

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Rationale and Significance of the Problem

At tertiary level, learning how to master effective writing is not easy as one might think since there are a number of crucial and theoretical factors involved. Definitely, these include the ability to select appropriate topic and content, and to organise the content coherently; the ability to form correct sentences, and to choose vocabulary wisely to express a variety of ideas (Caudery, 1998). Many EFL students engaging in writing classes may mostly experience the same problems such as where to begin, what to write and how to develop ideas. Good writing is extensively required for both academic and communicative purposes and it is ever more important as an essential skill for communication across cultures and countries (Weigle, 2002). Writing comprehensible messages is also requested outside an educational setting. Kelly and Gargagliano (2001) believe that excellence in student writing goes beyond the ability to write correctly and good writing should come from writing that leads to discovery of one's ideas and self-expression. Students should be exposed to learning through interesting and expressive activities rather than be pushed into learning through fear of failure. In the Thai context, students study grammar thoroughly, but when they have to write a composition; they can write neither grammatical sentence nor coherent text. They have difficulty expressing ideas as well. Besides, many EFL teachers in Thailand are still employing traditional teaching techniques which adversely affect students' writing ability, and these techniques are normally teacher-centered (Supakitjumnong, 2002). Wagner's research (cited in Weckert, 2000) also reveals that many teachers have studied particular foreign language learning theory.

However they rarely follow the prescribed teaching sequence so that the activity is no longer connected with a learning theory.

Some difficulties also occur in writing classes since the effective teaching techniques are not accurately applied to suit the learning situation. One of possible solutions to this problem is the use of genre and there has been much interest in “genre or text type” as a device for developing writing instruction. The term “genre” was first used in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) context by Tarone *et al.* (cited in Dudley-Evans, 1994) in an article that reported the use of the active and passive forms in astrophysics journal. It established the principle that within the conventions of the genre studied it was the writer’s communicative purpose that controls choice at the grammatical and lexical levels. Genre is either written or spoken form of language which differs in its structure. The reason why each genre is structured differently is the purpose for which the genre is being used. The purpose of narrative genre, for instance, is to hold the readers’ interest in the story and extend their imagination. Not only does the genre of a text differ in terms of its purpose, it also differs according to the particular situation in which it is being used (Derewianka, 1990). Fairclough (1995) defines a genre as a particular means of using language which is relevant to the way of particular social practice that is being involved, for example, an interview genre, a news genre or an advertising genre. Kress and Threadgold contend that “Genres are primarily as the socially ratified text- types in a community” (cited in Leckie-Tarry, 1995). Goatly (2000) states that genres are discourse types that have achieved importance within a particular culture, society and institution. It can be said that genre is part of that culture and to participate fully within it one needs to understand their linguistics and conventions. Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) also state that the use of genres as resources in communication is controlled by the order of discourse because the order of discourse constitutes the genres that are available. Swales (1990) profoundly illustrates the definition of genre as a class of

communicative events which will vary in their context of language and a discourse feature that turns the communicative events into a genre is some sets of communicative purposes. From this definition, the concept of genre is not just a plain discourse, yet it can provide an interaction between writers and readers.

Hoey (2001) characterizes text as a site of an interaction between a writer and readers which the writer controls. Fictions, for example, seem to fit this model of interaction quite well. In such a case there is a writer who has a certain kind of readers in mind and that kind of readers then come to the text and accept what the writer offers. Weckert (2000) also claims in her study that only the genre-based approach and the communicative approach can take account of language interactions. Learners can interactively participate in activities based upon these perspectives. Thus students find it easy to write their own texts and can recognise how some texts are organised when reading, and understanding the relationship between text types and their contexts will assist learners in writing skills (McCarthy, 1996).

Hyon (1996) has provided a conception of genre and genre-based pedagogy which have been conceived of in different scholarly traditions and teaching applications in three different areas: 1) English for specific purposes (ESP), 2) North American New Rhetoric studies, and 3) Australian systemic functional linguistics. The investigation reveals that a concept of genre based upon Australian systemic functional linguistics provides EFL instructors with insights into linguistics feature of written texts as well as guidelines for presenting its features in classroom. Australian genre is drawn upon Halliday's functional grammar or systemic linguistic theory which guides the use of written discourse. Based on Halliday's functional grammar, language is said to be functional because its organisation reveals the purposes of any natural language. Under this view, the functional nature of language is categorised in three metafunctions: 1) to understand the environment (the ideational), 2) to act on the others in using language (the interpersonal): 3) combined with these two

metafunctions is the textual which has to do with the organisation of language as coherent messages (Halliday, 1994; Christie, 1999). This theoretical approach to the discourse of academic texts has led to the development of genre structures that can raise both teacher and student awareness of the organisation of each text type in their writing activities.

In addition, Leckie-Tarry (1995) has expanded the three metafunctions as a means of specifying context of situation: 1) Ideational knowledge organised by schemata represents “the world of ideas” or the knowledge resources of a culture, 2) Interpersonal knowledge relates to how people behave in particular situations and the ability to derive communicative function from each context, 3) Textual knowledge is gained from other texts, including knowledge within the context and between each context and it involves conventions for the realisation and organisation of texts. Fairclough’s three dimensional model (cited in Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002) is also conceived upon Hallidayan perspective: 1) the linguistic features of the text, 2) processes relating to the production and the consumption of the text and 3) the wider social practice to which the communicative event belongs. According to Derewianka’s functional model of language (1990), the genre of a text is partly determined by the culture in which the text is used, because different cultures achieve their purposes through language in different ways. The type of language used in a text will depend on: the tenor (the relationship between participants, the field (the subject matter of the text), and the mode (the channel of communication being used). These three factors together determine the register of the text.

In an educational context genre becomes important for students to write successfully within functional context of each genre, by being acquainted with the generic structures of text type (Goatly, 2000). Kay and Dudley-Evans (cited in Hyon, 2001) note that some teachers believe a genre-based approach helps students

“discover how writer organised texts”, and is especially helpful for giving confidence to lower-level L2 learners. Henry and Roseberry (1998) have also found that genre-based approach helpful for teaching of EAP/ESP writing. They compared students’ writing about tourist information texts in both the genre and nongenre group and the results showed that students’ writing in the genre group improved significantly. Moreover, Rothery (1995) highlights one of its goals is to explain how texts are organised and why they are organised as they are. A major focus on her research has described the organisation of texts into stages which can be described in functional terms and to show this staging is not arbitrary but socioculturally motivated in that it enables texts to achieve social goals. Martin *et al* (cited in Goatly, 2000) have identified a range of genres which do seem to surface in the classroom. Based on their work, the education authorities in New South Wales came up with a list of text types or genres for curriculum development purposes. Genres in the classroom are narrative, recount, information report, discussion, explanation, exposition, and procedure.

Here is a sample text of recount genre in *Exploring How Texts Work* by Derewianka, (1990)

Dear Mum and Dad,

On Thursday 2.2 went on an excursion to observe plants

(orientation)

(series of events)

First we went to Port Kembla Beach. There were not many plants because of the salt and the sand. Then we got back on the bus. Next we went to the steelworks. We sat on a hill and observed the plants. We saw bushes and grass. Not many plants grow because of the pollution. We got back on the bus went to Mt. Keira rainforest. We got off the bus and ate our little lunch in the clearing area. We saw many trees of plants. We saw wattle tress, tall trees, thin trees and rock plants. After that we got back on the bus and went back to school. We arrived at school at 12 o’clock. Then we went into school and talked about our excursion.

(personal comment)

We had great fun!!

Aneta

Derewianka explains in her book that the focus of the recount genre is on a sequence of actions, all of which relate to a particular occasion. Orientation gives the readers the background information of the text, series of events unfolds the information in a chronological order and personal comment details the feeling of the writer toward the situation. The schematic structure of each genre reveals all contents that are indispensable in writing particular text so it is undoubtedly useful for teachers to implement this in classroom.

Genres are useful in teaching ESL students for several reasons: (Christie, 1999)

1. They offer a principled way to identify and focus upon different types of English texts, providing a framework in which to learn features of grammar and discourse.
2. They offer students a sense of the generic models that are regularly revisited in an English-speaking culture, illuminating ways in which they are adapted or accommodated in long bodies of text in which several distinct genres may be found.
3. They offer the capacity for initiating students into ways of making meaning that are valued in English-speaking communities.
4. Because they permit all these things, they also form a potential basis for reflecting on and critiquing the ways in which knowledge and information are organised and constructed in the English language.

Hammond *et al.* (1997) also demonstrate four stages in a teaching-learning cycle which are aimed at providing support for learners to master written texts. They involve the selection and sequencing of classroom tasks and activities and are related to the starting points of topic and type of text. The four stages in the teaching-learning cycle are: 1) building the context or field of the topic or text type, 2) modelling the genre under focus,

3) joint construction of the genre, 4) independent construction of the genre. The Teaching - Learning Cycle is based on the assumption that in order to learn to write effectively, students first need to have an excessive understanding of and familiarity with the topic they are writing about. They also need models of the genre they are learning to write, in order to have a clear idea of what it is that they are working towards. They need some support and guidance in learning how to organise what they are about the topic into an appropriate written text, and finally they need opportunities to apply what they have learned about writing the text, as they 'go it alone' and write independently. This teaching technique can provide teachers with insights how to teach students in three different levels of writing proficiency. Pre-intermediate students might spend more time in stage 1 and 2 and intermediate students need their further understanding in stage 3. Teachers will only facilitate upper- intermediate students when they write their own writings in stage 4.

The teaching-learning cycle is useful in that it;

1. provides a rationale and a framework for decisions about the type and sequence of teaching and learning activities appropriate in a language and literacy classroom.
2. incorporates tasks and activities that move learners from a focus on spoken language to a focus on the written language.
3. focuses on learning language and also about learning about language, that is, learning how and why written texts are shaped and organised as they are. This focus on learning about language may involve reading published texts, reading texts that have been written by teachers and / or reading texts written by learners.

The last stage of the teaching-learning cycle provides a broad contribution for students to work independently expressing their own ideas in the text; consequently, they are gradually autonomous from their instructors. Schwienhorst (1997) assumes that learner autonomy in the classroom means the teacher transfers all

control to the learners and thus becomes a redundant part of the learning process.

However, the teacher may play a major role in developing autonomy in the learners.

Holec and Little (cited in Little and Dam, 1998) state that learner autonomy grows out of the individual learner's acceptance of responsibility for their own learning and this means that learner autonomy is a matter of explicit or conscious intention: such responsibility will not be accepted unless learners have some ideas of what, why, and how they are trying to learn. The learners must take at least some of the initiatives that give shape and direction to learning process and must share in monitoring progress and evaluating the extent to which learning aims are achieved. Scharle and Szabo (2000) also conclude that, in order to promote learner autonomy, students clearly need to develop a sense of responsibility and teachers also encourage them to take an active part in making decisions about their learning. Learner autonomy implies a view of learner as an individual in two ways. First, each learner has personal history and needs that are totally different from one another. Second, the measure of success in second or foreign language learning is a fully integrated part of the learner's identity (Little and Dam, 1998). Camilleri (1997) also emphasizes that learner autonomy improves learning if it is introduced slowly; in addition, students are prepared for and willing to try it out. Such approach is important for it encourages each learner to find his or her own ways of learning and specify his or her own learning objectives. Students may create their work resulting from their individual preferences and goals within the learning environment that helps them meet their needs.

At the age of technology, computer is one of the current tools to assist and facilitate writing ability and learner autonomy. The utility of computer application and Internet in language classroom has long been concerned since the attempt to study another language is vital in the modern world. A key factor in this idea lies in the innovative devices and empirical methodology, hence; teachers need to possess the ability to merge the two disciplines together. Courseware is an application that has

eventually appeared in the classroom to assist and facilitate students in learning and practicing language skills, especially writing. Students have written and sent a variety of text types through computer programs and Internet.

Courseware is a module or authoring programme based on Computer-Assisted Language Learning. Levy (1997) has defined Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) as the search for and study of applications of computer in language teaching and learning and he also provides a history of CALL said to have begun with PLATO (Programmed Logic for Authentic Teaching Operations) Project which was initiated at the University of Illinois in 1960. PLATO was designed to provide interactive, self-paced instruction for large number of students, supporting communication between users in the form of notes files and 'talk', a kind of restricted email system. Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in teaching has long been used throughout the decades and it is considered to be a key factor in second language acquisition. Everyday language use is so tied to technology that learning language through technology has become a fact of life with important implications, particularly for second language acquisition (Chapelle, 2001). Larsen-Freeman and Long (cited in Levy, 1997) state that since the mid-1960s, there has been noticeable shift in perspective from a focus on language teaching to a focus on language learning through technology. This shift has been caused by inconclusive findings from comparative studies of language teaching methods, and changing views on the nature of language and language learning advanced by specialists in psychology and linguistics including the current trend of computer software. Poedjosoedarmo (1998) classifies that most CALL software has four components: 1) giving information 2) asking questions to check comprehension/ learning 3) allowing for user input 4) evaluating user input and giving feedback.

Currently, the use of CALL has grown rapidly and it is no doubt that most of courseware used contains some text types or genres with lots of cute sounds and

animated graphics appearing on screen. Rassool (cited in Chapelle, 2001) points out that to comprehend the features of electronic texts (e-text) as well as its interactive nature, we require more than just the ability to read and write in functional way. Meskill and Mossop (2000) examined in close detail contexts where electronic texts were being used effectively to help the L2 and literacy development of children and their finding show that students were motivated and learned independently by doing tasks with the computer. Cunningham (2000) has conducted a preliminary study in the EFL writing class by using computer. The finding indicated that 88% of the students believed the computer helped them to improve their writing skills. However, the application on the genre-based pedagogy on CALL is still in a challenging phase for all language teachers who value genre and CALL.

Hardisty & Windeatt (1994) have introduced the procedure of using CALL in classroom as follows:

1. Pre-computer work; the work done before the students sit in front of a screen.
2. Computer work; the parts of the activity carried out at the keyboard.
3. Post-computer; follow-up activities.

They have provided a number of activities in their book. Many EFL teachers have adopted this procedure into their classroom with the assistance of skilled technicians, but many of whom can even create and design their own courseware through a series of storyboard by using some computer applications.

In this study has combined the procedure of using CALL in classroom and the teaching-learning cycle together as the Genre-Based Courseware and the procedure is outlined as follows:

Genre-Based Courseware (GBC) procedures are:

GBC stage 1 (building knowledge and modelling text)

The aim of this stage is to reconstruct and discuss given activities with a

range of tasks designed to enable students to share, discuss, and argue about aspects of the topic via computer and Internet. Then the genre-based computer activities present students with features of the overall organisation of each text type.

GBC stage 2 (Joint construction of text)

The teacher helps students to complete each genre on screen by ways of e-text activities with negotiation between teacher and students, and between students, regarding appropriate beginning, middle, and end construction of text. E-text activities feature each text type in the form of misplaced moves, writing story from prompts, games, and etc.

GBC stage 3 (Independent construction of text)

Students can produce their own written texts with appropriate schematic structure and grammatical pattern and they can access to extra tasks for further understanding of given genres. Even when students write their texts alone on computer screen, they should concentrate on the prescribed organisation of the genre. Also, they have to answer on the questionnaire of autonomous learning after each lesson.

The process will gradually be implemented the idea of genres through a series of various activities which enhance students' writing ability as well as assisting them to learn autonomously. Therefore the research questions for this study were:

1. Do students in three different levels of writing proficiency pass the minimum requirements of each genre after accessing to the Genre-Based Courseware?
2. How much do students in each level improve their writing skills?
3. How different do students in three levels learn independently over a period of the study?

Purposes of the study:

The purposes of the study were:

1. To study English writing ability of learners after each lesson.
2. To compare English writing ability of learners with three different levels of proficiency: pre-intermediate, intermediate, and upper-intermediate.
3. To study learner autonomy after the study.
4. To compare autonomy of learners with three different levels of proficiency: pre-intermediate, intermediate, and upper-intermediate.
5. To investigate the correlation between levels of students' writing ability and autonomy.

Scope of the study

1. Subjects were the nine students with three different levels of writing proficiency and they were selected from 30 students who enrolled in 1553105 Creative Writing at Chiang Mai Rajabhat University in the first semester of the 2004 academic year.

2. Variables

2.1 Independent variable – Application of Genre-Based Courseware.

2.2 Dependent variables – English writing ability and learners' autonomy.

3. Content: genres or text types used in this study are narrative, news item, fiction review, information report, and exposition.

Hypotheses

1. English writing ability and autonomy of learners with 3 different levels of proficiency were different after the implementation of the Genre-Based Courseware.

2. Students' writing ability correlated with their autonomous learning.

Definitions of Important Terms

1. Genre stands for a written form of language which differs in its organisation. Text organisation (schematic structure) unfolds the writer's communicative purpose and the situation in which each genre is used. Genres will be displayed as e-texts.

2. Genre-Based Courseware (GBC) stands for a programme of teaching text-types via Internet in the following steps:

2.1 GBC stage 1 (building knowledge and modelling text)

2.2. GBC stage 2 (joint construction of text)

2.3. GBC stage 3 (independent construction of text)

3. Writing ability is a quality in composing each task of written genre with organisation, idea and grammar.

4. Learner autonomy means an explicit intention and responsibility for their own learning process which learners will find their own ways of learning, specify their own learning objectives and develop self-monitoring technique under the teacher's supervision.

Application Advantages

1. It should raise schematic structure awareness of each text type for interested people in writing.

2. It should encourage other teachers to assist their students to learn autonomously.

3. It would be helpful for students to develop self-monitoring and self-expression in their writing development.