

What do Genres do in the EFL Coursebook?

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1. The genres in the coursebook

The coursebook is probably the most prominent genre language learners are exposed to in many foreign language classes worldwide. However, this genre contains in itself a number of secondary genres or sub-genres (Lähdesmäki 2007). Whereas most of them are pedagogic (i.e. sections devoted specifically to the practice and illustration of linguistic forms), such as fill-in-the-blanks exercises, those genres which attempt to reproduce the real world external genres, such as brochures, blogs, and emails have become increasingly common. These correspond to various instances of actual social practices and have been said to be ‘slices of life’ which find their way into the EFL coursebook.

According to the Sydney School (Martin, 1992, 1997; Christie and Martin, 1997), each recognizable human activity constitutes a genre; therefore, in any given culture there exist as many genres as the many social activities in which the members of that culture engage (Martin and Rose, 2008). Martin and Rose (2003) define genre as a “staged, goal-oriented social process,” (p. 7) and elaborate that definition through the following explanation, saying that genres are “...**social** because we participate in genres with other people; **goal-oriented** because we use genres to get things done; **staged** because it usually takes us a few steps to reach our goals” (p. 8). The authors further illustrate the way in which each genre comes to be realized by certain recurrent *linguistic patterns* that yield the meanings at stake in any given situation (Bawarshi and Reiff, 2010, p. 30), for example, the typical ‘*Once upon a time...*’ opening line in children’s stories, or the use of simple present tense in jokes. In addition, given that multimodality has become intrinsic to meaning making, most genres can be associated with certain *multimodal configurations* (Martin and Rose 2008, p. 40). For example, in many cultures, a CV is now accompanied by a photograph, and instant messaging tends to include emoticons.

In their attempt to bring that world outside into the EFL classroom, EFL coursebooks have come to include genres as diverse as Internet pages, tweets, letters, news items, menus, gossip columns, encyclopedia entries, film reviews, character references, CVs, to name a few. Some are mostly verbal (consisting mainly of linguistic forms); some are predominantly visual (consisting mostly of images); and some involve alternative combinations in both modes. As a way of exemplifying the ensemble of verbal-visual elements, Bateman (2008) presents a diagram which places the coursebook along a spectrum of visual informativity (Figure 1).

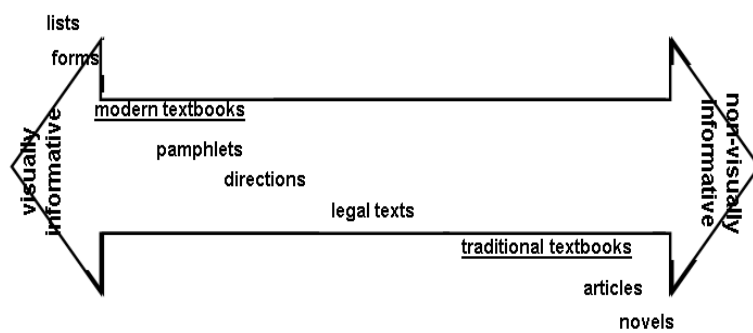


Figure 1: Spectrum of visual informativity (adapted from Bateman 2008, p. 10)

Quite often, the texts that are brought into the coursebook are reproduced in such a way that they *look like* “real-life exemplars of the genres” (Lähdesmäki, 2007, p. 376). For example, a pamphlet would appear surrounded by framing, including images and special typography resembling a real pamphlet. This means that book developers have to deal with enormous design and artwork demands. Such concern with layout and design reflects the visuality that has become a characteristic of everyday practice of modern life (Hemais, 2009).

2. Genre authenticity

In the context of foreign language teaching, genres are understood as “abstract, socially recognised ways of using language” (Hyland 2007, p. 149). This notion of genre implies that an awareness of “the world outside the ESL classroom” (p. 148) prepares learners to be effective in communicative practices in everyday settings.

The outside world comes into the classroom by means of authentic materials in the coursebook (i.e. naturally occurring language in social situations rather than language produced for instructional purposes). Authentic materials may come from various sources and, at present, enter the coursebook in the form of an increasing number of genres with very elaborate layouts, displaying multiple multimodal resources (Liruso, Bollati, and Requena, 2012; forthcoming). Quite often, however, the material in the authentic sources is subjected to a number of changes and adaptations before entering the coursebook. This type of manipulation is not a new idea in language teaching (see Gilmore 2007).

Genre authenticity could then be viewed from at least two different perspectives. On the one hand, we can think of the verbal and visual authenticity of the texts used as input data for learners, and consider the degree to which the text brought to the coursebook is a sample of real life. On the other hand, we can think of the authenticity of the task learners are expected to perform with such a text/genre, considering the ecological validity of the task. Given the nature of this study, our attention is focused on the first perspective mentioned and thus we try to answer the question: *Does the text look/read/sound like a prototypical genre people would encounter in real life?*

2. A classification of coursebook genres

In the framework of a study that explores generic and visual aspects in six EFL coursebooks used in Argentina¹ we decided to look into the different genres in terms of their authenticity. Our corpus spans over different levels of proficiency (beginner, intermediate and advanced) and includes coursebooks which adhere to the communicative paradigm of language teaching. This is relevant because one important tenet of this approach is precisely the use of real-life situations to promote communication.

In order to gather information for our study, all instances of external genres from selected units of each coursebook were analyzed. The identification of authenticity of a given genre involved checking copyright acknowledgement often expressed through wording such as *Taken from...* or *Adapted from....* depending on whether the original text had been subjected to any change prior to its inclusion in the coursebook.

Based on these considerations, following a preliminary analysis of the genres present in foreign language coursebooks, we classified such genres as *authentic*, *adapted* and *simulated*. We defined *authentic* genres as those which enter the coursebook with

practicallyⁱⁱ no manipulation by the author/designer of the book (Extract from screenplay of “Slumdog Millionaire”, *Advanced Language Leader*, p. 111). These are intended to be samples of real life and include texts such as literary excerpts, maps, photographs, dictionary entries, etc. Such description of authentic genres is closely related to the way Nunan (1988) defines authentic materials "as those which have been produced for purposes other than to teach language" (p. 99).

We defined *adapted* genres as those genres that suffer some pedagogically motivated transformation as they enter the coursebook while maintaining many features of the original version. An example of this would be a newspaper article which is adapted through linguistic, cultural and multimodal changes (news report “Smash! Clumsy visitor destroys priceless vases”, *Headway Intermediate*, p. 24).

Finally, *simulated* genres were defined as those specifically produced for teaching purposes, involving the reproduction or recreation of a real-life genre and containing a varying number of its distinctive identifying features, with no ‘genuine’ external source (Posting in traveller’s blog, *Speakout 1*, p. 45).

These three categories were examined in our corpus. A total of N= 18 texts were identified and analyzed, resulting in a skewed distribution of genres according to the operationalization imposed by the categories previously outlined (see Table 1).

Level	Authentic genres	Adapted genres	Simulated genres
Beginner (N=5)	-	-	5
Intermediate (N=6)	1	2	3
Advanced (N=7)	1	2	4

Table 1: Distribution of external genres in corpus according to genre type

As it becomes evident from the corpus analysis, simulated genres outnumbered the other two categories. This was true across proficiency levels -beginner, intermediate and advanced- though the advanced and intermediate levels showed more adapted genres than the beginner books.

3. Degrees of authenticity

Our study included an exploration of the way the social enters the coursebook via genres as well as the way these genres operate at a social functional level. This exploration, informed by principles from Systemic Functional Grammar and the closely

devotes a whole chapter (Ch. 11) to the simplification of reading material which may be performed through *adaptation* (in terms of vocabulary and grammar) and *re-creation* (changing the nature of the whole text by adding sections or even images, for example). In the present analysis of genres as multimodal processes, it is our contention that adaptation can occur at least at two levels: linguistic and/or visual.

In what follows, we present an example of graded authenticity by analyzing a genre commonly found in EFL coursebooks: the classified advertisement. We first analyze an *authentic* ad from a newspaper, and then we provide an *adapted* version of it. Finally, we present a *simulated* ad of our own authorship but whose content and design resemble simulated ads from our corpus not reproduced here for copyright reasons.

3.1 An Example of Authenticity Gradation

a) Authentic

It is not unusual for travelers and students in study-abroad situations to find themselves in need for renting some kind of living space. Such situation may require learners to consult and understand classified ads. Thus, a valid motivation exists for introducing that genre to EFL students. Should the foreign language teacher or materials designer decide to bring exemplars of authentic ads to the classroom, a real ad like the one displayed in Figure 3 would be appropriate.



Figure 3: Authentic classified ad. (Source: *The Daily Collegian*; 3/30/2015, p 10)

As would be evident to any language user with experience in this type of genre, the ad displayed in Figure 3 contains many of the prototypical features of a classified ad. At the linguistic level, there are many content words (*bedroom, month, heat, water, refuse*) and minimal syntactic work, abbreviated words (*undergrads*); all the information is presented in a very succinct manner. As to the visual level, there are words in bold type

and in capital letters. The whole text is arranged in a column, with framing devices in the form of lines separating the different ads.

b) Adapted

Without entering into a discussion of potential motivations for genre adaptation, which usually respond to pedagogical considerations, it will suffice to say that, as evidenced in our corpus, adapted genres as defined in previous sections are twice as frequent as authentic ones. As our analysis of EFL coursebooks has revealed, such adaptations occur at both the linguistic and visual levels. Thus, an adapted version of the classified ad in Figure 3 could read and look as the one we present in Figure 4 below.



Figure 4: Adapted classified ad.

The modifications in the linguistic dimension seek to make the text more accessible to learners. They consist of the inclusion of two sentences with finite verbs (*available now* > *it's ready to use*), the elimination of abbreviations (*undergrads* > *undergraduate students*), instances of lexical simplification (*done over* > *decorated*, *available* > *ready*, *furnish* > *provide*) and changes in contact information like the telephone number (*237-7763* > *437-7763*). As regards the visual dimension, the ad is accompanied by a color photograph of a bedroom; the text contains a friendlier parsing of sentences into lines with no split words. The framing resource used is different (lines to separate different ads > colored square background). Meanings conveyed concisely in writing in the newspaper are re-created and enhanced in an alternative mode in the simulated ad.

c) Simulated

Most of the genres surveyed in the corpus, however, were neither authentic nor adapted. Simulated genres provide materials designers with the freedom to come up with the texts they wish to include in the coursebook without having to go through the hustle of

searching for authentic genres and obtaining their copyrights, or having to adapt them in order to suit the target learners' level of L2 proficiency or to conform to layout and printing limitations. Figureⁱⁱⁱ 5 below shows a simulated ad which we created for an imaginary beginner level EFL coursebook and which could be included in a unit about Housing in which learners would learn to describe housing facilities/amenities through the use of *there be*.



Looking for an apartment in the city center?
Are you a teacher, an engineer, a nurse?

We have the apartment for *you!*

- ✓ 2 bedrooms
- ✓ large dining room
- ✓ remodeled bathroom
- ✓ and fully equipped kitchen

Low price and high quality!

Call 821-45902

Figure 5: Simulated ad.

In this simulated ad, the information presented does not correspond to a real world scenario (there is no such apartment, with such visual features, at such phone number). The ad's linguistic choices at the level of grammar and vocabulary were not made entirely on the basis of the communicative purpose of the genre (i.e. finding a tenant/finding a place to live) but were rather made pursuing the pedagogic purposes of (a) consolidating recently covered verb forms (e.g. *look for*) and newly introduced vocabulary on jobs and professions (e.g. *teacher, engineer, nurse*) probably taught in a previous unit of the coursebook, and (b) displaying contextualized new lexical items about housing/parts of the house (*bedroom, dining room, bathroom, kitchen*) which students are to learn. From the visual point of view, the ad contains various graphic elements which are deployed to direct the readers' attention to essential information: color (four colorful photographs depicting the different rooms; colored background); typography (interplay of color and font sizes); layout (check marks). When such simulated genres form part of the coursebook, it seems relevant to ask: Can this text still be recognized as an ad? Does this text with its visual and linguistic

components create a link between the classroom world and the real world? In the case of the ad, it was possible to identify a number of stable features throughout the three versions: succinct structure, column format, content words about the property offered and contact information. As long as these features are part of the text, the text remains an ad and as such it has a specific social purpose, a target audience, and a particular style. Based on the general similarities between 'authentic' texts and 'simulated' versions, it becomes evident that efforts are made to preserve certain 'genre identification' features, so that the original social purpose remains present.

4. What do genres do in the coursebook?

As is shown through the discussion and the exemplification above, genres in the coursebook support teaching by providing a source of data about how people do things in a society; and they also help position learners as language users immersed in a social practice (not only as learners of a code or system). In other words, simulated genres, just as adapted and authentic ones, can be thought of as operating along two parallel and simultaneous dimensions in the coursebook: the classroom for which they were designed and the fictional 'real world' of social practice. Authentic, adapted and simulated genres expose the coursebook user to two social functions: language learner and community member. It must be said though, that in interacting with the different versions of the genre, the coursebook user also moves along a cline. In the engagement with the authentic input the role of community member is stressed whereas in the engagement with the simulated input, at other end of the continuum, the role of language learner is stressed.

Our study has also revealed that another thing genres do in modern (as opposed to traditional/older) coursebooks is to show the strong text / context relationship by presenting contextualized instances of language use. Contextual elements of a text, such as purpose or participant roles are intrinsic to the notion of genre and are inextricably tied to the linguistic choices made in any text (Martin, 1997).

In addition, given the deployment of graphic/visual resources as genre components on the pages of the coursebook, genres can be credited with promoting multimodal awareness and with it a better understanding of the social meanings that are offered through various semiotic elements. By doing all this 'work', the genres that are brought into the coursebook can be said to bring learners closer to the social world.

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ⁱ This is part of a larger corpus which includes Spanish as a Foreign Language coursebooks as well. The data for the present study was extracted from the following EFL coursebooks: *Speakout Elementary* (2011) Eales, F & Oakes, S.; *Outcomes Elementary* (2012), Dellar, H & Walkley, A.; *Headway Intermediate* (2009) Soares, L. & Soares, J. *Outcomes Advanced* (2012), Dellar, H & Walkley, A.; *Touchstone 4* (2006) McCarthy, M., McCarten, J. & Sandiford, H.; *Advanced Language Leader* (2010) Cotton, D., Falvey, D.; Kent, S.; Lebeau, I. & Rees, G.

ⁱⁱ It should be made clear, however, that a certain level of manipulation will always exist, as the genre is recontextualized, which in itself entails some transformation (Linell, 1998 in Lähdesmäki, 2007).

ⁱⁱⁱ Image credits: Kitchen:

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b2/Fully_Furnished_Atenas_Apartments_for_rent.jpg; Bathroom: https://farm1.staticflickr.com/198/515756277_e5885ec452_o.jpg; Dining room: https://c2.staticflickr.com/6/5047/5284392785_240ba02c5f_b.jpg; Bedroom: <http://mountpleasantgranary.net/blog/images/Crieff-bedroom.jpg>