

REACHING THE GOAL OF ELT IN INDONESIA THROUGH UNDERSTANDING THE COMPETENCY AND GENRE-BASED TEACHING

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Abstract

Change of English high school curriculum in Indonesia brings about challenges and difficulties in the implementation. It often requires a shift on 'what' and 'how' to teach. Thus, it is not uncommon to find out that teachers are demanded to improve their cognition and to change their view on these two aspects. As teachers, we are key players in any teaching innovation change and innovation (Fullan in Markee, 1997), our thorough understanding about these is essential. Since 2004, the high school curricula have given attention to the development of the four language skills realized in several selected genres proportionally, which also to some extent affects a change in higher education curriculum for English teaching. To realize the goal of the curriculum, an understanding of language competence of the four language skills and genres is important, so that we understand what have to be taught and what instructional materials have to be prepared. We also have to be skillful and creative to apply techniques and strategies of teaching in line with an approach having principles of developing the competencies. This paper will discuss three main points: 1) communicative competence, 2) what and why genres, and 3) alternative teaching approaches. The discussion is expected to give an idea for self-appraisal and improvement to reach the goal of ELT in Indonesia.

Keywords: *communicative competence, genres, teaching approaches*

A. INTRODUCTION

High school curriculum in Indonesia has undergone several changes. As it is widely known, curriculum change usually affects some changes in some related aspects such as the language skill focus, the basis for the skill teaching (e.g. theme, text) the teaching approach to be adopted. A rather major change can be seen in the change of the 1996 to 2004 curriculum. Unlike the 1996, the 2004 curriculum, the competency-based one, required the students to be able to communicate in English both in oral and written forms in several selected genres. This requirement indicates that the four English skills were given attention. The basis to develop the skills was genre. The 2006 curriculum which is so-called as School- Based Curriculum (KTSP, in Indonesian) as well as the forthcoming one (the 2013 curriculum) adopt the same approach.

The curriculum change from one to another in Indonesia often brings about problems and difficulties. The difficulties seem to be resulted from the fact that the curriculum demands a change in view and practice. Teachers are required to develop students' language competence and to teach the four English skills integratively. They need to understand text types (genres) and how to teach them, so that the goal is reached. With this change, teachers have to understand what the language competence is and those who had used to teach the skills separately from the language components had to learn how to integrate the four skills and the components of the language into the skills. This is not as easy as one might think. The tendency is that teachers pay

little attention, if any, to the use of the language components of a genre. Furthermore, for those who had not practiced using the language actively teaching speaking and writing might be difficult, too.

The emerging phenomenon suggests that one of the very important aspects to run a curriculum successfully is teachers' understanding about the curriculum content itself. Thus, teachers' understanding about 'what' to teach and 'how' to teach seem need more attention. Referring to the underlying principles and theories of communicative competence, genres, and alternative teaching approaches to be highlighted, this article will discuss this issue. The discussion is expected to give some kind of reflection towards what should be improved in the teaching of English at high school and at universities/colleges that produce teachers.

B. DISCUSSION

Communicative Competence

The term communicative competence has been used since the purpose of learning a language is to be able to use the language for communication. Thus, having communicative competence is most likely a goal of language learning that a learner has to reach. This is also true for learning English stated in high school curriculum in Indonesia. Hymes (1972) states that communicative competence refers the use of language in social context. Halliday (1978) calls it as meaning potential. This means that a learner who has language competence is able to communicate in the language appropriately and accurately in various social settings.

Canale and Swain (1980) suggest that language competence comprises of linguistic competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. Linguistic competence refers to understanding the language in terms of the usage- sentence grammar forms that includes the lexical, morphological, syntactic, and phonological features of a language (Savignon, 2001). The ability to pronounce and write words and sentences well is an indication of having linguistic competence.

Discourse competence is the ability to organize and arrange utterances, clauses, paragraphs, and more extended excerpts into a well- organized and understandable meaning. It is the ability to understand and produce a message of a text and its relationship with the meaning of the whole text. In lexicogrammar system it is known cohesion, while outside lexicogrammar system semantic and contextual resources (Halliday, 2004). Halliday explains extensively the four ways by which cohesion is created in English; they are conjunction, reference, ellipsis, and lexical organization (2004).

Sociolinguistic competence means the ability to use a language appropriately based on the context including those to compensate to overcome any barriers in communication. It deals with "rules of language use" (Hiep, 2005: 4), which needs understanding of the context of communication involving three aspects or parameters known as field, mode, and tenor (Halliday, 1985; Martin, 1997; Butt et al., 2000). Someone can be said as having sociolinguistic competence when s/he can use his linguistic competence appropriately regarding 'what' is talked, 'to whom it is address', and 'the channel used'. Thus, someone who has language competence should be able to communicate in the language accurately and appropriately. The ability to communicate covers the ability to understand others, to give appropriate responses, to express one's ideas whether in oral or/and written forms.

All components of the communicative competence are interrelated. Savignon (2001: 17) emphasizes: "an increase in one component interacts with other components to produce a corresponding increase in overall communicative competence. As an illustration, to someone

who would like to complain to his/her boss has to be able to choose appropriate diction and knowledge appropriate expressions of complain, to arrange the utterances, to organize the pieces of complain, to start the communication, to convey the complain, and to end the communication accurately and appropriately so that the boss understands the message and gives the expected response. This involves the five competence mentioned above.

The definition of language competence mentioned above indicates that if the goal of an English curriculum is the students' ability to communicate in English, the teaching and learning activities have to cover both the usage and the use of the language and students are provided with ample opportunities to practice the language. These two aspects have to be integrated into the teaching of a genre in concern. This is not that simple for teachers of a foreign language who tend to use the language only for teaching purposes. In the new curriculum (since 2004), the communicative competence is realized in form of genres. Consequently, the new task the teachers have to learn is the concept of genre.

The Notion of Genre

Genre is a term that has been used for quite long in different fields of study such as literature, anthropolinguistics, and language teaching. It has been defined in various ways, which to some extent the definitions are affected by the nature of each field of study. The various definitions may bring about difficulties to conclude what a genre actually is. Coutinho and Miranda (2009) conclude that apparently a consensus in the literature on genre theory, the description of genres raises questions because of the multiplicity of facts and criteria that may intervene in the descriptive work and the changing nature that characterize genres as well. As this paper is concern with language teaching, some definitions of genre here are taken from those proposed by linguists and educationists, and are intended to refresh our understanding about genres.

Martin (1985) defines genres as staged, goal-oriented social processes. Genres are concerned with "systems of social processes, where the principles for relating social processes to each other have to do with texture- the ways in which field, mode and tenor variables are phased together in a text (Martin, 1997:12)." This means a genre realizes a social process or event determined by what is being talked, to whom it is addressed, and what channel is used.

Further, Swales (1990) states genre as a recognizable a communicative purpose identified and mutually understood by the members of the professional or academic community in which it regularly occurs. Mostly it is highly structured and conventionalized with constraints which are often exploited by the expert members of the discourse community to achieve private intentions within the framework of socially recognized purposes. "Genres are primarily literary, entirely identified by textual regularities in form and content, fixed and immutable, and classifiable into categories and sub-categories (Freedman and Medway, 1994:1)". These two definitions indicate that genres are stable in form and content, so that they can be classified and/or named. They are well-recognized and used by a certain community.

Bazerman (1997:19), however, sees genres in a broader sense. He states: "Genres are not just forms. Genres are forms of life, ways of being. They are frames for social action ... Genres shape the thoughts we form and the communication by which we interact." For him, genres are used to construct and recognize particular actions in particular situations. This definition suggests that genre is subject to where it exists and who uses it, and thus simultaneously shows its own features that might be similar or different from another genre constructed in different social and psychological factors. Genres are, therefore, historically determined, and constitute

relatively stable forms of utterances available in a culture. Unless there is change in the social structure, the new genre forms are unlikely to succeed. Kress (1987) states that the possibility of the emergence of a new genre form has to be supported by stable social occasion and authority.

A key insight of the genre theory is that language occurs in a social context and that it is structured according to the purposes it serves in a particular context and according to social relations entailed by that activity. In relation to this, Christie and Rothery have argued that language users choose linguistic choices to make meaning in accordance the context of culture and the context of situation where the language is used (cited in Richardson, 1994:125). In other words, “text and context are mutually dependent”; that is using genre is a matter of selecting a genre appropriate determined by social purposes within the context of culture (Christie, 1992:223).

Genres evolve in the society of the speakers of language; genres are both cognitive and social; they are located in socio-cognitive schemas for appropriate textual approaches to rhetorical problems (Grabe and Kaplan 1996; Bazerman 1997). Genre is typified action: that is, over time, people in recurring social situations develop consensual, conventional ways of understanding and responding. These genres are not only forms for action within situations, but they also shape the situations themselves and constrain, in helpful ways, the meanings one might make therein (Whitney et al., 2011). Thus, many scholars argue that the students who learn another language such as English should recognize genres in order to understand and be able to produce them well (Johns, 1997 and 2008).

The notion of genre given by some writers mentioned above indicate that to teach genres requires knowledge about the characteristics of genres in question and situational and cultural context of the genres where are used as well. In other words, teaching genres is not limited on introducing the features of genres, but also teaching how to use and manipulate them for communicative purposes. A question to be answered is whether or nor or the extent to which the teachers have been provided with the knowledge about this at university and at training programs.

Alternative Teaching Approaches

There are several alternative language teaching approaches that teachers can choose in order to realize the goal of the curriculum stated previously. Among others, Communicative Approach and Genre-Based approaches have been used and popular in Indonesia recently. The first one has been suggested along with the implementation of the 1994 curriculum, and the second one with the 2004 curriculum. Indeed, these two approaches are aimed at developing learners’ communicative competence. For the purpose of this article, the two approaches will be briefly discussed and a conclusion will be drawn.

1. Communicative Approach

It is widely known that the birth of the Communicative Approach was a reaction towards the previous approaches that were considered not successful in helping second or foreign learners to use the language they learned in communication. Savignon (2001: 13) states: “teaching materials, course descriptions, and curriculum outlines proclaim a goal of communicative competence” of the Communicative Approach (known as communicative language teaching at its earlier stage). This approach focuses on learner needs and their active involvement in teaching and learning activities. Learners should be encouraged to use the language from the start and introduced to the use of language appropriately and fluently based on

context. This means that the learners have to be provided with plenty models and practices of natural and authentic use of language.

Littlewood (1981:1) states: "... systematic attention and to functional as well as structural aspects of language" become the most distinctive feature of the communicative language teaching. In a more elaborate way, Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) list a number of characteristics of the approach, which among others include:

- Meaning is paramount
- Contextualization is a basic premise
- Communicative competence is the desired goal
- Fluency and acceptable language is the primary goal
- Linguistic variation is a central concept in materials and methodology
- The target linguistic system will be learned best through the process of communication

The characteristics indicate that in the Communicative Approach both language function and form get attention. Instead of ordering language form before function or separating it from the function, the approach emphasizes the importance of integrating them.

Even though there has been a kind of theoretical guidance given by the proponents of the approach as mentioned above, teachers' interpretation varies. Savignon (2001) observes that some teachers are frustrated for ambiguity about the language behavior language targeted and about the way individual learner has to be assessed. Despite that, other teachers are comfortable because they can select and develop their materials and rely on more global judgment. Richards and Rodgers (2001) also note that the approach is applied and interpreted in different ways.

The confusion is also evident in foreign countries like Vietnam and China. Hiep (2005) reports that in Vietnam and China teachers appreciate and are eager to learn the communicative language teaching, but the teachers, however, still teach in their own ways even though they have been trained to use the new way. In China even though communicative language teaching has been introduced more than twenty years, the classroom activities are still dominated by traditional methods (Yu, 2001). This is similar to how the approach has been used by many teachers. Suyanto (2001) states that the failure of the implementation of the 1996 high school curriculum was somewhat caused by teachers' misinterpretation of the Communicative Approach.

There seems to be several intertwined factors behind the problem of the implementation of the Communicative Approach in Indonesia. Firstly, genuine communication as expected in the use of English is least likely found in learners' life. The learners are not exposed to the use of the language outside the classroom and are not required to use it as well. This condition entails low interest and motivation to learn it. Secondly, teachers might have difficulties in interpreting the general guideline into a teaching framework. For instance, there are questions such as:

- Should spoken skills be emphasized?
- How should written skills be taught?
- How should grammar and vocabulary be taught?
- How should mistakes be treated?

Teachers may answer such questions based on their own interpretations on the approach or their own perception on what they perceive as what they have to teach and their students need to learn. In relation to this, Thompson (1996) asserts that teachers can hardly develop communicative language teaching into practices appropriately if they do not have good understanding about it. Teachers' understanding, as reported by Sato and Kleinsasser (1999), was merely based on their

conceptions, their personal experiences, and interactions with others, not based on relevant literature.

Thus, it is not surprising to find out variations in the implementation of the approach in the field. It should be noted, up to now teachers have not been instructed to leave and continue using the approach. Thus, some teachers may have left it due to the introduction of the new suggested approach, or still use it as they believe it is still applicable and suitable with the goal of the curriculum.

2. Genre-Based Approach

Genre-Based Approach can be considered as a new approach, especially for teaching English in Indonesia. There are three traditions that are concerned with how genres should be taught at school- New Rhetoric, English for Specific Purposes, and Systemic Functional Linguistics. Each has its own emphasis. Of the three traditions, the System Functional Linguistics proposes a framework of teaching that is adopted for teaching English in Indonesia since the implementation of the 2004 curriculum. For that reason, the discussion will focus on this model and will a source of reflection to see the extent to which it has been effectively applied.

The Genre-Based Approach emerged as a way to help disadvantaged students who had literacy problems in Australia. It has been widely used in Australia in teaching English as the first and the second language with its successful stories (e.g. Christie 1992; Derewianka, 2003; Feez, 2002; Flowerdew; 2000). However, as Derewianka (2003: 143) states:“...little has been done in the area of EFL in terms of genre-based learning theory”.

Genre theorists and educators have provided a framework for teaching genres indicating a theory of language learning requiring explicit teaching of text structures. Hick (1997:459) notes that: “... this theory calls for a return to grammar instruction but at the level of text-where personal intentions are filtered through the typical rhetorical forms available to accomplish particular social purposes.” Burns contends that a genre-based approach provides students with learning activities presented within a social contextual framework, which encourage them to focus on language and which assist them to become more independent and analytical learners (2001). By investigating the significant features of a genre that include its purpose, structure, and language features, the students are made aware of the fact that learning to write involves recognizing how writing has traditionally, generically, conventionally, and playfully functioned (Gilbert, 1990).

The issue of explicitness is central. Genres should be explicitly taught (Bhatia, 1993; Flowerdew, 2000; Paltridge, 2001) and learned (Christie, 1999) in order for the students to have control in appropriate written genres (Richardson, 1994). Since the structure of a certain text type is different from context to context, students need to be made aware of it and be introduced explicitly to it, so that they can “participate effectively in target situations” (Hyland, 2003, 22). Christie (1999) emphasizes the importance of teachers’ awareness about their teaching practices and their students’ learning, so that they can direct and guide their students as they learn well. Students stand in a relationship of apprenticeship to their teachers on the one hand, while teachers operate with some degree of expertise towards their students on the other hand, guiding them into new ways of working. Explicit teaching enables students to understand and later produce text types in appropriate linguistic features and rhetorical structure. Martin (1999) argues that learning genre conventions does not restrict children’s agency and voice; rather it liberates children by developing their power to engage in, contribute to, and critique a discipline

(cited in Wollman-Bonilla, 2000). Some studies (e.g. Carter, Ferzli and Wiebe, 2004; Henry & Roseberry, 1998) focusing on the implementation of a genre-based approach suggests that genres can be both explicitly and effectively taught. Recent discussions in the realm of education have suggested that a genre-based approach can be effective in a variety of settings. In fact, it offers a promising direction in the teaching of writing in mainstream educational settings, in ESL and EFL programs (Derewianka, 2003, Wennerstorm, 2003).

This approach has a teaching framework to guide teachers in designing and conducting the teaching and learning activities. A popular model is the Curriculum Cycle or Wheel model. There are some variations of this curriculum cycle model (see e.g. Callaghan and Rothery 1989; Hammond 1990; and Callaghan et al. 1993). The one adopted in Indonesia consists of four stages- building knowledge of the field, modeling, joint construction, and independent construction. Each stage has its own purpose. The activities arranged in from one stage to another enable teachers to scaffold students from dependent to independent in genre construction. Scaffolding is a kind of assistance and support provided by a teacher to help learners “move towards new skills, concepts or understandings and to work with increasing independence” (Hammond, 2001:5).

At the first stage, the students’ background knowledge about the genre and the topic to be learned is activated (Paltridge, 2001). An important activity is relating the students’ knowledge and experience about a genre and the topic. The students, for instance, should be made aware of the function of the genre in the situational and cultural context. The important lexicogrammar features of the genre are also introduced through activities such as question and answer and media.

The second stage is called modelling because the students are introduced to model text (s) of a genre through this way the students learn the concept of genre. The social purpose, text structure and language features of the genre of the text are investigated (Callaghan, Knapp, and Noble, 1993). They also investigate how the significant features of the genre are used (Callaghan et al., in Cope and Kalantzis, 1993; Christie, 1992; Gibbons, 2002; Martin, 1999). The activities can be done through reading and text analysis.

The third stage is joint construction. At this stage the students construct a text together and the teacher gradually reduces their contribution to the text construction (Feez and Joyce, 1998; Callaghan et al., 1993). The issue of scaffolding is central; both “design-in scaffolding” and “point of need scaffolding” are offered (Hammond, 2001:34-37). According to Feez and Joyce (1998), and Hammond (1990) the joint construction can be performed in two ways, within whole class and group writing activities. The whole class joint construction is intended to give hands-on experiences in constructing a text and use appropriate language. The application of group work enables the students to work collaboratively in sharing and generating ideas. “The teacher then acts as a scribe for the class and helps turn student ideas into an approximation of the genre” (Callaghan et al, 1993:182 in Cope and Kalantzis). The teacher’s role is to take the students’ spoken language, through careful negotiation, and transform the speech into writing. Here, explicit focus on grammar in the actual context of use can be given (Gibbons, 2001).

At the last stage the students construct the text independently. At this stage support by the teacher is reduced as the students are encouraged to work independently (e.g. Gibbons, 2002; Hammond, 2001). Even so, when necessary, they may seek for advice or suggestions to the teacher or their peers. For students with limited control over written language, explicit guidance in understanding purpose, schematic structure and the language features of a genre is needed before they can proceed to independent construction. The teacher has to give his/her feedback on

the students' individual constructed texts. According to Hammond in Paltridge (2001), teachers, however, may also come back from one stage to any preceding one if it is necessary as the stages of a curriculum cycle are not necessarily fix in sequence.

Originally, the Genre-Based Approach is intended to help students to develop their writing skills. Students are scaffolded as such that they can move gradually from speaking activities to writing activities. In the current high school curriculum implemented in Indonesia, however, the teaching cycles are divided into spoken written cycles. This may be intended to make it easier or the teachers to allocate the time and to put emphasis.

From a brief review above, it can be seen that in order to apply the Genre-Based Approach in teaching English effectively, some condition has to be met. Firstly, the teachers have to have good understanding of genres, and are able to see how genres are related to texts. This entails in ability to select appropriate materials. Secondly, as exposure and modelling important in language learning, the teachers are required to have good command of English. In other words, they have to be able to communicate in English in the four language skills. They also have to be able to develop appropriate teaching and learning activities, and execute the activities well.

When teachers find any problems and difficulties in the implementation of the approach, it may be wise to do some reflection, so that the root (s) of the problems and difficulties can be identified. Without having intention to be judgmental, based on some observation and discussions with teachers in several forums, there is an indication that some teachers may have limited understanding about genres, and thus when they teach they may give a mere emphasis on the structure of a genre theoretically, not its concept. Others may not practice using English actively, thus they may have difficulties to model how to use it both in speaking and in writing. Still others, they may have difficulties in selecting and arranging appropriate activities to realize the teaching framework proposed. These problems should get attention both from the government and higher education institutes that produce teachers.

C. CONCLUSION

The success of the implementation of a curriculum which is indicated by the attainment of the goal is influenced by many factors which include, among others, teachers' understanding about the goal of the curriculum, what to teach, and how to teach. As the goal of high school curriculum for English is to enable the students to communicate in English, which means the students have communicative competence, the teachers should understand communicative competence itself. The ability to communicate is indicated in the success use of the language in form of genres. Thus, teachers are also required to understand genres. Understanding of these two aspects will result in appropriate selection of instructional materials. The next task is designing activities that enable their students to use the language appropriately in various genres. This needs knowledge about teaching approaches and ability to transfer the theoretical knowledge into classroom practices. In short, teachers' thorough understanding about a curriculum is crucial in order the goal stated in the curriculum is reached. This is made possible if teachers are provided with required knowledge and skills at pre-service stage (at university) and throughout their career in form of professional development programs.

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