion. The function of each move that

Hyland identified was as follows: Introduction as the establishment of the context of the paper; Purpose as the indication of purpose, thesis or hypothesis, or the intention of the paper; Method as the information on design or procedure; Product as the statement of the main findings, results, argument, or the accomplishment of the study; Conclusion as extended results that go beyond the scope of the paper, inferences, applications, or implications based on the study (see Hyland, 2004a, p. 67 for more details).

In the corpus of the abstracts Hyland (2004a) analyzed, however, the full structure that consists of Introduction, Purpose, Method, Product, and Conclusion was not the most prevalent structure chosen by writers. Shorter move structures were the most dominant: Purpose-Method-Product, followed by Introduction-Purpose-Product. Other move structures included two-move abstracts with Purpose-Product only. With these different move structures, Hyland found the inclusion of the Product move in virtually all research paper abstracts in his corpus, which indicates writers' emphasis of their central claims or major findings "as a means of gaining reader interest and acceptance" (Hyland, 2004a, p. 68).

In the AW course, a brief lecture on the structural and linguistic features of abstracts was provided, based on Hyland (2004a). Students were presented with various possibilities of the move structures of abstracts, as well as phrases that emphasize the novelty or newness of research findings, such as *a novel method or the new model*, which are frequently used in abstracts. After the brief lecture, students were then asked to analyze the move structures of the abstracts of research articles they selected and also find any phrases used to highlight novelty or newness of the findings. Additional exercises followed with the analysis of the move structures of the abstracts of research articles that the instructor selected.

Principle 2: Relegation of disciplinary expertise to students

The previous studies I used as a source of instruction may not necessarily cover the disciplinary variations of all the fields of science that the students in the course were studying. Therefore, I decided to relegate disciplinary expertise to students, which worked as the second principle that helped organize the course. Students confirmed or contested the genre features of different sections of scientific research papers from my lectures by engaging in their own analysis of the structural and linguistic features of published articles of their own choice.

Moreover, the subsequent group discussion after the individual analysis of published articles contributed to students' incorporation of their expertise into the course content. Throughout the course, students had assigned seating, and they

formed homogeneous disciplinary groups for the group discussions. Thus, by interacting with the group members from the same fields of discipline, students were able to confirm the genre knowledge of scientific papers introduced in the lectures and also add to the body of knowledge by discussing the generic features specific to their own fields.

The differences in the genre features among different fields of science were the most manifest in Week 6, the topic of which was the Method or Experimental section. For example, the published literature used for this session stated that the use of the past tense was dominant in the method section of scientific papers (ALESS Program, the University of Tokyo, 2012). In the reports of the group discussions based on the individual students' analyses of the Method sections of published articles, all the groups except two confirmed the use of the past tense as the prevalent form. In contrast, the two groups, both from the field of electrical engineering, reported the use of the present tense as the dominant form; according to these groups' reports, the main purpose of the method section in electrical engineering is to describe the conditions of the experimental simulations, which is mainly expressed by the use of the present tense. This is different from the other fields of science, such as experimental chemistry or physics, in which the detailed procedure of the experiments is generally written in the past tense, because it refers to the conduct that was already complete.

Students also utilized their expertise in responding to their peers' drafts of the final assignment. Here, the topics of the last five sessions of the semester and explanations of some of the activities are provided.

Week 11:   Outlining, drafting of the final assignment. Explanation of guidelines about the draft to be submitted on the 13th session
Week 12:   No class session,[5] drafting outside of the class session
Week 13:   Peer response activity, submission of the draft
Week 14:   Exercises on common errors based on students' drafts
Week 15:   Continued exercises on common errors based on students' drafts
            Returning students' drafts with comments and feedback
One week later: Final submission

In the 11th session, students were provided with the guidelines of the drafts of either introductions or abstracts of their research papers to be submitted in the 13th week session. The guidelines also included the students' annotation of comments

in their drafts. In their typed drafts of the introduction or abstract, students were instructed to add annotated comments in the margins with the help of computer software. The annotation of comments was a way for them to explain or reflect on their own writing; students were specifically asked to explain their structural organizations of their drafts and their choices of words or phrases, if necessary with reference to what they had learned in the course, including specific moves and steps in introductions, move structures in abstracts, various examples of lexical bundles, and boosters and hedges. Students were also allowed to express questions or concerns regarding their writing in the annotated comments.

In the 13th week session, students participated in peer response activities, in which they formed a pair in their disciplinary groups and responded to each other's drafts by answering the questions in the guided sheet of paper. The guide prompted students to decide on their own specific points to address in reading their peers' drafts, including the move structures of the introduction, and the use of appropriate lexical bundles, boosters and hedges, and to make written comments as to what extent their peers succeeded in those points. The guide also prompted them to answer the writers' questions they inserted in their annotated comments. For example, one student raised a question about her own writing as to whether the use of *strong alkali* was correct to refer to *kyou enki* in Japanese. The student who paired with her answered her question in a written form that the correct phrase should be *strong base*. This kind of assistance was possible because the two students in the pair were from the same science discipline. Thus, by utilizing their expertise, students helped each other in their drafts in the area in which the instructor could not help them.

The peer response sheet that each student filled out for his or her pair was returned to the original writer. Students made revisions on their drafts based on their peers' comments, as well as my comments and feedback, which are described below.

Principle 3: Promotion of dialogue between the instructor and students

For the revisions of their drafts, I wanted to have a writing conference (one-on-one meeting) with individual students so I could learn about each student's needed areas of assistance and provide focused guidance. However, it was difficult to set aside such an opportunity for each of the 25 students during a class session. Moreover, it was not feasible to set up individualized writing conferences outside of class, due to time constraints on both my and the students' accounts. As an alternative way of having a writing conference, I provided individualized

assistance in the form of written dialogues, by which I mean responding to students' annotated comments and providing detailed comments and feedback on their drafts.

In the 19 drafts of abstracts and introductions,[6] students produced a total of 107 annotated comments: 61 comments in 10 introductions; 46 in 9 abstracts. Though categorizations of these annotated comments will be reported in a future study, overall, students' annotation of comments served as great help for me in formulating response comments to their drafts. First, their explanation of the structural organization or the use of specific lexical bundles, and boosters and hedges helped me detect to what extent students had understood the genre components introduced in the course. Second, their questions and concerns regarding specific choices of words, phrases, or sentence construction helped me discern areas of assistance they needed for revisions of their drafts. For example, one student's concern about her repeated use of *so* as a logical connector between sentences and her confession of difficulty generating other appropriate logical connectors helped me realize her awareness of the problem and need for assistance in introducing other connectors such as *thus* or *therefore*. Third, students' questions and concerns about the appropriate use of words and phrases related to their fields of study made me relegate such areas of assistance to their peers in the same discipline, as mentioned in the previous section. Based on students' annotated comments, I answered their questions and suggested alternative choices of words, phrases, and sentence structures in my written comments on their drafts.

Besides responding to the annotated comments, I also provided detailed comments to students' writing in their drafts. I pointed out areas where they lacked clarity or needed more explanation, such as the need for a brief background of their research instead of abruptly starting the purpose in their abstracts. Regarding grammar errors or problems with sentence construction, instead of simply correcting those errors, I provided reasons for the need of correction or clues for what to be corrected. For example, in one student's abstract, the inconsistency of tenses of the verbs was a major problem; he started by saying "We are developing" and "Our goal is," but switched to the future tense "we will have" and concluded his abstract by "we achieved." In my comment, instead of correcting the tenses, I pointed out the need for clarification as to whether his study was ongoing or complete by the use of appropriate tenses. In another student's draft of the introduction section, he said "This paper focus on …" or "The paper is comprised of five section." Instead of changing those sentences to "This paper *focuses* on …" or "The paper is comprised of five *sections*," I alerted the student to the correct

forms of verbs and nouns so he could make the corrections by himself.

As shown above, students' annotation of comments and my written responses to their annotated comments and my feedback to their writing served as dialogue, an alternative way of having individual writing conferences. In the 14th and 15th week sessions, students engaged in grammar exercises based on common errors I had detected in their drafts, including the tenses, subject-verb agreement, singular or plural noun forms, definite and indefinite articles, and active and passive voices. At the end of the 15th session, students received their drafts back with my written comments. A week later, they submitted the revised drafts, which concluded all the activities for the course.

Although students' comments about their course activities were not collected in the form of questionnaire, their responses in the course evaluation were informative in my reflections on the course. Students indicated the usefulness of group discussions in increasing their awareness about the structural and linguistic features of research papers in English and disciplinary variations. Moreover, they highly appreciated the opportunity of writing introductions or abstracts and receiving detailed feedback on their drafts, due to the lack of such opportunities in their daily educational practice in their own disciplines. On the other hand, there were students who revealed their lack of investment in the course, in terms of the time and efforts devoted to the writing assignment, because of the need for more time on their research in which they engaged in their disciplines. Although not all students responded to the course evaluation, these responses from students will be utilized for future implementation of the course.

Concluding remarks

Although genre approach has been increasingly adopted as a dominant form of instruction for L2 English students learning to write research writing in English, it is important for instructors to adapt the instructional approach by taking their classroom context and pedagogical realities into consideration. In my first year of teaching the Academic Writing course for science graduate students at Osaka Prefecture University, the instructional realities that affected my pedagogical approach included the large class size, diversity of students' majoring fields in sciences, and my limited expertise in scientific disciplines. Part of the challenge arising from these problems was lessened through three principles that helped organize the course: utilization of published literature as a basis and source of instruction, relegation of disciplinary expertise to students, and having a written form of dialogue with students through the annotation of comments in their writing

and my responses and feedback on their drafts.

In future teaching of this course, my instructional approach may be different from the one I adopted in my first year of experience. For example, various computer software programs derived from genre approach are available to assist L2 English writers who need to learn to write research papers in English (e.g., Mizumoto, 2016; Yasuda, 2016). Thus, future implementation of the course may necessitate the effective incorporation of such software into the classroom teaching. Moreover, a comparison of graduate-level English writing courses across different universities is necessary in order to investigate what educational approaches are adopted and to what extent those approaches are effective.[7] Based on the examples of other universities, various teaching approaches including genre approach need to be critically scrutinized.

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, graduate education plays a critical role in assisting L2 English graduate students with learning advanced academic writing in English and becoming competitive in ever-intense English-dominant world of academia. Continued reflections on and improvement of the AW course will contribute to the exploration of such vital educational endeavors.

Notes

1. The implementation of Academic Writing course was part of a larger study supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 16K02849. In addition, the data collection from the students in the AW course was approved by the research ethic committee of the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Osaka Prefecture University. Written forms of consent were obtained from students in the use of four kinds of data: (1) an initial background survey, (2) their written comments in peer response activities, (3) their drafts of introductions or abstracts with the annotation of comments, and (4) their final submissions of the introductions or abstracts.

2. The content of the course until the 10th sessions was delivered at a conference presentation (Fujioka, 2016).

3. Boosters and hedges were introduced as words or phrases that either strengthen or reduce the force of statements. Frequently used boosters include such verbs as *show (that), find (that), demonstrate (that)* or using adjectives or adverbs including *it is clear/clearly* or *particularly*, while common hedges include modal verbs such as *could, may, might, would*, or such verbs as *suggest* or *seem* (Hyland, 2004a, p. 91). The use of boosters and hedges is highly important in scientific research writing; writers need to present convincing arguments but at the same time need to avoid overstatement of their arguments (see Hyland, 2004a, pp. 85-103 for detailed definitions of and further discussion on boosters and hedges).

4. The chart presented to the students was a modified version from Cortes (2013, pp. 39-

40). In addition, the three moves and their respective steps were written in Japanese, based on the Japanese translation of Swales's analytical framework by Ono (2016). Also, the term, *lexical bundles*, was introduced to the students with its Japanese translation *gorensa*, which was used by Mizumoto (2016).

5. No class session in Week 12 was due to my overseas conference presentation. I offered a make-up session on the date when the university assigned make-up day so students could consult with me about their writing. However, no students availed themselves of this opportunity.

6. Out of 25 drafts submitted, 19 were analyzed for the annotated comments with the following reasons. Five out of 25 students did not agree to offer their drafts with annotated comments as data. Furthermore, one student, who agreed to participate in the study, indicated that the study from which his abstract derived involved other graduate students who were not taking the AW course, and thus this student's abstract was removed from the data. Consequently, 19 drafts of students' submissions were analyzed.

7. In the larger study I mentioned in note 1, I plan to investigate how graduate-level research writing courses in English are taught at different universities in Japan.

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Abstract

With the dominance of English for research and publication purposes in the world, second language (L2) English writers face intense pressure to acquire advanced academic writing skills in English. A graduate writing course is vital in order to assist students for future academic success in English. The purpose of this paper is to describe an English Academic Writing course offered for science graduate students at Osaka Prefecture University. Genre approach was adopted to teach structural and linguistic features of different sections of science research papers in English. Moreover, three principles helped implement the course: published literature as a source for instruction, relegation of disciplinary expertise to students, and promotion of written dialogue between the instructor and students through their drafts of the writing assignment and detailed feedback.

The genre-based instruction governed by the three principles contributed to effectively responding to the pedagogical realities of the classroom, including the large class size, differences in the various fields of science represented in the class,

and the instructor's lack of expertise in science. However, continued reflections on and further improvement of the course are necessary in order to better prepare L2 English graduate students for future success in English academic writing.