

## FUNDAMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS IN EDUCATING ACADEMIC ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS (AELLS): CHALLENGES AND PROMISES

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### Abstract

This presentation aims to bring together two notions, genre and metacognition, which are fundamental to our understanding of classroom-based teaching and learning of academic English, generally known as English for academic purposes (EAP). To me incorporating genre and metacognition is essential to the pedagogy the teacher has adopted or is developing. Genre is a complicated concept, a term used by scholars and teachers to mean different things. It is used in literary/literature analysis with a meaning different from what literacy/language educators and academic writing researchers are acquainted with (see Devitt, 2004; Swales, 1990). "Genre began as an absolute classification system for ancient Greek literature. Poetry, prose and performance had a specific and calculated style that related to the theme of the story. Speech patterns for comedy would not be appropriate for tragedy, and even actors were restricted to their genre under the assumption that a type of person could tell one type of story best" (Wikipedia). In linguistics and literacy/language education, Bakhtin's basic observations were of "speech genres" (the idea of heteroglossia), modes of speaking or writing that people learn to mimic, weave together, and manipulate (e.g., formal letters, grocery list, university lectures, or personal anecdotes; see Christie, 2013; Hyland, 2005; Swales, 1990; Zhang & Zhang, 2013). In this sense genres are socially specified, which are recognized and defined (often informally) by a particular culture or community. According to Norman Fairclough (2003), genre has a similar concept that emphasizes the social context of the text: Genres are "different ways of (inter)acting discursively" (p. 26). More significantly, the genre of a text may be determined at least by its four aspects, which include linguistic function, formal traits, textual organization, and relation of the communicative situation to formal and organizational traits of the text (Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Halliday & Mattiessen, 2004; Hyland, 2013).

The other key notion is metacognition. Despite a plethora of definitions about metacognition in the field of psychology, the core elements concern primarily knowledge or beliefs about what factors or variables act and interact in what ways to affect the course and outcome of cognitive enterprises. As applied to second language research on teaching and learning, Wenden (1998) and Macaro (2006), among others, recognize the significance of understanding students' metacognition about the multifarious aspects of language learning, stressing that this knowledge base can help teachers facilitate L2 students' language development (Zhang, 2003). In the context of metacognition, I briefly review and critique the relevance of genre as used in the three areas mentioned above, i.e., literature, literacy education and academic writing, to teaching English for academic purposes (Zhang, 2010, 2011; Zhang & Zhang, 2013). Using an experimental study as a case in point, I intend to emphasize the importance of genre knowledge and metacognition as they relate to the English textbooks being used and the real world in which university students and school learners work as well as the way English is taught and learned in both settings. Starting from an overview of what is academic language and academic proficiency, I will move on to examine the roles of genre and metacognition in educating academic English language learners (AELL). My overarching aim is to highlight the significance of genre and metacognition in AELL learning (Zhang & Ben Said, 2014).

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