Genre Analysis in ESP Curriculum Design:
Meeting the Language Needs of a Migrant Micronesian Population

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I. Introduction

In January 2012, two other researchers and I began volunteering at a homeless shelter in Honolulu, Hawaii, with the initial intent of providing an ESL class to the residents. Only three things were known before volunteering at the shelter: (1) the clients would be adults, (2) they would be recent immigrants predominantly from Micronesia, and (3) the shelter had requested that "life skills" be the content behind the English program that we were suddenly going to run. Without an established curriculum, we entered the shelter with the understanding that we were going to have to develop a language program from scratch. From those humble beginnings, overwhelmed, we began what was to become a 6-month adventure into needs analysis, ESP theory, and a set of experiences that changed our lives as English teachers.

Our time at the shelter, mostly spent working with the students in the English class, was documented in a study that we co-authored (Barbee, Escalona, & Holdway, 2012). The purpose of that study was to investigate the situational and linguistic needs of a prospective English program to be offered to adult English language learners at the homeless shelter in Hawaii. After exploring the socio-political factors that affected migrant populations, the needs of adult language learners, and current ESP theory, we designed a needs analysis that utilized time, methodological, investigator, and data triangulation.

The culmination of the study was the development of a needs analysis, as well as the creation of course objectives, materials, and a teachers' manual, with the project's framework centered around theories of pedagogy, more specifically in relation to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and adult ESL learners. The

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study is unique within the field of language learning and teaching as it is situated outside an academic context and directly involves the educational needs of a population rarely addressed in applied linguistics literature. This article is an attempt to bridge the needs analysis done in that first study with pedagogy that addresses the need for genre theory and critical pedagogy in designing curriculum for migrant populations.   An example lesson plan will be presented as a snapshot into what such a curriculum would look like—one that is informed by an extensive needs analysis, critical pedagogy, and genre theory.

II. Context of the Program

In 2009, the foreign-born represented 17.3 percent of Hawaii's total population (Migrant Policy Institute, 2009). This situation was heightened by the Compact of Free Association, which made residents of Micronesia eligible to enter the United States without a visa or time limit.   The three main reasons for migration are improved health care, education, and employment opportunities; however, after arrival there is often the inability to find work, the most prevalent reason being English language challenges (Barbee et al., 2012).   As a result, there are a number of Micronesian migrants in Honolulu's homeless shelters in need of language education, the focus being English for specific purposes, or ESP (Barbee et al., 2012; Hezel & Samuel, 2006; "Status of Micronesian Migrants," 2003).

III. Literature Review

In the case of our ESP class, the specific purpose for the students was not only needing to learn English to acquire the linguistic tools needed daily to survive and live in Hawaii, "life skills," but also as teachers our goal was to empower them to be able to discern their own linguistic needs for themselves and act on that knowledge.   Belcher (2006) states that ESP "assumes there are problems, or lacks, that education can ameliorate" and that "the problems are unique to specific learners in specific contexts" (p. 135).   In alignment with Belcher, the ESP program that was designed focused on a specific population of learners, adult Micronesian immigrants, who, because of having newly arrived in the U. S. share certain needs, linguistic and otherwise, that are specific to them and their new home, Hawaii.   Because the linguistic needs of the learners are absolutely necessary for survival in a country that does not share the students' first language (L1), English education that focuses on "life skills" is rightly a critical need and thus was a priority for the shelter to provide the residents with such a service. The critical nature of English for "life skills" provides the theoretical framework behind the inclusion of genre theory in the curriculum design process (Belcher, 2006).

Genre theory deals with how communicative events contextualize the target language (Hyon, 1996) and inspects the different directions of influence those events have on a particular population. This population can include the surrounding social environment of the learner, the sets of communication from institutions or occupations, and the purposeful communicative and activity systems (Belcher, 2006). Swales (1990) defines genre as "a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community" (p. 58). Whether expert or not, this community, Hyland (2007) says, has "little difficulty recognizing similarities in the texts they use frequently and are able to draw on their repeated experiences with such texts to read, understand, and perhaps write them relatively easily" (p. 149.) In short, genre theory involves allowing students access to a certain genre of writing or discourse so that they can make their own discoveries and invest in the own understanding of that certain genre. The lesson plan that I present in this paper, for example, involves the job application form genre. While some may argue that job applications do not a genre make, it does, however, meet Swales' (1990) definition. Picture an image of a job application. If we were to share with each other the images that came to us, it is most likely that we would have the same image, and what is more those images would have the same perceived purpose—the purpose being the standardization of the job application process so that every applicant for a specific job would have the chance to supply the same information as everyone else applying for the same job. It is this shared interpretation that makes a job application a genre like any other. For every job application, especially for entry-level work, applications share similar macrostructures, e.g., sections for biographical data, work history, educational history, availably, signature line, etc. Even the vocabulary and minute nuances can be similar, e.g., D.O.B., So. Sec. No., etc.

However, before focus can be turned to the job application lesson plan itself, it is important to understand the specific needs of the students. Here, I present an overview of how the objective and subjective linguistic needs of the community were assessed. First, as predetermined by the shelter, the focus of the new ESP program was to be "life skills" English. Without a clear understanding as to what linguistic "skills" the students already had and needed, a needs analysis was designed around the primary stakeholders at the shelter: the teachers, the staff, and the students. To elicit information from the teachers, a questionnaire was developed; for the students, a lesson was given that had them write or speak personal narratives about their life in Hawaii before and while living at the shelter (Barbee et al., 2012).

From the teachers and staff members' perspective, we cited the major themes found while analyzing the data gathered by the questionnaires; the following list (Table 1) of students' objective linguistic needs was developed.

Table 1

Objective Linguistic Needs in an English for "Life Skills" Program in Hawaii

- Finding employment (highest frequency of those surveyed) and related skills:
    Reading job advertisements
    Filling out applications
    Understanding questions in an job interview
- Acquiring housing and related skills:
    Budgeting
    Paying bills
- Meeting social, community, and legal responsibilities
- Communicating health and physical needs
- Being aware of social services related to welfare and healthcare
- Accessing higher education
- Being involved with their children's education

Note: This chart was adapted from Barbee et al. (2012)

Moreover, we also wanted to know the subjective needs of the students by examining their self-reported narratives. The results from the students' portion of the needs analysis are as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Subjective Linguistic Needs in an English for "Life Skills" Program in Hawaii

Reasons for learning English	• to apply for and get a job
	• to speak with the case manager
	• to speak English without needing an interpreter
	• to expand vocabulary
Reasons for living in Hawai'i	• for children's education
	• to find a better job
	• Hawaii is bigger and wealthier than Micronesia
Expected duration of stay in Hawaii	• for an indefinite amount of time (most students answered either "forever" or "for a long time"

Note: This chart was adapted from Barbee et al. (2012)

Both the subjective and objective linguistic needs, as well as situational concerns, were also considered when designing the curriculum. Table 3 represents the functional/situational syllabus that resulted from the totality of the needs analysis conducted at the shelter, including data from the teachers/staff members, students, and other stakeholders invested in the betterment and education of the target group, the students.

Table 3

Syllabus Design and Objectives for an Adult ESP Curriculum

Functional/Situational Category	Learning Outcome
Greetings and Introductions	1.1 Exchange greetings and basic personal information (e.g., name, place of origin, age) with others in different settings, such as encounters in the classroom, at the store, or at the workplace through role-playing
Forms and Documents	2.1 Complete essential forms by filling in name, address, telephone number(s), birth date, family information, place of origin, and language spoken at home, on a sample form
Personal Information	3.1 Communicate information about family, occupation, hobbies, skills, etc., through conversations with peers and the teacher
Directions	4.1 Read a local map of the area (e.g., Honolulu) by identifying street names including their corresponding abbreviations (e.g., St.=Street)
	4.2 Read a local map of the area (e.g., Honolulu) using cardinal directions (e.g., N King St., S King St.)
	4.3 Use the appropriate prepositional adverbs (e.g., on the corner of, in the front of, beside) in giving directions
	4.4 Use question words, "where" and "how" in asking for directions
Events and Scheduling	5.1 Read a clock to tell the time by transcribing time from an analog clock to its digital form
	5.2 Identify days, months, and years using a Western calendar
	5.3 Make appointments for a certain time and date by inserting them into a Western calendar
	5.4 Use frequency vocabulary when discussing daily/weekly routine (e.g., never, sometimes, often, always, daily, twice a day/week)
	5.5 Write daily/weekly schedules including the name, day, time, and the frequency of an event.
Shopping	6.1 Describe items as they become relevant in a clerk-costumer interaction through role-playing (e.g., adjectives for describing objects, etc.)
	6.2 Identify the denomination and amount of U.S. currency
	6.3 Use appropriate vocabulary when asking for and giving the price of merchandise
	6.4 Use U.S. currency and the appropriate vocabulary to complete a transaction for clothing or other merchandise through role-playing
Phone Calls	7.1 Make a call identifying themselves and the purpose for the call
	7.2 Make a call to make an appointment (e.g., doctor's appointment) using vocabulary from objective 5.3
Finding a Job	8.1 Use a newspaper to identify potential jobs by identifying type of job, phone numbers, addresses, and/or emails
	8.2 Request information about job positions by requesting an application form or asking for more information
	8.3 Identify common feature of a job application.
	8.4 Complete a job application using personal information by filling out a sample.

Job Interviews	9.1 Answer possible questions in an interview setting by carrying out mock-interviews
	9.2 Identify the various steps in an interview process and the associated etiquette by organizing a mock-interview dialogue
Medical Needs	10.1 Answer questions based on previous medical records/experience/current medication
	10.2 Communicate physical needs or emotional needs associated with pain, discomfort, or other related issues by role-playing the relevant encounters
Computer Literacy Skills	11.1 Identify the basic components of a PC computer and its external hardware
	11.2 Use the basic functions of a word processing application such as MS Word (e.g., toolbars, spaces and indentations, etc.) by typing a brief narrative
	11.3 Navigate the internet using a online search engine to make basic searches for information
Setting up an Email Account	12.1 Set up a flee online email account
	12.2 Identify the different parts of an email webpage interface (e.g., Send button, To:/Subject: input bar/ Inbox button)
	12.3 Correspond using email (e.g. sending and receiving emails) with a specific audience or purpose in mind (e.g., professional versus casual correspondence)

Note: This chart was taken from Barbee et al. (2012)

For the purposes of this article, the situational category *finding a job* was selected as the content for the lesson plan (Table 3).   The specific learning outcomes chosen for this lesson plan were *8.3, Identify common feature of a job application* and *8.4, Complete a job application using personal information by filling out a sample form from an actual business.*   The lesson plan that was created can be seen below.

Lesson Plan	Date:

Job Applications

Lesson Name

"Life Skills" English
(90 min.)

The Context of the class: This ESP program was designed for an adult migrant population in the U.S. There are approximately 15 students in the class. A needs analysis shows that students are mainly interested in and need English for "life skills" and, more specifically, to communicate in their daily lives, to find housing, to find jobs, and in dealing with healthcare matters. The students are predominantly from Micronesia and have been identified as beginning to low-intermediate level learners. Most have high intrinsic motivation for the program and English. The teacher is a native English speaker.

Learning Objectives:

The students will:

- Identify common features of job applications.

- Fill-out a job application form using personal information.

- Use strategies, i.e., dictionary, context clues, etc., to determine the meanings of unknown vocabulary

Materials:

- Sets of blank job applications (enough for each group of 2/3)

Task	Time	Procedure
Warm-up: Personal Information Form Wall Race	15	• Before class, the teacher will have prepared several slips of paper with different bits of contact/biographical information, for example, phone number, name, street name, apartment number, married status, etc., about a fictional person. The teacher will tape these pieces of paper around the room. • Students will make pairs. Teacher will give each pair a handout with a common, information collection form on it. From the textbook, Life Skills and Test Prep 1, (Warren, 2007). • Using the slips of paper around the room, the pair must work together to fill the information into the matching fields on the information form. Either the pair may travel around the room with the form, or the form can be required to remain at a central location so that students have to use their memories to fill-out the form. • The first team to correctly fill out their form is congratulated.

Card Slapping Activity	15	• Before class, the teacher will have prepared sets of 12 cards each with a picture of a different job. • The students will form groups of two or three. Teacher will give each group a set of the cards. • Students will arrange the cards on their desk, facing up. • While the teacher says the name of a job, the students must slap and take the card that matches that job name. The student in each group who has collected the most cards at the end of the game is the winner in that group.
Introduction to Job Applications Identify common features of job applications and develop new vocabulary (applied genre analysis)	25	• Students make groups of three, while teacher passes out a set of 3 blank job applications (Sample Job applications were found online through a basic Google search) to each group. (Make sure each person in a group has a different application.) • Teacher will ask each group to look at the applications and compare them. Together, each will circle words or phrases or labels that are the same on all applications. Students will make a running list of these words. • Teacher will record some of the words from each group on the board, then the teacher will ask if students know the words. If students don't know the words, they must record them in their vocabulary diaries so that they can be looked up later. • With the list of common words on the board, the teacher will call on students to give their own information in relation to the word. For example, common words on a job application may include name, phone number, date of birth, Are you a citizen of the U.S.?, etc. Students will respond with this information and the teacher will write it on the board beside the corresponding word. This is repeated. • The above activity is repeated for the words that are not common to all the applications in each group. The students will draw boxes around these words, and a list will be made on the board again.
Identifying specific information from a completed job application	20	• Working from the textbook, Life Skills and Test Prep 2, p. 165 & 167 (Magy, 2007), students will be presented with completed job applications and be asked to identify specific information from the application and answer questions using that information.
Practical Extension Activity	15	• Students will be given real job applications (Job Applications were gathered from actual businesses. MacDonalds and Wal-mart applications were used) from popular companies in the area. Students will then work together in groups to fill-out the applications with their own information.

IV. Conclusion

As teachers, it should not be our aim to push a lesson onto a student or force-feed them learning. As teachers, we may sometimes be guilty of thinking, "Learn this, learn that, now this, that, and when you finish, there will be a test. Please mold yourself to my teaching style and don't get left behind." Instead, we should be in the business of teaching our students how to learn and how to find information on their own, autonomy. It isn't enough to put a job application, or any other communicative genre for that matter, into the hands of a student and teach it. Why not restructure the class around the student`s needs and allow them to explore the material, rather than maintaining a teacher-fronted environment? Above all, genre analysis teaches us that we do not have to reinvent the wheel. As teachers in the 21st century, we are fully capable of collecting our own corpora and allowing our students to experience learning from the ground up, not the top down. As with the lesson plan in this paper, genre analysis allows the teacher to ask, what is a job application and what is its communicative purpose, instead of telling the students what it is and telling them what it does, as if all job applications are exactly the same. Not only can this approach empower teachers, by "provid[ing] access to the patterns and possibilities of variations in valued texts" (Hyland, 2007, p. 150), but it also can empower our students as well. As for the students in the shelter, they found a sense of pride in being able to show us and their families their completed applications. At the end of the day, the applications that they had completed were not from a textbook, they were real, from the community, authentic.

One day, our students will find themselves outside of the classroom, on their own. The genre approach to curriculum design gives students the authentic tools they need to meet an unknown and often overwhelming world with their heads up.

V. Bibliography

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