

Video of World Festivals as Novelties in Teaching Description Writing Using a Genre-Based Approach

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In order to motivate ESL students and engage them in different tasks effectively, it is necessary to make the tasks novel to the students. As one possible way of introducing novelty in the course, films could be used advantageously. In this study, a writing course integrated with videos of movies and cultural festival of different regions of the world including that of author's country were used as a novel activity and students' attitudes were investigated through questionnaire and open-ended comments. The students belonged to second year undergraduate course of food and nutrition sciences of a Japanese private university. In addition to the film videos as part of listening activity, students were introduced to writings of different genres such as autobiographical, general description, procedure and argumentative writings using a genre-based approach. Students were first introduced to a model writing followed by deconstructing the model writing based on a set of questions. Next, students were asked to write based on the questions to make an outline of their own writings. Following making an outline in the classroom, students constructed their own one paragraph essays. Effects of learning were assessed through students' engagement in writing and in class questionnaire on the video. It was found that students showed real interest in watching film and cultural festivals videos. With cultural festivals, students were made to make comparison with their own and report describing the interesting feature of the festival. The students were also asked to critically reflect on the festivals themselves. Because of the novelty, students actively engaged in the class making the class interesting to the students. In future, a more detailed curriculum using festivals from different parts of their country along with festivals from different parts of the world could be worth considering.

Keywords: language lab, films, ESL, motivation

1 Introduction

English is an international language of communication transcending communal and cultural boundaries promoting international communications (Pennycook, 2009; Widdowson, 2010). With English being a global language (Crystal, 2009), it becomes necessary for students to be proficient in communication both at conversation and in writing of different genres. As one way to induce students' spontaneous interests in acquiring

communications skills, videos have been used by different groups (Li, 2012; Vandergrift, 2007; Vanderplank, 2010).

In this study, video of festivals from different parts of the world were used as way to raise students' curiosity in not just learning about different cultures but also engage in writing with interest. Students belonged to second year of the undergraduate food and nutrition sciences department of a Japanese private university and they had around seven years of English education. In the first year, the students were taught mainly oral communication skills. Therefore, in the second year, students were asked to take elective courses for further improving their communications skills that include writing courses too. Following, viewing video on festivals, students' interests and motivations were investigated through survey which included open-ended comments and comprehension quiz on the video.

The author used the genre-based pedagogy for teaching writing. The choice of a genre-based pedagogy stems from two important facts: one being its extensive use in teaching writing different situations from primary to tertiary level students (Hyland 2007; Martin 2013) and the other being its effectiveness in teaching in a logical way suited to science students as well stated by (Hyland 2003:27):

Genre pedagogy is buttressed by the belief that learning is best accomplished through explicit awareness of language, rather than through experiment and exploration.

The main research questions addressed in this study are the following:

1. How the interests in students viewing of videos could be utilized in learning and acquiring skills?
2. What are the students' perceptions toward learning through video including festivals?

2 Literature Review

This literature review describes genre-based pedagogy for writing and the use of films and other entertainment videos in ESL classrooms.

2.1 Genre-based pedagogy

Genres arise out of recurring language patterns that occur when one engages in different social activities (Derewianka, 2003). Martin (1992) defined it as "For us, genre is a staged goal-oriented social process" (p. 505). Genres can be defined as social practices that have evolved to achieve social goals as they relate to the cultural context. Therefore, based on cultural and socio-contexts, one can have a system of language choices and genre theory categorizes these textual choices.

In general, to accomplish the certain social goals, "genres involve a

number of predictable functional stages with the meaning created in each stage being realized through the lexical and grammatical choices made” (Martin, 2000, p. 117). Therefore, through combining language, content, and contexts promise genre-based pedagogies benefit learners and at the same time, offer teachers a means of presenting students with explicit and systematic explanations (Christie & Martin, 1997). Hyland (2004) described genre-based pedagogies as a valuable resource offering both teachers and students a coherent objective framework for studying both language and contexts, and for producing effective and relevant texts.

In genre-based pedagogy, writers must consider two important variables: the purpose and the audience of a text to accomplish social actions (Pasquarelli, 2006). These variables are important because they influence the construction of the whole text which in turn determines the form, style and linguistic features at the sentence and word levels (Riley & Reedy, 2000). The relationship between purpose, audience, and the linguistic choice becomes the center of genre-based writing pedagogy and explicit teaching is required for novice learners (Martin, 2009). In addition, the main advantage of the genre-based approach for L2 writers is that it emphasizes the notion of genre which helps foster the understanding of the relationship between the features of the text and the communicative purpose (Johns, 1997).

2.2 Films and other cultural videos in ESL classrooms

In general, in a formal classroom context, following a textbook despite giving a direction to the students about learning it fails to motivate them because of its monotonous nature. Earlier research points out that such rule-based education does not make students to engage in the communication process leading to only superficial learning (Damen, 1987; Ellis, 1992; Pica, 1983). In contrast, there exists research that argue for the structured classroom as a protective environment or an artificial community, benefitting culture and language learning by allowing students to safely experiment with the language and culture (Mitchell, 1988; Kramsch, 1993).

At the same time, language laboratory (LL) that uses television and video has become a valuable tool in EFL classrooms. Such media could provide opportunities to students of listening to real-life situations. Vanderplank (2010) gives an extensive review on the different technologies of DVD, streaming video, video on demand, interactive television and digital language laboratories in language learning. In spite of existence of several studies (e.g. Danaher & Danaher 1998; Herron et al. 2006; Weyers 1999) indicating how DVD video and digital LLs can be successfully integrated into the curriculum, the research using media for pedagogical purposes is still in its infancy and there is greater demand for further extensive studies.

In the current study, the video of the festival itself was in Japanese language. The questionnaire was in English requiring the students’ ability to

output the language instead of input as in the video-based studies discussed above.

3 Methodology

In order to address the research questions of addressing how to utilize students' interests in movie videos for learning and their perception toward video as part of a learning tool, the course was conducted in the following way.

The writing course was taught over fifteen weeks with ninety minutes per week. A total of fifty students belonging to food and nutrition sciences participated in the study. The course contents included reading chapters of *Charlottes' Web* (White, 2012) with simultaneous viewing of the movie for 20 minutes. Writing skill was practiced through answering of quiz that included summarizing or paraphrasing the happenings of the chapter and also describing pictures or scenes taken from the book. Next, students were introduced to writing of different genres namely, autobiographical, general description, procedure and argumentative.

In order to introduce different genres, students were first given a model writing and were provided with a set of questions. The questions basically involved deconstructing the paragraph by answering the questions to help understanding of how the paragraph was constructed. This was followed by students making answers to the set of questions on their own topics in the classroom. This was essentially a brainstorming and scaffolding activity for the students to choose a topic and to have all the basic blocks for building a paragraph. The actual paragraph writing was given as a homework to be submitted after a week. An example of the autobiographical writing, 'My Favorite Activity' along with the set of questions is given in Appendix 1.

As a continuation of writing autobiographical description writing, students were next introduced to a festival from the author's country called "Pongal". This involved reading an essay about the festival followed by its breaking down through a set of questions. On having arrived at the suitable set of answers for the questions, students next had to choose a festival of their choice followed by answering the questions which was then expanded to a paragraph within a week's time. In the following class, a checklist for checking their writings was provided and the students checked with their peers. Here, the students developed some skill of critically looking at each other's writings.

Having finished writing of their festivals, students were next introduced to a short video on a novel festival from a different country (World festivals, NHK enterprise). The festival was from Guatemala honoring St. Tomas held in December.

The festival was a blend of Christian and Mayan traditions held in a place called Chichicastenango. The length of the video was around 6 min. In

Video of World Festivals as Novelties in Teaching Description Writing
Using a Genre-Based Approach

the festival, there was a process of palanquin very similar to Japan's parade of dashi and also there were fireworks and a unique event which is similar to banjee jump. Cover of the media and a few screen shots of the festival are given in Figure 1. The documentary video containing festivals from around the world was made in Japanese and thus the students watched the video in their native language, Japanese.

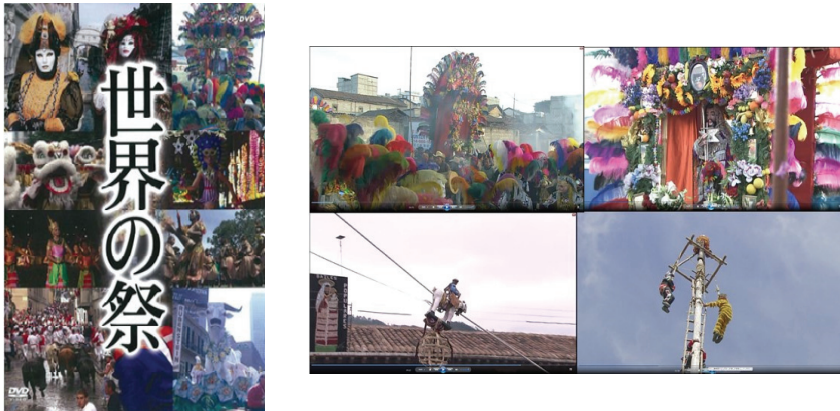


Figure 1. Cover of the media and few screenshots from the festival video of NHK shown in class

Again, upon viewing the video, students were provided with a survey. The survey analyzed the students understanding as well as their participation in the watching of the festival. The survey was also done to test the students' understanding of the video in relation to their own chosen festival. The survey contained open-ended questions to develop students' critical thinking skills. The survey questions were in English. Students were asked to give answers in English. A flow chart of the teaching procedure with video is given in Figure 2.

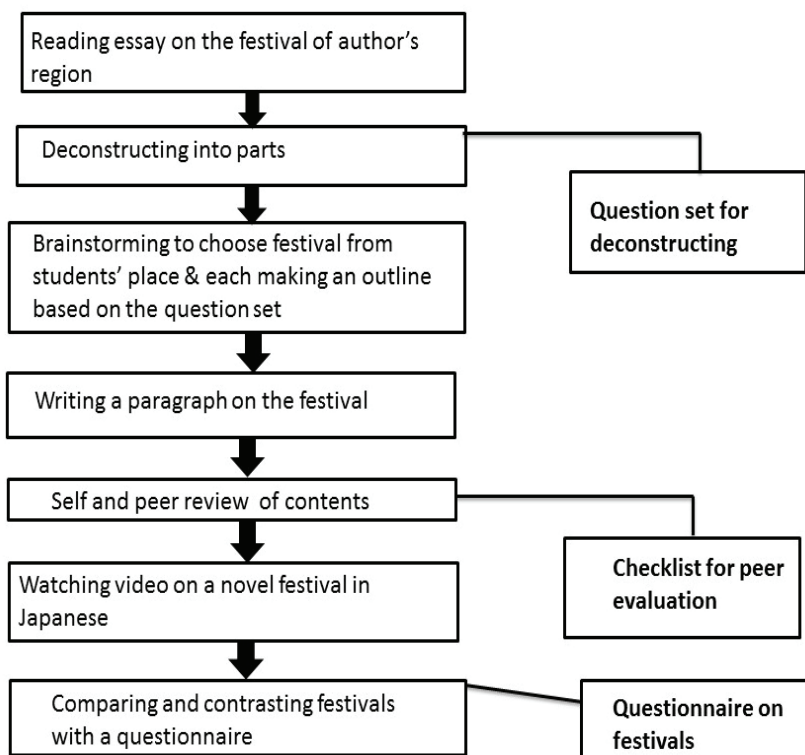


Figure 2. Flowchart for teaching description writing

Appendix 3 describes the example paragraph with its deconstruction based on a set of questions given in Appendix 4. Appendix 5 describes the questionnaire for conducting discussion on the festival video shown in the class with two examples given in Appendix 6. Appendix 7 provides a checklist for analyzing writings of peers on festivals.

4 Results and Discussion

The main aim of the course was to introduce students to writing. An initial survey of talking to students at the beginning of the semester revealed that the students had no prior experience of taking a writing course and it was new to them. Moreover, it was found out that most of the students were reluctant in studying English and they took the course, an elective course, only to fulfill the necessary grades. Therefore, to make the course attractive to the students, video became a part of the course. The students were shown at the end of the class with a questionnaire to check the comprehension. Of the fifteen weeks, the first half of the semester was used for reading and

Video of World Festivals as Novelties in Teaching Description Writing Using a Genre-Based Approach

paraphrasing activities while the second half of the semester was used for practicing writing.

The reading material for the course was chosen to be Charlotte's Web (White, 2012) as it has a feature film and almost occupied the first half of the semester. As the students were rather poor in reading, in-class read aloud practice by students was introduced followed by questioning to check understanding of the students. Students were also introduced to novel vocabulary which many students reported to be helpful for recollecting their vocabulary learnt in high school. The students were also reminded of their basic grammar skills through reading fiction. After reading, students practiced writing through paraphrasing sections from the book.

As a follow-up of the reading and paraphrasing activities, writing was introduced in the second half of the semester. Teaching writing involved genre based scaffolding activities. Students were introduced to models that were next deconstructed into parts which became the basis for generating students' own writings. Different genres were taught and in this paper, we addressed the issue of teaching a description writing. As part of this writing activity, video of festival was used.

Prior to viewing the video, the students were introduced to a model essay on a festival. This was followed by its deconstruction. In the deconstruction, the students were provided with a set of questions and the students answered the questions. Through this answering process, the students not only understood the contents but also formed a structure of how to construct a paragraph.

Having understood the construction parts from constructing an outline, the students next wrote up on a festival of their choice. This whole process made the students aware of general descriptive genre. In the academic writing class to ESL students, through teaching of autobiographic description and a general description writing, students were made to be aware of the genre structure of description writing.

In this study, in particular, for teaching general description writing, viewing of a festival of different culture was used as the topic. Introducing festival was found to be a novel activity to the students as none of them had any idea about the festival shown and they also reported such an activity festival itself was novel to them. The activity of using festival in classroom itself brought freshness in making the students to be alert with almost all the students participating in the class.

Following viewing of the video, the students were asked to answer a questionnaire. The questionnaire given in Appendix 5 contained questions that tested the students' comprehension and also contained some critical questions on personal reflections or opinions about the festival itself. In addition, the students were asked to make open-ended comments about the festival and were asked to write down any difference or similarity with the festival of their choice. Although the video itself was in Japanese, the

questions were in English and the students were asked to express their views and answers in English to score higher marks. Appendix 6 contains examples obtained from two different students.

While most of the students reported that the festival was fun, only some students could find similarities. In total, they enjoyed watching the festival. After watching the festival, the students were critically questioned on why we have festivals. Except for a few number of students, most of the students answered in English. Some of the examples of students' reply to "why we have festivals" are given in Figure 3.

There were some interesting observations by students. Largely students' opinion viewed festival as a tradition or a form of prayer. Most of the students reported the use of festival is to pass the traditions to future generations. Students also considered celebrating festivals as a way to enjoy life. Some students considered festivals as a way to make friendship and establish harmony in the community. For example, one student indicated that we may not need such festival as there is internet to connect people nowadays and so the point of having a festival may not be relevant in modern times. The questions challenged students to look outside of the festival.

5 Conclusion

In the current work, as a way to remove boredom in the language classroom usage of festivals from different parts of the world was used in building writing. It was found that using such an activity could not only help in inducing students' interests but can make students use their cognitive abilities to go beyond the walls of the classroom. Furthermore, having the video in Japanese helped students to digest the contents of the video fully aiding their thought process better to engage in giving comments. In future, a full redesign of the course based on festivals incorporating different writing genres compare and contrast, procedure, and so on could be worth considering in implementing in language classrooms.

Students comments for why we have festivals:

- Done to be a good person.
- Follow faith to be excellent person.
- We hope happiness.
- Because it is a tradition.
- Festivals mean celebrating something.
- Festival is necessary for human lives.
- People have to be opened sometimes and then enjoyed, that's why.
- I think nowadays, a benefit of traditional festival is getting vague because people can easily connect with people using internet.

Video of World Festivals as Novelties in Teaching Description Writing
Using a Genre-Based Approach

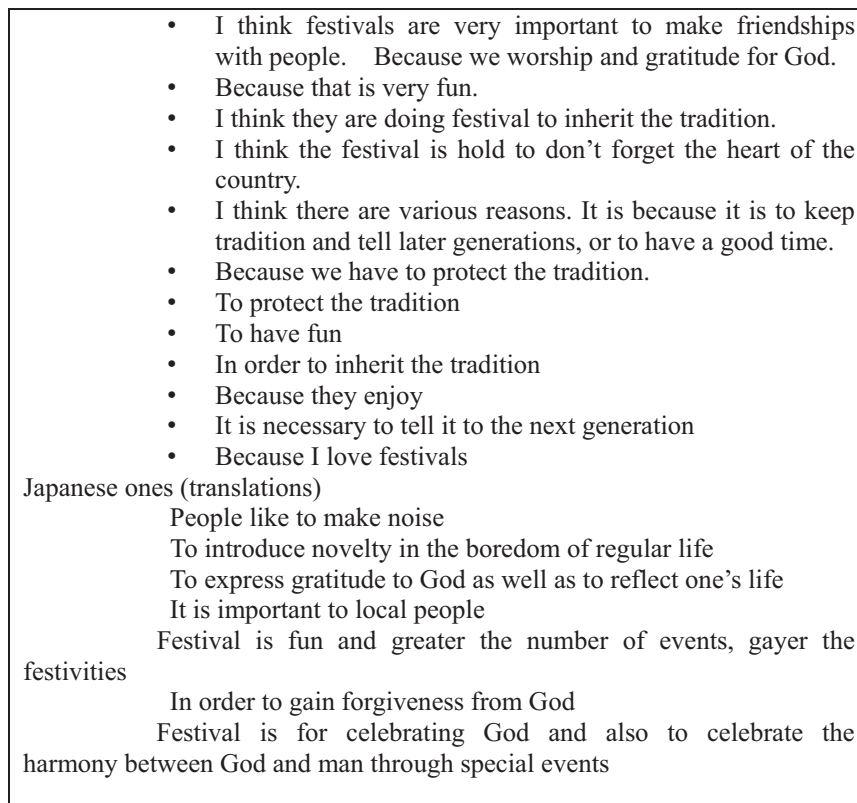


Figure 3 Comments of students on the reason for festivals

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Video of World Festivals as Novelties in Teaching Description Writing Using a Genre-Based Approach

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Appendix 1 Slides used for teaching my favorite activity

Example

- ▶ My favorite activity is reading books. I read different kinds of books such as comics, detective, mystery and romance. Especially I like classical novels from the Victorian era. My favorite detective writer is Arthur Conan Doyle. I always enjoy reading his creation involving Sherlock Holmes. For romance, I like Jane Austin's pride and prejudice. With respect to modern day writers, I read Sidney Sheldon, Michael Crichton and others. Currently I am reading inferno by Dan Brown. Reading makes you imagine the characters and you can visit different places and different times. So reading is a really enjoyable activity.

Breaking down...

- ▶ Topic or orientation sentence:
My favorite activity is reading books.
Specific:
I read different kinds of books such as comics, detective, mystery and romance.
Supporting sentence about specifics:
Especially I like classical novels from the Victorian era. My favorite detective writer is Arthur Conan Doyle. I always enjoy reading his creation involving Sherlock Holmes. For romance, I like Jane Austin's pride and prejudice. With respect to modern day writers, I read Sidney Sheldon, Michael Crichton and others. Currently I am reading inferno by Dan Brown.
Concluding sentence:
Reading makes you imagine the characters and you can visit different places and different times. So it doesn't s a really enjoyable activity.

Outline

- ▶ different kinds of books
- ▶ comics, detective, mystery and romance
 - ▶ classical novels from the Victorian era.
 - ▶ favorite detective writer :Arthur Conan Doyle (Sherlock Holmes)
 - ▶ For romance: Jane Austin's pride and prejudice.
 - ▶ Modern day writers: Sidney Sheldon, Michael Crichton and others
 - ▶ Currently I am reading inferno by Dan Brown.
- ▶ Reading makes you imagine the characters and you can visit different places and different times. So it doesn't s a really enjoyable activity.

Appendix 2

Peer review of my favourite activity paragraph

Paragraph belongs to:

Your/Reviewer name:

General details			
No.	Description	O/X	Comments/Any grammar mistakes (punctuation, spelling, etc.)
1	Can you find a topic or an orientation sentence?		
2	Can you find a Specific sentence?		
3	Can you find Supporting information about the specifics?		
4	Is there more than one supporting information?		
5	Is there a concluding sentence?		

Specific Comments: (Japanese also ok;)

Appendix 3

An example of a paragraph on an Indian festival, Pongal

Pongal, a harvest festival celebrated in mid-January is one of the important Hindu festivals in Tamil Nadu. The term 'pongal' in Tamil means "to boil", and this festival is celebrated as a **thanksgiving ceremony for the year's harvest**. Pongal also happens to be the name of a dish consumed during this festive time, which is sweetened rice boiled with lentils. **Pongal is celebrated over three days. The first day of Pongal is celebrated in honour of the god of rain.** Useless items of the household are tossed into a bonfire. **The second day of Pongal is the Thai Pongal festival.** This day, rice and milk are boiled together in an earthen pot. Also a turmeric plant is tied to the pot. Cooking is done in the open as an offering to the sun god, Surya. Along with this, sticks of sugarcane, coconuts and bananas are also offered. **The third day of Pongal is the Mattu Pongal festival.** Mattu Pongal is the day celebrated in the name of cows. The cows are colourfully decorated with bells and garlands and worshipped.

Adapted from <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/pongal-tamil-nadu-harvest-festival-bhogi-mattu-kaanum-thai/1/571157.html>

Appendix 4
An outline for writing on a festival

Write a description of a festival from your place based on the outline below.

What is the name of the festival?

What does the name mean?

When is it celebrated and how long?

How do you celebrate?

What do you do on each day?

What do you eat during the festival?

Add some pictures to show how the festival is celebrated.

Appendix 5
Questionnaire for discussing festival

Discussion about Festival (you can have answers
English or English mixed with Japanese)

- ▶ What kind of festival?
- ▶ Is there any relation to the festival you wrote?
- ▶ What do you find most interesting about the festival?
- ▶ What do think of festivals?
- ▶ Why we have them?

Appendix 6

Sample 1 on festival questionnaire

▶ What kind of festival?	The festival that the saints come back to the church and come back to their town.
▶ Is there any relation to the festival you wrote?	Yes, there is. New Year in Japan same there.
▶ What do you find most interesting about the festival?	It was most interesting that they were hanging on a stick and hanging around.
▶ What do you think of festival.	I think festival is important for people in the place. We also important that the New Year's active.
▶ Why do we have them.	Because it is a regional tradition.

Sample 2 on festival questionnaire

• What kind of festival?	The festival that the saints return to the church and come back to their town.
• Is there any relation to the festival you wrote?	It is similar with a print greeting someone.
• What do you find most interesting about the festival?	I was interested in entertainers that limited sinner coming back from heaven with forgiveness.
• What do you think of festivals?	I would like to participate.
• Why do we have them?	I think they are doing it to inherit the tradition.

Video of World Festivals as Novelties in Teaching Description Writing
Using a Genre-Based Approach

Appendix 7

A checklist for reviewing students writing on festival

Draft belongs to-

Name: _____ ID: _____ Your/Reviewer: _____ ID: _____

No.	Description	Yes/No
1	Is the name of the festival written clearly?	
2	Is there a mention of the place where the festival is celebrated?	
3	Is there a description about the meaning of the festival?	
4	Is there any mention of significance of the festival or why the festival is held?	
5	Is there a mention of the time when the festival would be celebrated?	
6	Is there mention of period of celebration?	
7	Is there a description of the activities that is done during the festival?	
8	Is there a description of what is done on each day?	
9	Is there a description of special food items or delicacies eaten during the festival?	

Specific Comments: (Japanese also ok with reduced scores)

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