

## **The Effect of Genre Consciousness-raising Tasks on EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension Performance**

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**Abstract:** *The present study attempted to investigate the effect of genre consciousness-raising activities on listening comprehension performance of EFL learners across language proficiency levels. A number of genre consciousness-raising tasks were adapted from Flowerdew (1993) and used as the treatment procedures in this study. Two different listening comprehension tests of News broadcast genre, used as pre- and post-test, were administered to 120 senior students majoring in English language translation. The results indicated that consciousness-raising tasks significantly affected EFL learners' listening comprehension performance. However, the effect of genre consciousness-raising tasks did not vary across different language proficiency levels. Overall, the findings provide empirical support for the facilitative effect of genre consciousness-raising tasks on the listening comprehension performance of the EFL learners.*

**Key Words:** *Genre, Consciousness-raising Tasks, Listening Comprehension, EFL Learners, Language Proficiency*

### **Introduction**

There has been a considerable interest in the genre-based approach to the teaching of language since the mid-1980s. As Henry & Rosberry (1998) argue, this approach has communicative purpose as its foundation and originated through the work of Halliday (1985), Swales (1981, 1990), and Bhatia (1991, 1993). The aim of genre-based language teaching, according to Henry & Rosberry (1998), is to raise learners' awareness of both the rhetorical organization and the linguistic features closely associated with the genre.

Rost (2002) says that in principle, learners should be exposed to a wide range of oral genres in order to 'develop a feel' for the range of spoken language. He continues that 'Developing a feel' goes beyond becoming familiar or comfortable with different genres and discourse types. By becoming familiar with different genres, learners can begin to adopt 'point driven' strategies for understanding rather than 'information-driven' strategies for understanding (Rost, 2002).

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Kay & Dudley-Evans (1998) believe that the concept of genre provides a way of looking at what students have to do linguistically-what kinds of discourses they have to be able to understand and produce in speech and writing. They add that genre also provide us with an understanding of why a discourse is the way it is, through a consideration of its social context and its purpose. Kay & Dudley-Evans conclude that genre would thus seem to be a potentially very powerful pedagogic tool.

As Paltridge (2000) maintains, a genre is more than just its discourse structures and patterns of language. He also mentions that there are many factors that are important to consider, such as, the sociocultural context of the text, the purpose of the text, the audience of the text, expectations of the particular discourse community, and the relationship the text has with other instances of the genre.

As Rost (2002) mentions, a part of the listener's initial task are to determine the kind of genre and then to activate the kind of listening orientation that is most useful to interpreting the text. He believes that knowledge if a genre allows the listener to focus on essential information.

Buck (1990, 1991, 1994) maintains that successful listening comprehension involves an interaction between linguistic skills, background knowledge, and knowledge of the context and inferencing skills. Furthermore, previous research shows that second language listening comprehension performance may be affected by variables such as age (Seright, 1985), gender (Bacon, 1991), background Knowledge (Markham and Latham, 1987), increased exposure to authentic language (Herron and Seay, 1991), and different types of speech modifications and simplification (Long, 1985).

Reporting on a multicultural workshop of 48 teachers, Kay & Dudley-Evans (1998) note that some language teachers believe a genre-based approach helps students "discover how writers organize texts" (p.310). In his paper, Hyland (2003) discusses the importance of genre approaches to teaching L2 writing and how they complement process views emphasizing the role of language in written communication. Hyland (2003) concludes that genre approaches see ways of writing as purposeful, socially situated responses to particular context and communities. Henry & Roseberry (1998) have found genre-based teaching significantly effective and helpful for teaching first year EAP management students to write tourist information texts. In her study, Flowerdew (2000), a case is made for devising genre-based exercises, on the grounds that they provide students with realistic, attainable models of academic writing. Weber (2001), experimenting a concordance- and genre-based approach to academic essay writing, concludes "the whole was a confidence-building exercise, which made essay-writing more accessible to non-native students by turning it into more of a cooperative and collaborative activity" (p.19). Sengupta et al. (1999) attempted to show that genre-based approach can go far beyond the prescriptive, structural mode and can indeed be seen as pedagogy of possibilities within a staff development context. Hyon (2001) found that students interviewed immediately after an EAP genre-based reading course reported paying greater attention to

rhetorical features on texts than before the course, as well as improved reading confidence and speed.

The present study used Flowerdew's (1993) process approach to the teaching of genres. The researcher refused to adopt a product-focused approach in which a given genre serves as a model for the learners' own attempts at creating instances of the genre. In contrast to product-focused approach, the emphasis here was not on trying to develop a near perfect mastery of one or more genres, but on showing how genre analysis can be applied to a range of genres and on learning about the sorts of variation that affect instances of genres (Flowerdew, 1993).

Rather than inculcating in the learner a fixed conception of the discourse and linguistic encoding of individual genre, the process approach to the teaching of genres, seek to develop sensitivity to subtle interplay between the various parameters affecting genre and how a change in any one of the parameters is likely to affect discourse structure and linguistic encoding (Flowerdew, 1993).

Sengupta et al. (1999:3) state "admit the enthusiasm over genre as teaching tool, however, few studies have evaluated the effects of genre-based pedagogy on students' language and literacy development". In prefacing their evaluation of genre-based writing instruction in an English For Specific/Academic Purposes (EAP/ESP) course, Henry & Roseberry (1998) observe that "the arguments for and against the genre approach in EAP/ESP have been limited to the theoretical, and few if any attempts have been made to evaluate the approach empirically in an ESP/EAP context" (p.148). Since genre studies have predominantly addressed writing instruction (Kay & Dudley-Evans, 1998) and as can be seen, in spite of the fact that there have been many studies in the field of applied linguistics on the effect of different variables on listening comprehension performance of EFL learners, very few have ever focused on the effect of genre-based teaching on listening comprehension performance of EFL learners with regard to their proficiency levels. In other words, none of the studies stated above have much to say about oral fluency and the genre-based approach seems to be largely connected with teaching of writing and reading. Clearly genre exist in spoken and written language, and thus knowledge of genre can be drawn upon in the teaching of speaking, listening and reading as well as writing. In this respect, therefore, the present study will examine the effect of genre consciousness-raising tasks on listening comprehension performance of EFL students as measured through listening comprehension tests. A further concern of the research is to explore whether the effect of EFL learners varies across their general English proficiency levels.

More specifically, the following questions motivated the present study:

Q<sub>1</sub>. Do any explicit genre consciousness-raising activities affect EFL learners' listening comprehension performance?

Q<sub>2</sub>. Does the effect of explicit genre consciousness-raising activities vary across different language proficiency levels?

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### **Method**

#### **Participants**

In this study, a sum of 120 male and female participants were selected from the total population of the available senior students at Azad University of Ghaemshahr and Mazandaran University (N=159), Iran. The subjects were screened into two proficiency levels based on their performance on a TOEFL test (Longman, 2001). Grouping was done based on the dispersion of the TOEFL scores around the mean. To ascertain the homogeneity of the subgroups (high & low proficiency groups) a One-way ANOVA was run on the scores of pre-test. The results confirmed the homogeneity of the subgroups, i.e. the high proficiency group differed significantly from the low proficiency group but genre group didn't differ significantly from non-genre group, before the treatment.

#### **Instrumentation**

In order to examine the research hypotheses of this study, two sets of listening comprehension tests in "News broadcast" genre were constructed and utilized as pre-test and post-test. The items of listening comprehension tests of "News broadcast" were in multiple-choice item type and there were 30 items in each test. These listening comprehension tests were composed of oral texts in "news broadcast" which are radio broadcasts (VOA news) of about 3-5 minutes, each followed by some multiple-choice questions.

To construct the tests, initially, some piece of "News broadcast" were recorded from VOA and transcribed. Then, a pool of listening comprehension items was developed. There was no control on the topic of the oral texts but most of the texts recorded were related to the social news i.e., social events.

A TOEFL (Longman, 2001) test was utilized in this study as a general language proficiency measure in order to screen students into two language proficiency levels of high low. This TOEFL test consists of 150 multiple-choice items in three sections: listening comprehension, structure and written expression, vocabulary and reading comprehension.

Before the administration of the tests to the intended participants, the two genre-based listening comprehension tests were piloted with all the participants (N=20) similar to the target groups in order to study their psychometric values. Further revisions were carried out according to the results of the item analyses. Both tests enjoyed acceptable concurrent validity as checked against the standard test with moderate to high reliability indices.

#### **Materials**

The kind of genre selected to be studied as a treatment in this study is "News broadcast". Initially, some pieces of "News broadcast" were recorded and transcribed from VOA and a pool of listening comprehension items was developed on the basis of these oral texts. The transcriptions were also used to develop instructional materials for treatment in both genre and non-genre group.

The subjects in genre groups received explicit genre consciousness-raising tasks for six sessions each half an hour. These tasks were presented to the

students, by using Flowerdew's model (1993). The procedures for subjects in non-genre groups included a more traditional approach modeled on the same genre for six sessions each half an hour.

#### Procedures

In order to investigate the probable effects of genre consciousness-raising tasks on genre-based listening comprehension performance of Iranian EFL learners, at first, the subjects were screened into two proficiency levels based on a TOEFL test. Grouping was done based on the dispersion of the TOEFL scores around the mean. Subjects were divided into two high and low proficiency groups. Each proficiency group was randomly divided into two genre and non-genre group, namely, high genre group, low genre group, high non-genre, and low non-genre group.

This study was carried out in three phases. In the first phase, all subjects in all four groups were given the pre-test in order to recognize the students' listening comprehension ability before the treatment. Second, subjects in the genre groups were treated based on explicit genre consciousness-raising tasks.

Subjects in the non-genre groups used a more traditional approach modeled on the same genre.

#### Activities Used for non-genre group

- pre-teaching of new vocabulary
- Extensive listening → questions about general context:
- Intensive listening → detailed questions;
- Examination of vocabulary and/or exponents of grammar;
- use of play and repeat/play and predict/recall words.

All instruction in genre group and non-genre group lasted at least six sessions each half an hour long. Genre consciousness-raising tasks were presented to the students, by using Flowerdew's (1993) model.

#### Genre Consciousness-raising Tasks used for genre group

##### First Session

1. Look at the texts below; analyze the structural formulas which are commonly used in these texts. (Texts 2, 4, 7)
2. Check whether you can identify any lexical items, which seemed to correlate with the structural formula, for example, a structural formula is "indirect speech" in which the reporting verb "say" is commonly used.
3. Provide alternative encoding for structural slots. For example, instead of reporting verb "say" other reporting verbs can also be used, like "tell, point out, declare, etc"

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Second session,

Find utterances in the text, which shows the following features ;( texts 15, 17, 20)

"News" writing tends to be:

1. Impersonal, to make it appear objective (to distance the reporter from the story) hence:
  - (a) Written in the third person,
  - (b) Use of indirect or direct speech which is attributed to someone other than the reporter,
  - (c) Some use of passive verbs but usually only when someone who is being quoted wants to distance himself from an issue and to show their objectivity about an issue,
2. About something that has taken place so mostly written in the past tense.
3. Simple, in fact close to the way we talk, relatively short sentences and words and some use of clichés which the whole audience understands.
4. Punchy, it must grab the readers' attention so often uses:
  - (a) Short rather than long words
  - (b) Active verbs
  - (c) Relatively short sentences
  - (d) Concrete rather than abstract vocabulary
  - (e) Sometimes emotive and colorful vocabulary
  - (f) Some use (but not overuse) of adjectives
5. But also relatively formal
  - (a) No use of contractions
  - (b) Sentences written in full (no elision) or elliptical sentences

Third Session

1. The 5Ws and the H  
Journalists are concerned with the 5Ws and the H (who did what, when, where, why and how). Any good news article will provide answers to all of these. Practice finding the 5Ws and the H in the transcripts of "news broadcast". (texts 27 , 28 )
2. The Inverted Pyramid style of writing
  - (a) To illustrate the effect of this style choose a transcript of "news broadcast" and list the main facts in the order the reporter presents them. (Texts 33, 17)
  - (b) Now rewrite the list in chronological order.
  - (c) Compare the two lists. Discuss the differences.
3. Intros  
The intro or the introduction is the first sentence of a news story. The basic requirements of the intro are that it should:
  - (a) Grab the readers' attention
  - (b) Concentrate on the main news point (the 'what')

- (c) Be short\_ no longer than 25 words
  - (d) Use active (Dog kills rat) not passive (Rat was killed)
  - (e) Be specific and clear
  - (f) Use simple language
- Find utterances in the transcript, which have those features, listed above.
- (Texts 35, 27, 4)

#### Fourth Session

##### Group Work,

Discuss in group :( texts 36, 2)

- (a) Content (the topical focuses of the genre)
- (b) Structure (genre's global organizational patterns)
- (c) Language style (linguistic features that convey the writer's stance towards the text content or audience)

Individual activity :( texts 7, 28)

Analyze the text individually and try to discover its prototypical features and the sorts of variation it is subject to.

#### Fifth Session

You are provided with a corpus made up from instances of "news broadcast" transcripts.

Political news , Sport news , Medicine news  
(Text 36) (Text 18) (Text 12)

1. Try to look for features which are common between them.
2. Try to look for features which are specific to a certain type of "news broadcast".

#### Sixth Session

1. Re-order the jumbled transcripts. Try to follow the organizational patterns of "news"
2. Create a piece of "news broadcast" text in the target language by examining carefully the specific features of similar texts in the "News broadcast". You can choose one of the recent newsworthy events which is interesting for you.

In the third phase of the study, the subjects were given the post-test in order to recognize the subjects' listening comprehension ability after the treatment. It is necessary to mention that for each genre-based listening comprehension test, first some oral directions were given to the subjects about the oral tests, type of questions and the answer sheet. In both genre-based tests, the audio materials were played only once.

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After collecting data, the scores for each participant were tabulated and subjected to statistical analyses in order to provide answers to the research questions formulated earlier.

### Results and Discussion

Initially, the subjects' performances on the three measures employed in this study (i.e. the listening comprehension tests and the TOEFL test) were tabulated and subjected to the conventional descriptive analyses. Table 1 illustrates the corresponding descriptive statistics.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for all measures involved in the study

Descriptive Statistics												
	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
TOEFL	120	194	454	648	550.92	5.18	56.694	3214.228	-.026	.221	-1.212	.438
PRETEST	120	10	10	20	15.09	.27	2.965	8.790	-.008	.221	-1.079	.438
POSTTEST	120	20	10	30	20.21	.53	5.798	33.612	.077	.221	-1.114	.438
Valid N (listwise)	120											

As it was mentioned earlier, subjects in the genre groups had explicit genre consciousness-raising tasks. Subjects in the non-genre groups used a more traditional approach modeled on the same genre. At the end of the treatment, the subjects were given the post-test in order to examine their listening comprehension performance and also the possible differences among all four groups after the treatment. After scoring the post-test, the scores were tabulated and subjected to descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. In order to probe the null hypotheses corresponding to research questions, a Two-way ANOVA was conducted on subjects' performances on the Post-test listening comprehension measure. The results are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2 The summary table for two-way ANOVA for post-test  
 Tests of Between-Subjects Effects  
 Dependent Variable: POSTTEST

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	3695.492(a)	3	1231.831	469.577	.000



Intercept	49005.208	1	49005.208	18680.921	.000
PROF	2832.408	1	2832.408	1079.722	.000
GENRE	858.675	1	858.675	327.329	.000
PROF * GENRE	4.408	1	4.408	1.680	.197
Error	304.300	116	2.623		
Total	53005.000	120			
Corrected Total	3999.792	119			
a R Squared = .924 (Adjusted R Squared = .922)					

As Table 2 indicates, there are significant main effects for both the PROF and the GENRE factors: the effects of both factors are significant beyond the .01 level. Despite the main effects of both factors, there is not a significant interaction. The P-value is given as .197, which means that it is more than .05. Clearly, the GENRE factor has the same effects upon high and low proficiency groups. As table 2 illustrates, there is a significant difference between genre and non-genre groups. These results reject the first null hypothesis and confirm the effect of genre consciousness-raising tasks on the EFL learners' listening comprehension performance. There is also a significant difference between high and low proficiency groups. However, the interaction between genre consciousness-raising tasks and proficiency levels of the subjects was not significant. So, the second null hypothesis is supported, i.e. the effect of genre consciousness-raising activities does not vary across different language proficiency levels. In order to locate the exact differences between pairs of groups, a Post Hoc Scheffe test was run the results of which are summarized in table 3 below. Inspection of the P-values shows that there are significant and meaningful differences among all four groups ( $P < .05$ ).

Table 3 Post Hoc Scheffe Test for Post-test

Multiple Comparisons  
Dependent Variable: POSTTEST  
Scheffe

(I) 4	(J) 4	Mean Difference (I- J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
high genre group	high non- genre group	5.73(*)	.418	.000	4.55	6.92
	low genre group	10.10(*)	.418	.000	8.91	11.29
	low non- genre	15.07(*)	.418	.000	13.88	16.25

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	group					
high non-genre group	high genre group	-5.73(*)	.418	.000	-6.92	-4.55
	low genre group	4.37(*)	.418	.000	3.18	5.55
	low non-genre group	9.33(*)	.418	.000	8.15	10.52
low genre group	high genre group	-10.10(*)	.418	.000	-11.29	-8.91
	high non-genre group	-4.37(*)	.418	.000	-5.55	-3.18
	low non-genre group	4.97(*)	.418	.000	3.78	6.15
low non-genre group	high genre group	-15.07(*)	.418	.000	-16.25	-13.88
	high non-genre group	-9.33(*)	.418	.000	-10.52	-8.15
	low genre group	-4.97(*)	.418	.000	-6.15	-3.78
* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.						

The significant differences among all four groups are more clearly shown in table 4 in which the groups are divided into homogeneous subsets, thus showing the true differences among the means of the four groups. Here, all four groups are significantly different from each other. Both main factors, i.e. Genre & Proficiency, are positively influential. As table 4 shows genre and high proficiency groups are performing better than non-genre and low proficiency groups.

Table 4 Homogeneous Subsets for Post-test

POSTTEST Scheffe					
4	N	Subset for alpha = .05			
		1	2	3	4
low non-genre group	30	12.87			
low genre group	30		17.83		
high non-genre group	30			22.20	
high genre group	30				27.93
Sig.		1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.					
a Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 30.000.					

## Discussion

Regarding the effect of genre-based pedagogy and genre consciousness-raising tasks on the listening comprehension ability of the EFL learners, the result of data analyses has revealed that genre consciousness-raising tasks as well as proficiency levels have significant and meaningful effect on the EFL learners' listening comprehension performance but there is no meaningful interaction between these two factors. As the results of the study show, the effect of genre consciousness-raising tasks is the same for both the low and high proficiency groups.

In other words, the results of two-way ANOVA illustrates there is a significant difference between genre and non-genre groups. These results reject the first null hypothesis and confirm the effect of genre consciousness-raising tasks on the EFL learners' listening comprehension performance. There is also a significant difference between high and low proficiency groups. However, the interaction between genre consciousness-raising tasks and proficiency levels of the subjects was not significant. So, the second null hypothesis is supported, i.e. the effect of genre consciousness-raising tasks does not vary across different language proficiency levels.

The findings of this study can be compared and contrasted with those of other researchers'. The present study is in congruity with the study done by Marshal (1991). In teaching the schematic structure, both studies emphasized on the relationship between these structures and the basic principles of thought and communication.

Mustafa (1995) found that genre-based teaching made the students aware of the "term paper" genre, but the students didn't follow the basic conventions and macrostructure of the "term paper" completely. The findings of the present study is in disagreement with the findings of Mustafa (1995), because, in the present study, genre consciousness-raising tasks made the students in genre group aware of the conventions and macrostructure of the genre and helped them perform better in genre-based listening comprehension tests.

The results of the present study are in agreement with the study done by Henry & Roseberry (1998). In both studies, genre analysis techniques and genre-based teaching were found helpful and successful for EFL learners.

Like the present study, Weber (2001) focused on genre consciousness-raising tasks and concluded that these tasks turned language learning activities into confidence-building, cooperative and collaborative activities.

The findings of the present study is in congruity with the study done by Johns (1999) in which the students analyze genre forms as well as their shaping social forces in preparation for approaching a variety of texts. She noted that genre-based approach was particularly successful. As it is true about the present study, Hyon (2001) found genre-based approach helpful in improving reading confidence and speed, but the findings of this study contradicts the last part of Hyon's study (2001) in which he pointed out that genre-based pedagogy was limited in increasing vocabulary knowledge and content comprehension.

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### **Conclusion**

The overall patterns of findings revealed that genre consciousness-raising tasks as well as proficiency levels have significant and meaningful effect on the EFL learners' listening comprehension performance. Also, the effect of genre consciousness-raising tasks was consistent for both low and high proficiency groups.

Analyses of the effect of consciousness-raising tasks used for the study by the learners shows that the learners were generally receptive to them. The results indicate that the learners viewed the tasks to be useful in imparting new knowledge about the language. Their responses indicated that the tasks were effective learning tools, and that learners viewed them to be so since they were able to use specific textual and contextual features of the News broadcast genre that they had learnt as a result of having completed the genre consciousness-raising tasks.

It is essential that learners be informed of the various options offered by the generic system of English without being coerced into making particular choices regarding those options. Second language learners may want to actively create both a new inter-language and an accompanying identity in the learning process. Second language learners' desire for observing native speaker generic norms or flouting native speaker generic conventions is shaped by learners' view of themselves, their social position in the target community and in different contexts within the wider L2 environment, and by their experience with native speakers in various encounters.

What I want to emphasize in this study is the importance of the general development of pragmatic awareness that we instill within our students so that they can figure out pragmatic meaning when they encounter it outside our classrooms. I believe that with advancements in technology, the accelerating globalization of today's world, and the worldwide use of English for communication, we need to help our students develop pragmatic awareness of English language norms in both EFL and ESL contexts.

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