

The Effects of Genre-Based Instruction on Iranian EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension

Hossein Ali Manzouri

Instructor in TEFL, Zabol University

Hossein3362004@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study aims at uncovering the effect(s) of genre-based instruction (GBI) on listening proficiency among Iranian EFL learners. Moreover, it seeks to explore the relationship between effectiveness of GBI and listening proficiency. For this purpose, 68 EFL learners in two different groups at Zabol University were selected. Group A included 30 participants (12 males and 18 females), and Group B consisted of 36 participants (16 males, and 22 females). Group A was divided into treatment and control groups and underwent two listening proficiency tests for pre and posttest. Results of independent *t*-test indicated that treatment group outperformed the control group as the result of GBI ($p = .001, t = 3.740$). Based on the proficiency test, Group B was also divided into proficient and less-proficient groups; each one underwent two listening tests for pre and posttest. Results of independent *t*-test and paired *t*-test revealed both groups improved significantly as the result of GBI ($p = .00$, correlation = .949, and .945 for proficient and less-proficient groups respectively) indicating that listening proficiency is not a significant factor in effectiveness of GBI.

Keywords: Genre-Based Instruction, Listening Proficiency, Iranian EFL learners

1. Introduction

Genre-based instruction (GBI) is predominantly related to second language writing pedagogy and stems from genre studies. It is founded on the notion that each writer produces their texts in a unique way, but in relation to social context and to other texts (Knapp & Watkins, 2005). Looking from the same perspective, Hyland (2004) describes GBI as "being concerned with what learners do when they write" (p.5), not a mechanical process of chaining words together. Therefore, GBI considers writing as a social communication which is characterized by its focus on language structures, subject content, writing processes, and textual forms. It deals with instructing learners how to use language to produce a

coherent discourse. As Cope and Kalantzis (1993) stated learners in GBI are taught in "the ways in which the 'hows' of text structure produce the whys of social effect" (p. 8).

It has been a truism among second and foreign language researchers to limit genre studies mainly to written discourse. As a result of such a limited view, research on genre-based pedagogy is still underrepresented (Cheng, 2008; Cheng, 2006). However, there is no reason to confine GBI to writing pedagogy and put it into the straitjacket of written discourse. Swales (1990) defines genre as referring to "a distinguishable category of discourse of any type, spoken or written, with or without literary aspirations" (p.33). Some studies reported positive correlation between GBI and

improvement in learners' attitude towards language learning (Henry & Roseberry, 1998). Moreover, these studies have evaluated the effectiveness of the genre-based instruction in improving learners' linguistic skills (Cheung & Lai, 1997; Flowerdew, 2000). As a significant linguistic skill, listening is generally considered an area in language acquisition in which language learner gains mastery sooner and with greater speed than other language skills. It also has a vital effect on the emergence and development of language skills, especially reading and writing (Oxford, 1990, 1993; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). Brown (2001, p.248) describes the significance of listening in the fact that it is "an important skill through which language learners internalize linguistic information without which they cannot produce language". However, as Brown (1995) contended, listening is a difficult skill to develop because it demands high levels of cognitive processing. To name few other reasons, Underwood (1989) mentions small size of learners' vocabulary knowledge as well as lack of contextual clues in the spoken language. Chiang and Dunkel (1992) assume listeners' lack of sufficient background knowledge to be of impediments before developing listening. Despite broad and inclusive potentials of genre theory and genre-based instruction, researchers mostly focused their attention on writing pedagogy (Cheng, 2006; Cheng, 2008; Cheung & Lai, 1997; Flowerdew, 2000; Manzouri & Shahraki, 2014). Of course such a trend doesn't seem to be weird, because for the first time the concept of genre arose from writing pedagogy research. As Bhatia (1993) discussed, language learners for active participation in a specialized communicative event, are required to acquire generic competence and genre knowledge in the profession. Under such a specialty-oriented instruction, language learners will eventually absorb the

specialist culture and achieve their membership in the target discourse community. To fill the gap of research in the field, this study aims at pushing the borders of applications of GBI further to one of the fundamental language skills; listening.

2. Review of the Literature

Genre, according to Hammond and Derewianka (2001), is related to "ancient Greeks and their study of rhetorical structure in different categories of the epic, lyric and dramatic" (p.69). Johns (2003) criticizes the traditional understanding of genre and believes traditional genre studies were highly focused on classification of literary works. Modern readings of the term, however, assume a social nature for it. To accentuate social attributes of genre, Hyland (2003) defines genre as "abstract, socially recognized ways of using language" (p.21). Genre-based instruction which is based on the modern definitions of the term is considered to be a revolutionary movement in language pedagogy, especially in the field of second language writing.

Before modern concepts of genre and its applications for language pedagogy were discovered, writing classes was dominated mainly by product and process approach. From 1940s to 1960s, and under influence of the product approach, pedagogy concentrated mainly on linguistic accuracy and structural well-formedness of the final product. For the role of teacher, product approach stressed teaching of grammatical rules which could hopefully lead to enabling students to produce grammatically correct sentences (Pincas, 1982). Due to numerous shortcomings of the product approach, it was replaced by its modern counterpart; the process approach. Kern (2000) argues that in the process approach attention is diverted from grammar, spelling and linguistic accuracy to enabling student

to express themselves freely. Therefore, contrary to the product approach in which linguistic forms were modeled, in the process approach “writers' processes” were modeled (p. 182).

Hyland (2004) believes genre pedagogy has the potential to introduce writing “as an attempt to communicate with readers, to better understand the ways that language patterns are used, and to accomplish coherent, purposeful prose” (p.5) because GBI is empowering, critical, consciousness-raising, explicit, systematic, needs-based, and supportive. In other words, GBI gives priority to how learners write not what they write (Hyland, 2004, Martin, 1992). As Paltridge (2001) argues, genre-based instruction can assist learners to succeed in linguistic communication and equip them with socially purposeful forms of language through providing generic knowledge and skills.

To accentuate the potential of genre as a powerful educational means, many studies have been carried out in the realm of language teaching (Bhatia, 1993; Cheung & Lai, 1997; Dudley-Evans, 1997; Flowerdew, 1993; Flowerdew, 2000; Henry & Roseberry, 1998; 2001; Holmes, 1997; Hopkins & Dudley-Evans, 1988; Hyland, 2002; Manzouri & Shahraki, 2014; Swales, 1990). These studies have generally confirmed that as the result of GBI learners' writing significantly improved and they tended to use communicative moves in their writing more frequently. In addition, GBI showed a high correlation with active participation of learners in the class activities. Other researchers found that achievements made through GBI helped participants to form a positive attitude towards language learning (Cheng, 2008; Emilia, 2005; Krisnachinda, 2006).

As a key language skill, listening is the most widely used language skill in our daily life (Morley 2001; Rost 2002). It is generally regarded as an active and

conscious process in which listeners focus on extracting the important information from the spoken linguistic input, comprehend its meaning and understand its function, and produce linguistically appropriate output through combining them with the contextual clues and their background knowledge (O'Malley, Chamot & Küpper, 1989). However, listening is also considered a tough skill to acquire because it demands that listeners infer meaning from the spoken linguistic input. Goss (1982) argues that listening comprehension is a complex mental process in which the listeners try to reconstruct the meaning out of what they received from the speakers. This cognitively complex process is performed when listeners rely on their background knowledge of the language as well as their world knowledge (Byrnes, 1984; Nagle & Sanders, 1986; Young, 1997) and recombine information in their long term memory to interpret the spoken language (Mendelsohn, 1994; Murphy, 1985; Young, 1997). GBI can assist language learners in the sophisticated process of development of listening skill through familiarizing them with the conventions of language use and equipping them with background knowledge in the specific genres of spoken language.

3. Research Questions

Following research questions are to be answered in the current study:

1. Is GBI effective in improvement of listening proficiency of Iranian EFL learners?
2. Is there a significant relationship between listening proficiency and effectiveness of GBI?

4. Methodology

The present study is an experimental research, including two sections, which employed quantitative procedures to uncover the effect(s) of GBI on listening

proficiency of Iranian EFL learners. A total of 68 EFL learners participated in this study. Group A, composed of 30 EFL students (18 females, and 12 males) participated in the first section of the research. For the second part of the study, 38 other students were entitled as Group B (including 22 females and 16 males). The independent-samples *t*-test as well as paired-samples *t*-test were employed to analyze the data through SPSS software version 19.

4.1. Research Subjects and Procedures

The participants of this study were 68 Iranian EFL learners who were divided into Group A, and Group B. Group A was composed of 30 EFL Learners including 18 females and 12 males, and was randomly divided into Treatment and Control groups, each composed of 15 students. On the other hand, Group B included 22 females and 16 males composing of a total of 38 EFL learners. Based on the Listening proficiency test, participants in Group B were assigned into Proficient and Less-Proficient groups. The participants were majoring at Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) or English Translation in English Department at University of Zabol, Zabol, Iran. Participants of Group A were studying at their 4th semester, while the Group B students were enrolled in their 3rd and 5th semester.

4.2. Research Procedures

Participants of Group A were administered a pretest in listening and then half of them (the treatment group) participated in a 10-session GBI listening class. The class took 3 weeks and in each session they worked on the listening comprehension in the form of answering to comprehension questions and transcribing the audio file. The listening file classified into “documentary” genre and belonged to BBC Planet Earth Series. They could discuss with each other and their teacher to check their understanding. At the same time, control group received a placebo. They were asked to participate in a 10-session listening comprehension class on English short stories. After completing three weeks of listening class, all participants (both treatment and control groups) were administered a posttest in the form of another listening comprehension test.

Group B participants, on the other hand, first took a listening proficiency test and then were assigned to Proficient and Less-Proficient groups. These two groups were asked to take part in listening comprehension classes for three weeks and 10 sessions. The material of the class was the documentary files adopted from BBC Planet Earth. After finishing the instruction, both groups took a listening comprehension test. Table 1 shows groups statistics.

Table 1. Groups Statistics

			N	Mean	Std.	Std. Error Mean
Group A	Treatment	pretest	15	87.00	2	7.745
		posttest	15	95.66	1.07	4.169
	Control	pretest	15	85.66	2.38	9.23
		posttest	15	84.66	2.73	10.60
Group B	Proficient	pretest	18	70.55	1.70	7.25
		posttest	18	91.94	1.57	6.67
	Less-Proficient	pretest	18	55.55	1.611	6.86
		posttest	18	65.27	2.19	9.31

5. Results

5.1. Results of Group A

To answer the first research question, Group A participants were divided into treatment and control groups. First, both groups underwent a listening proficiency test to make sure of the equality of proficiency of both groups. Analysis of the listening test revealed there was not a significant difference between treatment and control groups. As Table 2 shows, the value ($p = .672$) was greater than alpha level (.05), indicating equality of treatment and control groups on the pretest.

After the treatment group received the treatment, another listening proficiency test was administered to both treatment and control groups to uncover any significant difference made as the result of instruction.

As shown in Table 3, Independent-samples t -test revealed that there was a significant difference between the treatment and control groups in the posttest ($p = .001$, $t = 3.740$). This indicates the effectiveness of instruction for the treatment group.

5.2. Results of Group B

To discover the relationship between listening proficiency and effectiveness of genre-based instruction, Group B participants, first underwent a listening proficiency test. Based on the results of the test, they were assigned into Proficient and Less-Proficient groups. To make sure of the reliability of the test results, an independent-samples t -test was run. Table 4 indicates that the proficient and less-proficient groups were significantly different in their listening proficiency level ($p = .00$, $t = 6.38$).

Table 2. Independent Samples t Test for Pretest of Group A

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper	
1	Equal variances assumed	1.479	.234	.428	28	.672	1.33	3.111	-5.040	7.707
	Equal variances not assumed			.428	27.1	.672	1.33	3.111	-5.049	7.716

Table 3. Independent Samples t Test for Posttest of Group A

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper	
1	Equal variances assumed	15.603	.000	3.74	28	.001	11.0	2.94	4.97	17.02
	Equal variances not assumed			3.74	18.2	.001	11.0	2.94	4.82	17.17

Table 4. Independent Samples Test for pretest of Group B

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
VAR0002	Equal variances assumed	.635	.431	6.38	34	.000	15	2.3	10.22	19.7
	Equal variances not assumed			6.38	33.8	.000	15	2.3	10.22	19.7

Table 5. Paired Samples Correlations (for the proficient group)

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	post &pre	18	.949	.000

Table 6. Paired Samples Test (for the proficient group)

		Paired Differences					t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	post -pre	21.3888	2.30444	.54316	22.53486	20.24292	39.378	17	.000

Then, to uncover the effectiveness of genre-based instruction on each of the participating groups (proficient and less-proficient), scores of pretest and post-test of each group were run through paired-sample *t*-test separately. In the proficient group, correlation and *p* were found to be .949 and .00 respectively. Tables 5 and 6 reveal high correlation between the two sets of scores, indicating the effectiveness of instruction on the proficient group.

The same process of pairing scores of pretest and posttest was performed for the less-proficient group. For this group, like proficient group, paired-samples *t*-test revealed high correlation (.945, *p*= .00) between two sets of scores, indicating effectiveness of instruction for the less proficient group. Tables 7 and 8 show results.

Table 7. Paired Samples Correlations (less-proficient group)

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	post & pre	18	.945	.000

Table 8. Paired Samples Test (for the less-proficient group)

		Paired Differences					t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Std.	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
Mean	Deviation	Mean	Lower	Upper					
Pair1	Post- pre	9.722	3.62679	.85484	11.52578	7.91866	11.373	17	.000

The same process of pairing scores of pretest and posttest was performed for the less-proficient group. For this group, like proficient group, paired-samples *t*-test revealed high correlation (.945, $p = .00$) between two sets of scores, indicating effectiveness of instruction for the less-proficient group. Tables 7 and 8 show these results.

6. Discussion

According to the results of the study, we can answer the research questions. The first research question concerned the effect(s) of genre-based pedagogy on the listening proficiency of Iranian EFL learners. Results of Group A (Table 3) indicated that the treatment group outperformed the control group in listening proficiency test as the result of GBI ($p = .001$, $t = 3.740$). Therefore, the answer to the first research question was positive; GBI proved to make significant difference in the improvement of listening proficiency among Iranian EFL learners.

The second research question addressed the relationship between GBI effectiveness and listening proficiency. In fact, it sought to find out which of the two groups (proficient, and less-proficient) favored most from GBI and improved more significantly.

Results of data analysis (Tables 5, 6, 7, and 8) revealed both groups improved significantly (Sig. = .00, correlation = .949, and .945 for proficient and less-proficient groups respectively). Level of correlation between two sets of scores for each of the two groups was found to be really close, indicating equal improvement for both groups. These results also reveal that proficiency level did not affect the effectiveness of GBI.

Results of this study in general confirm what was reported in previous studies by other researchers on the effectiveness of GBI in language pedagogy (Bhatia, 1993; Cheung & Lai, 1997; Dudley-Evans, 1997; Emilia, 2005; Flowerdew, 1993; Flowerdew, 2000; Henry & Roseberry, 1998; 2001; Holmes, 1997; Hopkins & Dudley-Evans, 1988; Hyland, 2002; Krisnachinda, 2006; Manzouri & Shahraki, 2014; Swales, 1990). While these studies focused mainly on writing, results of the current study proved GBI effectiveness in language skills other than writing. Such studies can show the broad potentials of GBI in assisting language learners to cope with challenges they face in the process of acquiring language skills. Other researches, meanwhile, can focus on the effectiveness

of GBI on development of reading and speaking.

7. Conclusion

Traditionally, genre-based instruction belongs to writing pedagogy both in second and foreign language learning (Swales, 1990). However, it has been discussed (Cheng, 2008) that genre theory can be applied to other language skills as well. This study, as an attempt to push the limits of genre theory, aimed at exploring effect(s) of genre-based instruction (GBI) on listening proficiency among Iranian EFL learners. Results of data analysis on all groups revealed that GBI had a significant effect in improving listening proficiency among Iranian EFL learners. Moreover, the results indicated that GBI can be effective for both proficient listeners as well as for the less-proficient listeners similarly; suggesting that proficiency is not a significant factor in effectiveness of genre-based instruction. Findings of the current study can serve language teachers to take advantage of the potentials of genre theory for teaching language skills, especially listening. Moreover, the study can assist teachers to have a broader view on the factors involved in listening.

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