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Testing the waters: exploring the teaching of genres in a Cape Flats Primary School in South Africa

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Twenty years after democracy, the legacy of apartheid and hitherto unmet challenges of resourcing and teacher development are reflected in a severely inequitable and underperforming education system. This paper focuses on second language writing in the middle years of schooling when 80% of learners face a double challenge: to move from ‘common sense’ discourses to the more abstract, specialised discourses of school subjects and, simultaneously, to a new language of learning, in this case English. It describes an intervention using a systemic functional linguistic (SFL) genre-based pedagogy involving 72 learners and two teachers in a low socio-economic neighbourhood of Cape Town. Using an SFL analytical framework, we analyse learners’ development in the information report genre. All learners in the intervention group made substantial gains in control of staging, lexis, and key linguistic features. We argue that the scaffolding provided by SFL genre-based pedagogies together with their explicit focus on textual and linguistic features offer a means of significantly enhancing epistemic access to the specialised language of school subjects, particularly for additional language learners. Findings have implications for language-in-education policy, teacher education, curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in multilingual classrooms.

Keywords: adolescent literacy; English as a second language; genre-based pedagogies; middle school; multilingualism; second language writing; systemic functional linguistics

Introduction

This paper takes up McCarty, Collins, and Hopson’s (2011, 336) challenge: ‘What will count in changing what counts as a contemporary solution to linguistically structured inequalities?’ by focusing on epistemic access, or access to the knowledge that educational institutions distribute (Morrow 2007). It focuses in particular on the development of writing in a second or additional language as a means of demonstrating knowledge, crucial for success in school examinations, further study and employment.

Twenty years after the transition to democracy, the ongoing legacy of apartheid and challenges of resourcing and teacher development unmet by the state are reflected in a system that is ‘grossly inefficient, severely underperforming and egregiously unfair’ (Spaull 2013, 10). Recent reports show that South Africa had the poorest performance of all middle-income countries participating in international assessments of educational achievement, worse than many low-income countries (Department of Basic Education 2011; Howie et al. 2006, 2012; NEEDU 2013). These results point to severe shortcomings

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in the teaching of both reading and writing in schools. This paper however focuses on writing as an area that receives little attention in schools or in South African research.

The paper presents findings from a one-week, 10-hour intervention which explored the potential of a genre-based literacy development pedagogy for developing second or additional language writing in an under-resourced multilingual school in Cape Town. Using an analytical framework based on systemic functional linguistics (SFL) (Halliday 1985), we analyse and compare the lines of development in learners' control of the information report genre in two Grade 6 classrooms. We argue that the explicit scaffolding provided by genre-based pedagogies as developed by the 'Sydney School', for example, Rothery (1994), Christie and Martin (1997), Rose and Martin (2012), offers a means of providing epistemic access to the specialised language of school subjects in the middle years.

In what follows, we briefly outline some key features of genre-based pedagogies and review international empirical research into the outcomes of these pedagogies in multilingual contexts. We then describe the different phases of the intervention, presenting analyses of texts produced before, during and after the intervention with a focus on one second language learner who had been described as unable to write. First, however, we provide some background on current educational challenges in South Africa.

The severity of the challenges facing South African educators is illustrated in results on the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), which tests the reading literacy of Grade 4 and Grade 8 learners in participating countries. Unlike almost all other countries that participated in 2006, where only Grade 4 learners were tested, in South Africa Grade 5 learners were also tested because of concerns about the effects of the widespread change to English as language of learning and teaching (LoLT) in Grade 4 (Howie, Venter, and van Staden 2008). In the 2006 PIRLS, these Grade 5 learners achieved the lowest score of the 45 countries that participated, including other middle-income countries such as Morocco, Iran, and Indonesia. Only 13% of Grade 4 and 22% of Grade 5 South African learners reached the Low International Benchmark of 400 for Grade 4 compared to 94% in half of the other participating countries. Reaching the Low International Benchmark indicates an ability to recognise, locate and reproduce explicitly stated information (Howie et al. 2006). Thus, it appears that the majority of learners in South Africa, including over 80% of African language speakers, did not have even the most basic reading skills and strategies for accessing school knowledge.

In 2011, there was no significant difference in the overall achievement compared to 2006 (Howie et al. 2012). A difference of 134 points, equivalent to 2–2.5 years of schooling, between the first language (L1) speakers of English and the 75% of de facto second language (L2)¹ speakers (Howie et al. 2012) signals the dramatic effect of the difference between learning in a first or second language, compounded by other factors such as poverty, lack of resourcing, and under-prepared teachers. The long-term consequences of these linguistic and other disadvantages are seen in statistics showing that of 100 learners that start school, only 50 will make it to Grade 12, 40 will pass, and only 12 will qualify for university (Spaull 2013). For those who do enter higher education, the success rate for African and 'coloured'² youth is under 5% (Council on Higher Education 2013).

It is thus clear that 75%–80% of learners have very little access to the knowledge distributed by educational institutions. International research has shown that it can take between five and seven years for learners for whom English is not a first language to match their English-speaking peers in the effective use of academic registers of school (Cummins 1996, 2000; McKay et al. 1997; Thomas and Collier 2002) and this is in well-resourced Northern contexts. Although South Africa has adopted an additive mother-tongue based bilingual education policy (Department of Education 1997), this policy has not been backed by state resourcing. Instead, the Department supports early

transition to English as LoLT at Grade 4, in effect an early-exit subtractive model, despite research spanning thirty years that learners have not acquired sufficient lexical or linguistic knowledge to cope with an expanded content-based curriculum in English by this stage (Macdonald 1990, 2002; Heugh 2013).

In the absence of any push for more effective bi- or multilingual education policies, understanding what happens in the years immediately after this transition is crucial. In all schools, the middle years of schooling (years 4–6, called the Intermediate Phase in South Africa) are a critical phase where students begin to grapple with the demands of a progressively more abstract and specialised curriculum (Christie 2012): in well-developed education systems, learners begin to communicate more on topics outside their personal experiences, such as historical events and abstract theories, and are exposed to more complex factual and analytical genres in all subject areas (Polias 2003).

Multilingual students learning in a second or additional language thus face a double challenge: to make the move from ‘common sense’ to more abstract scientific discourses (Bernstein 1996) and to do this in a language in which they often do not have sufficient levels of either everyday or ‘academic’ competence. Where appropriate teacher education and educational resources are lacking, the challenge becomes far greater.

It is thus of critical importance to explore enabling models of education, pedagogies, curricula and assessment. Research in Australia, and more recently in Sweden, other EU countries, and the USA, seems to indicate that genre-based pedagogies might be one path to enhanced epistemic access for multilingual students (Coffin, Acevedo, and Löfstedt 2013; Culican 2004; Kuyumcu 2011; Tardy 2006; White, Mammone, and Caldwell 2014).

The need for a theoretically principled approach to the development of L2 writing is evident in large scale surveys from 1999 onwards. Writing in Grades 3 to 6 was minimal, in Grade 3 this took place only once a week restricted largely to isolated words (NEEDU 2013; Taylor 2001; Taylor, Fleisch, and Shindler 2008). Disturbingly, even in Grade 7 in four state schools in the Eastern Cape in 2005, learners were found to write few extended texts. Those written were mainly personal expressive texts unlikely to promote the ‘development of abstract cognitively demanding language proficiency and disciplinary knowledge’ (Hendricks 2006, ii; see also Brock-Utne and Desai 2010 comparing Tanzania and South Africa). Overall, then, writing after Grade 3 for the vast majority of South African learners is both narrowly conceived and poorly developed.

Survey of the field

The tools that the humanities, social sciences and sciences have developed to understand the world are ‘fundamentally linguistic ones – the genres and varieties of abstract and technical language associated with each discipline’ (Martin, Christie, and Rothery 1987, 64). Access to disciplinary knowledge is thus hard to achieve unless education deconstructs the language involved and suggests ways in which such language can best be taught.

The need for explicit knowledge of the function, structure and language patterns of written language increases substantially in the middle years of schooling with the move to more abstract disciplinary knowledge and apprenticeship into new forms of knowledge and analytic practices (Christie 2012). This need is particularly acute for those students whose homes do not reflect the language of learning or linguistic patterns of the school curriculum (Gibbons 2006; Rose 2004; Rose and Martin 2012).

Genre-based approaches

Making explicit to students the expectations around school-based literacy and the cultural knowledge and assumptions associated with writing in particular disciplines has been at

the centre of the genre-based project based on M.A.K. Halliday's (1985) SFL. This project has found synergies with Vygotskian notions of 'semiotic mediation' and 'zone of proximal development', Bruner's notion of 'scaffolding', and Bernsteinian concepts of 'visible and invisible pedagogies', 'classification' and 'framing', among many others. (For an overview, see Christie 2005). Work in Australia has resulted in the identification of key genres of schooling (argument, procedure, explanation, review, information report) (Derewianka 1991). Genre here is defined as a 'staged, goal-oriented social process' (Martin and Rose 2003, 7–8): 'Social because we participate in genres with other people; goal oriented because we use genres to get things done; staged because it usually takes us a few steps to reach our goals'. For each genre, the structure or stages and the characteristic linguistic features are identified, and learners are scaffolded into progressive control of these across the curriculum.

Research on interventions using this framework and its later developments is encouraging. For example, using the Learning to Read: Reading to Learn methodology (Rose 2004, 2005; Rose and Martin 2012), a middle years Literacy Intervention Research Project in 24 schools with approximately 400 students considered to be educationally disadvantaged accelerated the literacy performance of over 95% of underachieving students. Over a two year period, literacy outcomes improved at an average of two to four times expected rates of development, for all students across all classes and schools (Culican 2004). Similarly, in 2012–2013, a five-country EU project, Teacher Learning for European Literacy Education (TeL4ELE), used the Reading to Learn pedagogy with approximately 2450 students in 97 classes. All students 'improved by an average of 14.3% on their writing and 9% on their reading (in almost half of all cases in less than 5 weeks)' (Coffin, Acevedo, and Löfstedt 2013, 3).

Particular strengths of genre-based approaches documented in multilingual contexts in Australia and across the EU as well as in the USA are the explicitness of focus on textual and linguistic features, the coherent and systematic modelling and development of writing practices, and the promotion of metalinguistic awareness (Coffin, Acevedo, and Löfstedt 2013; Culican 2004; Sellgren 2011; Humphrey and Feez 2014). Both teachers and learners acquire a 'metalanguage', a shared language for talking about language and literacy, with which to engage in thinking, analysing, and talking about language/s or language choices. This metalanguage is especially helpful in bilingual programmes, providing a principled means of comparing and contrasting written texts across languages. One of a handful of bilingual teacher education programmes in post-apartheid South Africa so far found substantial benefits for teachers in genre-based instruction leading to greater competence in constructing school genres in two languages (Plüddemann, Nomlomo, and Jabe 2010). These benefits were carried over to their learners.

Genre-based pedagogies have been criticised for treating genres as fixed and unchanging, for an overly prescriptive approach to teaching and learning, and for a simplistic conception of the relationship between particular textual practices and social power (Luke 1996, among others). However, if genre pedagogies are taught with attention to critical language awareness, students can critique and redesign genres alongside mobilising them to interrogate power relations (Christie and Mission 1998; Rose and Martin 2012; White, Mammone and Caldwell 2014 and Heugh 2014).

The intervention: Hope School, Delft

To understand 'what develops' in L2 writing we focused our analysis on one of the main genres of schooling (Derewianka 1991): the information report. This descriptive or classifying report is a key genre for engaging with the Natural Sciences.

We define ‘development’ as the writer’s gradually increasing control over the shape and quality of L2 texts. Shape and quality are operationalised from within SFL as the ability to deploy three general functions of language for making meaning in disciplinary-specific ways (Halliday 1985): first, to talk about our experience of the world, to describe events and states (ideational); second, to interact with other people, to establish and maintain relations, to express viewpoints and to elicit or challenge others’ (interpersonal); and third, to organise our messages to fit in with other messages around them and with the wider context in which we are talking or writing (textual).

The research involved 72 Grade 6 children and two teachers in a school on the outskirts of Cape Town in 2008. The school, located in a low-income neighbourhood on the Cape Flats, had 70% black African speakers of isiXhosa and 30% coloured speakers of Afrikaans. In 2007, 91.3% of the children in the school qualified for free school lunches. The Intermediate Phase (Grades 4 to 6) at the school had been classified as ‘very weak’ by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) after the provincial systemic assessments (2006/2007), with the majority of Grade 6 learners performing at Grade 3 level for both numeracy and literacy (WCED 2007a).

The school was one of 15 pilot schools in a Language Transformation Plan (WCED 2007b) initiated in partnership with the University of the Western Cape’s Language Education Department and the Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA) with the goal of extending mother-tongue-based education to the end of Grade 6. The Revised National Language Curriculum (Department of Education 2002) promoted a ‘text-based’ approach along with Communicative Language Teaching, exhibiting some theoretical confusion and offering little guidance on how to implement such an approach.

Consequently, for the teacher in-service programme integral to this pilot, we structured the programme around the development of the key genres of schooling. This was seen as providing a principled way of helping learners to control school genres in both L1 and L2 and offering support to teachers in theorising and implementing the transition from one language of learning to another. Each of the 16 schools involved in this pilot nominated one teacher to attend the course. Although the training explicitly encouraged biliteracy and the use of all linguistic resources in every classroom, this paper focuses only on writing in English as L2.

Teachers

The main participating teacher was the one nominated to attend the in-service programme. A second teacher from the school expressed an interest in taking part in the research thus enabling us to trace writing development in two Grade 6 classes.

Learners

The children in both classes were 10- to 13-year olds. In Class A there were 51 isiXhosa-speaking children and in Class B, a multigrade class, there were 21 learners in Grade 6 (15 isiXhosa-speaking, 6 Afrikaans speaking) along with 20 others in Grades 4 and 5 who were not part of the study. Permission was obtained from parents using a multilingual letter of consent specifying the research purpose, the right to withdraw, and the protection of information and identities.

Implementation

With the permission of teachers, parents and learners, 10 learners were randomly selected from Class A and placed with Class B for the duration of the intervention. From the

qualitative study that formed the background to this intervention, findings showed that learners in Class A wrote only word and sentence level tasks. In the last class assessment for English in Class A, of the learners selected, three had scored 1 ‘not competent’, five had 2 ‘competent with support’, and two had 3 ‘competent’. None had 4 ‘excellent’. Marks were allocated by teachers according to their own criteria. In Class A, these criteria were surface correctness based on word or sentence level tasks. It was felt that a focus on 10 learners moved from this class to Class B would bring out developments more sharply as learners in Class B were already familiar with a genre-based approach and producing reasonably good texts.

Key features

Key features are given as follows:

- (1) A pre-intervention analysis of learner texts.
- (2) The design, implementation and evaluation of a unit of work within the curriculum domain of Natural Science, focusing on the classification and description of mammals.
- (3) The scaffolding of progressive control over the ‘information report’ genre taught in English in 10 half-hour lessons taught in two classes.
- (4) A clear social purpose for the unit, namely, for Grade 6 learners to design information reports that could be used to teach Grade 4 learners.
- (5) Activities sequenced in accordance with the teaching/learning cycle developed in the Australian ‘Write it Right’ project (Rothery 1994) and extensively used since then. This pedagogical framework moves through stages of setting the field, deconstructing the text, modelling writing, jointly constructing and finally individually constructing a similar text.
- (6) The development of a metalanguage weaving together the phases of the teaching/learning cycle, helping learners to recognise language patterns and to appropriate them for their own purposes (Humphrey and Feez 2014).

Writing assessment criteria were adapted from Rose and Martin (2012) (see Table 1) and the Australian Literacy Continuum across Stages of Schooling, Level 10 (year 6) (DECD 2013).

Due to curriculum and timetable constraints, we were unable to compare two genres of the same kind before and after the intervention. There are distinct differences between the argument genre, which was the first pre-intervention text, and the information report genre in all three metafunctions (the relationship between composers of texts and their audiences, the kinds of participants and processes, and the ways in which texts are organised and developed). For this reason we decided to focus the analysis largely on ‘text knowledge’ as defined by the Australian Curriculum for Level 10 (Year 6) (DECD 2013), i.e. the organisational structure (purpose, staging) and the degree of textual cohesion realised by rhetorical organisation and cohesive links (conjunction, identification). Grammar was analysed but only in relation to key features for the genre such as the timeless present tense. Presentation (paragraphing, layout, visuals) was considered as part of ‘text knowledge’ (DECD 2013). Spelling and punctuation were not assessed for our purposes in this paper but would receive increasing attention as learners progressed during the remainder of the year.

This focus on text knowledge allows a judgment of the degree of ‘texture’ created by writers deriving both from the text’s coherence with its social and cultural context (genre

Table 1. Writing assessment criteria (adapted from Rose and Martin 2012, 323–4. © Equinox Publishing 2012).

Context	(Quick judgements are made about these context criteria.)
Purpose	How appropriate and well-developed is the genre for the writing purpose?
Staging	Does it go through appropriate stages, and how well is each stage developed?
Phases	How well organised is the sequence of phases in the text?
Field	How well does the writer understand and explain the field in factual texts or describe the issues in arguments?
Tenor	How well does the writer objectively inform in factual texts or persuade the reader in arguments?
Mode	How highly written is the language for the school stage? Is it too spoken?
Discourse	(Discourse criteria are marked in the text, to give an accurate measure.)
Ideation	What are the writer's lexical resources? How well is lexis used to construct the field?
Appraisal	What are the writer's appraisal resources ⁵ ? How well is appraisal used to persuade or evaluate?
Conjunction	Is there a clear logical relation between all sentences?
Identification	Is it clear who or what is referred to in each sentence?
Grammar and Graphic Features	(Grammar features are judged overall rather than one-by-one.)
Grammar	Is there an appropriate variety of sentence and word group structures for school stage? Are the grammatical conventions of written English used accurately?
Spelling	How accurately spelt are core words and non-core words?
Punctuation	How appropriately and accurately is punctuation used?
Presentation	Are paragraphs used? How legible is the writing? Is the layout clear? Are illustrations/diagrams used appropriately?

and register) and from internal cohesion where 'referential, lexical and logical ties bind passages into relatively coherent, unified semantic units' (Eggs 2004, 53; Halliday 1985): the degree of texture contributes to a text's recognisability as a particular genre.

Data collection

The data gathered included the following:

- (1) Field notes from classroom observations.
- (2) Pre- and post-intervention writing samples from all learners.
- (3) Pre- and post-intervention average and individual achievement results (school-based and provincial Annual National Assessments).
- (4) Audio recordings of interviews with teachers during and after the intervention process.

Phase 1: Pre-intervention text analysis

Prior to the intervention, as part of school policy, the teachers had jointly created a lesson plan and activities for their learners. This entailed an essay on the South African

government, past and present: the task was framed as an argument and would thus suggest a structure of a title, a thesis or position statement, followed by a series of logically ordered supporting arguments, and finally a restatement of position. As the task was to compare South Africa before and after apartheid, there would be connectors of time, marking broad temporal stages, as well as possible connectors of cause, consequence and contrast, a distinction between present and past tense, and some evaluative component. As a benchmark we first analyse a text from Class B where a genre-based approach had been used for six months.

In all learner texts original orthography and layout are retained and meaning glossed between square brackets where necessary.

Class B

Text 1 Class B argument

Comparing apartheid government with the democratic government in South Africa

- 1 Although democratic government and apart at government are different in many ways.
 2 The apartheid government passed laws that affected black, coloureds as well as Indian people.
 3 These laws were discriminating the South African people
- 4 The black, coloureds and Indians were very living in (the) different areas, as apartheid laws
 5 were very painful for these race groups. As time goes by democratic law came by to make
 6 living standards better for these certain race groups, why. because they have collected race
 7 groups and put them in one area so that they can be free.
- 8 Only whites had wealthy than blacks, coloureds and Indians. They were the only race that had a
 9 lot of wealthy than those certain race were not allowed to. And coloureds they also had money
 10 but not like whites people, because coloureds had small amount of money than whites.
- 11 Job was not easy to find, it was difficult for the blacks to find jobs so that they can earn an
 12 amount of money. They were asked to clean coloureds houses and whites so they can earn
 13 money not to stay hanger [hungry] for weeks, months and even years staying without food.
 14 They had no choice of unexcepting the offer so they had to do it so that they can earn money to
 15 buy food.
- 16 They were forced to [could not] choose the leader that they think would let them stay where
 17 they want to stay, some could not choose the leader that could rule the country that is there's
 18 [theirs], they're own land so that they can be free from apartheid government. Democratic
 19 government is what they needed not to be boli [bullied] by whites and tell them what to do,
 20 when they can do it and how they can do that. They had a vision how it will be like to have a
 21 democratic government, how they can be treated and how much respect they will gain with
 22 democratic government.
- 23 Finally they had a president that had set them free, to go where they want to go and to be more
 24 free not to be discrimination and be put in living arrangements for certain race groups to get
 25 them together to make one country in many cultures, religions and believes. They had the
 26 leaders that could rue [rule] the country politely not to harm them because apartheid
 27 government was wrong setting certain kinds of race in certain areas.
- 28 Leadership set them free from what they were going to become with apartheid government
 29 now the democratic government is known for what he has done for those who needed help,
 30 needs and wants. Now they know how to be grateful for that in past times
-

This writer, representative of the class average, manages the task well on the whole: in terms of organisational structure, there is an introductory thesis statement, if incomplete, and a series of logically developed paragraphs on the basis of new points: living

conditions, wealth, jobs, leadership with a conclusion bringing together some of the themes. The first sentence is incomplete and others are slightly strange but the text as a whole is well developed and recognisable as an exposition. There is some rhetorical foregrounding of themes as in ‘only whites’ (1.9), ‘finally’ (1.24). The author describes the issues reasonably well, using abstract nominal groups such as ‘democratic government’ and ‘apartheid laws’ with the appropriate transitivity structures. Tenor is carried through declarative mood in third person to realise impersonality along with some evaluative language (‘very painful’, ‘wrong’) and appropriate use of modality ‘could rule the country politely’. Cohesion is managed through theme³ and information structuring, good referencing, linking words and phrases, and logical relations of cause ‘because’, consequence ‘so’, purpose ‘so that’ and contrast ‘but’.

This text also meets the Australian criteria for grammar knowledge for Grade 6: for example, ‘vary length and structure of sentences for effect’; ‘construct a variety of clause and sentence structures to elaborate, extend or explain ideas, including complex sentences using a wider range of subordinating (binding) conjunctions including those that show manner and concession’; ‘demonstrate developing control of subject–verb agreement when agreements are more complex’ (DECD 2013, Levels 7–10). Learners from economically deprived homes in an under-resourced school were thus capable of meeting international benchmarks with a well-trained teacher using a genre-based approach.

Class A

By comparison, in Class A, where the teacher had no induction into genre-based approaches, this exposition task was taught more like a factual historical recount using a timeline: the learners were told what to write and instructed to compare the old and new.

Text 2 Class A argument: Buzwe (not moved to Class B)

Old Times

In old times the black people not alway to go to town and whites people they go to town all Time. they want to go to town and Black people and wore no equal blak and whiter had ther own resturente and tolled school [toilet and school]

New Times

in new times the people alway go to town and white people they go to town an Time they wants t town black peiple and white peopt were not separated occord-ing not roes and black people have the right to vate and people were eqql black people and whites people they chared the toleid school

This text is appropriately structured by time frames, and the theme of each paragraph is foregrounded by choosing contrastive circumstantial phrases of time as starting points. However, there is no further paragraphing, merely a series of statements chained together by ‘and’. Arguments are not clearly made nor are there any persuasive elements such as modality or other resources for attitudinal meaning, except in words such as ‘equal’. Lexis is limited with nominal groups restricted to people rather than abstract concepts. Logical relationships are implicit only, not represented in the discourse: conjunctive resources are limited to ‘and’ and cohesive links non-existent. Identification is comprehensible but uneven in its realisation. There are also obvious problems with the micro norms of spelling and

punctuation. Overall the text is not well developed and would not be immediately recognisable as an exposition genre. The language is still very close to spoken mode.

The next text was written by another Class A learner who was later moved to Class B for the intervention. This shows a greater degree of planning and a shift from spoken language. Once again there is good structuring by temporal framing along with the use of space and headings to indicate key thematic contrasts. One could argue for a degree of coherence in the almost poetic rendering of the repeated and contrasted nominal groups at the beginning of each clause and the rhythm created by the format tying across sections. There is a series of statements and one abstract nominal group 'Bantu education', otherwise a fairly limited lexis. In terms of interpersonal resources, evaluation is implicit in lexical items such as 'discriminate', 'equal' and 'peaceful' but no persuasive element is present. Conjunctive resources and clause combining strategies are absent. Identification is recognisable but unevenly realised with echoes of isiXhosa in the pronominal 'they' following the noun group. The text is recognisable as a contrastive text if not an argument/exposition.

Text 3 Class A argument: Hlumelo before moving to Class B

Old

The white people They want to own SouTh AfriCA.
 The white people give black people banto eduCAtion.
 The white people The desetremite [discriminate] black people.
 The white people They want went black people learn They language.

New

The black people and white people The educAtion are equal.
 The black people and whites Their right are equal.
 The black people and white people They treat equal.
 White people and black people They are peaceFull.

Texts 2 and 3 are representative of all those in Class A: there were a range of structural formats to indicate the contrast in time periods. However, in general, texts lacked the expected organisational and linguistic genre features. In contrast to Class B texts, none of the texts contained a title, a thesis or position statement, logically ordered supporting arguments, or a final restatement of position. There was almost no textual development, many just had bullet points. There was very little use of appropriate lexis or appraisal resources, few logical relations between clauses or sections, and erratic identification. 'Texture' (Egins 2004) created by coherence with social and cultural context (genre and register) and by internal cohesion was largely lacking.

The next section describes the phases of the intervention and presents examples of 'information report' texts constructed during this process. The purpose of this genre is to provide accurate and relevant information about the living and non-living world. The stages of a typical information report would include a general statement or definition and classification followed by a description of attributes or characteristics grouped under appropriate subtopics with headings and/or topic sentences. Paragraphs would be logically ordered and organised according to the phases of an information report, e.g. appearance, breeding, food, hunting methods, habitat. Expected ideational resources would be generalized participants with some technical classificatory terms, the timeless, simple present tense, some passive voice, relational processes expressing part-whole relationships, possession, or characteristics, and

material processes describing behaviour or activities. Circumstances would add details of time and place. Visuals may complement written description/explanation. There would be little evaluation, rather the use of the impersonal third person to signal objectivity (DECD 2013; Christie and Derewianka 2008).

Phase 2: Setting the field

Building field and setting context is crucial for each phase of the teaching/learning cycle and refers to activities which build content knowledge and awareness of the contexts in which a genre is used. In this way, learners move from everyday, common sense knowledge towards technical, specialist subject knowledge, and are gradually inducted into the discourse of school subjects. In this phase, the teachers built the field or content knowledge about a member of the class of mammals, the elephant. The information report was to be on the differences and similarities between two types of elephants, Asian and African. First, learners listened to a narrative ‘Mumbo and Jumbo’ about two elephant brothers, one that left for India and another that stayed in Africa (Appendix A, available as supplemental data).

The story focused on what the elephant brothers ate, their body parts, and their similarities and differences, using everyday common sense comparative language. The discussion focused on simple participants and material or relational processes, for example, elephants eat grass and plants, body consists of head, body and legs, and similarities and differences between the two types. The teacher later built on the knowledge developed in this narrative to introduce new subject-specific discourse elements in the information report.

Phase 3: Deconstructing texts

In this phase, teachers used a sample information report ‘All about Elephants’ (Appendix B, supplemental data) to guide the learners to recognise the following: the purpose of the text, the intended audience, the stages of the text and some relevant language features. Learners followed while the teacher read and discussed the text. The focus was on checking learners’ understanding of the technical language, where elephants are found, what they eat, etc. as well as recognising comparative language. The after-reading task was a comprehension one, assessing the content and technical language understood by learners. The final tasks were a focus on some key language features, in this case, on descriptive factual language and the timeless present tense.

Phase 4: Modelling writing

During this phase the teacher focused on explicit teaching about the stages and language features of the information report such as descriptive factual language and timeless present tense. This was achieved through leading questions, drawing learners’ attention to features previously discussed, explanations and reminders. Together the class then designed a writing frame to use as a model for jointly constructing a similar text. This frame included a title, classification, subheadings, visuals, and timeless present tense.

Phase 5: Joint construction

Groups were asked to design their own information report on ‘Elephants’ for Grade 4 learners at the school. In these groups, learners had to first decide on their own title and possible subheadings, cut pictures from the hand-outs that they were given, and then use the appropriate language features to create a text. Groups then evaluated one another’s

information reports and commented on title, classification, subheadings, visuals, and appropriacy of language features.

Text 4 Class B: jointly constructed information report

Odwa (Class B), Abongile (from Class A) and Hlumelo (from Class A)

Two different elephants
There are two different ani elephants, there is African elephants and Asian elephants. They look the same but there are parts that are different for example the back of the African elephants is concave and the Asian elepj elephant is convex.

What they eat
elephants are part of herbivores. They eat plants, mainly grass and trees. They do not eat people they are very friendly, lovely and very proud of human being. Elephants can spend about 16 hours a day eating.

Weighst of elephants
Did you know an 11 years of old ele elephant weighs about 1000kg. African elephants are bigger than Asian elephants. An adult elephants ways between 3000 and 6000kg. Did you know an African elephants almost weighs about a group of 6 cars.

Body parts of elephants
All elephants have a body, tail and head. The head consists of a mouth, eyes, tusks, ai ears and mouth. The trunk uses to drink water and to move the trees on the way.

What does elephant do to protect it self

Text 4 has a clear organisational structure with a title, introductory paragraph, subheadings with relevant information grouped under each, and a classification 'herbivore'.

The text is immediately recognisable as an information report with an appropriate register carried through abstract nominal groups and technical lexis, along with some use of modality ('can spend') and thematic choices that structure information so that key points are highlighted. Cohesion is achieved by good use of the theme in first position of each paragraph, conjunctive links of contrast and exemplification, and reasonable use of referencing. A sense of audience is evident in the rhetorical questions starting 'did you know' to engage the Grade 4 learners' interest and in the intensification of 'very friendly, lovely and very proud' which addresses young children's possible fear of elephants, even if the information is misleading. There is also good use of comparative language both within and between clauses, and control of subject-verb agreement on the whole, but not yet of the passive: 'the trunk uses to drink water'.

Phase 6: Individual construction

In phase 6, learners used the acquired knowledge of the purpose, audience, text stages and key features to write an individual text about 'Cheetahs'. Learners received a slightly jumbled fact sheet on cheetahs (Appendix C, supplemental data) and had to use these facts to write their own texts for the Grade 4 learners at their school, using appropriate

headings. Field-specific ideational resources (participants, processes and circumstances) were given on the worksheet.

We present first as a point of comparison a text from Buzwe in Class A. The teacher in Class A completed the unit of work including the ‘setting the field’ activities, but did not follow on with the deconstruction, modelling and joint construction phases as he had no induction into this approach. He was therefore not equipped to offer explicit instruction in textual and linguistic elements.

Class A

Text 5 Class A individual information report: Buzwe (not moved to Class B, no intervention) (for original see online)

- 1 Cheetahs as mammals. Cheetahs have chest is deep
- 2 Cheetahs have Head, body, legs and tail. Body is
- 3 Marked with irregular patches or streaks of different colours
- 4 Males tend to be slightly larger than Females and have
- 5 bigger heads cheetas is a carnivore, eat meat. The
- 6 adult cheetah weiighs between 40 kilograms and 65 kilograms
- 7 The skin is covered with hair called fur and it is rough
- 8 when you touch it. The tail usually white at the end
- 9 eats mammals under 40 kilogram. It for food early
- 10 in the morning or later in the evening the cheetah huts
- 11 by vision. They could go for several days without water
- 12 ~~eat~~ Cheetahs are Found in Africa, Namibia and Iran ~~Five~~
- 13 Five subspecies of cheetahs for, 4 in Africa and 1 in Iran
- 14 people kill cheetahs for their fur
- 15 farmers hunt them because the faima are Afraid that cheetahs will eat their cows sheep and Chickens
- 16 The total body length is approximately 115 centimetres
- 17 The tail can measure up to 84 centimetres

This learner did not provide a title, subtitles, opening statement or closing statement. There is little apparent order to the grouping of information (body, colouring in two different places, size, carnivore, weight, fur, tail, food, why hunted, length) except for the set of facts on food and why hunted. There is however a categorisation in line 1.

In terms of texture, there is no use of themes to structure paragraphs and few text connectives. There are three clause combining choices, one of them already provided on the factsheet: ‘and’ (l.4, l.7), ‘because’ (l.15). Referencing is random except in l.7 and l.15 (provided in factsheet) but identification is nevertheless possible. Punctuation does not aid clause distinctions; control of morphosyntactic norms is uneven.

The other 28 Class A texts followed similar patterns: there was little sense of audience or purpose. None had a classification; thirteen had a title, at least two subheadings and/or paragraphs. There was little cohesion through referential, lexical or logical ties. Few were minimally recognisable as information reports.

Class B

Class B had six months' exposure to genre-based pedagogy and the result was evident in most samples. In general, these learners included all the elements necessary for the information report. This is evident firstly with the rhetorical organisation carried in titles, subheadings and topic sentences, often complemented by pictures and visuals, for example, a picture of the cheetah under the subheading 'body parts' was labelled accordingly. Another learner included a map to illustrate the subheading 'Where cheetahs are found'. These learners demonstrated an awareness of key stages and were able to manipulate the text to some extent: some experimented with subheadings and layout, arranging their texts to be interesting for the intended audience of Grade 4 learners, or choosing to phrase the subheadings as questions. They thus had a fair degree of control over the genre

Text 6 Class B: individual information report after the intervention (for original see online)

The members of the cat family

Cheetahs are mammals, they are the members of the cat family they are called felidae. They are the fastest land animals.

Their weights

The adult cheetah weighs between 40 kilograms and 65 kilograms. The total body length is approximately 115 centimetres to 135 centimetres the tail can measure up to 84 centimetres Male tend to be slightly larger than females and have bigger heads. The cheetah is the fastest land animal.

What ~~ele~~ cheetahs eats

The ~~cheat~~ cheetah eats mammals under 40 kilograms. Cheetah is a carnivore it eats meat.

How cheetahs hunt for food

It hunts for food early in the morning or later in the evening. The cheetah hunts by vision. Cheetahs hunt the animals under 40 kilograms. They could go for several days without water.

Body parts of the cheetah

The chest is deep, waist is narrow. Every cheetah has its own head, body legs and tail. The body of ~~a~~ cheetah is marked with irregular patches or streaks of different colours. It is confused with a leopard but it is different from a leopard. A cheetah has long lines that run from the corner of its eyes to its mouth and the cheetah's tail is thinner and longer than the leopard.

The cheetah's skin

The cheetah's skin is covered with hair called fur and it is rough when you touch it. The tail is usually white in the end; the tail can measure up to 84 centimetre.

People hunt cheetahs

People kill cheetahs for their fur. Farmers hunt them because they are afraid that they will eat their cows, sheep and chickens.

In text 6 structure and key stages are well handled: all but one subheading is appropriate. The section on body parts is well structured and developed. In terms of cohesion, referencing is mostly correct and more developed than in Class A texts, and there is

attention to logical ties of, for example, comparison and contrast. The lexis contains more technical terms than any text in Class A and the degree of coherence and appropriacy is substantially higher. Grammar and graphic resources are largely correct. This text thus realises a solid degree of 'texture'.

Text 7 Class A learner moved to Class B: Hlumelo's information report after the intervention (for original see online)

FAstEsT of CheeTAhs' mAmmAls

It has long lines That run from The corner of its eyes to its mouTh and The cheeTAH's TAIL is Thinner and Longer Than The Leopard. The SkiN is covered with hair cAlled Fur and it is rough when you Tush it.

The weight of CheeTAhs are difference. The TOTAL body LengTh is approximAtely 115 Centimetres to 135 centimetres. The TAIL CAN measure up to 84 centimetres. The adult CheeTh weigh between 40 kilOgrams

[picture] ~~Male tend to be slightly larger in the evening~~

WhAt They EAting

CheeTah is a CArnivore, eat meat, Eat mammals under 40 kilograms. They could go for several dAys wiThout wAter. It hunts For Food early in The morning. The CheeTAh hunts by vision.

Why people kill CheeTAhs.

FArms Hunt Them becAuse The FArms are aFraid That CheeTAhs will eat Their Cows like, Sheep and Cows. people kill CheeTAhs becAuse She wAnt Fur.

[picture]

Where are found in AFriCA.

IRAn and NAmibia. Five subspecies of CheeTAhs. 4 in AFriCA and 1 in IRAN.

They are different coLours streakd.

Chest is deep
WAist is NARrow.

With explicit instruction of the purpose, key stages and linguistic features, Hlumelo managed to control the information report genre reasonably competently. His report demonstrated evidence of understanding the social purpose, key stages, and linguistic features. First, his report consisted of a title, *Fastest of Cheetahs-Mammals*, which is a classificatory heading. Although there is perhaps some misunderstanding of semantic relationships, he did combine two pieces of information from the worksheet in a new way. His opening paragraph, whilst not a classification, at least provided a description of the cheetah. Subheadings were also created to reflect different groups of attributes or

activities: *The weight of cheetahs are difference, What they eating, Why people kill cheetahs, Where are found in Africa.*

Appropriate information is grouped under each, except 'Weight' which includes length with weight at the end of the paragraph rather than the beginning. The last heading is not appropriate for what follows.

Hlumelo deploys some abstract and scientific terms such as 'carnivore', 'mammal', 'length' and 'weight'. In terms of cohesion there are some logical relationships of cause and coordination, a wider range than in texts from Class A. Referencing is uneven but there is evidence in the referencing errors of his attempts to develop ideas, as in 'people kill cheetahs because she want fur' which is again a reformulation of information on the worksheet rather than a straight copy. In this respect he differs from Class A writers.

The writer can be seen to be 'designing' his text as do his colleagues in Class B using paragraphs, punctuation, indenting, and space, even writing around one of his pictures. Although the sentence 'male tend to be slightly larger in the evening' was later deleted because he realised it was incorrect, it nevertheless demonstrates creativity in the use of multimodal and 'text-shaping resources' (Blommaert 2013).

In terms of the interpersonal metafunction, Hlumelo shows a good sense of writing for a particular audience. Three of the headings are framed as questions in order to build a relationship with the reader and to invite engagement. The pictures also work to create interest, carrying some meaning not present in the text (spots, size, stride).

Grammar and graphic features are uneven and idiosyncratic in the capitalisation of certain letters. Despite these microlevel problems, this text is immediately recognisable as an information report, considerably more developed than others from Class A in organisation, logical relationships and cohesion. A greater degree of texture illustrates an emergent control of the genre, its stages and linguistic features, leading to some confidence to be creative with illustrations and rhetorical structure.

Of the other nine learners moved to Class B, six had a well-developed organisational structure, including a title, classification, paragraphs, subheadings, and pictures, and demonstrated evidence of understanding the key language features. Three learners only had sentences and a title. However, these three had missed at least two of the ten sessions. The majority of learners thus showed an adequate control of this specific genre.

Cracking the code

Hlumelo's ability to gain control over the basics of the information report and to use these with some creativity are particularly striking as he was thought to have minimal reading and writing ability in English and in isiXhosa. His mark as assessed before the intervention was 1 'not competent'. He was over-age for the class, struggling academically, and we were told 'Don't bother, he can't write'. Yet after 10 hours of instruction he was able to independently produce a recognisable and reasonably competent report. This finding resonates with research which shows that while all learners gain from genre-based pedagogies, those who have the weakest foundations gain the most (see White, Mammone, and Caldwell 2014).

The teaching/learning cycle described above and the way in which learners learned to control the basics of the information report are illustrative only yet confirm the importance of 'visible' pedagogies and of a metalanguage for talking and thinking about how language works (Schleppegrell 2013; Humphrey and Feez 2014), particularly for multilingual learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. All learners made substantial gains in the information report during this intervention, showing increasing control of the

dimensions of the genre in a series of intersecting shifts: in field or content, from everyday, concrete and specific to more technical, abstract and generalised; in tenor, from informal and familiar to more formal and distant; in mode, from more spontaneous and speech-like to more planned, organised and reflective. These shifts in development are explicitly supported in genre pedagogies. For those who remained in Class B, gains were sustained over the rest of the school year: these students showed substantially improved results at the end of the year when compared to Grade 6 classes in the same school and others of similar socio-economic and linguistic profiles in the province. Moreover this class was the only one in the whole school that showed improvement in literacy results for 2009, more than twice that of the other three Grade 6 classes (WCED 2010). This class had been doing better than the others before the intervention but the difference between the classes widened substantially once the genre-based pedagogy was introduced (Teacher B, p.c)⁴.

Changing assessment: valuing meaning-making

Functional grammar thus provides an ‘essential linguistic tool with which we can trace development, noting the ways in which changes occur and using it in a diagnostic sense to establish problems’ (Christie 2012, 190). Focusing on meaning-making and the ways in which formal lexico-grammatical features, rather than being arbitrary, are connected to social purposes can lead to forms of assessment which recognise learners’ discursive choices as matters of design, rather than negligence (Bawarshi 2006). This would entail a strong focus on the development of genre-appropriate structure and language features and on how micro-norms of grammatical correctness, spelling and punctuation contribute to broader meanings: identifying lines of development in this way provides affirming evidence of progress and can offer explicit formative feedback for learners. For example, Hlumelo’s teacher, after emphasising the strengths of his text in terms of purpose, audience, design, staging, and lexis, might suggest that he now focus intensively on thematic development through pronominal identification and consistency and correctness in the use of the present simple tense. This form of Dynamic Assessment unifies ‘assessment and instruction into a single activity, the goal of which is learner development’ (Poehner and Lantolf 2005, 254) and is consistent with emergentist understandings of second language acquisition and views of language knowledge as ‘reorganisation, redirection, expansion, and transformation’ (Hall, Cheng, and Carlson 2006).

Functional grammar thus offers a more refined analytic and diagnostic toolkit than currently in use in South Africa and a set of criteria which evaluate performance consistently and constructively, of importance in a context of unequal distribution of linguistic and other resources.

‘Why can’t we have English like this all the time?’

A further benefit of the strong scaffolding in a genre-based pedagogy is its effect on learners’ sense of self. In Hlumelo’s first hours in Class B he seemed withdrawn and silent, but, as the week progressed, he participated more enthusiastically, contributing ideas and making creative suggestions. Success in creating his own report led him to comment ‘Why can’t we have English like this all the time?’. The confidence engendered through success bolstered his identity both as learner and as writer. It is possible to see this pedagogy as democratising the classroom (Martin and Rose 2005). First, it supports all learners to operate at the same high level while providing the greatest support for those who need it most. Second, it promotes collaborative relations of power, seeing learners

and teachers as jointly constructing knowledge. These two features affirm learner identities as co-producers of knowledge and generate high levels of academic engagement (cf. Cummins 2000, 2014).

Conclusion

We argue that the explicit scaffolding provided by genre-based pedagogies as developed by the 'Sydney School' of SFL offers a means of substantially enhancing access to the specialised language of schooling for learners from low socio-economic backgrounds whose home language does not match the LoLT in the school.

It is important to note that, despite results which exceeded expectations, plans to expand the pilot programme to 130 more schools were inexplicably cut when there was a change of political governance in the province. This illustrates the challenges of sustaining attempts to remake pedagogy as 'part of a broader political and social agenda for redistributing knowledge and reshaping power relations' (Luke 1996, 313). Further evidence of these challenges is the continuing struggle to implement truly additive multilingual education. In the absence of solid additive or dynamic models of bi/multilingual education after Grade 3, genre-based pedagogies offer a partial answer to 'what should count in changing what counts as a contemporary solution to linguistically structured inequalities'. The potential of such pedagogies could be dramatically increased should learners be able to learn through one or more familiar languages in addition to the language of schooling. The hope generated by a new draft policy document on African Languages in schools (DBE 2013a; Plüddemann 2014) was soon dashed by a revision three months later (DBE 2013b) which removed all references to the development of African languages as languages of learning and teaching.

Further research

This paper records gains made using the teaching/learning cycle developed by Rothery (1994) and her colleagues in Australia. Further research could investigate outcomes using developments of this pedagogy such as Learning to Read: Reading to Learn which provides a greater focus on detailed reading to enhance text deconstruction and the recognition and use of language patterns (Martin and Rose 2005; Rose and Martin 2012). It would be important to research the effects of genre-based pedagogies in a variety of school contexts as well as the kinds of learning opportunities and teaching environments that would encourage teachers to adopt these pedagogies.

An area not explored in this paper is the role of the multilingual interactions among learners which were explicitly encouraged during the intervention, particularly during the joint construction phase. The role of multilingual talk in co-constructing knowledge in the L2 or language of learning is under-explored yet seems to play a crucial role in the successful construction of knowledge (see Probyn 2014). Most importantly, exploring the potential of genre-based pedagogies for the development of biliteracy across the curriculum could contribute to the development of new understandings of how to engage learners' multilingual meaning-making potentials and so transform teaching and learning.

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Supplemental data

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed here.

Notes

1. We use the term ‘second language’ (L2) in the knowledge that for many children this may be a third or fourth language or language variety.
2. The term ‘coloured’ historically included descendants of Khoi and San populations, slaves brought from the Dutch East Indies, and those of mixed parentage. Black African is generally used to distinguish those of African heritage from coloured or Indian groups. These apartheid categorisations are retained by the democratic state to monitor redress and equity.
3. In SFL, there is ‘the point of departure’ for the clause (Halliday 1970: 161). The choice of this first constituent in a clause plays a crucial role in framing and organising the message.
4. The Western Cape Education Department only started providing differentiated results per Grade 6 class in each school from 2009. No individual class results were available for 2008.
5. By appraisal resources, we mean the language used to express attitudes, take up stances, and adjust degrees of feeling (Martin and White 2005).

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