

Using a genre-based approach to promote oral communication in the colombian english classroom

El uso de un enfoque de generos textuales para promover la comunicación oral en las aulas de inglés en colombia

Jose David Herazo Rivera
Universidad de Cordoba
Montería-Colombia
E-mail: jherazo4@gmail.com

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Abstract

The genre-based approach (GBA) has been used in different curriculum areas to develop learners' meaning-making potential. Using the text as the main unit of communication and pedagogy, this approach conceives of language learning and use as a social, textual, and goal-oriented process. Thus, it constitutes a promising alternative to the practice –not uncommon in Colombian classrooms– of teaching EFL oral communication through memorized dialogues with no realistic purpose. Based on a revision of recent literature and research, I argue that the GBA may foster students' oral interpersonal communication skills because it 1) involves them in meaning-oriented, text-based, and realistic practice, 2) assumes an explicit pedagogy that discloses the lexical and grammatical resources needed for successful communication, and 3) facilitates learners' increasing control of oral communication thanks to their appropriation of the necessary metalanguage to talk about the process of making meaning in English. I also maintain that this approach gives teachers linguistically-principled tools for planning instruction and assessing learning. Finally, I discuss various curriculum and syllabus implications resulting from the adoption of the GBA for EFL instruction and suggest specific objectives and activities with a sample lesson based on Colombian standards.

Keywords: genre-based approach, oral interpersonal communication, EFL, learning, instruction

Resumen

El enfoque basado en género (GBA) ha sido utilizado en diferentes áreas curriculares para desarrollar el potencial de la construcción del significado de los aprendices. Utilizando el texto como la unidad principal de comunicación y pedagogía; este enfoque concibe el aprendizaje de idiomas y su uso como proceso social, textual y orientado a objetivos. Por lo tanto, constituye una alternativa prometedora a la práctica –no es poco común en las aulas Colombianas– de la enseñanza de la comunicación oral del inglés como lengua extranjera a través de diálogos memorizados sin ningún propósito real. Con base en una revisión de la literatura reciente y la investigación, sostengo que la GBA puede fomentar las habilidades de comunicación interpersonal oral, ya que 1) los involucra en el sentido orientado a la práctica realista basada en el texto, 2) asume una pedagogía explícita que da a conocer los recursos léxicos y gramaticales necesarios para una comunicación exitosa, y 3) facilita el control de la comunicación de los aprendices gracias a su aprobación del metalenguaje necesario para hablar acerca del proceso de construcción de significados en inglés. También sostengo que este enfoque da a los maestros las herramientas lingüísticas de principios para la planificación de la enseñanza y evaluación del aprendizaje. Por último, discuto varias implicaciones curriculares y del plan de estudios resultantes de la adopción de GBA para la instrucción del inglés como lengua extranjera y sugiero objetivos específicos y actividades con una lección de muestra basada en las normas Colombianas.

Palabras clave: enfoque basado en género, comunicación interpersonal oral, inglés como lengua extranjera, aprendizaje, enseñanza.

Résumé

L'approche fondée sur le genre (GBA en anglais) a été utilisée dans domaines différents du plan d'études pour développer le potentiel de la construction de la signification chez les étudiants. En utilisant le texte comme l'unité principale de communication et de pédagogie, cette approche conçoit l'apprentissage de langues et leur emploi comme un démarche sociale, textuelle et orientée vers des objectifs. Par



conséquent, elle est une alternative prometteuse face à la pratique –qui n’est pas peu fréquente dans les salles de classe colombiennes– d’apprendre la communication interpersonnelle à l’oral en anglais à travers de dialogues appris à cœur sans aucun but réel. Sur le fondement d’une révision de la littérature récente et de la recherche menée, j’affirme que l’approche fondée sur le genre peut promouvoir les compétences de communication orale, car 1) elle fait participer les étudiants dans le sens, visant à la pratique réaliste basée sur le texte ; 2) elle assume une pédagogie explicite que fait connaître les ressources lexicales et syntactiques nécessaires pour une communication réussie ; et 3) elle facilite le contrôle de la communication des étudiants, grâce à son approbation du métalangage nécessaire pour parler sur la démarche de construction de significations en anglais. J’affirme également que cette approche donne aux formateurs les outils linguistiques de principes pour la planification de l’enseignement et l’évaluation de l’apprentissage. En fin, je discute plusieurs implications curriculaires résultant de l’adoption l’approche fondée sur le genre pour l’enseignement de l’anglais comme langue étrangère et je suggère des objectifs spécifiques et des activités dans une leçon modèle fondée sur les règles colombiennes.

Mots clés: approche fondée sur le genre, communication interpersonnelle à l’oral, anglais comme langue étrangère, apprentissage, enseignement.

Resumo

O enfoque baseado em gênero (GBA) tem utilizado em diferentes áreas curriculares para desenvolver o potencial da construção do significado dos aprendizes. Utilizando o texto como a unidade principal de comunicação e pedagogia; este enfoque concebe a aprendizagem de idiomas e seu uso como processo social, textual e orientado a objetivos. Portanto, constitui uma alternativa prometedora à prática – não é pouco comum nas salas de aulas Colombianas - do ensino da comunicação oral do inglês como língua estrangeira através de diálogos memorizados sem nenhum propósito real. Com base em uma revisão da literatura recente e a pesquisa, sustento que a GBA pode fomentar as habilidades de comunicação interpessoal oral, já que 1) os envolve no sentido orientado à prática realista baseada no texto, 2) assume uma pedagogia explícita que dá a conhecer os recursos léxicos e gramaticais necessários para uma comunicação exitosa, e 3) facilita o controle da comunicação dos aprendizes graças a sua aprovação da metalinguagem necessária para falar sobre o processo de construção de significados em inglês. Também sustento que este enfoque dá aos professores as ferramentas linguísticas de princípios para o planejamento do ensino e avaliação da aprendizagem. Por último, discuto várias implicações curriculares e do plano de estudos resultantes da adoção de GBA para a instrução do inglês como língua estrangeira e sugiro objetivos específicos e atividades com uma lição de amostra baseada nas normas Colombianas.

Palavras chave: enfoque baseado em gênero, comunicação interpessoal oral, inglês como língua estrangeira, aprendizagem, ensino.



Introduction

Monica (pseudonym) greeted her EFL students in English, wrote the date on the whiteboard, and described her favorite movie, emphasizing her use of *was* and *were*. Then she asked students to go to page 95 on their textbooks and do activity 5, which showed an incomplete dialogue about a movie. Students had to write the words *was*, *were*, and *wasn't* in the spaces in the dialogue and, after that, create their own dialogues following the textbook model. Transcript 1¹ shows two students performing their dialogue for the class.

Transcript 1. The baseball game.
 M Okay guys... speak up
 S1 were you at the [basebol] game?
 M d- again BA::SEba::ll you say baseball
 ... *duro duro a ver* ((louder, louder go on))
 S1 were you at the baseball game?
 S2 yes I was
 S1 was a g- was a good game
 S2 the game excellent but
 M the game WAS
 the game was excellent but the players
 weren't so good
 1 M uh huh\
 0
 1 S1 who was in it?
 1
 1 S2 Alex Rodriguez the best of the
 world
 2
 1 S2 and CC Sabathia ... was the pitcher
 3
 1 S1 were they good?
 4
 1 S2 yes they were.. and the player was
 good
 5
 1 M okay guys excellent but A. Rodriguez
 is not the best of the world... he's not
 6

1 Author's data. M stands for Monica, square brackets ([]) show pronunciation, the symbol shows overlapping speech, successive colons (::) denote lengthening of pronunciation, a slash (\) shows falling intonation, capitals show emphasis, and translations appear in double parentheses (()).

Transcript 1 is the result of common teaching sequences used in foreign language (FL) classrooms, not uncommon in the Colombian context (Herazo, 2010; Herazo & Donato, in press). Such sequences first present textbook oral texts to model how grammar is used and then require students to recreate these texts using their own information. By personalizing the texts, it is argued, learners engage in meaningful interaction that leads to FL learning. A detailed reading of Transcript 1 suggests, however, a less promising outcome. For instance, the dialogue shows an unrealistic Ping-Pong view of oral communication in which speakers share an orderly and equal amount of turns, Monica's interruptions (turns 3, 8, 10, 16) enforce students' accurate use of grammar rather than contributing content, and most features of authentic conversations such as pauses and unfinished clauses are missing from both the model and students' dialogues, portraying an idealized version of language. Equally important, both dialogues are presented as isolated events, when in reality they usually occur as 'chunks' of talk within larger conversations (Eggins & Slade, 1997). Finally, these teaching sequences reverse the logical order of communication because they start from a grammar feature (e.g. *was/were*) rather than from a communicative purpose to be achieved using grammar as a resource (Burns, 2010). Sequences like this supplant authentic oral communication and give students the message that speaking consists of deploying accurate grammar in smooth turn-taking.

Monica's situation as an EFL teacher is characteristic of many FL learning contexts in Colombia: in these contexts learners' aural exposure to the new language is mostly limited to classroom interaction, instruction very rarely goes beyond three hours per week, teaching materials are scarce, and large classes are the norm (Cárdenas, 2006, 2007). Overcoming this



adverse situation requires instruction to provide meaningful opportunities for learners to use and learn the new language (van Lier, 2000). Contrary to this expectation, Monica's lesson turned oral communication into a futile learning experience. In this paper I maintain that the genre-based approach (henceforth GBA) and its instructional model, the teaching-learning cycle, constitute useful tools to promote learners' oral interpersonal communication (OIC) skills in FL contexts, transforming teaching practices such as Monica's into meaning-full FL development experiences. My discussion draws heavily on the Australian version of the GBA and on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Unlike other approaches², the Australian GBA has been unique in proposing a principled model for language teaching, adopting an explicit language-based orientation to improve learning in school classrooms such as Monica's. In the first part of this paper I will describe the GBA and review its most representative research. Then I will make a case for using this approach to teach OIC in FL learning contexts, highlighting some of its advantages for FL instruction and research. This paper ends with a discussion of some of the challenges and limitations of this approach.

The Genre-Based Approach (GBA)

The GBA is a framework for literacy education that places texts (i.e. coherent chunks of language larger than a sentence) as the centerpiece of instruction and curricula (Johns, 2002). It is based on SFL's position that any instance of social language use constitutes a text and that all texts are exemplars of specific genres in context (Christie, 1992). This concern for the language-context nexus explains why the GBA focuses on whole texts rather than on the form of isolated sentences. Genres, in turn,

² For a comparison with other genre-based approaches see Hyon (1996) and Johns (2002).

are purposeful, staged, and repeated ways of using language to respond to the demands of specific cultural contexts (Martin & Rose, 2007). For instance, the dialogue in Monica's lesson constitutes an 'opinion' genre (Eggs & Slade, 1997). 'Opinions' seek to propose, elaborate, or defend a view of an event, thing or people; their basic structure consists of an 'opinion' followed by a 'reaction'.

Hyland (2007) describes five key traits of the GBA. First, it is a visible pedagogy (Martin, 1999) that discloses what learners need to learn and how they will be assessed. Second, it draws on SFL to show how specific linguistic choices relate to the context of use and to the language system in general. Third, it sees teaching as assistance that supports learners' evolving ability to create meaning during language activities; this assistance occurs through "interaction in the context of shared experience" (Martin, 1999, p. 126). Fourth, it sees teaching as an intervention to empower students for accessing, understanding, and challenging valued texts (Martin, 1999). Finally, the GBA aims to increase learners' and teachers' awareness of how texts work. For this it discloses the language resources texts use and the social reasons why they use them. For the GBA, explicit knowledge expands learners' meaning-making potential, that is, their ability to flexibly deploy language to achieve various functions in context (Halliday, 1993). These features of the GBA are epitomized by the teaching-learning cycle.

The Teaching-Learning Cycle

The cycle is a text-based instructional sequence that leads learners from joint to independent creation of meaning (Burns, 2010; Callaghan & Rothery, 1988). It includes three main stages: deconstruction, joint construction, and independent construction. The cycle



concept implies that the stages are flexible and recursive, allowing instruction to start at any stage or return to previous ones depending on students' familiarity with and mastery of the genre (Rothery, 1996). In contrast to Monica's lesson, where students recreated an isolated dialogue on their own, the cycle develops students' ability to create whole texts³, oral or written, under teacher guidance. The model⁴ in Figure 1 shows the cycle and its stages⁵.

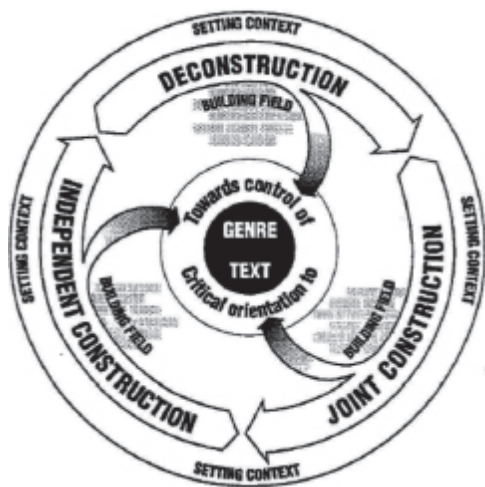


Figure 1. The teaching-learning cycle (Rothery and Stenglin, 1994, in Martin, 1999).

In Figure 1, *setting the context and building field* activities occur throughout the cycle rather than as part of independent stages (cf. Feez & Joyce, 1998) and seek to raise learners' awareness of the social context and purpose(s) of the genre under study. This involves understanding what the genre is used for, its context, and its vocabulary; the roles and relationships of the people involved (e.g. formal, informal, distant, or close); and the mode of

communication in which the genre occurs (e.g. face-to-face or email). Using Monica's lesson as example, learners could discuss the purpose of an 'opinion' text, the context(s) in which it occurs, and the type of language it uses (e.g. evaluative vocabulary).

During *deconstruction*, the first stage in Figure 1, learners analyze an authentic model text belonging to the genre. In this stage students learn the rhetorical structure of the genre and the lexico-grammatical (i.e. lexical and grammatical) resources it uses to create meaning (Derewianka, 2003). It is during deconstruction that direct language teaching is most likely to occur. Following with our example, Monica could explain the parts of an opinion dialogue (i.e. opinion, reaction), or learners could compare several dialogues to discover them. They could also organize a jumbled opinion text, draw evaluative vocabulary maps, or practice grammatical patterns critical to this genre (e.g. *be + adjective*, *'I think...'*) (Feez & Joyce, 1998).

During *joint construction*, the teacher guides learners to create a new text belonging to the same genre. This stage constitutes, as Callaghan Knapp, and Noble (1993) note, an approximation by students to producing the genre thanks to teacher mediation. Mediation is possible due to the shared metalanguage that students gained during *deconstruction*. For example, Monica and her learners could construct a new opinion text jointly, with Monica rewording students' contributions when necessary and explaining the reasons for doing so. Pair work activities to create a new text, like the dialogue in Monica's lesson, could take place in this stage with more teacher support.

During *independent construction*, learners create another textual instance of the target genre independently (e.g. an opinion text about a party). However, they can still recruit the teacher's help in

3 Although the creation of meaning can also occur through nonlinguistic signs, in this paper I use the word 'text' to refer to meaning that is created linguistically due to the importance of language in the EFL classroom.

4 See Martin (1999) for a historical discussion of the different representations of the cycle and what they entail.

5 For a more detailed description of these stages see Feez and Joyce (1998).



the form of co-editing and other types of feedback (Derewianka, 1990). For this stage, learners in Monica's lesson could do role plays, simulated or authentic dialogues, or inside-outside circle conversations. Prior to this, learners would need to build knowledge of the language needed to talk about parties and decide whether other contextual factors of the conversation are to be maintained (e.g. roles and relationships of participants).

Each one of these stages adds to learners' critical control of the genre, as the arrows pointing towards the center suggest in Figure 1. An optional stage not shown in Figure 1 involves learners in *linking related texts*. That is, learners relate what they have learned to other or similar genres, and to previous or future cycles of teaching and learning. For example, learners could compare opinion texts in different fields (e.g. about events vs. about people), or compare written and oral versions of them.

As may be already obvious, the cycle draws on a sociocultural view of development (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986) for which language and literacy result from an individual's guided participation in social, language-based activity. Accordingly, the cycle builds on the concepts of scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) and the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) that see instruction as the provision of graded and contingent support (i.e. tuned to students' ability level and offered only when needed). This results in learners' awareness of how language works, which in turn leads to learners' control of actual language use (Painter, 1996). Abundant research from ethnography of communication and education (Heath, 1983; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988), cultural psychology (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2003), linguistic anthropology (Baquedano-López, 2004), and second language (L2) sociocultural theory (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), a detailed review of which is beyond the scope of this paper, sustain this view of learning as assisted participation.

A Review of Research on the GBA

Genre-based research has described the written genres of K-12 education and outlined 'generic' learning pathways (i.e. sequences of increasingly complex and abstract texts) for the design of curricula⁶ (cf. Christie & Derewianka, 2008; Macken-Horarik, 1996; Schleppegrell, 2004). Additionally, this research has assumed an interventionist orientation in order to improve content area literacy in first language contexts (Callaghan et al., 1993; Chamorro & Moss, 2011; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010; Moss, 2010; Veel & Coffin, 1996) and L2 and FL classrooms (Byrnes, 2009a; Byrnes, Maxim, & Norris, 2010). In what follows I review the most representative findings of genre-based, interventionist research.

In contrast to the purposeless use of language in Monica's lesson, a variety of research has shown that genre-based instruction increases learners' awareness of the social nature of language use and helps them produce clearly structured texts. This finding is consistent across different studies, such as Coffin's (2006) investigation of L1-history learning, Colombi's (2006; 2009) research on advanced academic literacy by Spanish heritage speakers at the tertiary level, Burns' (1990) study of L2-writing by adults, and Byrnes' (2009a) research of FL-German writing by collegiate students. Banks' (2000b) research on adults' development of L2 conversation ability and many other studies in various linguistic and disciplinary contexts endorse these findings as well (Burns, 1990; Gebhard, Harman, & Seger, 2007; Macken-Horarik, 2002; Martin, 1999; Schleppegrell, Achugar, & Oteiza, 2004; Veel & Coffin, 1996).

Students' improved use of specific lexicogrammatical resources as a result of GBA

⁶ See also Martin (2002) for a review of genre-oriented, descriptive research.



interventions is another recurrent research finding. For example, Colombi (2006; 2009) and Byrnes (2009a) provided robust evidence that learners' control of grammatical metaphor (i.e. the use of nominalization) improved during instruction; Cullip (2009) showed that secondary students' L2 writing improved in use of clause types (e.g. declaratives, interrogatives), formality, modality (i.e. use of modal verbs), and conjunctions; Banks (2000b) demonstrated that students improved their ability to ask for clarification and give feedback during L2 conversations. Research on teaching L2 conversation using a GBA, although anecdotal and short of detail, suggests similar findings (Banks, 2000a; Butterworth, 2000; Reade, 2000). In contrast, Coffin's (2006) study and Hyon's (1995) research on L2 reading in college showed little gains on learners use of specific linguistic resources, suggesting the need for more detailed GBA research.

Another finding common to almost all the previous studies is that learners and teachers developed a shared metalanguage for talking about texts. In other words, they became increasingly able to use a student-friendly version of SFL's terminology to describe, monitor, and improve the texts students produced or read (see also Christie, 1992; Martin, 1999; Unsworth, 2000). The use of language to monitor one's own activity, linguistic or otherwise, is an important step in development, as sociocultural research in L2 has shown (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). In this sense, shared metalanguage became an important mediational tool (Kozulin, 2003) for promoting content and language learning in genre-based teaching.

As this short review has shown, genre-based instruction promotes learners' ability to use language to create meaning. Despite addressing writing mainly, this research provides reasons to anticipate that the GBA can also contribute to students' development of OIC skills

in FL situations like Monica's. Specifically, this approach can raise learners' awareness and control of how oral interpersonal communication is structured to respond to specific meaning-making situations (i.e. generic awareness) and of the varied lexicogrammatical resources those situations allow. Since patterns of meaning are relatively stable for each genre, oral or written, awareness and control of these patterns can help learners make predictions of how interpersonal communication events will be likely to unfold, facilitating their interaction and their use of lexicogrammatical resources (Burns, 2010; Burns, Joyce, & Gollin, 1996; Joyce, 2000). Below I elaborate on these ideas.

The GBA and the development of OIC skills in a FL context

This section outlines a proposal for teaching OIC in a FL using a genre-based approach. At the curriculum level, I discuss the view of language, FL learning, and oral communication that the proposal implies. Next I describe syllabus aspects like objectives, activities, materials and assessment using Monica's situation as context.

Curriculum Level

Rather than a collection of rules to judge correct use (like in Monica's case), the GBA sees language as a system of interlocking and stratified resources for making meaning through texts (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). In other words, whenever we use language in social communication, this occurs in coherent units of meaning-in-context called texts. In turn, texts are made up of interrelated contextual, semantic, and lexicogrammatical choices from the different systems of language (e.g. systems for representing the world, for relating to other people, and for organizing messages) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Since texts integrate all these systems into a visible functional unit, they provide a model for learners' to understand what meaning



choices to make and when (Derewianka, 2003). Consequently, teaching OIC in the FL classroom requires a focus on whole texts, their function in society, and how they work linguistically to achieve their purposes. This also implies that, unlike Monica's case, teaching should start at the context level, by raising students' awareness that language use is goal-oriented and that social situations influence the specific linguistic choices that speakers make.

The concept of genre explains how these choices tend to cluster in similar ways under recurring situations (Christie, 1999), hence this concept serves as a tool for organizing 'generic pathways' in the FL curriculum⁷. As Martin (2009) points out, "pathways of this kind make it possible for teachers to plan for what can be assumed, and for students to move from one genre to another without having to take too much on board" (15). Hence, a program for promoting OIC can be designed as a sequence of oral genres of increasing variability and complexity. Burns, Gollin, and Joyce (1996) divide OIC into conversation and encounter genres (Figure 2). Conversations are interpersonally oriented and can be 'casual' and 'formal'. Casual conversations can be 'polite' or 'confirming', depending on the relationship between speakers. Encounters are pragmatically oriented and can be 'factual' (i.e. exchanges of information) or 'transactional' (i.e. exchanges of goods and services).

Although Figure 2 shows conversations and encounters separately, most interactions involve a mixture of the two. For teaching purposes, however, it may be more practical to separate them at initial stages of learning, and then combine them as learners become more proficient (Joyce & Slade, 1997). Along these lines, an example of an OIC goal in a genre-based curriculum can be 'to enable learners to participate in factual and transactional conversations'.

⁷ See Byrnes *et al* (2010) for an example of a FL curriculum organized in 'generic' terms.

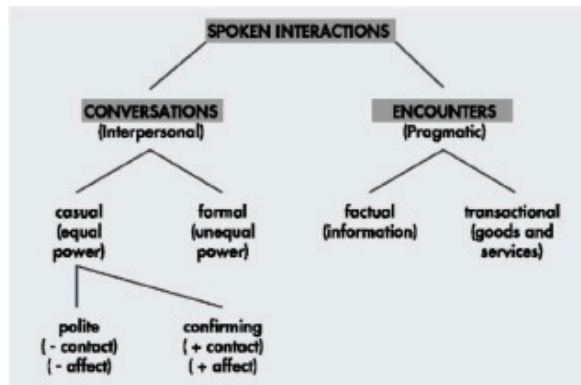


Figure 2. A typology of spoken interaction (Burns et al., 1996)

If we conceive language as a system of choices and language ability as being able to deploy those choices to make meaning in context, then it is unlikely that using intra-sentence grammatical "recipes", like Monica did, will develop learners' OIC skills; nor will these skills arise naturally from un-guided participation in classroom communicative situations, as if by osmosis (Martin, 1999). Rather, developing OIC skills requires mediation of learners' knowledge (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) about how oral texts work socially, generically, and lexico-grammatically; as well as learners' guided and conscious participation in realistic situations of FL use.

Syllabus Level

Syllabus type. The syllabus Monica follows is organized around structures. Although students practice language skills and functions during each teaching unit, these opportunities are designed and sequenced to target particular grammar issues. The teaching sequence presented at the beginning of this paper is telling of this situation. In stark contrast, the GBA proposes that the syllabus be organized around textual units, using meaning-making activity in texts as both medium and result of learning (Hall, 2010; Vygotsky, 1986). Since it is driven by how language works rather than by how language is learnt, a genre-based syllabus provides a coherent framework to mix elements of more traditional syllabi such



as structures, functions, or language tasks (Feez, 2002; Feez & Joyce, 1998).

Syllabus objectives and contents. Colombian educational goals aim to promote learners' ability to "communicate in English at internationally comparable levels" (MEN, 2006, p. 3, my translation). To achieve this goal, Monica's ninth graders should be able to "participate in everyday communicative situations" and "start, maintain, and end simple conversations about familiar topics" (MEN, 2006, p. 23, my translation) by the end of their school year. Due to its focus on purposeful language use in communication, objectives defined through a GBA seem more likely to suit Colombian EFL educational goals than the grammar-based objectives Monica

currently promotes. One such objective can be to "enable learners to start, develop, and close a conversation to buy food items in a store."

The GBA espouses a stratal (i.e. multidimensional) view of language. This means that any instance of communication involves choices at the cultural, situational, textual, lexico-grammatical, and expressive (i.e. graphology and phonology) dimensions of language (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). This view, as Feez and Joyce (1998) suggest, provides a heuristics for defining syllabus objectives and contents, as shown in Table 1 for a unit on factual and transactional conversations in the Colombian EFL context.

Table 1. Objectives and contents in a genre-based unit

Colombian standards		
- Participate in everyday communicative situations –Start, maintain, and end simple conversations about familiar topics		
Curriculum goal		
Develop learners' ability to participate in factual and transactional conversations		
Dimensions of language	Syllabus objectives	Suggested contents
Context of culture (genre)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand the purpose of a simple conversation to buy food items in a store in The United States and Colombia. Recognize and use the key stages of a simple conversation to buy food items in a store. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social context of convenience stores in the States vs. tiendas de barrio in Colombia. Beginning, middle, and end of conversations to buy food items: greeting, query about availability of the items, query about cost, leave taking, etc.
Context of situation (register)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize how the relationship between participants, the topic, and the channel of communication influence a simple conversation to buy food items in a store. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Types of relationships between speakers (e.g. formal-informal, close-distant, frequent-sporadic, etc.), features of oral vs. written language, the vocabulary of shopping and food.
Discourse semantics (text)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take turns appropriately within simple exchanges to buy food items in a store (e.g. question/ answer, request/compliance). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The relationship between turns: (e.g. adjacency pairs in shopping exchanges).
Lexicogrammar (clause)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize and use the key features of a simple conversation to buy food in a store. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expressions and vocabulary related to quantity of food and numeratives (e.g. 'a pound of', 'two, three', 'how much', 'how many', 'half a dozen'). Shopping expressions and structures (e.g. 'give me three please', 'how much are they?', 'do you have any milk?')
Expression (graphology and phonology)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build pronunciation skills and strategies, specifically in the areas of intonation and pronunciation of key words. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intonation of questions vs. statements; pronunciation of food vocabulary.



Teaching and learning activities. As a result of its mixed nature, the genre-based syllabus does not prescribe a particular type of activity for teaching OIC. Instead, it provides a framework for exploiting a variety of them, including those common to other syllabi. According to Burns (2010), a genre-based syllabus must include *preparation activities* to activate students' previous L2 knowledge; *discourse activities* that focus on how texts begin, develop, and end; *language activities* that provide practice on the micro-features of the genre (e.g. verb

tense, pronunciation, and sentence patterns); and *interaction activities* that require learners' participation in realistic tasks involving the genre being studied. The genre-based literature provides abundant examples of specific activities for each of these categories (cf. Banks, 2000a; Burns, 2010; Derewianka, 2003; Feez & Joyce, 1998; Joyce, 2000; Joyce & Slade, 1997; Thai, 2009). Rather than reproducing this extensive list, in Table 2 I suggest activities for each stage of the teaching-learning cycle based on the objectives proposed above.

Table 2. Activities for a genre-based unit on transactional conversations

Stages	Activities
Deconstruction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher-guided discussion about students' shopping experiences in their L1 and the reasons why people use language in a store. 2. Students visit a 'tienda de barrio' (convenience store) in their neighborhood and collect information about shopping exchanges in their L1, their structure, purpose, participants and their relationship, their topic, etc. A checklist is provided by the teacher. 3. Presentation and practice of vocabulary related to food items (e.g. matching picture with word, building word maps from a vocabulary list, listening and identifying key vocabulary) and quantities (e.g. matching representation of quantities with quantity expressions). 4. Reading and listening to a short conversation in English that takes place in an American convenience store. Students compare this conversation with the information they collected in activity 2 and draw intercultural conclusions. 5. Teacher and students construct an explanation of how conversations to buy food items in a store are organized. OHP presentation of this organization by the teacher using the model conversation and a graphic representation of its stages. 6. Teacher explains how the conversation develops in pairs of turns and how these are related. 7. Students complete a skeleton table of the genre with key-phrases and structures from each stage of the conversation. Students practice using these phrases through cloze dialogues, picture-sentence matching, micro-dialogues, etc.



Joint construction	<p>8. As a class, students choose their favorite dish from two options the teacher provides. Then, they list under different categories (e.g. vegetables, meat, grains, spices, etc.) the food items needed in order to prepare the dish. Finally they identify where they can buy those items, the role language would play there, the characteristics of the context, and their relationship to the vendors.</p> <p>9. Students organize a jumbled dialogue, similar to the one presented in the deconstruction stage, where a person their age buys one of the ingredients needed for the dish they chose.</p> <p>10. Students complete a cloze dialogue where one turn from each adjacency pair in the conversation has been omitted.</p> <p>11. Students get in pairs and, using the diagram presented in activity 5, prepare a dialogue to buy any of the ingredients needed for the dish they chose in activity 8. Teacher provides assistance with pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar as needed.</p> <p>12. Teacher and students discuss the importance of acting out dialogues in front of the class and getting feedback from classmates, and how that favors learning.</p> <p>13. Students act out at least one conversation per category of food items. As they listen, students analyze these conversations using a checklist provided by the teacher (see Figure 3 below). After each conversation, teacher and students share their analyses.</p> <p>14. Teacher provides additional focused language practice on expressions to indicate amount, food vocabulary, and key structures.</p>
Independent construction	<p>15. Teacher sets up an unfocused task (Ellis, 2003) in which a third of the class will act as vendors and the rest will act as shoppers. For this, a small 'street market' is set up outside the classroom, in a bigger room or an open space. Shoppers make a list of the ingredients they will need for the dish based on one of the categories identified in activity 8. Vendors set up stores for each one of these categories using drawings and labels for prices. There will be at least two stores for each type of ingredients and they will carry different items. As a reminder, teacher and students discuss the characteristics of the social context of street markets.</p> <p>16. Shopping time: The shoppers go to the different stores and buy the food items they need using English. Support is provided through a poster of the stages and elements of the genre or through teacher assistance. The teacher can use a checklist, like the one in activity 13, for assessing students' appropriation of the genre.</p>
Linking related text	<p>17. The class discusses how their conversations would have changed if they had been buying the food items in a big grocery store rather than in a market, or from a vendor they know closely.</p> <p>18. Learners reflect on their 'shopping experience' in EFL during activities 15 and 16. They also reflect on the unit as a whole.</p>

As Table 2 shows, activities in the teaching-learning cycle proceed in a top-down fashion, focusing on the cultural and situational context of conversations before attending to specific language features (Fawcett, in press). These activities also provide repeated opportunities to engage learners with the genre and its features, supporting their awareness of how effective speakers make choices in vocabulary and

grammar based on the cultural and situational contexts in which they interact.

Unlike current genre-based literature, Table 2 includes activities that involve learners in researching L1 use (e.g. activity 2), and activities that prepare them to learn or make them reflect about learning (e.g. activities 12 and 18). Activity 2 includes an ethnographic component (Heath,



1983; Paltridge, 2001) that builds learners' L1 background of oral genres. This component is necessary in FL teaching because, since the opportunities for using the L2 socially outside the classroom in this context are scarce, learners usually lack implicit knowledge of how the L2 works. Whereas most genre based interventions activate students' background knowledge using their implicit understanding of the L2, in contexts such as Monica's this needs to be done through cross-cultural comparison between learners L1 experiences and samples of L2 use. Another adaptation is represented by activities 12 and 18, which attempt to overcome the critique (Callaghan *et al.*, 1993) that the cycle assumes students' familiarity with the 'negotiation of learning' that occurs during joint construction. In a context such as Monica's, where learning experience has not necessarily been a matter of negotiation with learners, activities such as 12 and 18 seem to increase the cycle's cultural responsiveness (Rogoff, 2003).

Syllabus materials. The activities suggested in Table 2 require different types of materials including formats, tables and graphic representations that appear frequently in the GBA literature (Feez & Joyce, 1998; Paltridge, 2001; Thai, 2009). However, the use of graphic, conceptual representations of the genre (e.g. in activities 5, 11, and 16) is less common and thus deserves special attention. Recent research in the instructional applications of sociocultural theory (cf. Ferreira, 2005; Lantolf, 2011; Negueruela, 2003) has shown that the use of such representations helps learners' acquire linguistic concepts that facilitate language performance. Hence, activities 5, 11, and 16 seem a valid step to overcome the lack of explicit attention genre-based instruction and research have given to the cognitive dimension of L2 development (Callaghan *et al.*, 1993; Ferreira, 2005).

The GBA encourages the use of authentic conversations to model realistic OIC (Burns *et al.*,

1996). However, obtaining such conversations in FL contexts such as Monica's, where the L2 is not used in everyday communication, is an incredibly difficult task (see Shih, 1999 for a similar assertion). To overcome this challenge, FL teachers can use semi-scripted model dialogues along with authentic and scripted dialogues (Feez & Joyce, 1998). Semi-scripted dialogues include many of the features of authentic OIC, but do not result from real instances of L2 use outside the classroom. Instead, they are obtained by defining the context and purpose of a conversation, and then arranging for colleagues or native speakers to role-play it (Butterworth, 2000). FL teachers can also re-script textbook dialogues using the detailed descriptions of authentic conversations that genre-based research provides (cf. Eggins & Slade, 1997).

Assessment. According to Feez (2002), genre-based assessment needs to be text-based, linguistically principled, criterion-referenced, explicit, and continuous. I explain these features in turn. *Text-based* means that assessment should focus on learners' production of whole texts and on the language resources used to make those texts effective. Accordingly, genre-based assessment needs to go beyond intra-sentence language phenomena and consider aspects such as text structure, pairs of utterances, relation of language choices to text purpose and context, and so forth. *Linguistically principled* implies that decisions on what to assess should be based on a systematic and comprehensive linguistic framework, such as the one SFL provides (Byrnes *et al.*, 2010). *Criterion-referenced* means viewing assessment as a process of matching students' meaning-making in texts to performance criteria from all language dimensions (Burns, 2003). Since the GBA advocates a visible pedagogy, assessment needs to be *explicit*; that is, it must make clear to learners what aspects of language are to be learnt and how these will be evaluated.



Finally, assessment needs to be *continuous*, providing teachers with valuable information to tune assistance throughout the teaching-learning cycle (Perret, 2000).

In a GBA, data for assessing and researching learners' achievement comes from the texts learners produce (Perret, 2000). For assessing the OIC objectives presented above, for example, this data would correspond to the conversations learners' hold with other learners or with the teacher. Several authors suggest recording such conversations and then analyzing them in detail as a means of assessment (Banks, 2000a,

2000b; Burns et al., 1996; Joyce, 2000; Reade, 2000). However, this procedure is difficult to implement in large classes such as Monica's. As an alternative to overcome this practical constraint, FL teachers can design assessment rubrics and checklists based on the descriptions of genres available in the literature (Feez & Joyce, 1998; Joyce, 2000). These rubrics and checklists can be used for teacher, peer, and self-assessment activities (see activity 16 and 18 in Table 2). Figure 3, taken from Banks (2000b), shows one example of a checklist used in peer-assessment of casual conversation.

Conversation skills									
Objective: For you to practise the language you need to have a short conversation with an acquaintance.									
Instructions: Listen to each conversation. Did the two speakers:									
		S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
Start	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • greet each other? • talk about the weather? • talk about something round them? • ask for information? • ask for a small favour? 								
Continue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ask questions? • give feedback? • seek clarification? • tell a story? 								
Finish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • say they had to go? • give a reason why? • say when they would meet again? • say goodbye? 								

Figure 3. Checklist for peer-assessment of casual conversation (Banks, 2000b).

In Monica's context, students' familiarity with self and peer assessment procedures, as well as with the characteristics of appropriate performance, can be a limitation to this alternative approach. However, the repeated instances for using language and reflecting about it provided throughout the cycle may develop learners' familiarity with the genres being studied and

the metalanguage needed to talk about them, facilitating thus the new assessment procedures.

Conclusions

In this paper I have highlighted the benefits of using a GBA for promoting OIC skills in a second language. I started with a description of this



approach and a review of some of its most salient research. I discussed that the GBA underscores the role of explicit instruction to raise learners' awareness of how texts work. This awareness leads to learners' control of genres, which in turn facilitates performance (Lantolf, 2011). The GBA also pictures language development as a guided, textual, social process that occurs through classroom interaction during the teaching-learning cycle. Additionally, it sees performance as agented by both teacher and learners through the use of a shared metalanguage – a mediational tool for expanding learners' meaning-making potential. The teacher's role as mediator is facilitated by the grammar of the GBA (i.e. systemic functional grammar). Since this grammar makes explicit how language choices in different language dimensions realize and are shaped by social contexts, teachers can make principled decisions on what, why, and how to teach (Byrnes, 2009b; Macken-Horarik, 2002). Finally, the GBA sees FL development as the expansion of learners' meaning-making potential and grammar as a resource for meaning rather than a recipe to be followed.

The proposal presented in the second part of the paper reflects all the previous principles. I argued that the GBA is likely to promote students' development of OIC in FL contexts in a similar way as it promotes writing and literacy in L1 and L2 situations. I have provided specific examples of how a GBA could be used to this end using the specific context of Monica, a secondary school teacher in Colombia. Given the specific characteristics of Monica's context, I suggested that a GBA needs to include an ethnographic component to build students' background about how language works, needs to assume a more culturally-responsive orientation, needs to include activities and tools that link teaching to a cognitive dimension of students' development, and finally needs to devise strategies to overcome detailed

assessment of language use in large classes. All these areas constitute important challenges to be addressed by genre-based instructional research in a FL context.

However, the benefits of adopting a GBA to promote OIC in a FL situation cannot be uncritically assumed. In part, because the lexico-grammatical resources needed for meaning-making in oral interpersonal genres differ from those needed in the written school genres that most L1, L2 and FL genre-based research has focused on. Rather than invalidating the claims this paper has made, what this suggests is the need for more classroom genre-based research, especially in FL contexts where such research has been neglected. The fact that the GBA yields valuable learners' language data throughout the cycle facilitates research on learners meaning making potential, allowing for contrasts between the language learners produce during joint construction and the language produced during independent construction and beyond (Perret, 2000). In both cases, learners' textual activity appears to be an appropriate unit of research analysis, given its nature as the only unit of meaning-making that integrates aspects from the culture, the situation, and the lexico-grammar in a recognizable, functional and unified linguistic entity.

Space limitations prevented me from discussing various other aspects. For example, I was unable to discuss the role of needs analysis in a GBA, the way teaching units can be sequenced in a syllabus, the integration of skills in a GBA or the sequencing and grading of content. Whereas genre-based resource books like Feez and Joyce (1998), Paltridge (2001), and Thai (2009) touch on some of these aspects, their discussion does not address FL contexts specifically. Once again this points to the urgent need to research and reflect on all these issues along different contexts.



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THE AUTHOR

JOSE DAVID HERAZO, is a full time teacher at Universidad de Córdoba (Montería, Colombia), where he works as a pre-service teacher trainer in the English as a Foreign Language department. He holds a Master's degree in Education and is currently a third year doctoral student at the University of Pittsburgh (USA). He is member of ESCU research group at Universidad de Cordoba. He has published in Colombia and abroad, and has presented in numerous conferences.

