

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of related literature will be discussed under four subheadings, corresponding to the four related areas that undergird the research topic. They are:

(1) theoretical background of the Genre-based Approach; (2) personal recount writing; (3) meaningful content; and (4) related research on personal recount.

#### **2.1. Theoretical Background of GBA**

##### **2.1.1. Former approaches to the teaching of writing**

The genre-based approach to teaching writing has come into existence in native-speaking countries like Australia and some parts of America due to two approaches: the "product-based approach" (mid 1960s), known as the traditional approach and the process-oriented approach (the recent approach in the 1980s). The first approach used "a controlled composition model" which was originally based on the oral approach proposed by Charles Fries (1945). It was primarily concerned with the completed product (patterns of organization, spelling, grammar), and the success was measured by the ability to incorporate the grammar rules into one's writing. This approach was criticized as "prescriptive" (Applebee 1986, 94), that is, imposing grammar as a rule or as a guide. This approach is teacher-centered in which the role of the teacher is that of an evaluator of the linguistic products. The knowledge and skills that learners bring to the classroom are undervalued.

The process approach which was derived from the work of Murray (1982) and Graves (1983) provided "a way to think about writing in terms of what the writer does (planning, revising, and editing)" (Applebee 1986, p. 96). It focuses on the learners' ideas and experiences, small group activities and teacher and students' conferencing. However, the process approach is viewed by some researchers as "a number of recursively operating sub-processes rather than a linear sequence" and they are "complex rather than simple" (Applebee 1986, p.96). Moreover, Applebee (1986) reported that a research study found out that the process approach does not offer learners sufficient input, particularly, in terms of linguistic knowledge to enable them to write successfully.

### 2:1.2. Genre Theory and GBA

To fit in the goal of "real writing", some Australian educators or theorists, including Christie, Martin, Rothery and Kress have recognized the empowering nature of genre and have consequently urged the use of genre-based writing for teaching in the Australian school system for over ten years (Gee, 1997). The term "genre" derives from the Latin word "genus" which means "race," or "kind" and came to English through the French word "genre" in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It has long been used to refer to different kinds of art or literature. It has also been used in linguistic discourse to refer to different types of texts (Halliday and Hasan, 1976 and Hasan, 1978).

Clare Bradford (1992, p.18) explains Halliday's view of language as the basis for expressing meaning:

**Halliday's approach, systemic linguistics, sees language as a functional tool for learning how to mean, a way in which children learn to construct their own meanings and to understand how other people construct meaning. He emphasizes that language exists as a text; a sequence of meaningful utterances, not as single sounds or words. He places language firmly in its context.**

The so-called genre theorists have focused more on the notion of Halliday's three main ideas (language as tool for making meaning, language as text, and language in context) and have developed the approach based on them. These theorists argue that different genres like "procedure" include a set of instructions which can be seen as enabling people to "mean" or "get things done." Bradford (1992, p.18) explained that the "procedure" genre, for instance, needs a sequence of stages for instructions. To illustrate the concept, according to Bradford, the topic "How to use a microwave oven" in Bradford's words, might include imperatives such as "Turn on the switch on the wall and press the far right button at the bottom." In this way, the procedure allows the reader or listener to cook something by using them.

Christie and Misson (1998, p.11) argue that "genres are not culture free." Whenever people work out those genres (either spoken or written), they do so in the way they understand from their own cultures. A spoken genre "Buying and selling," for example, may need the stage of bargaining for a Myanmar woman while for an Australian may not. Therefore, genres can be defined as "purposeful, social and cultural activities that include a sequence of stages." However, in the context of GBA writing, the term is used somewhat broadly. Martin's definition of genre as "a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture" has been particularly influential in the work of the Australian genre-based approach to teaching writing (1984, p.25). Thus, genre theorists defined the approach based on genres as "a staged, goal-oriented, and purposeful social process."

The GBA has been widely applied in Australian schools and colleges over the last decade and has now been introduced in some parts of the United States, too. Although this approach has previously been applied mainly for specific purposes

(ESP), it is now increasingly being applied for other areas of language teaching, such as writing or English for academic purposes (EAP), English in the workplace, adult second language literacy development, and in language development schools throughout Australia (Paltridge, 1996).

### **2.1.3. Components of GBA**

The genre-based approach to teaching writing consists of two components: the process and the content. The process includes the teaching and learning cycle that includes three phases: modeling, jointly negotiating the text, and independent construction of the text. The content or ideas are expressed by certain types of schematic structure and language features.

#### **The Process**

Before modeling, preparation is necessary because whether learners achieve their purposes in their writing or not depends on the quality of preparation for writing in the classroom (Rothery 1992, p.271). Preparation includes identifying important facts to understand and abilities to be developed for the unit, deciding which genres would be appropriate to develop (the language focus), planning a number of activities to familiarize the learners with the genre, and locating sample texts in the chosen genre to use for modeling (Derewianka 1990, p.6).

Derewianka (1990) explains that modeling must start with introducing a model of the genre. This model should be similar to the one to be written later by the students using an OHP, and it should be followed by discussion of why this genre is important (the purpose) in the society. Next, students identify how the text is structured (both

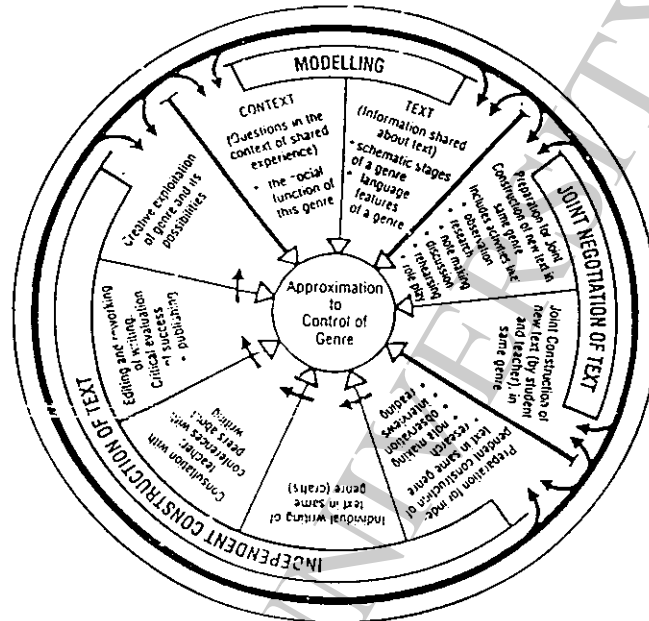
schematic structure and the language feature), and finally, discuss again the function of each stage of the schematic structure. In this phase, teachers can compare a successful text with the one that has not achieved its purposes, and can ask learners to find out what makes a successful or effective piece of writing. The teachers must write the model text or use one written by former students. Derewianka also notes that it is even more helpful if teachers can draw pictures for the students while modeling.

Derewianka (1993) says that the second phase, jointly negotiating of the text (followed by joint construction) can be done jointly by the whole class, by small groups, or by the teacher and a learner during conferencing. This phase includes researching the topics (report, for example, can be based on observing, reading, making notes and watching videos). Moreover, this phase also includes pooling information, in other words, organizing ideas through using charts, columns, flowcharts, etc. Other steps included in this stage are revising generic and language structure referring to the model text, and jointly constructing the text. The latter includes asking questions and suggesting ideas about the structure of the text. Finally, the teacher must assess the students' progress by noticing which learners need further modeling or which learners can work independently. This stage is rather flexible and allows the learners to work in groups.

The third and last phase is the independent construction of a text. Learners have to choose their topics with the guidance of their teacher, then they have to write their own drafts, consult with their teacher or peers to receive feedback. Finally, if they want to, they can edit and publish (on bulletin boards) their texts. In the teaching process of this approach, the teacher's role is not only that of a guide, a leader, and a supporter,

but also a facilitator rather than "a resource assisting the students when called upon" in the traditional approach (Cope and Kalantzis 1994, p.5). The genre-based approach process is illustrated graphically in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1. The GBA Teaching and Learning Cycle**



Adopted from Metropolitan East DSP: Language and Social Power Project

### The content

GBA offers both discourse structure information and linguistic feature information in putting across the content of a discourse or text. Different genres have different schematic structures and language features. These are shown in the table in the next page.

**Table 1. Different Types of Genres with schematic structures and language features**

Types of Genres	Purpose	Focus	Schematic structure	Language features
Narrative	to entertain or inform	stories or imaginary recounts	-orientation -initiating event -complication -resolution -moral(optional)	-specific participants -descriptive languages -temporal conjunctions -simple past tense -first or third person
Recount	to retell events	a sequence of events in chronological order	- orientation -chronological sequence of event -re-orientation/ comment	-specific participants -temporal conjunctions -action verb -simple past tense -first or third person
Procedure	to describe the steps involved in something	events in sequence	-goal or aim -materials -steps -evaluation	-imperatives -temporal conjunctions -timeless present tense -subject-specific vocabulary
Report	to classify or describe how things are	factual information	-general classification -factual information -summary	-generalized participants -third person -impersonal language -timeless present tense
Explanation	to explain why something is the way it is	general explanations of how or why things happen	-definition of a phenomenon -sequenced explanation	-general participants -causal conjunctions -temporal conjunctions
Argument	to present a logical argument from a particular point of view	logical reasoning	-thesis -argument -conclusion	--mental verbs -temporal conjunctions -causal conjunctions -modality
Description	to describe a particular person, place or thing	a particular thing	-general classification -details	-specific participants -present tense -relational verbs -action verbs

Source: Adopted from "ESL Companions: English as a Second Language. A2, B2 and B3)

Rothery and Martin (1981) point out that one of the clearest ways in which genres vary is in the "distinctive beginning-middle-end structure of texts in each genre" (p. 11) which influences choices of content and style. "Narrative," for example, starts its schematic structure with orientation. It is followed by a series of complication and resolution (Derewianka 1990, p. 40). On the other hand, the discourse structure of the genre "instruction" includes goal, materials, and methods (p. 27).

Moreover, Freedman (1993) claims that GBA offers "very fixed patterns or language features of texts" (in Caudery 1998, p. 3). Every genre has limitation of language use such as participants, types of verbs, use of tense, and time clues. While

"narrative" uses specific participants (Derewianka 1990, p. 40), "report" uses generalized participants (p. 53). Material verbs (action verbs) with past tense are mostly used in "narrative" writing (p. 40) but relational verbs (verb to be or verb to have) with simple present tense (p. 53) are seen in "report." The linking words which have to do with time in "narrative" shows the sequence and specific time clues (p. 40) whereas "report" uses detailed description of participants (color, shape, size) and detailed information on how (with a knife or carefully), where (1 inch from the top) and when (after you fold the paper into two) is used (p. 53).

The genre theorists, therefore, believe that if learners know how a language "functions in the society," they can "construct their own texts and participate effectively in the life of the community." (Bradford 1992, p. 19)

#### **2.1.4. Advantages and disadvantages of GBA**

In Language Education in Australia, the influence of this genre approach is remarkable due to some advantages underlying the approach. The first advantage for this approach is that it contextualises teaching of syntactic forms towards meaning and function. Unlike the traditional grammar that starts with words as parts of speech, this genre approach "gets further than dissecting clauses and sentences." Sentences and clause are only performed "in order to explain the workings of the whole text and how it realizes its social purpose" (Cope and Kalantzis 1994, p.10). Moreover, Martin and Rothery (1994) cite that "looked at from language, the different types of meaning organize the grammar and semantics of language into what Halliday calls metafunctions." (p.144)



Hammond (1986, p. 75) exemplifies the approach through a narrative written by Silvana, a year 3 NESB student in 1985;

"A Scary Story"

line 1      Once, there was a house on top of a hill. It was old and ugly. There were  
old flowers in the garden.  
One day, a ghost came in the old and ugly house. The ghost haunted the  
house. I told my friends that I would go in the house. Then one of my  
line 5      friends said that she wanted to go too. When it was dark, me and my friend  
went there. We could not find a place to get in. We found an open window and  
we went in. My friend was scared. A ghost was behind us. The ghost said,  
"Don't be afraid. I won't hurt you." The ghost was hungry. I asked him to  
line 9      come for lunch at our house. The ghost said yes and he had lunch at our house.

From the above narrative genre, if we look at the clause level, "different types of processes" (Derewianka 1990, p. 43) can be seen in one genre. In line 1, "was" and "were" are "verbs to be" but they indicate that something exists, so they are functioning as "existential verbs" while "was" in line 6 functions as "relational verb" linking or relating the first clause to another. The verbs "haunted" (line 3), "go" (line 4) and "had" (line 9) are "action verbs" which describe the behavior. And they indicate what is happening in the world, so they are functioning as "material verbs." However, the verb "found" (line 6) is showing how a person perceives and interprets through the senses, so it is a "verb of perception" and is functioning as a "mental verb." And "wanted" is also another "mental verb" showing how human feels or desires to do something through the senses, so it is a "verb of feeling." The verbs "told" (line 3), "said" (line 4), and "asked" (line 8) are all related to the talking, so they function as "verbal verbs." Thus, in this way, through the genre-based approach, the learners are able to use, not only the parts of speech, but also to use the clauses in a meaningful and functional way.

Furthermore, another advantage of this approach to teaching writing is that it limits linguistic demands on writers. Learners can simply follow "very fixed patterns

or language features of texts" (Freedman in Caudery 1998, p. 3) as well as its "schematic structure- a distance beginning, middle, and end" (Christie 1984b, p. 270) and build their own texts on it. Following the fixed language content of each genre, it may result in controlling learners' errors in their writing. Knowing the limitation of linguistic structure and feature of each genre, learners can more appropriately construct their own texts on that and avoid making errors as much as possible.

This approach also offers students free choices to write their own texts. Knowing how to write a range of genres, they may choose the genre they like for one theme. It is obvious in Hammond's (1986, p.75) aforementioned study with Silvana. For the theme "ghost," she chose to write a narrative genre when she was in a creative mood. And two days after, for the same theme, she selected to write a report genre in a scientific way. She named her topics as she likes such as "A Scary Story" for narrative and "Ghosts" for "report." Along this line, Donald Graves and others (1983) argue that it is essential to let students choose their own topics (in Cope and Klantzis, 1994). In addition, for one genre, learners can choose the types, which they prefer to write. For instance, for one genre "recount", learners can write "personal recount," "factual recount" or "imaginative recount". (Derewianka 1990, p. 15). Even in one type of recount, they can also choose different styles such as "formal written paragraph" or "letter with oral anecdote" or "diary entry." (p. 15)

For this reason, some participants from a workshop led by Kay and Dudley-Evans (1998) have felt that the GBA is "particularly suitable for young ESL or EFL learners with beginner or intermediate level." Learners "need to learn the rules before they can transcend them" at those levels. In this way, they become confident and secure and are able "to produce the texts that serve the intended purpose." In the long

run, after being aware of different types of genres for some time, their creativity in their own texts enable them to become successful writers. Thus, Kay and Dudley-Evans (1998) argue that GBA provides "a useful framework for teachers and students" (p. 310).

Some authors like Knapp and Watkins (1994) believe that the genre approach helps learners categorize the social processes that are realized through the use of language. And they broaden the application of the commonly used concept of the term "genre," not only as an end product, but also as the process that produces the end product -- "a dynamic interaction of social participants and appropriate generic resources" (Knapp and Watkins 1994, p. 20). They also claim that this approach enables the teaching and learning of language "to be a dynamic social process that encourages the development of creative and independent writers" (p.20). It means that learners realize social processes such as describing, explaining and arguing rather than the particular final product "genre" such as report, explanation and argument.

Moreover, they also point out that seeing genres as processes rather than products provides three advantages. The first advantage is that during the process, the learners come to realize their purpose of communication in writing their texts rather than reproduce "rule-governed formats." For example, during the process of "reporting," learners realize that their purpose of communication is to inform the readers about living things as well as non-living things. This leads to the criticism that "teaching genres simply reduces writing texts to replicating formulas" (p. 21).

The second advantage according to Knapp and Walkins (1994) is that realizing genres as processes rather than products enables the learners to apply their knowledge of using generic features (structure and grammar) for different genres from infants to

senior secondary. This allows a developmental approach to teaching that enables the writers to build on and develop from what they already know about each of the genres. In the primary level, learners learn genres that are relatively simple and straightforward.

However, in the advanced level, they are expected to produce texts that include more than one genre. For example, a topic like "A Visit to the Zoo" includes three genres: personal recount, report and explanation. Seeing genres as processes, learners will not have any problems producing those multigeneric texts in their later age, as they have been aware of all the different processes (generic and language features) of each genre in their young age. This is the third advantage of this approach that sees genres as processes rather than products (p. 21).

On the other hand, critics like Walshe (1985) and Sawyer and Watson have expressed their concern that explicit teaching about the schematic structure brings back "the 'bad old days' of grammar drills and teacher-directed topics." They have commented that this structure "will constrain the creativity and self-expression of children who are engaged in writing" (Walshe et al. in Hammond 1987, p. 175).

Moreover, Kay and Dudley-Evans (1998) reported that some workshop participants (see p. 20) fear that GBA can become restrictive and boring if the teachers can not create an enjoyable classroom environment. Students could also become demotivated. Critics are mostly concerned about the rigidity of formula-type teaching which could disempower rather than empower learners or writers. This contradicts the strong belief of the Australian genre practitioners that genres are "empowering and enabling, allowing writers to make sense of the world around them" (in Kay and Dudley-Evans 1998, p. 340).

Although there are strengths and weaknesses in every approach, in this particular GBA approach, one participant from Kay and Dudley-Evans' workshop suggested that the weak point of GBA, prescriptivism, can be avoided. He suggested that the genre teachers should collect data from various sources, put them together, put them in order and select them. This should be done collaboratively among teachers.

Moreover, the participants from that workshop also suggested that there are ways to liberate the concept of "genre," namely : (1) by ensuring the teachers not to consider that generic structures are prescriptive, but allowing for variations due to cultural and ideological factors; (2) by ensuring that the genre examples selected for teaching/learning purposes are authentic and suitable for learners; (3) by adopting a lesson procedure which facilitates interaction; (4) by contextualising a text-- considering its purpose, audience, institutional beliefs, values, linguistic features and so on; (5) by immersing students "in a wide variety of texts within a particular genre", and (6) by using GBA in conjunction with other methods, e.g. with the process approach.

Overall, as the GBA is a functional approach to language, it stresses how meanings are made in conjunction with other people, that is, in communicating with other people in a written text and participating in it. Moreover, as the meaning is found within a written text as a whole, this approach describes how language operates at the text level, not at the level of individual words and sentences in isolation (Derewianka 1994). Nowadays, as the focus of language teaching and learning has shifted to communicative purposes, this approach provides for real language used by people to meet their needs in real situations. In other words, this approach is a kind of

communicative approach which enables people to use the language as a tool to communicate with members of society in order to participate in it.

#### **2.1.5. GBA resemblance with four current theoretical approaches**

GBA shares some similarities with four current theoretical approaches to the teaching of English writing suggested by Ann Johns (1990). An overlapping of these approaches might be discerned but their theoretical discussion is helpful in understanding the nature of GBA.

The first approach is the expressive approach which regards writing as "an art, with the focus on the individual discovery of the true self" (Reid 1993, p. 21). In this approach, the role of a teacher is non-directive but a facilitator who designs the classroom act "to promote writing fluency and empower the students" (p. 21).

The second approach, known as the cognitive approach, sees writing as a "thinking and problem-solving process" applied to EAP and ESP. In this approach, it is "fundamental" for the learners to develop their image of the audience, the situation, and their own goals (the purpose) (p. 22).

Another approach is the interactive approach that shares the responsibility for "coherent communication" between the reader and the writer. To be able to communicate appropriately, the writer organizes the discourse to accommodate the reader who attempts to look for "cohesion" and "the direct explanation of information" (p. 22).

The last, the social constructionist approach, views writing as "essentially a social act in a specific context" (Coe in Reids 1993, p. 22). Learners write in a

communicative way demanded by the goals and expectations of different discourse communities.

GBA is an approach in which the teacher plays his/her role as a facilitator to make learners aware of their purposes of writing, their situations in a particular discourse community, their linguistic knowledge of each text and empower them to communicate successfully with their audience through their own texts. The significance of GBA is therefore in the fact that it resembles some characteristics of each of the four current theoretical approaches in teaching writing discussed.

## **2.2. Personal recount**

### **2.2.1. Personal recount writing in Myanmar**

The following review of literature is partially from the discussion and interview with two Myanmar lecturers: one is U Thet Lwin, a lecturer from Myanmar Department in Chiangmai University with fifteen years' teaching experience, and the other is U Aung Thinn, a retired lecturer from Myanmar Department in Yangon University, with over forty years' teaching experience, who is an author of books and articles on Myanmar rhetorical writings.

Myanmar students consider that real life events are the appropriate content for a personal recount (retelling personal experience). Therefore, if learners/ writers think they have no actual experience related to the topic, they do not pretend to have had that experience. They do not create it to entertain the reader unless it is an imaginative topic such as "If I won the lottery" and "If I were a tree." Therefore, to avoid that kind of problem, the personal recount essay, which is assigned for the examination, must always be a real life experience expressed in a general way. The topics for the writing

might be something like "The person I can never forget "or "The happiest day in my life."

Retelling past experience is one of the four different rhetorical writing techniques in L1 taught when Myanmar learners come to the last year of the middle school level (grade 8). In that grade, they are introduced into the use of figures of speech such as metaphor, simile, exaggeration, repetition, personification, alliteration, and irony. By studying such expressions, learners are expected to use them in any paragraph writing in the high school level. Moreover, using these expressions is an essential part of marking or scoring the writing, too.

From grade 8 and onward, students are taught how to write formal essays that include three main components: introduction, body and conclusion. The body is the most important part and its content varies according to different kinds of essays. Regarding retelling past experiences, the body must consist of detailed and specific information, e.g., who, whom, when, where, why and how.

Even though learners are assigned to write their actual experiences in their retelling experiences, they can include the other three rhetorical writings too. For example, in an essay topic such as "The unforgettable primary school life," a student can start writing in the introduction, explaining how many levels of student life he has passed. In the body, he can explain how happy he was to be a primary school student then, and describe the pleasant setting of a primary school classroom. Next, he can mention the reason for making him prefer primary school life to middle and high school life. Finally, in the conclusion, he can write his personal comment.

In the examination, whether a piece of writing is successful or not, depends on the checklist set by the Myanmar board. The items on the checklist are: relevance to



the topic, good organization, correct use of mechanics (punctuation and spelling) and cohesive devices, appropriate use of vocabulary, correct use of grammar, original ideas, use of figures of speech, quotations, famous sayings and whether or not the whole paragraph/text is entertaining (Myanmarsar board 1993).

Although Myanmar learners are not made to write about their experiences in their Myanmar (Burmese) until they come to Grade 8, the last year of middle school level, Aung Thinn (1995) argues that it is "natural that every student can easily write on topics which are related to his/her interest and personal experience" (p.11).

Thinn (2000) proves this with a written text "The Little Egrets I Caught" of Pyi, a Grade 5 boy from his study with his older sister (2000, pp. 11-12). They have a big backyard in which big trees and bamboo plants grow. The egrets are nesting in those plants. They are used to catching and picking up the little egrets falling from the nests. When they were assigned to write a topic, the littlest egrets came into their thoughts and they chose their free topics on "Little Egrets."

While the older sister titled her topic as "My Lovely Little Egret", the boy chose as his topic "The Little Egrets I Caught." And he managed to embed the other three rhetorical writings in his written text. However, in his text, he tended to recall his experiences with the egrets most of the time. Therefore, his text is generally regarded as retelling his past experience. And that study has made the author see the boy's capability of successful writing and Thinn (2000) remarks that his writing is "far better than I expected" (p. 10).

In the boy's recount written text (in Thinn 2000, pp. 11-12), Thinn states that the boy introduces his topic by explaining where the egrets' nests exist, how they (he and his sister) pick up the little egrets, and what usually happens to the little egrets. In the

second paragraph, he describes in detail what the little egrets are like (the size and the color). In the third paragraph, he continues describing how with difficulties he catches the egrets. In the fourth paragraph, he states the events in chronological order by explaining one of his adventures of catching them. He includes the accident and the results of it. In the same paragraph, he expresses his emotion that however painful he felt, he tried to hide his pain because of his admiration for the egrets.

In the fifth and sixth paragraphs, he explains his other adventures of catching egrets by arranging the sequences of the events into chronological order. He inserts his feeling towards egrets, the habits of egrets, and the dangers he has experienced in catching egrets in those paragraphs. He presents the detailed information on the habits of egrets (what they eat what they prefer to eat, how they peck each other, how they ask for food and how they fight against each other to get food).

In the last paragraph, he concludes that egrets are smart and clever animals, and expressed how much he loves them and they love him. He ends his writing with his strong commitment that he would take care of the egrets forever.

From the boy's personal recount writing, Thinn (1995) strongly recommends that when a person relates the topic to his real experience and interest, he has become "motivated and starts to write immediately" (1995, p. 11) irrespective of the class levels or exposure of that particular kind of writing. He compares a teacher's role with that of a midwife who enables the child to come out of its mother's womb smoothly (2000, p. 12). In other words, a teacher is a person who is able to draw the potential out of his/her students' (p. 12) by facilitating their writing in the learning process.

### 2.2.2. Personal recount writing in GBA

This section discusses personal recount, including its purpose, its text organization and focus, its schematic structure and language features, and its evaluation by the teacher.

Students from literate societies are aware of genres such as description, report and narrative in written language even before they enter school. They learn those genres in the home and community through listening to stories read to them such as storybooks and pet books, and later by reading them.

Parkes (1986) studied and adopted the short text of John, a five-year-old boy, a native speaker of English, to illustrate a very young child's familiarity or awareness of the recount genre. Parkes quotes John's writing as:

MY DaD  
 SaID He  
 WOOD BYe  
 Me a Kam  
 Peutr Gam  
 on the HaLLaDays  
 I wN DOOr  
 Wn He IS (Parkes 1986, p. 12)

John seems to mean in his writing "My Dad said he would buy me a computer game on the holidays. I wonder when he is." This short text seems to fall into a type of recount writing, or a diary entry. He started with recalling his past experience of his father's promise (stating who was involved in the event, and what happened). In this 'sentence,' John expresses his feeling of uncertainty towards his father's promise (personal comment or feeling).

As John's father usually comes home very late at night, John wrote a short note to his mother to remind his father about his promise to buy him a computer game. Parkes

found that John's writing shows "a growing awareness of how written language is organized and his invented spellings show considerable insights into how words are formed" (p. 14). It also shows that native English-speaking children are familiar with "personal recount" genre in written language before they start school.

When they come to study in the junior primary level, it is believed that the two genres, recount and report, are the easiest to start with for individual writers while narrative writing is done as group work. Moreover, Christie and Rothery (1990) found that in many primary schools, children tended to write only simple reconstruction of personal experience. Cope and Kalantzis support this observation thus: "children's first writings are usually recounts" (in Cope and Kalantzis 1994, p. 10).

In discourse analysis, Longacre (1971) establishes four categories or genre of discourse and believes that recount is a kind of narrative (p. 10) while GBA sees recount is different from narrative in terms of social function and language content (Derewianka, 1993). In GBA, both narrative and recount have independent roles having their own characteristics (discourse structure and language features) (see p. 19).

As stated before (see p. 22 ), there are three types of recount genre, namely, personal recount, factual recount, and imaginative recount (p. 15). They are slightly different from each other, in terms of purpose and language features (see Table 2, p. 34).

There are different styles of writing even in a personal recount. A student can write in a formal way about his own experience which happened in the past, or he can also write a letter to his parents about the previous week or he can write a diary entry about what he did this morning (Derewianka 1990, p. 17).

**Table 2. Language Features of Three Types of Recount**

	Personal Recount	Factual Recount	Imaginative Recount
Purpose	-retell an activity that the writer personally involved	-to record the particulars an incident	-to take an imaginary role and give details of events
Schematic structure			
Orientation	←-----what/when/where/who/whom-----→ (detailed information)-		
Events	←-----chronological sequence-----→		
Re-orientation	personal comment	outcome of activity	personal reaction
Language features			
Participants	1 <sup>st</sup> person prn (I, We)	3 <sup>rd</sup> person prn (he, she, it)	1st person prn (I,We)
Verbs	←-----Action verbs-----→		
Tense	←-----Simple past tense-----→		
Vocabulary	←-----detailed information-----→		

Adopted from "Exploring How Texts Work" ( Derewiaka, 1993)

According to the frame of the language structure and language content of personal recount writing along with the instruction of the teaching process, learners are encouraged to write their own experiences.

In GBA, before commencing to assess a student's writing skill, the teacher is responsible for explaining the purpose, the audience, the topic, and the setting. Then the assessment of the learners' writing can be done by using the Writing Profile Sheet as a guide, Hood and Solomon (1988) suggest.

From that Writing Profile Sheet, how learners construct their texts can generally be judged by looking for some items. They are organization of ideas. cohesion,

sentence structure, number, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation (Hood and Solomon 1988, pp. 28-29).

### **2.3. Meaningful content**

Three subsections are discussed in this section, namely: different definitions of content in a written text, the items involved in meaningful content, and recognition of meaningful content in a personal recount.

#### **2.3.1. The definition of content**

Different theorists or researchers have given different definitions on the term "content" in a written text. Harris (1969) claimed that "content" is one of the five general components in written text and it means "the substance of the writing; the ideas expressed" (Harris 1969, p. 68). However, in the 1980s, a group of theorists, Zingtraf et al. (1981) mentioned in the "ESL Composition Profile" that the "content" in a written text could be recognized by looking at whether there is a knowledgeable, substantive development of the thesis, and whether it is relevant to the assigned topic (in Reid, 1993).

Jacob et al. (1987) look at "content" in a written text to include "organization, relevance to the topic, creativity or interest, range and sophistication of syntax and richness of vocabulary and expression" (in Henning 1987, p. 33). Later, Weir (1993) pointed out that "organization, cohesion, adequacy of vocabulary for purposes, grammar, spelling, appropriateness of language to content and function intended, and appropriate use of layout" must be taken into account when assessing writing content (Weir 1993, p. 136).

The different views of "content" discussed in the preceding section show that "content" includes items such as organization, cohesion and coherence, grammar, mechanics (punctuation and spelling), creativity, adequate and appropriate vocabulary, or expression and appropriate sentence structure for the writing purposes.

### **2.3.2. The definition of meaningful content**

In daily life, people communicate with each other through the use of language in spoken or written form. Therefore, the focus of both speaking and writing should be "on the meaning" people want to communicate (Cope and Kalantzis 1994, p. 5). Halliday (1975) employed the term "how to mean" in learning writing in a language based on the very early language development in children and the relevance of an understanding of this process for linguistic theory (in Christie, 1999).

Several educators suggest that more attention should be given to content rather than to form. Garner (1982) is concerned with teacher feedback as well as instruction. He believes that second language teachers should not concentrate too much on correcting surface structure errors, but should give positive feedback to the communication and the message aspects. He expects that in this way, the learners can gain enough knowledge and interest to learn and to improve their writing (Garner in Girolamo 1999, p. 8).

Lock (1983) agrees with that view and adds that teachers' main considerations should be with meaning and effective communication in giving their feedback about learners' writing. Lock and Elliot (1984) also emphasized that when teachers look at L2 writing, meaning and communication must be considered as the most important perspectives (in Girolamo 1999, p. 8). Based on the meaning of "content" and the focus of writing, the term "meaningful content" would therefore refer to the content

that has communicative meaning between the writer and the reader. However, Klassen (1991) poses the question: "Which items of content must be sorted out for the purpose of communication has come into consideration?" He suggests that those global errors such as grammar (word order), cohesive devices (incorrect connectives) must be considered as a priority for correction because they hinder communication. Local errors, such as mechanics (punctuation, spelling) and grammar (tense, articles, auxiliaries), do not hinder communication significantly (Klassen in Kral 1995, p. 134). Consequently, their correction is of lower priority.

This means that the meaningful content items must include organization (layout of the text), cohesion (use of appropriate conjunction, referent), coherence (relevance to the topic), syntax (word order), creativity (originality of ideas), as well as adequacy and appropriateness of vocabulary (verb, participants, details).

### **2.3.3. The items of meaningful content in personal recount writing**

As discussed in the previous section, the meaningful content in personal recount consists of six elements. The first one, organization includes the schematic structure of personal recount such as orientation (who was involved, what happened, when and where it happened, how or why it happened), events (sequences into chronological order), and personal recount or re-orientation. Appropriate and adequate choice of vocabulary must include use of first person pronoun and some specific participants. The use of material (action) verbs and use of detailed information must be considered under that item too.

Although the use of past tense is the significant feature of personal recount, for the purpose of communication, it is left out and only word order is taken into account. Under cohesion, such sub-items as conjunction or connective and referent are



considered. Coherence means whether all the sentences used in the text are relevant to the topic or not. The last item, creativity in personal recount writing, the teacher or evaluator should assess if the writer is writing the text from his/her own experience.

These items can be used as a checklist to assess whether a personal recount text consists of meaningful content or not.

#### 2.4. Related research study on personal recount

Using the GBA in writing enables learners to enter a particular discourse community and discover how writers organize texts. This, in turn, gives the confidence which enables them to produce a text that serves its intended purpose (Kay and Dudley-Evans, 1998).

Four research studies investigated whether the writers are capable of writing with meaningful content or not in (two English speakers and two non-native speakers), which are related to personal recount writing.

Christie (1998) studied the writing of Lucy, a year 1 native speaker of English (NS) student and found out that she was able to write with meaningful content in her text despite local errors, such as misspelled words, repeated cohesive devices and faulty punctuation. Christie found that Lucy's communication was not hindered significantly by these mistakes (Klassen in Kral 1995, p. 134). Christie exemplified Lucy's writing as follows:

Anakie Gorge

Orientation-----→ On Wednesday we went to Anakie Gorge

Event (1)----- → and we went past Fairy Park

(2)-----→ and we walked halfway

(3)-----→ and we found a koala

(4)-----→ and then we got to the picnic area

(5)-----→ and we saw another koala

(6)-----→ and then we clim[b]ed up the mountain



that there were no evaluative meanings scattered through the event stage. Therefore, Rothery concludes that the lack of evaluative meaning makes this writing convey 'flat matter of fact' impression to the reader (p. 263).

Moreover, Rothery also found that although the writer (the boy) had been aware of writing genres for more than six years and had known the differences between the spoken and written language, in his text, he uses "and" in joining clauses and uses "Then" to join sentences. He exhibits feature characteristics of the spoken mode. In addition, this text did not show the relationship created between the two main characters (why they fought). Likewise, neither reorientation nor his personal comment is shown in the end. Therefore, this text is not as fully communicative as Lucy's text. Rothery (1992) thinks that the writer is "in need of much more assistance" (p.267). He added that the writer is "poorly equipped" to meet the writing demands (p.267).

Oller (1992) did research on a written text done in a personal recount style from a beginning student of ESL at Southern Illinois University and compared it with the rewritten text as follows:

I have a car. I go to stret and an other car he's titesh me. I call to the Police man he's cam in. He's gav to the another ticet becuas he's titesh me.

Rewritten Text

I have a car. I was backing into the street and another car hit me. I called the police. They came. They gave a ticket to the other man because he hit me. (Oller 1992, p. 390)

Although there are errors in spelling and tense, and there are no cohesive devices used to connect sentences in the above text, the reader can figure out the intended meaning. However, if the errors involve misuse of verbs ("go" for "back" and "titesh" for "hit"), misuse of expression ("go to street" for "backing into the

street") and misuse of pronoun ("he" for "They"), the message is not clearly conveyed in the text. Without seeing the rewritten text, the reader cannot grasp what the writer wants to mean or the intended meaning of the text, Oller explained.

Another sample of an ESL student's written text studied by Reuter (1999) shows the writer's capability in writing communicatively.

One day on a tram. The tram traveled to city many people on tram. Suddenly the old woman goes in the tram and she's standing and holds on the handle. The boy see her and said to get on his set. After that he stands but he is very small. He can't hold on the handle. So the old woman told his to set on her leg.

Reconstructed Text

One day, I was on a tram. Many people travelled to the city on this tram. Suddenly, I saw an old woman got on the tram and stood holding the handle. A boy saw her and asked to take his seat. After that, he stood but he was too short to hold the handle. So the old woman told him to sit on her lap.

The writer is trying to tell his experience --what he saw on a tram-- but he failed to mention himself, using the first person pronoun "I". There are some surface structure errors in using articles ("the" for "a"), tense ("present tense" for "past tense"), spelling ("his" for "him"), vocabulary ("set" for "seat" and "leg" for "lap"), and expression ("goes in" for "get on"). However, the reader can understand the writer's intended meaning, so Reuter (1999) admits that this text has meaning and is, therefore, "still communicative."

From these four personal written texts (two NSs' written texts and two NNs' written texts), Garner (1982) believes (in Girolamo 1999, p. 4) that "problems with cohesion are some of the main errors of the L2 writer, as well as misuse of pronouns and tenses". However, Gass and Magnan (1993) pointed out that "even the errors made at sentence level are similar in all writers" (in Girolamo 1999, p. 4). These texts

also show that those surface structure errors or local errors do not hinder communication nor affect the meaning of the text very much.

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