Analyzing Genre Exemplars in Preparation for Writing: The Case of an L2 Graduate Student in the ESP Genre-based Instructional Framework of Academic Literacy

AN CHENG
Oklahoma State University

Some researchers believe that the ESP genre-based framework of writing instruction is effective in teaching discipline-specific English EAP writing to L2 learners, especially to advanced L2 graduate students. However, studies examining students’ genre-based learning in such a framework are still underrepresented in current ESP genre-based literature. This study focused on a Chinese-speaking graduate student in electrical engineering who analyzed genre exemplars in preparation for writing. My analysis of the data reveals this student’s two prominent and interrelated ways of analyzing the discourse-level generic features in discipline-specific genre exemplars. They are (a) rhetorical, as evidenced in his consistent attention not only to the generic features, but also to the underlying rhetorical parameters, such as reader, writer, and purpose and (b) evaluative, as shown in his increasingly sophisticated evaluation of the discourse-level generic features in the genre exemplars. The student’s rhetorical and evaluative reading of the genre exemplars highlights the potential power of genre as an explicit, supportive tool for building academic literacy.

INTRODUCTION

To some researchers, genre has become ‘one of the most important and influential concepts in language education’ (Hyland 2004: 5). In the genre studies literature, genre is often defined as ‘a distinctive category of discourse of any type, spoken or written’ (Swales 1990: 33) serving as ‘responses by speakers or writers to the demands of a social context’ (Johns 2002: 3). Some researchers have identified three broad, interrelated approaches to genre (e.g. Hyon 1996). The approach informed by Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday 1995) is adopted by many researchers who study the broad genres of schooling, such as description, narration, exemplification, and argumentation, in the Australian school contexts (Paltridge 2002). The New Rhetoric approach is developed by composition researchers in North America who are more interested in the social and ideological significance than in the rhetorical organization and the language features of genres (Devitt 2004).
The English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approach—the major theoretical and pedagogical background of the present study—is often favored by researchers interested in genre as a tool for teaching discipline-specific writing to L2 users in professional or academic settings.

In the ESP tradition, genres are often defined as structured communicative events engaged in by specific discourse communities whose members share broad communicative purposes (Swales 1990). As seen in this definition, many ESP genre researchers often associate genres with discourse communities, such as academic disciplines or particular professions, and often use the nomenclature of these communities, such as ‘research article’ and ‘lab report’, to identify valued genres (Johns 2003). The most influential ESP genre-analysis framework, established by Swales (1981, 1990), is initially characterized by the analysis of ‘move’, often defined as a ‘bounded communicative act that is designed to achieve one main communicative objective’, and the language features undergirding a particular move (Swales and Feak 2000: 35). Following Swales’ lead since 1990, however, many ESP genre-based (hereafter ESPG) researchers have increasingly emphasized the important balance between generic features, such as moves and language features, and the underpinning disciplinary and rhetorical contexts (e.g. Swales 1998). Such a context-sensitive approach to genre analysis has generated numerous descriptions of the rhetorical situations and the recurring generic features of discipline-specific genres (see, for example, many genre analysis articles in this journal, Applied Linguistics, and in other journals) as well as many pedagogical proposals and materials (e.g. Swales 1981, 1990; Weissberg and Buker 1990; Bhatia 1993; Flowerdew 1993; Johns 1997, 2002; Swales and Feak 2000, 2004).

Despite its often-proclaimed effectiveness in teaching discipline-specific writing to L2 users, especially to advanced L2 graduate students (Swales 1990; Hyland 2002, 2004; Johns 2003), there are still very few substantial discussions of students’ learning in the ESPG instructional framework. Specifically, various aspects of explicit learning and teaching that characterize the ESPG instructional framework, such as how students analyze genre exemplars or how such analyses shape their writing, are still not duly explored (see Cheng 2006a, for a recent discussion of this gap in the ESPG literature).

This literature gap is especially surprising, given the many direct and indirect criticisms against the ESPG approach by some researchers from various theoretical and pedagogical backgrounds (e.g. Spack 1988; Freedman 1993; Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995; Prior 1998; Beaufort 1999; Casanave 2002; see Cheng 2006a, for an analysis of these criticisms). In addition, current studies that specifically address ESPG explicit instruction, though few and far between, have also highlighted various limitations of ESPG instruction, such as students’ inadequate improvement in move accuracy (Henry and Roseberry 1998), insufficient unpacking of concepts or
vocabulary items in genre samples (Hyon 2002), and misapplication of prototypical genre qualities (Mustafa 1995; Hyon 2001).

Notably, while exposing the limitations of explicit ESPG teaching, these studies tend to show inadequate attention to the processes of genre-based learning. For example, Henry and Roseberry (1998) included only a short paragraph that discusses students’ post-instructional ‘opinions about how much they enjoyed the genre-based’ (vs. the grammar-based) approach (p. 152). Other ESPG studies or commentaries (Swales et al. 2001; Yakhontova 2001; Swales and Lindemann 2002; Swales and Luebs 2002) often present student learning in the form of selected post-instructional ‘insightful student reflections’ (Johns and Swales 2002: 21) that reveal very little about the processes of ESPG learning.

Given the lack of attention in existing ESPG studies to the processes through which students develop genre awareness and discipline-specific writing, more investigations, especially case studies that allow for the extensive display of data, seem necessary. To pursue this line of research, this study asked two research questions:

1. What features does a graduate student attend to when he analyzes discipline-specific genre exemplars, and how does he attend to these features?
2. Does his analysis of the generic features change over various genre-analysis tasks? How?

THE STUDY

The course

This paper reports on one case in a series of case studies that address student learning in the ESPG framework of writing instruction. The data were collected in an English academic writing course taught by the author in a large American State University (ASU, a pseudonym). Twenty-two L2 graduate students from various disciplines enrolled in two sections of this course. Among the 22 students, 12 were from China, seven from Korea, and the other three were from Saudi Arabia, Ecuador, and Germany respectively; 17 of the 22 were doctoral students. Each section met for two 75-minute sessions weekly for 16 weeks. Since most of the students were expected to write research reports during and beyond their study at ASU, the ESPG approach (Swales 1990; Swales and Feak 2000, 2004) was adopted to guide their explicit explorations of the generic features of discipline-specific research articles (RAs).

As indicated in the instructional content (see Appendix A, available to online subscribers at http://applij.oxfordjournals.org/), the course consisted of four interrelated sections. In Section I, I followed Johns (1997) and used
non-academic genres, such as wedding announcements, obituaries, and good/bad news letters, to develop the students’ conceptual understanding of genre and to introduce them to such basic genre analysis techniques as identifying moves and the underlying language features. I also alerted the students’ attention to the roles of various rhetorical parameters, such as writer, reader, purpose, in shaping a particular genre. Section II focused on the generic features of RA introduction because it ‘generally present[s] greater rhetorical problems than [the] methods and results sections’ (Swales and Lindemann 2002: 117). Moreover, since the introduction is arguably the most frequently studied part of RA (e.g. Swales 1981, 1990; Swales and Najar 1987; Samraj 2002, 2005), I hoped that the resulting rich theoretical insights could enable me not only to raise the students’ awareness of the generic features of this part, but also to guide them to use genre analysis as a tool for their increasingly independent explorations of other parts of RAs. Built on Section II, Section III concentrated on the generic features of the method, discussion, and conclusion sections of RAs. Section IV dealt with academic support genres, such as job application and manuscript submission letters (Swales and Feak 2000).

The discovery-based approach to genre teaching and learning

In order to (re)situate in the students’ own eyes the generic features and the disciplinary practices behind these features, a discovery-based orientation to genre teaching/learning was emphasized in this course. Before Section II, the students were instructed to each collect five published RAs from reputable refereed journals in their fields as samples for subsequent genre-analysis (GA) tasks. They were directed to select RAs similar to those they envisioned themselves writing and publishing and were encouraged to seek the guidance of their professors or more experienced peers regarding the quality of the research and the writing of the selected RAs. Copies of all the selected RAs, along with short rationale statements explaining why the RAs were chosen, were also provided to me. In Sections II and III, samples from these RAs were used to lead class discussions aimed at heightening the students’ awareness of the generic features and the underpinning rhetorical parameters. Efforts were made to include at least one section from the RAs submitted by each student in the samples analyzed in class. Many of these samples turned out to be empirical, quantitative RAs quite representative of those submitted by the students.

Class discussions focused on discourse-level features, such as the moves, the embedded steps, and the language features unique to a move or a step (see, for example, the ‘Language Focus’ sections in Swales and Feak 2004). The students were also encouraged to discuss whatever rhetorical or language features that they found useful or interesting (see Appendix B, available to online subscribers at http://applij.oxfordjournals.org/, for the framework used for guiding class discussions of the genre exemplars).
Similar to Swales and Lindemann (2002), class discussions were open-ended and inductive. I asked questions such as ‘What was the author trying to do with these two sentences in the first paragraph?’ or ‘What are the words, phrases, or sentences that the author used to achieve this purpose?’ in order to heighten their awareness of the functions of the generic features in the samples. I also asked questions such as ‘Why did the author choose to structure this part this way?’ to alert the students to the rhetorical and the ideological dimensions of genres in discipline-specific contexts. Theoretical insights I gained from reading existing ESP genre-analysis studies (see some examples of these studies in Appendix A, available to online subscribers at http://applij.oxfordjournals.org/) were often introduced to the students during or after, but seldom before, the discussions so as to avoid the impression of imposing certain rules of academic writing. The students were constantly reminded at the end of a discussion to use the insights they gained as a set of heuristics for their future observations of the generic features in RAs, rather than as a set of rules that should be immediately applied to their next writing task.

To maintain such a discovery-based focus, I designed a series of out-of-class GA tasks in which the students independently analyzed different parts of the selected RAs (see Appendix C, available to online subscribers at http://applij.oxfordjournals.org/, for the purposes of these and other learning tasks in this course). The students were encouraged to use the framework adopted for structuring class discussions (see Appendix B, available to online subscribers at http://applij.oxfordjournals.org/) to guide their out-of-class GA tasks, but they could explore any features that they found interesting or useful. They cut and pasted different sections of the articles and utilized the editing functions in Microsoft Word®, such as boldfacing and italicization, to highlight and analyze the generic features they found relevant. They were given credits for doing the tasks on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, and I responded to their analyses through (a) offering additional examples, usually based on my own reading of ESP genre-based studies, to supplement their analyses and (b) clarifying misunderstood points; among others. In my comments, I also constantly reminded them that the ultimate goal of the genre-analysis tasks was to build a repertoire of generic features that could be useful for their future writing tasks, rather than just learning a set of rules.

The students on this course completed three major writing assignments. The first writing assignment was a literacy narrative where they reflected on their L1 and L2 reading and writing practices. The second and third writing assignments were discipline-specific writing tasks in which the students wrote various sections of RAs (for a detailed description of these writing tasks, see Cheng in press). After every writing assignment, I held a text-based interview (Odell et al. 1983) with each learner to discuss their writing and their GA tasks. These interviews were audio-recorded.
The focal student

The focal student in this study, Fengchen (a pseudonym), caught my attention initially because he seemed to be quite representative of the students taking this course in many respects. Fengchen was in his early 30s at the start of the study. He earned his B.S and M.S. in electrical engineering from a premier research university of science and technology in China. After that, he worked for two years, first as a research associate in a major lab in China and, then, as a network engineer in a major Chinese telecommunications company, before coming to the United States. His academic training and professional experience seem to be quite typical of the ‘impressive and successful cohort’ of students in other ESPG instructional settings (Swales and Lindemann 2002; Swales and Luebs 2002: 149) as well as students taking this course. Seventeen of the 22 students enrolled on this course were doctoral students, and many students’ literacy narratives reveal their extensive professional training and experience. Fengchen’s major was also quite representative. Eight of the 14 students in Fengchen’s section were various engineering majors. Fengchen was also one of the nine Chinese speakers in his section. In general, these aspects not only make Fengchen representative of his class, but also quite representative of the students enrolled on this course in general, at least in the four years during which I had taught this course.

At the start of the study, Fengchen had been in the United States for two years and had been a doctoral student for a year and a half. He seemed to be aware of the literacy obstacles he faced. The activity of academic writing, according to him, remained ‘hard, very hard,’ and his English writing was, as he described in his needs assessment survey at the beginning of the semester, ‘very poor’. He felt that he was ‘not a good writer at all’ (Fengchen’s needs assessment survey, p. 2). In my first interview with him early in the semester, he repeatedly mentioned that he was ‘dreaming of writing a good journal article or a project proposal’ in the future, but he did not know ‘what to do about it’ or ‘how to improve’ his academic writing (interview 1 transcript, p. 3). His self assessment of his English writing ability is again typical of that of many students taking this course. At the time of this study, ASU enrolled 2,311 international graduate students on its main campus, according to the homepage of ASU’s Office of International Students and Scholars. However, only 22 students enrolled in this course in the semester in which this study was carried out, most of whom, similar to Fengchen, enrolled either because of their perceived difficulty in academic writing or because they failed the writing components of various tests in their departments.

Fengchen’s self-assessment of his writing abilities possibly led to his appreciation of the value of writing instruction. ‘You do not need instruction but just through practicing to enhance your speaking and listening skills,’ he explained, ‘but it is different in written English especially in writing
academic papers’ (Fengchen’s literacy narrative, p. 3). In class, he often listened attentively to class discussions. Once he joined a discussion, however, he would eagerly make his points using halting English. Once, he argued with another engineering student about how numbers should be used in engineering RAs. In the next session of the class, he presented a handout to the whole class with examples from several RAs, apparently as final evidence to support his previous argument. He often stayed after class to ask questions or to dispute an earlier analysis of a writing sample by his classmates or by me. I often suggested that he bring some samples to support his points. In most cases, he did.

I was also quite impressed by his dedication to the GA and writing tasks. Unlike some students who sometimes failed to complete their learning tasks on time because of their busy research schedule,1 Fengchen’s analyses of the RAs and his annotations of his own writing were not only on time, but also very extensive. Since this study emphasized the students’ initial, careful reaction to writing samples in their respective fields, the timeliness and comprehensiveness of his data allowed me to trace his development more extensively than I could with some other students on this course.2

Data analysis

Both the typical and unique aspects of Fengchen made him a potentially interesting focal learner for an instrumental case study (Stake 2005).3 In this study, I focused on Fengchen’s several GA tasks, his literacy narrative, and the text-based interviews as the main data sources. A constant-comparative method was adopted to develop categories and thematic patterns (Glaser 1978; Strauss and Corbin 1998). First, each document in the set of main data sources was read in its entirety numerous times. Key words, phrases, and notes were written down on each section of each document. These key words, phrases, and notes became the groundwork for open-coding, in which whole paragraphs were separated into units of information and were labeled in preparation for the phase of developing categories (Strauss and Corbin 1998). For example, Fengchen made this comment when analyzing an RA:

In order to illustrate the problems more clearly, in the second paragraph, the author presents an example of ‘express highway system’ and compare it with the wireless access network.

The phrase ‘in order to’ and the word ‘author’ led me to label this unit as ‘invoking authorial intention to analyze move’. I then came across another comment by him:

I think there are three moves in this paragraph. For the first move, the author begins the first sentence with ‘In this article we present . . .’ giving the objective of this article. In the second
The author introduces his contribution which ‘improves measurement resolution’, which is the second move.

Despite the word ‘author’ and the descriptions of various moves, I did not label this excerpt as ‘invoking authorial intention to analyze move’ because Fengchen seemed to be merely pointing out what the author did (the content of the text), rather than why the author chose to deploy the text in such a manner (authorial intention). This excerpt was thus coded differently. After open coding, axial coding was applied until categories are related to their subcategories to form more precise and complete explanations about phenomena’ (Strauss and Corbin 1998: 124). For instance, it turned out that there were multiple examples to establish the category ‘invoking authorial intention to analyze move’. While this category was being established, another category called ‘invoking communicative purpose’ was also established through open coding. Since both ‘authorial intention’ and ‘communicative purpose’ belonged to an overarching theme called ‘invoking rhetorical parameters’, they were identified as conceptually congruent at the same level of abstraction and were used as evidence to construct the overarching theme. These themes were then applied to the data again for an iterative, spiraling analysis until further details could be identified and an overall theoretical understanding of the main themes within the data could be achieved (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Since many emergent categories and themes cut across the data, I was also able to trace a theme and its categories through the progression of Fengchen’s multiple learning tasks, thus generating a dynamic picture of his growing awareness of genre.

The data were coded after the end of the semester in which the study was carried out. The data were mainly coded by me, and the coded data were cross-checked by a doctoral student in educational research with extensive training in grounded theory analysis. Any inconsistencies between us were discussed until agreement was reached.

**FINDINGS**

The analysis of Fengchen’s GA tasks generated four major themes. This section focuses on two interrelated themes—Fengchen’s rhetorical and evaluative reading of discourse-level generic features. These two themes are illustrated with unedited samples from Fengchen’s GA tasks (see Appendix D, available to online subscribers at http://applij.oxfordjournals.org/, for the five RAs Fengchen analyzed in his GA tasks).

**Fengchen’s rhetorical reading of discourse-level generic features**

My analysis of Fengchen’s GA tasks indicates that Fengchen gradually, but extensively, invoked various rhetorical parameters—reader, writer, and purpose, among others—to analyze the genre exemplars.
For example, Fengchen’s analysis of reader in his GA Task 1 reveals his initial, and rather simplistic, framing of the role of this important rhetorical parameter. As seen in Excerpt 1 (see Appendix E, available to online subscribers at http://applij.oxfordjournals.org/), Fengchen noticed that the three examples presented in sentences (2), (3), and (4) respectively were arranged in an incrementally interesting manner with sentence (4) ‘conclud[ing] the example and mak[ing] it more interesting to the readers.’ His annotation suggests his perception of the reader mainly as someone who needed to be informed of the topic and whose attention ‘to the main topic of the article’ the writers of the RA tried to attract.

Task 2

In Task 2, completed a week after Task 1, Fengchen started to frame the role of reader in a more complex manner.

Excerpt 2

An RA sample

In this work, we have examined how preprocessing of data from a wet-chemical sensor system can be made using wavelet transform in order to obtain a lower number of parameters. These parameters also contain less noise than the original data, and by choosing the wavelets using different criteria, different structures in the data set can be made more evident. The purpose of this paper is to show how preprocessing of data from a sensor array can be used to smooth noisy data, to extract the most relevant information, and to increase the interpretability of the results.

Fengchen’s analysis

At this time, the reader should have an intuition that the author will begin to show in the following sentences that his own research method will certainly overcome the disadvantages mentioned above. Well, this is exactly the function of this part, the second move of the paragraph. And in the last sentence of the paragraph, the author directly gives the purpose (or the content) of this paper. His method is the one of the best. (Fengchen’s GA Task 2, pp. 1–2)

Fengchen’s conceptualization of reader has become more sophisticated here because he was not merely attending to the unidirectional influence of the writer on the reader, as seen in his analysis in Excerpt 1, but to the interaction between the two. Specifically, he noticed how the writer had oriented his text to the ‘intuition’ of the projected (expert) reader, and how the reader was cognizant of where the writer was heading with the text.
In addition, unlike in Excerpt 1, Fengchen’s discussion of the interaction between the reader and the writer here has become situated in a particular generic context. In his view, the interaction between reader expectation and writer projection had connected the research-gap step in the previous paragraphs with the gap-filling step in this paragraph.

Task 4

Fengchen mainly focused on specific language features in his GA Task 3 with very few comments on discourse-level generic features. In Task 4, completed three weeks after Task 2, Fengchen incorporated rhetorical purpose into his analysis of reader/writer interaction, thus further complexifying his initial framing of the notion of reader. In a global statement at the end of Task 4 (see Excerpt 3 in Appendix E, available to online subscribers at http://applij.oxfordjournals.org/), Fengchen rather authoritatively pointed out the important role of rhetorical purpose (‘applying for funding’ vs. ‘introducing a mathematical algorithm’) in shaping the generic patterns in RAs. Significantly, he highlighted the intricate connection between rhetorical purpose and reader. According to him, once a writer understood the expectations of the reader, he or she could organize the generic patterns to achieve a particular purpose with the ultimate goal of meeting the expectations of the reader. Given the interlocking relationship between various rhetorical parameters, Fengchen’s ability to connect them in his analysis signals his increasingly sophisticated rhetorical reading of the genre exemplars.

Task 5

Fengchen’s growing awareness of the rhetorical dimensions of the genre exemplars can also be seen in the way he actively placed himself in the position of the writer. In Excerpt 3 (see Appendix E, available to online subscribers at http://applij.oxfordjournals.org/), he mentioned that ‘before writing an article, we should first make it sure who will be the reader. Then we could carefully arrange the introduction part by using different language features to realize different functions of the articles’. Such a comment highlights the way he oriented himself as a writer when analyzing the generic exemplars and his realization that the ultimate goal of genre analysis was to write better. In Task 5, which he completed two weeks after Task 4, Fengchen carefully considered the options available to the writer who wrote the literature review section of an RA (see Excerpt 4 in Appendix E, available to online subscribers at http://applij.oxfordjournals.org/). According to him, after introducing an existing solution to a problem, the writer could
either critique the solution as a whole or just point out some smaller problems with the intention of refining the overall solution. He argued that the writer of the particular RA he analyzed had opted for the latter to avoid ‘critique[ing] the turbo-coding’. Fengchen’s analysis of this move may be problematic. An expert reader in his field may argue that, by critiquing even a small part of the turbo-coding model, the writer may in fact be criticizing turbo-coding as an overall solution. However, whether Fengchen’s analysis here is perfectly correct may be less relevant than the fact that he tried to position himself as the writer of this RA through evaluating the various available options and reconstructing the writer’s rationales. His ability to do so again reveals his increasingly rhetorical reading of the genre exemplars.

Task 6

Fengchen’s rhetorical reading of the discourse-level generic features continued in Task 6 (see Excerpt 5).

Excerpt 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>An RA sample</th>
<th>Fengchen’s analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This portability brings with it many fringe benefits; the end user is no longer tied to a particular physical location, upgrades can be done centrally, and a rental rather than outright sale revenue model becomes possible.</td>
<td>This paragraph is used to evaluate the new method and list its contributions to the whole research development. The contrast between the old and the new method—the change from ‘tied’ to ‘portability’—is emphasized again here. It is understood that the main contribution of current research is that it set the devices free from the ‘fixed’ locations and has the ability of portability. It is the main focus of the author’s argument and I would expect to see that the author puts a lot of effort in explaining this part in the following paragraphs (Fengchen’s GA Task 6, pp. 1–2).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It seems that, in this excerpt, instead of talking about a general, abstract reader whose attention the writer tried to attract (as in Excerpt 1) or whose expectation motivated the discourse-level generic features in general (as in Excerpts 2 and 3), Fengchen situated himself specifically as a disciplinarily savvy reader. He invoked disciplinary knowledge (the significant difference between ‘tied’ and ‘portability’) to make sense of the purpose of this paragraph and to predict the textual purposes and patterns of the subsequent paragraphs.

In fact, placing himself in the role of the specific reader also enabled him to see how a writer intentionally built ‘echo’ into a text, as can be seen in Excerpt 6, also from Task 6.
Excerpt 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>An RA Sample</th>
<th>Fengchen’s analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This article describes a network architecture and protocol that supports both of these dimensions of service portability: device portability and location independence. These portable services bring with them many challenges, but even more opportunities.</td>
<td>This is the end of introduction in this article. After giving the objective of this article, the author continues to evaluate the new method. He does not give a road map for the next part. The last sentence is very interesting to me. The author acknowledges that this new way would bring many challenges but he is very optimistic because he is confident that the opportunities it brings us are predominant. <strong>My guess is in the discussion part, some of the challenges will be brought up, so the author already paves his way for it in the beginning of the article. This tells us that echo in the whole article and pave your way for later parts are very helpful for your readers to understand your paper.</strong> <em>(Fengchen’s GA Task 6, p. 2)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Excerpt 5, Fengchen predicted the generic patterns and purposes in subsequent paragraphs. In Excerpt 6 here, his discipline-sensitive reading of the text led him to predict how this paragraph would influence the generic purposes and patterns of the paragraphs further removed from the immediate context of the present paragraph. The comments in this excerpt are also interesting in that Fengchen had departed from his previous descriptive/analytical tone to a more advisory/evaluative one (‘this tells us that…for your readers to understand your paper’), an important genre-analytic gesture explained in greater detail in the next section.

In sum, my analysis of Fengchen’s genre-analysis tasks points to Fengchen’s increasingly sophisticated rhetorical reading of the genre exemplars. Starting with a rather simplistic initial framing of the role of the reader, he quickly learned to consider how the interaction between the reader and the writer influenced generic move progression. He subsequently integrated other important rhetorical parameters, such as purpose, into his reading of the generic features. He also placed himself specifically in the positions of the reader and the writer, envisioning the possible intentions behind, and predicting the rhetorical patterns and purposes of, certain sections of texts.

**Fengchen’s evaluative reading of discourse-level generic features**

Apart from consistently deciphering the rhetorical parameters of generic features, Fengchen constantly evaluated the generic features in the
genre exemplars. For example, in Task 4, he focused on an important discourse-level feature—the logical connection between moves. As seen in Excerpt 7 (see Appendix E, available to online subscribers at http://applij.oxfordjournals.org/), Fengchen first analyzed the move pattern in a section of an RA. According to him, ‘there are three moves in this paragraph’. These three moves, however, ‘are not closely connected’. Note that his main suggestion for strengthening the connection among the three moves is to add some phrases (‘in this circuit’ and ‘in order to realize this method’) and some adverbs between sentences.

When analyzing another RA sample in Task 4, Fengchen again focused on the connection between moves, as can be seen in Excerpt 8.

Excerpt 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RA in Fengchen’s collection</th>
<th>Fengchen’s annotation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) This article describes a network architecture and protocol that supports both of these dimensions of service portability: device portability and location independence.</td>
<td>This short paragraph comes from the last paragraph of the introduction part. It has two moves here. The first sentence is the first move and the second sentence is the second move. In the first move, the author gives the objective of this article. The objective is also his solution of the previously mentioned problems. In the second move, the author gives a positive evaluation of his solution. Compare with the entire introduction part this paragraph is relatively short. Since in the second move the author claims that: ‘These portable services bring with them many challenges, but even more opportunities.’ <strong>I think the author should add one or two more sentences in this paragraph to explain the reasons. Why the services bring with them many challenges? And what are the even more opportunities? Thus the second could serve as a support to the first part, and the two moves connect more closely</strong> (Fengchen’s GA Task 4, p. 4).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) These portable services bring with them many challenges, but even more opportunities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although still attending to the issue of the connection between moves, the focus of Fengchen’s evaluation here seems to be different from that in Excerpt 7. In Excerpt 8, he suggested that the connection between the moves in this sample be strengthened not by just adding some cohesive devices such as phrases and adverbs, as he suggested in Excerpt 7. Instead, he argued that the writer should consider elaborating on some ideas in this section so that ‘the two moves’ could ‘connect more closely’.
The connection between moves again appeared in his critique of another RA in Task 4:

Excerpt 9

I think the relationship among these paragraphs is not close enough. I think it would be better if the author change the sequence of the second and third paragraph. If I were the author, I would added at first that the research area is very important, then after pointing out the research gap, I would give my solution in the second paragraph by the sentence of ‘In this article a significant structure will be present to solve the problem.’ In the third paragraph, I would give the reason why my solution is applicable, which is used to support the second paragraph (Fengchen’s GA Task 4, p. 5).

Here, his evaluation of the move pattern of the RA in question has gone one step further. Instead of suggesting the addition of some cohesive devices (as in Excerpt 7) or the expansion of the content of one move (as in Excerpt 8), he suggested that the move pattern of this section be overhauled in order to strengthen not only the logical connection between moves, but also the overall quality of the argument in the introduction section of this RA.

Task 5

In Task 5, Fengchen’s evaluative reading of texts took a different and meaningful turn, as can be seen in Excerpt 10 below.

Excerpt 10

Then in the second sentence, the author does the literature review in a very special way. In order to tell the reader that the author’s research area is really important, he points out that this research has even been highlighted in Science [vol. 295, pg. 2209, 22 March 2002]. This is a very powerful way to show the importance of his work, since ‘Science’ is the most famous and authoritative journal in the world and no one will doubt it. I think I can learn a lot from this type of expression in my future writing. If you want to show the importance of your work, you could say that it has been cited by a top journal, or some famous person (such as Bill Gates) has shown interest in this area. Actually this is very useful in writing a proposal for applying research funding (Fengchen’s GA Task 5, p. 4).

Here, Fengchen noticed a unique way the moves were organized in the literature review section by the authors, and he showed his interest in adopting such a pattern in the future. It is noteworthy that his positive evaluation of this section here seems to have departed from his previous
comment on the specific details of moves and the connections among them and have touched upon more general and important issues, such as discourse communities and disciplinary practices and their influences on move pattern.

Interestingly, Fengchen reanalyzed a section of RA in Task 6, which he completed three weeks after Task 4 (see Excerpt 7, Appendix E, available to online subscribers at http://applij.oxfordjournals.org/, in which he analyzed the same section).

Excerpt 11

An RA sample

In this article we present a microcontroller-based circuit capable of precise determination of sensor resonance frequency from the signal emitted by a transiently excited sensor. A repetitive interrogation method is employed to improve measurement resolution, with the frequency determined by measuring the time period of a given number of signal cycles. The implementation of the reciprocal frequency counting technique for determining the frequency of a sensor during its decay transient is illustrated in Fig. 1. First, a fixed frequency burst actively drives the sensor. After the excitation signal stops, the transient response of the sensor is captured, and the zero crossings are used to trigger a series of square pulses which are then used to increment a digital counter.

Fengchen’s analysis

Analysis: Compared with other articles analyzed before, this article is not very clear in its moves and specific rich-features. It might be related to the author’s proficiency in English since English is his second language. The only thing I could see from his writing is that he is evaluating the present research through several words ‘precisely’ and ‘improve’. This could be taken as advantages of the new controller. Overall the evaluation is not explicitly positive and this lead to a modest impression of the research. In other articles, however, the authors are enthusiastically and very optimistic about their results. They are so proud of their research and this has been expressed through the lines.

(Fengchen’s GA Task 6, p. 5)

In this excerpt, Fengchen had again shifted his evaluation from issues such as the connections between moves, as he did in Excerpt 7, and had attended to issues such as authorial stance, positionality, and voice which are very relevant to the learning of writing in general and of genre in particular. The main problem with the move pattern here, he felt, was that the writers failed to highlight the positive aspects of their own research, which led to the moves in this section being ‘not very clear’. Interestingly, he attributed such a problem to the authors’ status as L2 users—this ‘modest’ style of writing may, according to him, be related to ‘the author’s proficiency in English since English is his second language’.

In sum, from Excerpts 7 to 9, we can see that Fengchen focused his critiques on a very important discourse-level generic feature—the connection between moves. The solutions he offered, however, had become gradually
more expansive, thus pointing to his growing understanding of the possibilities for deploying certain generic features. Fengchen’s increasingly sophisticated and expansive evaluative reading of the sample texts is significant since, as noted by one of the reviewers of this article, even in most published genre analysis studies, researchers seldom evaluate the quality of writing in the RAs.

Although Fengchen’s evaluative reading of the genre samples is discussed as a separate theme, the connection between his evaluative reading and his rhetorical reading of the genre samples are noteworthy and significant. To a large extent, his evaluation of the genre exemplars is grounded in his rhetorically sensitive analysis of the texts, as can be seen in the way he placed himself in the concrete position of the writer (Excerpts 8 and 9) and invoked author/reader interaction (Excerpt 10) to comment on the connections between moves. The interconnectedness of these two ways of reading the genre exemplars points to the potential of genre as an enabling tool of learning, as is discussed in the next section.

**DISCUSSION**

**Genre as an explicit tool of learning**

The ESP genre-based framework of academic literacy is often touted as a ‘visible pedagogy’ which ‘seeks to offer writers an explicit understanding of how target texts are structured and why they are written the ways they are’ (Hyland 2004: 11). However, very few studies have explored what becomes explicit for students involved in genre-based learning, prompting the concern that what becomes explicit may be just ‘conventionalized lists of genre-identifying features’ that can lead to ‘an imposed rather than a responsive notion of text’ (Kay and Dudley-Evans 1998: 311).

My analysis of the data suggests that genre analysis, as a tool of learning, does encourage Fengchen to notice various genre-identifying features, such as the influence of a move on the patterns and purposes of subsequent moves (Excerpts 2, 5, and 6) and the various ways of strengthening the connections among moves (Excerpts 7 to 9). However, my analysis of the data also suggests that Fengchen’s noticing of the genre-identifying features was underlain by, and often resulted in, his explicit understanding of the intricate interaction of various rhetorical parameters, the influences of disciplinary practices on move patterns and the roles of voice, argument, and stance in academic writing. In other words, what becomes explicit seems to be more than just a list of genre-identifying features; it seems to be a responsive notion of text that ‘incorporate[s] both the discourse and contextual aspects’ of genre (Hyland 2004: 11)—a deepened understanding of how writer, reader, and purpose interact in a piece of text that results in the use of certain generic features.
The development of a responsive notion of text can also be seen in Fengchen’s reflections on the notion of ‘a framework of writing’. In his literacy narrative that he composed at the beginning of the semester, Fengchen mentioned that, in a cram school in China that prepared college students to take the TOEFL and GRE tests, he was told to ‘recite some patterns and use them as a model for all the tasks’. As a result, he asked the following questions in his literacy narrative: ‘What is the popular pattern in my research field and secondly how should I apply this pattern efficiently without risking plagiarism’ (Fengchen’s literacy narrative, p. 5). At the start of the study, he also described in his needs analysis survey that his main goal in this class was to learn a framework of writing that he believed could help him to write research papers and project proposals better. The search for a particular pattern of writing suggests a static view of genre that needs to be replaced by a dynamic and flexible concept of genre in the learning process (Johns 2002). In an interview near the end of the semester, I asked him whether he had found the specific ‘framework of writing’. He answered that, instead of learning a set pattern of writing, he had learned about ‘possibilities’.

[Before this course,] I know there are things like author, reader, etc. and of course they are important. Now I see how the dialogue between you and readers can be put into the pattern in the text. It is complicated sometimes…. There are many different possibilities, depend on your purpose and your relationship with the reader. There is no one way of this (transcript of interview 3, p. 5).

His comment suggests that genre, as an organizing principle of learning, may have enabled him to flesh out his initial understanding of genre and have led to his awareness of not only the possibilities that are generated by the purposes of a text and by reader/writer interaction, but also how these possibilities are concretely realized in the generic features in the RAs. The power of genre as an explicit tool of learning to enable learners to construct and develop their genre awareness, as seen in the case of Fengchen, thus points to the significant value of genre as a ‘visible pedagogy’ (Hyland 2004: 11).

**Genre as a supportive tool of learning**

Some researchers argue that genre-based teaching can support learners to gradually develop control of genres (Hyland 2004). In current genre-based literature, however, this support is often theorized as the role assumed by teachers who scaffold learners to move toward their potential level of performance and to acquire the confidence to independently create texts (Feez 2002).

My analyses of Fengchen’s genre-analysis tasks foreground a different conceptualization of the supportive role of genres. Specifically, genres can support learners through facilitating their *writerly* engagement with texts.
A writerly reader, according to Hirvela (2004), reads as the writer. He or she constantly considers the writer’s perspective at various points, predicting what rhetorical choices the writer will make and comparing the actual development of the text with his or her own envisioning of it. In other words, a writerly reader, while reading, is actually writing the texts being read through and for the writer.

Some researchers argue that learning to be a writerly reader—learning to be keenly aware of how rhetorical choices are made—can help students to make these choices in their own writings (Hirvela 2004). Meanwhile, many researchers also realize that learning to be a writerly reader can prove challenging for many L2 learners (Hirvela 2004). Many L2 learners, including those targeted by the ESPG instructional framework, are used to reading mainly for subject-matter information. For example, in his genre-analysis Task 4 (see Excerpt 3 in Appendix E, available to online subscribers at http://applij.oxfordjournals.org/), Fengchen mentioned that he ‘read more than fifteen articles in recent three days’. When asked in an interview why he read so many articles, he explained that a project proposal was due in a few weeks, and he was scanning the RAs for research ideas. Otherwise, he would ‘be in trouble in the next lab meeting’. When asked how he read those RAs, he explained that he glanced through ‘the introduction, the results, and the conclusion’ and would turn to the method section only if a particular study looked interesting. He explained that he rarely paused to consider the rhetorical parameters in the text before this class (transcript of interview 2, p. 4).

Given such a pattern of reading, it is notable that the genre-analysis tasks seemed to have given him a space to analyze the generic features and the underlying rhetorical parameters, thus facilitating his writerly reading of the RAs. Frequently placing himself in the specific position of the writer, he imagined the interaction between the reader’s possible expectations and the writer’s purposes (Excerpts 2 and 3), considered the options available to a writer (Excerpts 4, 5, and 6), predicted how the writer would organize various moves in a text (Excerpts 5 and 6), and reflected on how he would organize the information if he were the writer (Excerpts 7–10).

Fengchen’s reflections at the end of the semester vividly capture how the genre analysis tasks facilitated his writerly reading of the genre exemplars. He admitted that, initially, he was not accustomed to, and was even resentful of, the exercises aimed at cultivating a writerly reading of texts:

at the first few weeks, this class was really a pain for me. It usually took me three hours or even more to finish one Rich Feature Analysis assignment. I need to put myself in the authors’ shoes and justify their each move. The linguistic analysis was also very annoying. Do I have to find a reason to use verb A rather
Gradually, however, he started to see the benefits of ‘deep thinking’ that resulted from a connection with the ‘minds’ of the RA authors:

But it finally paid off after a long time practicing. It was after our third or fourth Rich Feature Analysis; I began to find some feeling for this... I understood the structure of articles better and had my own opinion about the good or bad of this structure. I would even hold some expectations when I was reading. If some of these expectations were met in the latter part I would be so proud of myself and told me ‘the great minds think alike.’ If the authors presented their ideas in another way, I would carefully compare the difference between my suggestion and their ideas. What were the advantages and the disadvantages for each method? I felt one thing I benefit most from this class is the deep thinking about the structure. It told me with good plan you could put your readers on hook and keep them thinking with you throughout the whole paper (Fengchen’s literacy narrative, p. 7).

It seems that the benefit of this course may lie in his being ‘on hook’ with genre analysis and his constant ‘thinking with’ the writers of the RAs through the genre-analysis tasks. The supportive role of genre-based learning may thus reside in its role as a platform that fosters his and possibly other learners’ thoughtful and critical engagement with texts from the writer’s perspectives.

CONCLUSION

This study is one of the first studies to concentrate on advanced learners’ analyses of genre in ESPG instructional settings. It illustrates how Fengchen, a Chinese-speaking graduate student in electrical engineering, engaged in rhetorical and evaluative reading of RAs in his field. Though not without its problems, Fengchen’s appropriation of genre as a supportive, explicit tool of learning in ESP genre-based learning helps address researchers’ concerns about the potential product-focused nature of ESP genre-based instruction (Casaneve 2004).

Although many researchers have valued the ‘epistemology of the particular’ (Stake 2005: 454) in case studies like this one, the study of one learner is admittedly limited in scope. Other researchers can conduct similar studies and juxtapose Fengchen’s learning profile with those of students from different disciplinary, cultural, and first-language backgrounds in the ESPG instructional framework. As one of the anonymous reviewers of this article aptly points out, doing so can enrich our understanding of learners’ various ways of analyzing genre and the resulting impact on their writing, thus helping us to determine the objectives of the ESPG academic literacy instructional framework, clarify its approaches to learning and
teaching, measure its effectiveness, and ascertain the extent to which the ESPG framework can measure up to its promise as one of the uniquely effective approaches to the teaching of discipline-specific writing to L2 users.

Final version received December 2006

NOTES

1 For example, one student came to class everyday just to listen to the discussions, but did not do many of the learning tasks until the end of the semester. Another student never finished any learning tasks and willingly took an F.

2 Although all the students chose to participate in this study, only the data of three focal students have been extensively analyzed at this point.

3 According to Stake (2005), an instrumental case study is undertaken not because of intrinsic interest in a particular case, but because of the insights into an issue (in this case, learners’ development of genre awareness). The case, which facilitates one’s understanding of that particular interest, may be seen as typical of other cases or not, although it is expected to ‘draw a purposive sample, building in variety and acknowledging opportunities for intensive study’ (Stake 2005: 451).

4 Since the researcher was also the instructor, ASU’s Institutional Review Board required that the students’ informed consent forms, which were collected at the beginning of the semester and held by the ESL course coordinator, should not be made available to the researcher until the end of the semester. Consequently, the focal learners, including Fengchen, were not identified and the data were not analyzed until the semester was over.

5 See Appendix B available online to subscribers at http://applij.oxfordjournals.org/, for the definition of discourse-level generic features. The other two themes are related to Fengchen’s analysis of language features, which, though interesting, are not discussed here due to space considerations.

6 Neither the content nor the language in Fengchen’s learning tasks has been edited. In terms of formatting, unless specified otherwise, the various forms of highlighting in the left column are by Fengchen. The boldfaced emphases in the right-hand column are by the author.

7 Fengchen added these comments to the end of his literacy narrative which he revised and handed in at the end of the semester as a part of the requirement in this course.

8 Fengchen’s writing performance is reported elsewhere (see Cheng, in press).

9 For my reflections on some potential problems in Fengchen’s analysis of genre, see Cheng, in press. In that article, I used a different set of data to examine how Fengchen analyzed and enacted academic criticisms—how RA writers criticize other researchers’ works. My analysis of the data indicates that some instances of Fengchen’s analysis of academic criticisms could be disputed by more seasoned members of his research community, by applied linguists, and by philosophers of science. My analysis also shows that
Fengchen’s approach to academic criticisms seemed to be strongly influenced by the narrative of technology development that many writers in science and technology often subscribe to.

REFERENCES


