

Lecture 5: II-Teaching the Four Language Skills

3-Teaching the Writing Skill

Introduction

Writing is a difficult skill to master, it is more difficult than speaking. While speaking we can use simple, repetitive words and incomplete sentences. Speaking does not have a standard form. But written language has a standard form of grammar, syntax and vocabulary, etc. Richards and Renandya (2002) explained that “writing is the most difficult skill for L2 learners, since they need to generate ideas, organize them and translate these ideas into readable text which can be very difficult for students”. In the past, learners were 'writing to learn' not 'learning to write' (Tribble, 1996, p. 118) as it was a task that aims at fostering grammar and lexis; however, writing is now viewed as a more complex activity in which communication is more important than accuracy.

1. Definition of Writing

Coulmas proposed six meanings of ‘writing’: (1) a system of recording language by means of visible or tactile marks; (2) the activity of putting such a system to use; (3) the result of such activity, a text; (4) the particular form of such a result, a script style such as block letter writing; (5) artistic composition; (6) a professional occupation (2002, p. 1).

2. Approaches to Teaching Writing

2.1. The Product Approach

The Product or the ‘controlled writing approach’ was widespread in the mid-1960s. It focused on the final product and mastery of linguistic features through the imitation of the teacher’s model. It is “a traditional approach in which students are encouraged to mimic a model text, usually is presented and analyzed at an early stage” (Gabrielatos, 2002, p. 5). Thus, errors of grammar and lexis were continuously corrected. Importance was given to the surface structure of language rather than the underlying meaning. According to Steele (2004), the product approach includes four stages:

Stage one: Students study model texts and then its features are highlighted.

Stage two: This stage consists of controlled practice of the highlighted features, usually in isolation.

Stage three: This is the most important stage where the ideas are organized. Adherents of this approach believe that the organization of ideas is more important than the ideas themselves and as important as the control of language.

Stage four: students individually use the skills, structures and vocabulary they have been taught to produce the final product.

The product approach has been severely criticized because of its neglect of the learners' needs and the stages of the writing process. It considered language as "basically a process of mechanical habit formation" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 57), which hindered creativity and imagination of the learner.

2.2. The Process Approach

The process approach has emerged at the end of the 1960s as a reaction to the product approach. What is important is the way of writing rather than the final product. The process approach is "an approach to the teaching of writing which stresses the creativity of the individual writer, and which pays attention to the development of good writing practices rather than the imitation of models" (Tribble, 1996, p. 160). Kroll defined it as

[A]n umbrella term for many types of writing courses What the term captures is the fact that student writers engage in their writing tasks through a cyclical approach rather than a single-shot approach. They are not expected to produce and submit complete and polished responses to their writing assignments without going through stages of drafting and receiving feedback on their drafts, be it from peers and/or from the teacher, followed by revision of their evolving texts. (2001, pp. 220-221)

Hence, what is important in the process approach is the discourse level and content, rather than the sentence level and structure. It takes the learner far from imitation and mechanical habits. It stresses the importance of creativity in writing. According to Tribble, this approach includes four main stages: prewriting, drafting, revising and editing, which are 'recursive' and 'not linear at all'.

Steele (2004) further introduced eight stages of the process approach:

1-Brainstorming: This is generating ideas by brainstorming and discussion.

2-Planning/Structuring: Students exchange ideas into note form and judge quality and usefulness of the ideas.

3-Mind mapping: students organize ideas into a mind map, spidergram, or linear form. This stage helps to make the hierarchical relationship of ideas which helps students with the structure of their texts.

4-Writing the first draft: students write the first draft. This is done in the class frequently in pairs or groups.

5-Peer feedback: drafts are exchanged, so that students become the readers of each others' work. By responding as readers students develop awareness of the fact that a writer is producing something to be read by someone else and thus they can improve their own drafts.

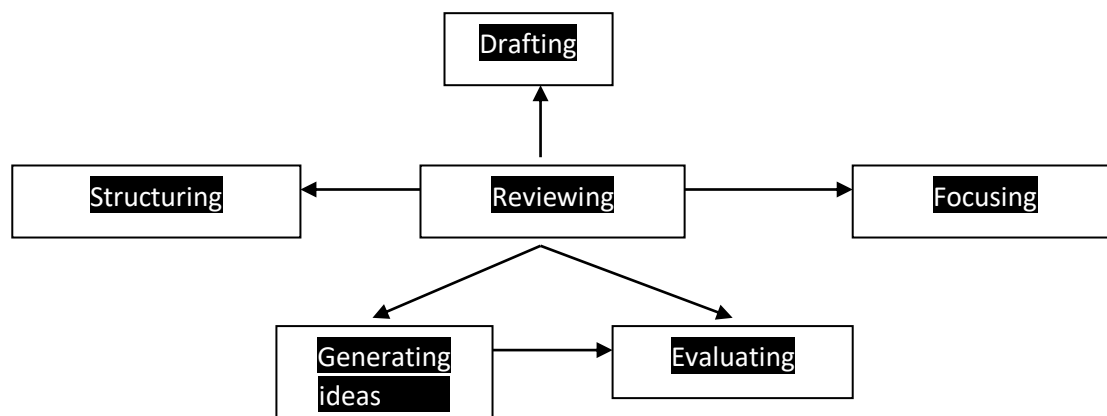
6-Editing: drafts are returned and improvements are made based upon peer feedback.

7-Final draft: a final draft is written.

8-Evaluation and teachers' feedback: students' writings are evaluated and teachers provide a feedback on it.

The following diagram by White and Arndt (as cited in Harmer, 2001, p. 258) explains the process approach stages:

Figure 1. White and Arndt's Process Writing Model



Adapted from: White & Arndt, as cited in Harmer, 2001, 258.

The previous model represents a process of writing in which “reviewing” is a central stage where the learner revises his/ her draft. So, the learner evaluates the draft continuously in order to generate more sentences that express better his/her ideas. Structuring depends on the review of the draft according to what the learner aims to express. Moreover, correction is not emphasized from the early stages because it hinders communication. It comes only at the last stage which is “revising” or in White and Arndt’s words “reviewing”. Unlike the product approach where the teacher is the only corrector, feedback in the process approach is received from both the teacher and the learner. In this respect, the language skills rather than the linguistic features are developed.

According to Badger and White (2000), the process approach has been criticized because it views the process as the same for all writers, regardless of what is being written and who is doing the writing, and because it gives insufficient importance to the purpose and social context of the piece of writing. Other typical problems for learners involve lexico-grammatical errors, erroneous use of logical connectives and insufficient planning. This last point meant that a return to the product approach was never aimed at.

Another criticism directed against it is that it does not adequately address the issue of the reader, especially when the form of the text expected is convention and content-specific. Firstly, there is the lack of discrimination between different text types based on the assumption that all types of writing are similar. Secondly, the “imagined reality” of the writer does not necessarily reflect the real context, which leads to a purposeful ignorance of the contextual meaning of a written text or discourse. In addition, teaching of the correct usage of forms and even of grammar items is neither explicit nor context-related. Consequently, it may lead to the likely increase of grammar errors and use of irrelevant forms in the final written product.

2.3. The Genre Approach

This approach is the result of criticizing both the product and the process approaches. It emerged in the mid-eighties to advocate learners’ study of a text within a specific genre before proceeding to writing (Harmer, 2001, p. 258). It is the fruit of the work of Halliday (1985), Swales

(1981, 1990), and Bhatia (1991, 1993) that aims at developing the learners' communicative competence in relation to a specific genre, e.g. a short story.

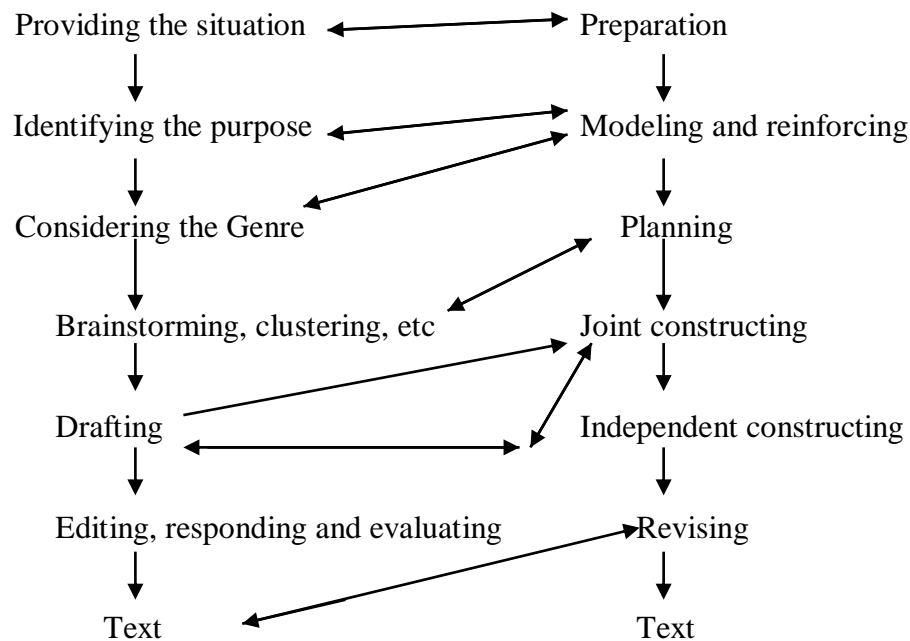
Like product approaches, genre approaches regard writing as predominantly linguistic but, unlike product approaches, they emphasize that writing varies with the social context in which it is produced. So, we have a range of kinds of writing --- such as sales letters, research articles, and reports--- linked with different situations. To write in a particular genre, whether a formal report or a historical romance, the writer must be aware of the formal patterns that shape a text. Teachers need to familiarize students with the schemata associated with the particular genres they will require. Genre analysis can therefore provide the vocabulary and concepts to explicitly teach the text structures we would like our students to produce. It places language at the center of writing development by allowing shared understanding and explicit guidance. The learners could start writing by imitating the given model which leads the students to "...see writing as a form of 'reproduction' rather than as a creative act" (Harmer, 2001, p. 259).

According to Cope and Kalantzis (1993), the genre approach to writing consists of three phases: (1) the target genre is modeled for the students, (2) a text is jointly constructed by the teacher and students, and (3) a text is independently constructed by each student.

2.3. The Process-Genre Approach

Badger and White (2000, p. 153) coined the name of this approach which is the result of combining the process with the genre approaches. Its purpose is to build students' awareness of the different genres in writing through the process approach. Badger and White (2000, p. 153) introduced six stages in teaching writing under the process genre approach: preparation, modelling and reinforcing, planning, joint constructing, independent constructing, and revising. The following figure represents the discussed stages of the approach. It illustrates how the process and the genre approach work together for a purposeful teaching of writing:

Figure 1. Application of the Process-Genre Approach



Adapted from: Badger & White, 2000, p. 21.

This approach is similar to the product approach in that imitation is a monitoring factor in the writing process; hence, it has been bitterly criticized. Harmer claimed that “A genre approach is especially appropriate for students of English for Specific Purposes” (2001, p. 258). The following is a comparison of the three approaches to teaching writing:

Table 1

A Comparison of the Product, the Process and the Genre Approach

The Product Approach	The Process Approach	The Genre Approach
-A model is followed: controlled writing. -The final product is the most important thing. -Interest in Linguistic Knowledge -Individual -The teacher is the only feedback provider. -The learners' needs are	-no model to follow: free and creative writing. -the process of writing is the most important thing. -interest in the functions and skills of the language and the learners' needs -cooperative -peer review and teacher's feedback. -the learners' needs are	-a model is followed: controlled writing. - the genre is the most important thing. -interest in the rhetorical style and the linguistic features of the genre. -cooperative then individual -peer review and teacher's feedback. -the learners' needs that serve

neglected. -Linear. -Continuous correction of errors. -One draft.	satisfied. -recursive -errors' correction is at the end. -more than one draft.	the genre are emphasized -linear -errors' correction is important especially if it affects the genre. -more than one draft.
--	---	--

Adapted from: Abdaoui, 2010, p. 44.

Conclusion

As mastering foreign language writing is very interesting in learning English, the teachers of English should pay attention to teaching the writing skill to EFL learners especially through technological tools and Artificial Intelligence assistants as electronic or digital writing is dominating language instruction.

References

- Badger, R. G., & White, G. (2000). *A process genre approach to teaching writing. English Teaching Forum*, 43 (3), 18-26.
- Bathia, V. K. (1991). A genre-based approach to ESP materials. *World Englishes*, 10 (2), 153-166.
- Bathia, V. K. (1993). *Analyzing genre: Language use in professional settings*. Routledge.
- Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (1993). *The powers of literacy: A genre approach to teaching writing*. University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Coulmas, F. (2002). What is writing? In *Writing systems: An introduction to their linguistic analysis* (pp. 1-17). Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139164597.002
- Gabrielatos, C. (2002). EFL writing: Product and process. *ERIC*, ED476839.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1985). *An introduction to functional grammar*. Edward Arnold.
- Harmer, J. (2001). *The practice of English language teaching* (3rd Ed.). Longman, pp. 246-267.
- Kroll, B. (2001). Considerations for teaching an ESL/ EFL writing and going just beyond. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (pp. 219-232). Heinle, Cengage Learning.

Richards, J. C., & Renandya, W. A. (2002). *Methodology in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.

Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2011). *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Steele, V. (2004). *Product and process writing: A comparison*.

Swales, J. M. (1981). *Aspects of article introductions*. The University of Michigan Press-Michigan Classics.

Swales, J. M. (1990). *Genre Analysis*. Cambridge University Press.

Tribble, C. (1996). *Writing*. Oxford University Press.