

TEACHING *GENRES* IN AN L2 WRITING COURSE. THE INCIDENCE OF FOCUS ON FORM IN WRITTEN PRODUCTION OR HOW TO GO A STEP FURTHER THAN NATIVES¹

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Since the generalisation of the concept of *Communicative Competence* in Foreign Language Teaching, the Communicative Approach has been largely adopted. Since Canale and Swain's (1983) seminal work to the (1999-2001) *Common European Framework*, methodology and research on methodology of Second Language Learning have aimed at INTEGRATING not only the four skills but also the role of the target culture, and culture biased production -such as textual genres- as part of language learning.

¹ An earlier version of this article was presented at the *Symposium on Second Language Writing: Crossing disciplinary boundaries*, 2010, held in Murcia, in May 20-22.

Learning culture through writing in a Second language in instructed setting is a challenge for University students. So is for teachers. Our assumption in this paper is that by using FoF and genre approach to writing, it is possible to learn (and teach) both CULTURE AND a Foreign LANGUAGE.

In order to support the previous idea, we report a study conducted at the UPF in Barcelona, on the effect of the use of FoF when teaching how to write “market share news”, a subgenre of EXPOSITORY-ARGUMENTATIVE TEXTS to Spanish L2 university students. Students were enrolled in *Textos Específicos*, a writing course for improving B2 learners’ mastery on genres in the domains of Economics, Literature, Science, and Technology. We divided the group in two halves: one underwent FoF treatment and the other did not. After, both groups were asked to submit a text. We used a native control group, also within the UPF. Differences in performance were found within groups. Surprisingly, being native did not help to perform better, while undergoing FoF treatment did help.

WHAT IS CULTURE? HOW IS IT CONVEYED?

While Byram and Fleming (1998) claim that the intercultural and multicultural approach is the most common / or ideal framework, Risager (in the same volume) lists up to four different approaches to Culture:

- The FOREIGN culture approach focuses on target language culture, without any explicit link to the student’s own culture.
- The MULTICULTURAL approach values the learner’s cultural diversity, as well as the ethnic diversity.
- The TRANS-CULTURAL approach focuses on the potential linguistic situations where nobody is a native speaker of the language spoken by the group.
- The INTERCULTURAL approach takes into account the learner’s culture (as well as the target culture). This approach implies developing an INTERCULTURAL MIND and a *meta-cognitive* perspective of communicative tasks, a sort of *third way*.

The latter, neatly meets the definition of Kramsch’s INTERCULTURAL SPEAKER: an individual whose competence is by far more interesting than that of the Native Speaker.

If we bear in mind the conglomerate of components of Communicative Competence in 2006-2010 –as shown in Ortega 2007 for instance– the resulting picture looks now far more complex than that of Canale’s 1983.

In its turn, CULTURAL content –for an intercultural speaker– is the part of the content conveyed not through bare grammar or lexical learning, but through a richer and more complex knowledge, inherent to a written situation. This knowledge is composed by:

- Genre command
- Textual structure (micro and macro)
- Rhetorical issues
- Author's stance
- This is to say: *literacy* and *specificity* issues

All these components exceed the common contents chosen for FoF teaching techniques, since they go beyond *grammar issues*. They fit better under the umbrella of *genre analysis*, widely understood, where language AND literacy do play a role (Paltridge 1987; Halliday and Hasan 1980; Hyland 2002, etc.).

CULTURE AND GRAMMAR. WHY USING FOF IN L2 INSTRUCTION?

According to FoForm postulates, focus on meaning alone, with plentiful opportunities for exposure and processing of input, as in immersion context, (...) often results in levels of high comprehension ability and fluency, *BUT POOR ACCURACY IN PRODUCTION* (Harley, 1993; Harley and Swain 1984). Learners did not selectively attend to and notice communicatively redundant, perceptually non-salient, or infrequent and rare forms in the input.

Long (1991) argues that FoF, in the context of a meaningful use of language, requires promoting and guiding attention to aspects of input that otherwise may go unnoticed, unprocessed, and unlearned. Quoting Long:

FoF refers to how focal attentional resources are allocated...during an otherwise meaning-focussed classroom lesson, focus on form often consists of an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features –by the teacher and / or one or more students– triggered by perceived problems in communication (Long and Robinson, 1998:23).

In areas where unguided incidental learning is slow and inefficient (Long 1996) or impossible for learnability reasons (White 1991), *guided focus on form* is widely accepted to be a necessary pedagogic intervention.

Doughty and Williams (1998) stand for techniques *minimally intrusive* on the communicative activity. Techniques such as instructing learners in targeted features prior to communicative activities, or directing the process for meaning, are

compatible with drawing learner's attention to a something by underlining or highlighting it.

Other authors favour instead *reactive techniques* such as oral recasts of problematic utterances, which do not involve prior decisions on targeted forms.

WHICH ARE THE ANTECEDENTS OF THIS KIND OF RESEARCH?

Recent experimental laboratory research has investigated these issues by comparing DIFFERENCES IN LEARNING under incidental, instructed and enhanced conditions (Hulstijn 1997 offers a review). Agreement has been reached on the fact that proactive rule instruction can lead to SHORT-TERM RATE ADVANTAGES over incidental and enhanced learning *in simple grammatical domains* (DeGraaff 1997; DeKeyser 1995; N. Ellis 1993; Robinson 1997), but the positive effects of rule instructions in complex grammatical domains are much less obvious.

On the other hand, there is reliable research that shows that INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES, and cognitive ability variables such as aptitude [Robinson (1997; 2001)], and working memory capacity [Mackey et al. (2002); Philp (1999); Robinson and Yamaguchi (1999)], HAVE EFFECT ON INDIVIDUALS, BUT EFFECTS ARE LESS ROBUST ON GROUPS.

Exploratory studies on the effect of FoF in genre domain are scarce. And so are studies comparing NNS performance to native performance.

In Lucha and Díaz (2005), and later in 2007, we conducted an exploratory study about QUALITATIVE differences among four groups of writers facing an expository text on Economy (2 non-native groups and 2 native groups), one under the effect of FoF teaching. Differences were found among experts and non-experts, irrespectively of being Natives or non natives. By then, we concluded that the mere fact of being native is not enough, supporting Kramsch's thesis. In our opinion, this assumption still holds.

Nevertheless, as no statistic analysis was conducted at that time, reliability was arguable.

The present study is a step further on this direction. Now, statistic analyses partially confirm 2005 and 2007's results.

2005-2007 → Model text + 2 non native groups [confronted with performance by a native speaker in a *Model Text*]
2009-2010 → Native group + 2 non native groups [L1-L2 performances compared]
2010- on → Native experts + native non-experts // 2 non-native groups [Language + Expertise compared] FoF again + genre issues

PRESENT STUDY HYPOTHESES

1ST HYPOTHESIS: *LITERACIES AND CONTEXT BEFORE NATIVENESS*

If –as suggested by Kramsch– being a native speaker is not a guarantee for being a competent speaker, then instruction or specific literacy are responsible.

Comparing written competence of two groups of proficient speakers/writers in a given language –Spanish-native and non-native university students of similar socioeconomic and cultural background- *will show more similarities than differences*, indicating transfer of instruction or literacy, but not necessary transfer of LANGUAGE².

2ND (HYPOTHESIS): *EFFECTIVENESS OF FoF*

We hypothesize that intensive teaching with FoF technique will cause non native-experimental group to perform far better than non native incidental learning group, and also better than the native group. (By the effect of *consciousness-raising*).

3RD HYPOTHESIS: *TEXTUAL GENRE APPROACH (COROLLARY TO THE 2ND)*

Taking TEXTUAL COMPETENCE and recognition of prototypical structure-in sequence, as parameter determined by genre, and *if FoF applies also to GENRE focusing* (a bigger structure), then differences in the FoF treatment group would be qualitative and quantitatively bigger when compared with other groups (regardless of being natives or not).

THE STUDY

SUBJECTS AND TASKS

In order to test these hypotheses we carried out a study with 3 groups (N=10) of university students at the UPF.

Groups 1 and 2 were *non native Spanish B2 level students* enrolled in Textos Especificos, a subject in the Erasmus Exchange program, lasting 10 weeks. Students mother languages were: English, German and French.

Group 3 was a *Native group of students*, same age, same Faculty, taking Spanish Language in Translation Studies (*Gramática y Análisis del Discurso II*).

All non-native students did an entrance test to check their Spanish level (B2) at arrival.

² This will imply pushing Kramsch's postulates to the limits: NNS without treatment will perform as Natives (if context, namely, *background literacy* applies to both natives and non natives, and provided a high degree of specificity in text/genre is not addressed).

This will support Kramsch's hypotheses on Intercultural competence acting "by defect" provided the right context.

Expository-argumentative texts from 10 students of each group (N=30) were gathered.

Only one of the NN (non native) groups underwent intensive teaching on FoF for a session of one hour and a half, where "*before-hand selection*" of items on topics and grammar points was made. *Explicit teaching* based on textual comprehension and text structure was also carried out.

Tasks can be seen in the *Annex*

CONDITIONS ON DATA ELICITATION

GROUP 1 (non native FoF experimental group): students in this group were asked to produce the text *IN* the classroom.

GROUPS 2 AND 3: students in these groups were given a writing task *AS HOMEWORK*, without any additional teaching or comment.

CATEGORIES ANALYZED

a) In order to evaluate *QUALITY of information*: we selected Nouns, Adjectives, Verbs (inflected and uninflected) which reflect text conceptual content: *compra, venta; comprar, vender, aumentar, disminuir; mayor aumento; ligera disminución*.

b) In order to evaluate *local COHESION*: we chose conjunctions (coordinate and subordinate conjunctions).

c) In order to assess the *presence / absence of structures characterizing sequences*: we targeted Adverbs, comparative Adjectives and the structures they were nestled in: "*más que*", "*menos que*", "*mayor que*"; "*más que antes de*"; "*menos que al término de*".

These categories were selected after having analyzed a set of texts (corpora of study) considered prototypic of the genre. All three categories (a, b, c) were defined as parameters for quantifying and testing learners' productions.

THE FOF TASKS (TEACHING MATERIAL USED IN INTENSIVE TEACHING)

A set of 5 subtasks (all written input) were administered to the Experimental group. They were prepared by an experienced teacher of Spanish as a Foreign Language. All tasks did focus on comparison of products, services and individuals. A set of two over five tasks were based on a semantic-functional approach; the three remaining adopted a formal, textual and structure-based approach.

DATA ANALYSIS

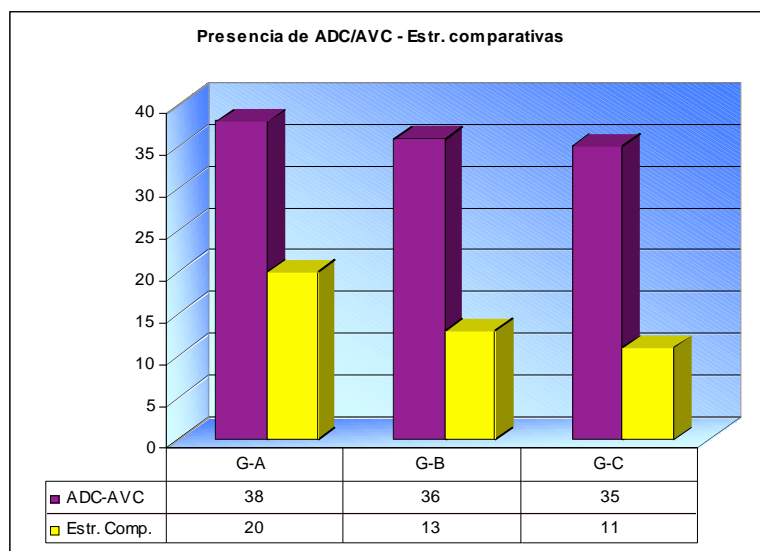
Students' written production was gathered, re-typed and analyzed with two tools, freely accessible in the Internet:

- Connexor (a prototype which allows for morphological tagging³), and
- Childes (Carnegie Mellon University⁴) whose Clan tools allow for counting (freq, Standard deviation, Media Deviation).

These tools allowed us for quantifying categories previously selected.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The analyses conducted did show that comparative adverbs and adjectives (ADV/Adj) do appear more than other comparative structures, as can be seen below:



The most interesting thing is that all 3 groups rely on the first ADV/Adj category; and that groups 2-3 (non experimental groups) show a very similar profile⁵.

Nevertheless, we do not go too far on this, since this is a general assumption prior to any statistical analysis.

³ Connexor: www.connexor.eu

Para una demostración, ver: www.connexor.eu/technology/machinese/demo

⁴ CHILDES stands for: Child Data Base Exchange System. Is the *child* language component of the TalkBank system (Mac Whinney 1990) supported by grant R01-HD23998 from NIH-NICHHD, to Carnegie Mellon University.

⁵ The reason is the iteration of use of items given in the examples –as “*durante menos de una semana*”– or similar versions, instead of more complex structures dealt with in the FoF session).

Still in the Qualitative side, we show the differences in the range of structures and forms used by each group:

ESTRUCTURAS PARA "COMPARAR"

GRUPO A		GRUPO B		GRUPO C	
comparar		comparar		comparar	
TXT. M	más que... el mismo (...) que	TXT. M	más que... el mismo (...) que	TXT. M	más que... el mismo (...) que
EST. 1	menos (...) que	EST. 1	menos que	EST. 1	mejor que
EST. 2		EST. 2		EST. 2	peor que
EST. 3	mejor (...) * contra	EST. 3	mejor que... (3) más ... más...	EST. 3	
EST. 4	mejor que...	EST. 4		EST. 4	elemento A + en comparación con + elemento B
EST. 5	mejores que... menos (...) que... más (...) que...	EST. 5	más que...	EST. 5	mejor que más que
EST. 6	tan (...) como... más (...) que...	EST. 6	más que... menos que... mejor que...	EST. 6	elemento A + respecto a elemento B más (...) que
EST. 7	más que... peor que... más que... tantas como...	EST. 7	menos... que... peores que...	EST. 7	mejor que
EST. 8	más... tanta (...) como	EST. 8		EST. 8	elemento A + en comparación con + elemento B mejor que
EST. 9	más que... el mismo (...) que menos que más que...	EST. 9		EST. 9	
EST. 10	el mismo que... menos que...	EST. 10	peor que * mejor de	EST. 10	mejor que

Data show that G1 (the FoF group) offers a wider repertoire (in variety and quantity); followed by G3 (natives) and G2 (NN).

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Due to the low number of samples/participants, a non-parametric statistical test was selected in order to obtain RATIOS for the 3 parameters: a) quality b) cohesion c) structures.

	GRUPO	MEDIA/MEN	MEDIANA/MEDIAN	DS / STANDARD DEVIATION
CALIDAD	1	0,3564	0,3588	0,0325
	2	0,3122	0,2901	0,0652
	3	0,2989	0,2973	0,0172
ESTRUCTURAS	1	0,0436	0,0199	0,0163
	2	0,0235	0,0462	0,0131
	3	0,0228	0,0254	0,0092
COHESIÓN	1	0,0662	0,0687	0,0283
	2	0,0434	0,0430	0,0202
	3	0,0277	0,0258	0,0106

Since texts produced are different in length, the Ratio is useful in order to allow for comparison.

Then, in order to establish statistically significant differences, a KRUSKAL-WALLIS test was conducted. Taking a significance level of 0,05 the three parameters selected did result on significant differences. That is to say, they were useful to discriminate.

	CHI-SQUARE	P-VALUE
CALIDAD	9,653	0,008
ESTRUCTURAS	10,458	0,005
COHESIÓN	11,074	0,004

In order to disentangle differences per groups, a Mann-Whitney U test was then conducted. This allowed for comparison by pairs only when differences were statistically significant:

ANÁLISIS Y DISCUSIÓN III

MANN- WHITNEY U TEST PARA COMPROBAR ENTRE QUÉ GRUPOS EXISTE DIFERENCIA ESTADÍSTICA SIGNIFICATIVA

	GRUPOS	Z	P-VALUE
CALIDAD	1-2	-1,664	0,105
	1-3	-3,631	0,000
	2-3	-0,378	0,739
ESTRUCTURAS	1-2	-2,609	0,007
	1-3	-2,948	0,002
	2-3	-0,151	0,912
COHESIÓN	1-2	-1,814	0,075
	1-3	-3,099	0,001
	2-3	-0,890	0,063

According to MacWhitney-U Test, significant differences for the parameter "Structure" do leave G1 (FoF) on the one side, and 2-3 on the other. This can be explained by the fact *that instruction in the classroom did play a role* (which proves hypothesis 1-2). "Being native", in its turn, does not play a role!

Concerning the parameter "Quality of information" and "Cohesion", differences are not as cut-clear.

Non-natives (G1-G2) similitude in *Quality of Information* may be due to the fact that they all are in a study abroad context plus a formal instruction setting, at the time data were gathered. The University context favours written discourse (argumentative-types) for advanced levels, and academic writing is very similar to the task proposed. *Context*, we guess, may have played a role.

Concerning proximity among G2 (NN) and G3 (natives), balance may be attributed to activation of the monitor in the case of G2, which may equate incidental knowledge of native students (in *stand-by* position for this specific genre).

CONCLUSIONS

1. According to Kramsch, and to hypotheses 1-2, both groups, *natives and non natives, without FoF teaching perform similarly*. This confirms that instruction or *specific literacy* do have an effect in competence, rather than language command itself. Therefore, the fact of being native does not improve competence at this specific/genre/specific structure point.

2. FoF teaching causes visible difference in performance, especially in the linguistic and genre aspects targeted. These results confirm previous research on *grammar structure* improvement (like the one by Sanz & Morgan-Short (2004), etc.)

We are aware that the size of the sample does not allow for big generalisation, and that a post-test should be conducted in order to test memory effects. Further research will be conducted in order to address these issues. This will allow us to claim for effectiveness of the technique in the long term.

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ANNEX

Clasifica las siguientes frases:

1. ¡Está riquísimo!
2. Lo malo de la subida del IPC es que subirán los intereses bancarios.
3. ¡Fantástico!
4. Es algo increíble.
5. Lo bueno de Cremosa es que podemos comerlo a todas horas.
6. Ha sido más fácil de lo que pensaba.
7. Otro inconveniente es que es un poco caro.
8. Es una locura.
9. La ventaja principal de este crédito hipotecario es su bajo interés.
10. Ha sido una semana muy difícil.
11. ¡Qué bueno!
12. La ventaja del Chupa- Chups es que no te manchas los dedos.

EXPRESAR SATISFACCIÓN	EXPRESAR VENTAJA / INCONVENIENTE	EXPRESAR VALORACIÓN
¡Fantástico!		

EJERCICIO 1. Completa las frases con los elementos necesarios. Compara tus respuestas con las de tu compañero.

1) _____ desventaja _____ vivir fuera de la ciudad _____ la incomodidad de tener que coger siempre el coche.

2) Uno _____ los _____ de este despacho es _____ tiene poca luz.

3) Como puede ver, este apartamento tiene muchas cosas positivas, pero _____ principal _____ está a cinco minutos del metro.

4) En _____ con los resultados del semestre pasado, este semestre hemos tenido beneficios.

5) Manolo tiene un coche nuevo, pero _____ inconveniente _____ que consume mucho.

EJERCICIO 2. Forma frases que expresen ventajas o inconvenientes con los elementos que aparecen. Faltan algunos elementos de la estructura, añádelos.

Ejemplo:

lejos	preciosa	desventaja
estar	centro	lejos
muy	casa	ser

Es una casa preciosa, pero TIENE la desventaja DE estar muy lejos del centro.

1. desventajas luminosidad cámara poca tener
2. versatilidad su este producto nuevo significativa
3. azúcar aportar otro mucha
4. poco tener consumir
5. negocio rentabilidad este poca principal

Con tu compañero, lee el siguiente diálogo y marca las estructuras comparativas que aparecen.

EJECUTIVO 1: - En este primer semestre de 2004, Cremosa ha facturado un 2% más que Smint.

EJECUTIVO 2: - Sí, pero tienes que tener en cuenta que el beneficio operativo de Smint de este semestre ha sido un 4% más alto que el del año pasado. En cambio, Cremosa se ha mantenido, ha obtenido el mismo beneficio que en el 2003.

EJECUTIVO 1: - Ya, pero no olvides que el capital destinado a la publicidad de Cremosa este semestre ha sido de un 10% menos que en el mismo período del ejercicio anterior. Esto, sin duda, ha repercutido en sus ventas, que se han estancado.

EJECUTIVO 2: - Sí, y, además, la campaña de Smint ha sido muy agresiva. Pero desde el departamento de Marketing me han comentado que tienen prevista una nueva campaña de Cremosa para el mes que viene. Las previsiones son que en los próximos 3 meses se consigan unos resultados tan positivos como los de Smint.

EJECUTIVO 1: - Cremosa no tienen tanto público como Smint. Éste se dirige a un público más amplio que el de Cremosa.

Ejemplo:

Unos resultados tan positivos como los de Smint.

EJERCICIO 3. Forma frases con estructuras de comparación. Añade los elementos que sean necesarios para que la frase tenga sentido.

Ejemplo:

Marisol: ventas = 2000€ / Tú: ventas = 2000€ (vender)

Marisol ha vendido tanto como tú.

1. (costar)

Mi coche: 13000€

Tu coche: 17000€

2. (ser)

Mi casa: muy luminosa

Tu casa: muy luminosa

3. (tener)

Juan: discos = 30

Miquel: discos = 25

4. (facturar)

Aceites Oliv: 5 millones de euros

Aceites Andalus: 3 millones de euros

5. (tener, edad)

Juan: 25 años

Sofía: 25 años

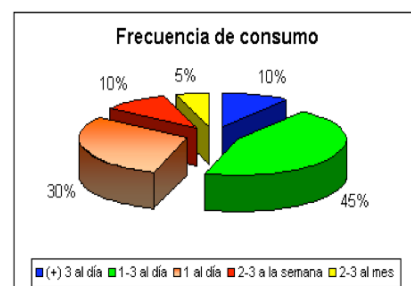
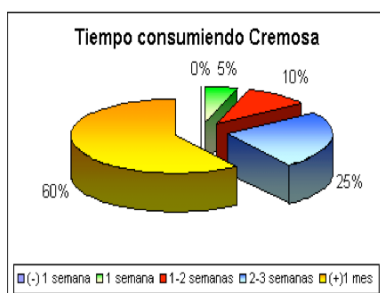
MODELO DE INFORME DE VENTAS

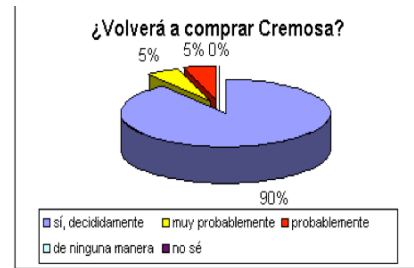
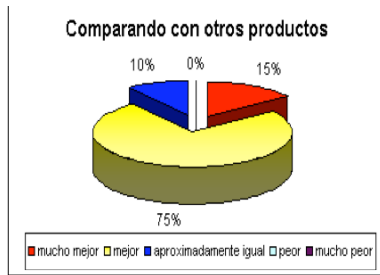
La producción de Chupa Chups S.A. correspondiente al primer semestre de 2004 ha sido un 5% más que en el mismo período del año pasado. Sin embargo, las ventas sólo han subido un 2%.

En cuanto a la facturación, se ha mantenido en el 3%, el mismo porcentaje que en el primer semestre de 2003. La ventaja respecto a sus más directos competidores es que su facturación no ha descendido como ha sucedido con ellos.

A pesar de todo, Chupa Chups ha conseguido un beneficio operativo de tres millones de euros y un crecimiento de valor de cuatro millones de euros gracias a la subida de precios, el ajuste de plantilla y la venta de algunos activos.

Gráficos correspondientes a la 5ª semana de salir el producto al mercado:





Gráficos correspondientes a la 10ª semana de salir el producto al mercado:

