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The co-construction of readership
and the teaching of EFL writing

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RIO DE JANEIRO

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DEPARTAMENTO DE LETRAS
Especialização em Língua Inglesa

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**Monografia apresentada ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras
da PUC-Rio como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de
Especialista em Letras.**

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*“We never just use language –
we are always using it
‘to do something’.”
(Eggins, 2004:75)*

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Abstract

In this study, I analyse the co-construction of the intended readership in texts produced by advanced EFL students preparing to sit a proficiency exam. As theoretical background, this research is grounded on Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Halliday & Matthiesen, 2004) and the Neo-Vygostkian approach (Mercer, 1994) to classroom pedagogy. Inspired by the sustainability principle of Exploratory Practice (Allwright & Hanks, 2009), data gathering included the use of a PEPA and aimed at helping students develop genre awareness (Devitt, 2004), which can give them the necessary autonomy to operationalize both known and unknown genres in written modes. A blend of the three main approaches to textual genres was applied: ESP and its sub-fields, New Rhetoric, and the Sydney School (Hyon, 1996), as aspects from all of them relate to my classroom context. The textual analysis conducted focused on one of Halliday's metafunctions, the interpersonal one, as the relationship between writer and readership was analysed through the use of modality.

Key words: Systemic Functional Linguistics, interpersonal metafunction, modality, Exploratory Practice, EFL writing, proficiency exam.

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1. Introduction

The research I present here is concerned especially with the teaching of writing skills in a foreign language, more specifically English (EFL). Much has been written on the acquisition of individual skills and the communicative competence as a whole, but Hedgecock (2005) tells us that, when compared to the number of studies on the other skills, the studies on Writing are still unfairly fewer and more recent. Although his account was made a decade ago, I still have not found evidence of the improvement of this disparity. Nonetheless, EFL writers have needs both as language learners and as novice writers that set them apart in term of linguistic, sociocultural and educational needs that still have to be addressed (ibid.).

I decided to approach the teaching of written genres in line with the Sydney School, which is concerned especially with *empowering* migrant students via written literacy to participate in Australian society (Hyon, 1996). This idea of empowering students to act upon their communities (or upon the communities they aspire to join) via written modes has had growing presence in my classes which aim at the development of written skills. Nonetheless, my ideological interest is not on geographically migrant students, but on social hierarchy and mobility: how students can use their written skills in English to reposition themselves in the community, or to secure the position they have already acquired, through better educational or professional opportunities.

My work here focuses on potentially empowering students with the tools to deal with known and unknown genres they may face in their everyday lives. This autonomy is especially important when teaching General English (as opposed to teaching English for Specific Purposes¹), as students should finish their studies equipped to deal with most communicative situations. Even though my students were getting prepared to sit an exam to achieve an advanced proficiency certificate, and therefore with a goal in mind more suitable to English for Academic Purposes, I believe the achievement of a proficiency certificate is mostly a milestone and the mastering of General English skills are still relevant. For that reason, I believe the solo study and memorization of genre structures

¹ Despite the apparent dichotomy, Rosinda Campos (personal communication, 2015) reminds us that General English and ESP are, in fact, two extremes in a continuum. This means that both General English and ESP courses can present elements from one another if it contributes to reaching teacher's and students' goal(s).

and conventions aiming at the exam is an incomplete approach as it does not prepare students to adapt to future circumstances.

My original puzzle relates to **an investigation of the co-construction of the readership in EFL writing classes**. By this I meant to analyse the construction, in collaboration with students, of the image of the target readers including these readers' expectations, writer-reader's relative positions in social hierarchy, and the course of action we want our readers to engage into. Then, finally I analyse if this collaborative construction creates some form of "critical awareness of how genres operate" (Devitt, 2004:194) that may lead students into the written genres and their conventions, eliminating thus the necessity for extensive study and memorization of formulaic genre conventions and structures.

For the present research I focused on the classes related to the production of texts within the genre known as *Proposa*². This genre was selected for this research as it is very complex due to a series of cultural expectations that are embedded in it – which means that the writer must have already mastered them prior to the writing event. I also considered a *Proposal* to be ideal for my research as I believe it to be the genre my students were least likely to have ever encountered before, so I could better observe the development of the genre awareness. A more detailed development of this can be seen in the next chapter, sessions 2.3 and 2.4, where I approach genres and their relevance of its teaching in the EFL classroom.

² In the present work genres will be presented with capitals as to avoid mistakes with similar terms used in the textual analysis.

2. Theoretical Background

In this chapter the theoretical framework of this research is outlined. The first part consists of an overview of Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth SFL), developed around Halliday's (2004) work and its perspective on the nature of the relationship between language and the community to which it belongs.

Secondly, I present the definition of genre within the SFL which has grounded my research and its relevance for communication. This definition is closely linked to the notions of *choice* and *predictability of content*.

Next I outline the pedagogic grounding from my practice, established mostly around Neo-Vygotskian studies. In this part I also present some of its key concepts: *the zone of proximal development*, *scaffolding* and *appropriation*.

Last, but not least, I present the three ways genres are dealt with within the EFL/ESL classroom. I also present the distinction between teaching for genre acquisition³ and teaching for genre awareness and the greater relevance of the latter for my research.

2.1. A Systemic Functional approach to language

The approach to language that grounds this study is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). This area of linguistic study originated from the works of Michael Halliday in the 1960's and is concerned with the development of a framework which is simultaneously descriptive and interpretive to view language as a "strategic, meaning-making resource" (Eggins, 2004:2). According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), by referring to 'language' they mean natural, human, adult, verbal language communication; as opposed to artificial communication such as mathematics and computer programming; as opposed to children's attempts at mastering their mother tongues and their uses; as opposed to music or dance. This does not attempt at undervaluing other forms of communication. Accordingly, the focus of SFL is on the examination of authentic products of social interaction, in any medium, considered in relation to the cultural

³ Acquisition here means the learning process as seen by sociocultural approaches developed from Vygotsky's work. For a deeper description of the process in relation to foreign/second languages, please refer to Lantolf and Thorne (2007).

and social context in which they are created, exchanged and negotiated (Eggins, 2004; Christie, 1999). In line with this, for this research I analysed authentic texts produced by EFL students. Also, the processes from which language derives and upon which language acts led to the assumption that language is simultaneously context-dependent and context-creator (*ibid.*). This relationship is so deep that has led Eggins (2004:7) to claim that “context is in text”.

This dynamic context thus entwined with the text is, according to the theory of the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1923, 1935, in Christie, 1999, Halliday and Hasan, 1989), and further developed by the linguist J. R. Firth (1935, in Halliday & Hasan, 1989), composed of both the macro context of culture and the micro context of situation. The context of culture is the cultural background which the participants share and, consequently, the meaning their practices have for that culture is also determined by this shared background⁴. For the present research, the context of culture is, besides the fact that all students and the teacher were born and raised in Brazil, the shared beliefs of the people who study and value knowing English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

The context of situation, on the other hand, is the immediate environment surrounding the text and is simultaneously formed by notions of (i) field, or the construction and representation of experiences, (ii) tenor, or the social relations between the communicating parties and (iii) mode, or how a coherent message is created with the use of the language (Christie, 1999; Halliday & Hasan, 1989). For the participants in my research, the shared context of situation is the immediate classroom but also the imagined situation posed by the writing task the students had to answer. This duality is fruit of the course being a preparation for the students to sit an exam, so all tasks aim at simulating the challenges students are likely to face during the actual test.

The context of situation is also the key to the (un)conscious prediction of content made by the participants, a fundamental element for successful communication which gives origin to genres. The notion of genre will be further explored in the next section, but it is relevant to state here that the knowledge of both contexts of culture and situation are necessary for the adequate understanding of the text. This has led to the development of two approaches on

⁴ Ruqaiya Hasan (Halliday & Hasan, 1989) brings the notion of culture closer to SFL by conceptualizing it as the totality of a set of semiotic potentials that includes ways of doing, of being and of saying.

genre within SFL, one developed by Martin (1992, in Martin 2000), which gives greater prominence to the context of culture, and one developed by Hasan (Halliday & Hasan, 1989) which grounds genre on the context of situation. The focus of my work, however, has led me to work in line with Hasan's work due to my focus on the writer-readership interaction.

The unit of analysis for the SFL is the **text**, defined by Halliday as any instance of language that makes sense to someone who knows the language (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Also, any text must serve a function composed by meanings set by a context of situation (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). The medium of production, he states, can be either verbal or written as a text is organized around meaning rather than form. The challenge is to see a text beyond its lexicogrammatical structure for us to be able to relate it to the language as a whole, but simultaneously keeping in mind that without structure there is no text. In a similar way, it is also necessary for systemic descriptions to be made in a way that is it possible to use this description as a toolset for text creation. Nonetheless, it is relevant to point out that that any choice made from a linguistic system only gets its meaning when interpreted against the background of potential choices that were not made (Eggins, 2004).

Furthermore, above all this lays the question posed by Halliday (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) in relation to the role of language within our ecological and social environment. Two attempts at tackling this issue are suggested by him (ibid.): to make sense of human experience and to act out our social relationships. These purposes would then be realised, according to Christie (1999), through the semiotic choices⁵ made available by the immediate context of situation and part of the system of possible choices that constitutes a language. The meanings thus created are formed by these possible choices which will then be realised simultaneously by the three **metafunctions**: (i) the ideational function, which encompasses the experiential meanings, that are representations of the world under the optics of human experience, and logical meanings, responsible for the relationship between meanings; (ii) the interpersonal function, according to which language is action, so it is used to mediate interactions between participants; (iii) the textual function, or the

⁵ Semiotics, under Hallidayan perspective (Halliday & Hasan, 1989), is the study of sign systems rather than the sign itself. Under this social-semiotic approach, the text is seen as a semantic entity established within the possibilities of meaning-making and meaning-understanding within a social structure (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

realization of language into a text⁶ (Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Eggins, 2004). However, as in the present work I analyse the relationship between writer and reader, only the interpersonal metafunction is worked on while analysis of the other two functions was left aside. More details on it and how language is seen under the interpersonal point of view can be seen on the next section, as follows.

2.1.1 The interpersonal metafunction

In line with the objective of my analysis, then, the metafunction I focus on is the **interpersonal** one. According to this perspective, Thompson (1996) tells us that the objective of language use is the **exchange** of meaning between participants, which is performed by giving and demanding either goods-&-services or information (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). As a means of carrying out the analysis, the language unit is the clause, and it is divided in Mood and Residue⁷.

The **Mood** is the first and most important part of the clause and is composed by the Subject and the Finite. The **Subject** under the interpersonal perspective is, according to Thompson (1996:55), “the entity that the speaker wants to make responsible for the validity of the proposition being advanced in the clause”. Throughout the development of the conversation, speaker and listener must keep the Subject the same otherwise the exchange has moved on to a new proposition. The second element of the Mood, the **Finite**, then, is the first element of the verbal group, but it is separated from it as it is the Finite that makes possible the negotiation of the validity of the whole proposition in terms of tense (time), polarity (positive, negative and in between) and modality (the extent of its validity and truthfulness).

As stated above, there are two types of clause. The first type, when the communication aims at the exchange of information, is a **proposition** (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). In a clause such as this, Thompson (1996) tells us that the modality expresses the likelihood (probability) and frequency (usuality) of the validity of the information, in a process referred to as **modalisation**. The second type of clause, then, when the communication aims at the exchange of goods-&-

⁶ For a deeper analysis of the metafunctions and their relation with the context of situation, please refer to Halliday & Hasan, 1989.

⁷ The analysis of the second part of the clause, the Residue, is not relevant for the present work. It suffices to say that it is composed of three kinds of functional elements, the Predicator, Complements and Adjuncts. For a thorough description of the Residue please refer to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004).

services, is a **proposal** (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Thompson (1996) tells us that in a clause like this the modality represents the likelihood of the speaker/writer being successful (through the indication of one's obligation or inclination to follow a given course of action), in a process known as **modulation**.

Despite not working explicitly with the Hallidayan (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) distinction between propositions and proposals, Thompson's work presents highly valuable tools for interpersonal analysis. In addition to his views on modalisation and modulation presented above, Thompson (1996) presents other perspectives to enrich the analysis of modality: the notions of commitment, responsibility and evaluation, which are situated on scales rather than determined by absolute values. **Commitment** refers to the author's commitment to the validity of the clause; **responsibility** accounts for the author's attitude (point of view) expressed by the clause; and **evaluation** is actually situated in the edge of grammar, in the threshold between the lexical choices made and the author's judgment of the goodness/badness of the topic addressed.

Modality is particularly important in the interpersonal function as it indicates also the intentions, feelings and attitudes of the writer/speaker in relation to the content of the clause, so the various categories for the study of modality presented above are particularly important in the analysis of my students' texts I present in chapter 4. There I also describe how they shape the reader-writer relationship, and the reasons for the prominence of some of them.

Nonetheless, how are meanings exchanged successfully between participants despite the chaos of stimuli and noise that surround us? The answer lays in our ability to predict (un)consciously the content of the conversation, predictions which are related to genres, our next section.

2.2. Considerations on the nature of genre

Halliday (1975, in Christie, 1999) stated that learning a language is learning *how to mean*. Although this was originally related to children development while making sense of the world around them, I believe it should be considered as an ongoing process throughout our entire lives as people and situations are never static within a culture. Learning how to mean, consequently, will be learning the patterns of meaning exchange validated by the social environment in which

speaker/writer and listener/reader are or aspire to be. Such patterns, then, are the foundation to the concept of genre, as follows.

Within SFL, Ruqaiya Hasan (Halliday & Hasan, 1989) starts her analysis of text by presenting the concept of **contextual configuration** (CC). According to her (ibid.), a CC is formed by a specific combination of values of the variables field, tenor and mode. This notion is important because it is the CC that allows us to analyse the structure of a text. If text can be seen as a social activity expressed verbally, then it is through the CC that the significant attributes of this social activity can be described. Also, she states, the features of the CC can be used when predicting textual elements: which are obligatory, which are optional and in which order and frequency they might occur. When the finite amount of obligatory and optional elements for a CC have been laid out, we have the text's **generic structure potential** (GSP). Provided a text does not lack the obligatory genre-defining elements, these optional elements are what make the variety of texts within a genre possible.

In line with Hasan's work, Dirk (2005) reminds us that solely mastering the formal features of a genre does not suffice to accomplish successful communication. It is also crucial, he says, to master the genre's rhetorical features to be able to make careful and specific choices in order to accomplish specific results on the part of the readers. In the present work, the student's preparation to work along the genre known as *Proposal* consisted of scaffolding them to recognize the CC which grounds the genre and to differentiate its mandatory and optional elements in order for them to be able to produce a text in line with the genre proposed by me, their teacher. A further analysis of the CC features can be seen in chapter 4.

Further adaptations of the performance to the situation are what Halliday (Halliday & Hasan, 1989) refers to as **register**. This term refers to a functional variety of language and the contextual values associated with such variety. As a consequence, different registers will be realized differently within the system of lexicogrammatical choices made available by the possibilities in field, tenor and mode within a situation (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

In sum, when the semantic choices related to a course of response to a certain event are recurrent, then it can be said that a genre was established (Frow, 2005). The recurrence of the response means that from the beginning it is

possible to have a sense of the end, leading to a sense of predictability as a means of facilitating communication.

For this reason, the study of genres is relevant as they play a key role in how experiences are socially constructed, a perspective parallel to Hasan's~;(Halliday & Hasan, 1989) assumption of genres originating from social experience: genre performance is both fruit and evidence of one's social experiences. That does not mean ignoring that genre-related choices also encode particular ideological positions and values (Eggins, 2004). In fact, according to Eggins, participants should ask themselves why the genre performed is relevant for the culture and what this genre tells about the culture that is using it (ibid.), therefore the critical reading of genres is important especially when facing everyday communication.

In the present research, then, genres played a central role in the teaching-learning process I analysed. With the purpose of identifying the contextual configuration, students worked on a sample of *Proposal* towards the identification of the choices that had been made by the author and that ground this genre and make visible the register, the possible reasons for doing so and which other choices were also available but not made. How all this was developed pedagogically is what I present in the following section.

2.3. The teaching-learning process

In the absence of a strong theory which would bring together both teaching practice and the social nature of the learning process, Mercer (1994) claims that the perspectives on the work of the Russian psychologist L. S. Vygotsky so far seem to be the best ground to work from.

Vygotsky's original work attempted at a re-definition of psychology within a unified science of human thought, language, culture and society (Mercer, 1994; Pollard, 2001). Nowadays, the essence of the neo-Vygotskian approach is the assumption that culture not only influences but also bases both human learning and cognitive development, which are socio-communicative processes rather than solely belonging to one individual. In line with this, cognitive development is

shaped and formed by the availability and use of semiotic elements (Pollard, 2001) and so it is, to use Mercer's term, *saturated* by culture (Mercer, 1994:93).

This perspective creates an intersection between the neo-Vygotskian approach and Halliday's perspective on semiotics, as the latter grounds his work on the assumption that learning is fundamentally a social process and it takes place within a social institution. The learning process leads then to knowledge, which is built through relationships which only take place in social contexts (Halliday & Hasan, 1989).

Although Vygotsky's focus was not on the classroom practice, it reaches into it as he deeply focused on the shaping of human thought by language and on cultural development being fruit of the influence of an adult's culturally mature forms of behaviour on a child's primitive behaviour (Vygotsky, 1981, in Mercer, 1994). In line with this, Bruner (1996 in Pollard, 2001) presents the concept of a **culture of education**, as it is through education as a key institutional process that a society shares existing knowledge and negotiates new forms. He defines this process by stating that "education must help those growing up in a culture to find identity within that culture" (Bruner, 1996:42, in Pollard, 2001). The encounters between child and adult make it possible for the new learners to engage in peripheral, however legitimate, participation in these communities before they acquire enough knowledge and become acculturated enough within the social performances.

For this reason, the focus on language and culture made possible the application of Vygotsky's work to the two core features of educational practice: talk and teachers (Mercer, 1999). In addition, the key concepts for the analysis of the classroom practices focus on what Mercer (1999:96) calls "the essential psychological asymmetry of the teaching and learning relationship" and are known as *scaffolding*, the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD), and *appropriation*, as follows.

The first key concept, **scaffolding**, refers to what takes place when the learning process is reshaped by the teacher via the reduction of the degrees of freedom the pupil would have, so that the activity proposed by the teacher does not exceed the children's capabilities at the moment and the outcome of their

efforts are constrained so as to lead towards the goals the teacher has set⁸ (Mercer, 1994). This serves as a means of having the children concentrate on the skill, concept or level of competence they are in the process of acquiring, developing or perfecting (Bruner, 1978, in Mercer, 1994). Scaffolding, then, is the cognitive support offered by the teacher's intervention when initially the children alone cannot cope with the activity. As a result of the scaffolded interaction, the students will have become able to realize a similar activity independently.

The second key concept, the **zone of proximal development** (ZPD), is characterized by Vygotsky as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance in collaboration with more able peers" (Vygotsky, 1987:86, in Mercer, 1994). The ZPD differs from a stage of development presently unattainable as it contains a set of functions already in stage of maturing. From this it can be affirmed that it is normal for natural human development to happen under assistance or instruction, and that the right kind of cognitive support can stretch the limits of a person's ability to learn or to solve problems, and that all happens strictly as context-bound processes (Mercer, 1994). Similarly, the actual development and the ZPD of an individual are not only fruit of the cognitive capabilities and potential, but they are also dialectically related to the cultural framework supporting the learning process.

Mercer (1994:102) states that the ZPD is "the product of a particular, situated, pedagogical relationship", meaning that it is established in a particular way according to each particular learning event and is accessed differently depending on the teacher's scaffolding. However, by being *particular*, he argues that it is not appropriate to apply the concept of ZPD to an entire classroom of students as each pupil would have his or her own ZPD, so an analogue concept (or a new approach to the existing concept) is still needed for when teachers are supposed to work at the level of the whole group (ibid).

The third key concept to the neo-Vygotskian theory of learning is **appropriation**. Originally it referred to meanings made by the children from their encounters with objects, concepts and ideas within their cultural context. Now, in the classroom, it happens both with pupils and with the teacher, as discourses

⁸ Even though setting goals in the classroom environment may sound too strict, I believe Mercer (1994) used the term referring to a guiding north used by teachers in the designing of their lessons and courses.

are taken up, modified and offered back to the group charged with new cultural meanings (Newman, Griffin & Cole, 1984, in Mercer, 1994). When there is appropriation on the part of a student, it can give evidence of the learning process. When it happens on the part of the teacher, appropriation becomes a tool for feedback via assisted performance, helping pupils relate their thoughts, actions and motivations to the new tasks they face (Mercer, 1994, Pollard, 2001).

In sum, the student reaches and accesses the ZPD in the classroom when facing activities which can be successfully done with the scaffolding interference of the teacher. Throughout this process, in the dialog between the student and the teacher both take turns appropriating each other's discourse as a means of building shared understandings.

In the present research, then, the students were scaffolded by me in order to focus on the development of their knowledge related to one genre. The steps of their development were traced according to the Wheel diagram presented in the next section, so as to facilitate the teaching-learning process while at the same time we could re-enact the naturally-occurring genre-establishing process. There was also an aim at familiarizing the students with the structure of the test they are going to face. In addition, the expected shared ZPD of my students was predicted based on the assumption of their having previous knowledge related to genres such as Letters and Reports, which share some formal features with Proposals, and some knowledge of how to write in formal registers to a hierarchically-higher reader. In the end, the exchange of appropriated discourses attempted towards the lesson aim: the development of genre awareness.

2.4. The appropriation of genres in the educational environment

The three main approaches to the teaching of genres in the EFL setting are related to (1) teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), (2) New Rhetoric studies and (3) the approach developed by the Sydney School (Hyon, 1996).

As stated by Hyon (1996), according to ESP and its related fields, such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Professional Communication (EPC), lessons are developed in an EFL environment and focus mainly on the formal features of the expected genres for the academic and

professional fields and present an ever-decreasing focus on the specialized functions of texts and the social context in which it was produced. Hence, according to this approach, genre is a tool for language analysis (ibid.). In accordance with this assumption Flowerdew (1993, in Hyon 1996) proposes that non-native students should receive training in the techniques of text analysis in order to identify the discourse conventions of new genres outside the classroom.

On the other hand, the classroom work developed under the New Rhetoric studies has taken place in an environment in which English is both the teacher's and the students' native language (Hyon, 1996). Also, according to Hyon (ibid.), the New Rhetoric tradition has given special prominence to the social purposes surrounding the genre occurrence, with special attention to the social purposes and actions of the text to the detriment of the focus on the form of the text. In addition, the analysis of text conducted is more ethnographic than linguistic and it is left up to teachers to develop their own pedagogical procedures.

As for the Sydney School, in line with the SFL, the target public is migrant adults in education and workplace training programmes supported by the Australian government (Hyon, 1996). Genre-based instruction within this approach was developed as a response to students not being prepared to face a significant variety of texts, so there is a special focus on teaching the social functions and contexts of texts, with an emphasis on the function and meaning of language in context (ibid.). There is also a unique concern with empowering students via the acquisition of linguistic resources as a means of achieving social justice (Christie, 1991 in Hyon, 1996), and this is the reason why Kress (1993, in Hyon 1996) stated that these educational programmes in Australia were both pedagogical and political projects.

To guide the procedures in a genre-based class within SFL, a Wheel diagram (figure 1) was developed, organizing the process in three major stages:

Figure 1: The Wheel (Martin, 2000)

(i) deconstruction, or modelling, (ii) joint negotiation and (iii) independent construction. In the modelling stage, the teacher breaks down the text to its function, schematic organization of information and function of its lexico-grammatical features (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993, in Hyon, 1996). In the second stage, which I consider too interventionist and consequently will not make use of, Hyon (1996) tells us that the teacher becomes a *scribe* for the students as they collaboratively construct an original text within the new genre. Finally, independent construction is what happens when students have the opportunity to create a new text by themselves. It has also been suggested that there should be a fourth stage related to the building of field knowledge, as students might not have previous knowledge of the social context and content topic of the genre they are to work on (Hammond, Burns, et al., 1992; Joyce, 1992, in Hyon, 1996). Furthermore, by being a wheel, this diagram does not have a mandatory introductory point, nor does it imply that the focus on each stage is a one-time event that cannot be repeated if necessary. The only imposition is that the movement must attempt towards the centre, which represents the student having gained control of the genre.

To guide the development of writing lessons, Dirk's (2010) proposal presents a pedagogical approach that can be used parallel to the theoretical

foundations illustrated by the Wheel (figure 1). According to him, the first step is to determine what action will be accomplished or set in motion by the final text. Then, the writer should learn as much as possible about the context in which the text is to be produced, including its purpose, the intended audience, the amount of freedom given to the writing situation and to which extent the location would affect the genre. Finally, after these steps, the writer can research how others have responded to similar situations in order to have positive and negative samples to work on. However, above all, the primary task that teachers cannot lose focus of is to keep form and context intertwined (Devitt, 2004).

Devitt (ibid.) also discussed the approach developed by Coe (2002, in Devitt, 2004), according to which he sometimes asked students to reinvent a genre from the situation in which it would occur, by having only ineffective samples of this genre. Students would then not only acquire the genre but also develop a sort of manual⁹ for successful performance in that genre. This approach is the closest to what I aimed at in the development of my *potentially exploitable pedagogic activity* (PEPA), as it will be seen in the next chapter.

Analogous to these approaches to the EFL educational setting, Dirk (2010) is in line with Devitt (2004) when he suggests that teachers should aim at giving students critical and analytical tools to approach genres, therefore they should teach, instead of genre acquisition, **genre awareness**. Devitt (2004:191) argues that “genres must be taught as both constraint and choice so that individual awareness can lead to individual creativity”. This critical awareness of how genres work would lead students to “learn the new genres they encounter with rhetorical and ideological understanding” (Devitt, 2004:194). The author also says that the problem with the current practice of presenting students with model texts from target genres and then moving to production, even when making use of the Wheel, is that this would undermine students’ own intuitions and inclinations, as they would see the models as prescriptive and the writing assignments as imitations of those models. Instead, students should be able to examine examples of a genre, know what to look for in them and how to interpret their findings, especially concerning the differentiation between required and optional elements, and the rhetorical purposes behind them.

⁹ Although the choice of the term *manual* by the author may sound prescriptive, I believe it to be actually closer to being a set of guidelines.

Devitt (ibid.) also states that explicit teaching might not be crucial to the production of acceptable texts within generic constraints, but it is important for the perception of the purposes of generic forms and their potential ideological effects. The author also claims that focusing on rhetorical understanding is the only thing that can counter students' impulse toward writing formulaic texts, especially as it is impossible to fully describe all the contextualized features of a piece of genre. Then, with the development of genre awareness what would have been a prescriptive writing formula becomes part of the students' language repertoire via appropriation (Russell, 1997, in Devitt, 2004). A possible positive side effect of this teaching as proposed by Devitt (ibid.) is the use of known genres as antecedents in the acquisition of new genres. Students, then, would have the knowledge of genres they have already appropriated, their functions and elements, functioning as the foundation on which they would ground the acquisition of a new genre.

Furthermore, the greatest difference between teaching for genre awareness and teaching for genre acquisition is the goal: the acquisition of genre awareness focuses on the understanding of the connections between context and form, the perception of ideological influences and the discerning of systems of both constraints and choices within a given genre.

Even though Devitt's work is on New Rhetoric, her ideas on writing instruction mentioned here can be seen as in line with the propositions of the Sydney School as she focuses on the teaching of situated genres and teaching for genre awareness (ibid.). I understand that, even though she highlights the importance of the study of the rhetorical features of the genres, the combination of these two foci could lead students to a state of linguistic emancipation which would allow them access to the community(ies) they aspire to join – the ultimate goal of the Sydney School.

From the three approaches above, the one my practice is closest to is the Sydney School. Nonetheless, my students' profile and the objective of the course bring me closer to the context in which ESP is usually developed – the exam the students are preparing to sit is unarguably part of an academic setting even though the certification certainly has broad professional recognition. Further discussions of this relation can be seen in the next chapter, session 3.2. Also, concerning classroom procedures, the Wheel was adapted to the course's aim, included the above mentioned fourth stage in which some cultural background

knowledge is worked on, and including plenty of discussion of the presence if ideological inclinations in the sample text. Another procedure I adopted was the use of a sample text of the studied genre, analogous to the work developed by Coe (2002, in Devitt, 2004) – due to time constraints I could not include more samples in this first encounter of the students' with the target genre. As mentioned earlier, an imperfect sample like the one chosen here is worth being studied as an example of Proposal, but at the same time it is easily perceived as not good enough to be used as a model. Further details of this can be seen in the next chapter as well.

3. Method and Procedures

This chapter outlines the research paradigm which guided my research and the accompanying methodology I made use of. I also present the context I worked in, the participants I worked with and the procedures I used for the lessons taught prior to the data collection and for the analysis of the texts my students produced.

3.1. Paradigms of research and methodology

The present research was conducted within the constructivist paradigm, differentiated from the positivist and post-positivist paradigms as there is no concern with isolating the analysed phenomena from the environment either to validate or invalidate my assumptions, or to enable the reproduction of this phenomena elsewhere (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Constructivism is also differentiated from critical paradigms as there is no special focus on the validation and mediation of knowledge, but rather on its co-creation through interaction between researchers and respondents (*ibid.*). Above all, a qualitative paradigm is fundamentally necessary as my research is what Richards (2003:9) calls a “person-centred enterprise” with a great “transformative potential for the researcher” (*ibid.*) instead of a detached dualist analysis of facts as quantitative inquiries are (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

It is important to mention that research within the constructivist paradigm is relativist instead of dualist, as multiple and sometimes conflicting social realities are taken into consideration and which can alter if their constructors (the people) have any increase of information or sophistication (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, the knowledge generated in the present research is open for discussion at any time.

In my research I studied human actors in their natural settings, in this case the language classroom, but my analysis shall not attempt to describe their behaviour in terms of a closed set of pre-established categories. In order to have a closer analysis of the data, I focused on a small number of individuals (four

students) instead of attempting at analysing one single feature of a large population (Richards, 2003).

For this research I did not attempt at developing an isolated universal model of pedagogic practice. Instead, I aimed at “getting close to practice” (Eisner 2001:137 in Richards, 2003:9), so in the next chapter I present the analysis of my classroom practice in order to contribute to a better **understanding** (Allwright & Hanks, 2009:146) of how genre awareness can be achieved by the students through the analysis of how they relate to the target readership of their texts. The analysis focuses mainly on how the writers (students) work on the CC to position themselves in relation to the text and the intended reader (Halliday & Hasan, 1989), thus working within the GSP in an attempt towards reaching their communicative goals. By deciding to focus on understanding I declined having the burdensome work of finding a solution to an alleged problem in the classroom practice, which would take me away from my main job – to teach – and this solution may well end up being a temporary palliative but mostly fruitless in the long term, or I may just fail to tackle the core of the issue at all.

3.2. Context, participants and research procedures

To carry out my research I decided to make use of Exploratory Practice, which is “an inclusive form of practitioner research” (Allwright & Hanks, 2009:149), bringing together all the participants of the research process working in a spirit of mutual development towards understanding and not only valuing the researcher while marginalizing the students (*ibid.*).

In line with the beliefs of Exploratory Practice, then, my research process is guided by a puzzle (Allwright & Hanks, 2009:156) I seek to understand. It can be defined as the investigation of the co-construction of the intended readership in the process of development of genre awareness. In the present work, my puzzle was an investigation of the co-construction of the readership in EFL writing classes. To help the understanding process I made use of a potentially exploitable pedagogic activity (PEPA) so as to maximize the authenticity of students’ production and to ensure the data generation and collection would not take time and effort away from the course’s main focus.

Even though the pedagogic work for the development of this research shares many beliefs with the work developed by the Sydney School mentioned in section 2.4 of the previous chapter, it is important to keep in mind the points in which they differ. First and foremost, neither was my work developed in Australia nor the group of students I worked with was composed by the underprivileged seeking better social opportunities via the study of the local language (Hyon, 1996). In this sense, my work environment is closer to the environment in which ESP is developed: communities that value English as a foreign language, and students from the dominant socio-cultural-economic part of the society (ibid.). Likewise, my students did not seek learning English as a *second* language such as the ones in Sydney, and were studying English in order to sit a proficiency exam, therefore in an environment rather close to the EAP side of ESP. Nonetheless, my beliefs on the nature of language and its genres, and my beliefs on how genres ought to be approached in the classroom have me working along the lines of the Australian scholars and under Halliday's theoretical influence.

The proficiency certificate my students aim at achieving is the Cambridge English: Advanced certificate (C1 in the Common European Framework of Reference). The exam consists of a series of four papers, Reading and Use of English, Writing, Listening and Speaking¹⁰. The Writing Paper consists of two parts: Part 1 consists of one mandatory Essay and in Part 2 there are three different options for the candidate to choose one to develop. The lessons this research explored were outlined around the preparation of students to answer Part 2. This Part, the one in which the student can choose from options, provides clear guidelines for the development of the texts, such as context, topic purpose and target reader, but no input material is provided as in Part 1 of the same Paper. Also, in Part 2 the candidate is expected to develop the chosen task in between 220-260 words within a limited amount of time (90 minutes) which is to be used to write both answers for Parts 1 and 2. In the revised exam to be taken from 2015 on, the possible genres for the answer of Part 2 are commonly known as Letter/Email, Proposal, Report and Review. In addition, the Cambridge ESOL exams seemed ideal for the conduction of a research such as mine for their focus on the communicative aspect of the language. In the specific case of the Writing Paper, each text is marked on a scale related to Content, Communicative Achievement, Text Organisation and Language Range.

¹⁰ More on the exam can be seen in <http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams/advanced/>

Carrying out this study I focused on the construction of the conventions underlying one of the genres that students may face in this paper, the *Proposal*. However flexible and mutable as genres are, a Proposal can be currently stated to be a type of argumentative formal letter written for a superior or peer group and the suggestions presented should be supported by factual information and evaluation in order to persuade the reader of the desired course of action¹¹. This particular genre was chosen due to having the greatest likelihood of being the most diverse from genres students might have had contact with prior to joining the preparatory course. This means that the acquisition of genre awareness could be observed from the closest to its initial stages.

The PEPA I designed to collect data was wholly original, apart from the input sample, which was taken from a Past Papers booklet (Cambridge ESOL, 2012). This particular sample was chosen because it is a text with enough genre-specific elements to be worth a thorough and critical study but not good enough as to be seen as model. Therefore, the basic approach to the development of the lesson echoes the one developed by Coe (2002, in Devitt, 2004), in which students reinvent the genre based on the situation, but in the present study the procedures adopted were in line with the Wheel diagram from the Sydney School (see section 2.4). In addition, my work is also in line with Dirk's (2010) guideline also mentioned in the same section 2.4, according to which the entire communication process will most likely be fruitless without some knowledge of who the readership is going to be and what their expectations are going to be when facing such text. This is reflected in the text in the tenor component of the CC, which is related to the interpersonal metafunction of language (Halliday & Hasan, 1989).

Consequently, the course of action I decided to adopt was the ones mentioned in the previous chapter, section 2.3, when I presented the Neo-Vygotskian approach. I chose to scaffold the students to retrace the steps of how a genre is established. As seen in section 2.1, this means outlining the contexts of culture and situation related to the target readership and the choices that were going to support the register which would most likely set in motion their intentions as writers and their consequent rhetorical choices. By means of my scaffolding

¹¹ This description of the selected genre can be found in the 2015 edition of the handbook for teachers who prepare students to sit the exam for the Cambridge English: Advanced certification, therefore it is pertinent for the students participating in the research. This handbook is issued by Cambridge ESOL.

presence throughout the activity I aimed at an attempt to empower students to construct by themselves the image of the readership (therefore I use of the term *co-construction* to highlight this collaborative nature, intentionally more between students and their peers than between me as a teacher and the students), so they would be able, via appropriation, to recreate this process individually when facing this and similar genres outside the classroom environment.

The basic outline of the lesson, to be carried out during two meetings of 90 minutes each, was as follows:

Stage of the Wheel (Hyon, 1996; Martin, 2000)	Activity and rationale	Pattern of students' interaction
[introduction]	Students start by reading the text in order to be able to answer the subsequent questions.	IND
1- Field negotiation	1) By analysing the writer's intention, students get in touch with the text's communicative goal. The achievement of writer's goal is determined by students experience and expectations.	IND – PW
	2) Activates previous knowledge of students' previous experience and presents the notion of text as a communicative unit in either oral or written mode.	IND – PW
	3) Students' previous knowledge on the communicative situation is necessary for completing the table – the joint completion of the table helps reinforcing knowledge of argumentative patterns to be applied in the genre.	PW
2- Deconstruction	4) The five items in this question explore the Contexts of Culture and of Situation in which this text is situated. Students have to reflect upon the social purpose of the texts, the ideologies behind its construction, the role of the participants, their expectations and how language is used to perform all this.	IND – PW
	5) The identification of the stages of the text presents the notion of the	IND – PW

3- Joint negotiation	genre structure and its coherence (Eggings, 2004:29).	
	6) Students continue the analysis of formal features of the text, their hierarchical placement and the rationale for the use of headings in this genre.	IND - PW
	7) Students analyse how language performs the roles mentioned in #4 and #5. Students also have the opportunity to expand their knowledge of the possible choices for those performances.	PW
	8) Students are invited to reflect upon the success of this text facing the criteria for grading the Advanced Writing paper. This analysis will be fruit of the reflections generated by the previous steps	IND – PW
	9) Students are invited to reflect upon task completion by retrieving the task instructions from the final answer (the input text for this lesson) and the presence of <i>input material</i> (which would be of mandatory inclusion in the answer). By creating a writing question students can develop their perception of how the instructions are reflected in the final answer.	PW
	10) Students have the chance of personalising the task by bringing it close to their realities and experiences. - The whole group will vote to choose one among all tasks to	PW – WG

4- Independent Construction	be answered in class.		
	11) Students perform the task at home according to the instructions presented.	IND	

Key for the acronyms: IND – students work individually; PW – students work in pairs; WG – all students debate a topic together.

One point in which I differ from the set of guidelines proposed by the Wheel is that I chose not to conduct the writing of a Proposal sample in class, a stage suggested to take place prior to student's independent writing. The reason for this is that I believe by mediating the relation between students and text I would most likely end up being the one who validates their suggestions, therefore being too interventionist. Another reason is the time constraint of the course because, as I work in line with EP, I believe in the sustainable aspect of this classroom investigation, and I would not have more than two whole open lessons in the calendar to conduct this data collection. Also, any extended amount of time spent focusing on this one single topic would undermine the variety of practice expected in a preparatory course such as the one I teach. The material I designed to be used for the PEPA conducted in this pair of lessons is attached in the Appendix 1.

From the whole group of my students which took part in the PEPA, four students produced the text proposed in the end of the material (task 11 of the PEPA) which is the data for my analysis. Their names were omitted here so as to help me detach the textual analysis from my opinions of them as students who are to spend the whole year in preparation with me. Student 1 is the youngest of the group, is still completing her school years and joined the preparatory course right after completing the regular General English course in the same institution. She wants to sit the exam as a way of strengthening her CV for her future career. Student 2 is the oldest of the group – around her mid-thirties – and works as a civil servant. She had not been studying English for a while prior to joining the preparatory course and wants to get the advanced language certification as a personal achievement. Student 3 is an English major at university and a trainee teacher in the institution which offers the preparatory course and wants to get the certification as part of his admission process – the same institution I belong to and where I carried out this research. Student 4 is also an English major at university and a trainee teacher at the same language school, but he had already graduated in marketing and advertising before choosing his present career path. He also wants to get the certification as part of his admission process and has taken the exam before but without scoring enough marks to be awarded the certification. Students 1 and 2 had been taking the course for 3 months before the PEPA, and students 3 and 4 had been taking the course for 9 months. Their unedited texts can be seen in the next chapter.

4. Analysis of students' production

In this chapter I present the analysis of the four student's production. Firstly, I present preliminary considerations related to the contextual configuration and generic structure potential of the four texts, in line with Hasan's (1989) work. Next, I present the individual analysis of each text, focusing on the presence of modality (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), commitment, responsibility and evaluation (Thompson, 1996), and how these elements contribute to the development of the interpersonal features of each text and the likely reception of each text. Then, I finally present a final data discussion in which I consider possible evidences of the development of genre awareness (Devitt, 2004).

4.1. Preliminary considerations

Following Hasan's (1989) style for textual analysis, the initial step is to outline the contextual configuration for the communicative event. Here it is the same for all texts, and it is a student writing to a course coordinator, as it can be seen in the PEPA in Appendix 1. Starting from this, I can say that the field corresponds to a debate of pedagogic strategies in which the reader is to be convinced of best course of action for the preparation course. As to tenor, the participants are a student (subordinate) and a coordinator (superordinate), so the dyad is hierarchic and the social distance is maximal as the reader and writer have actually never met. Finally, the mode is constitutive, as the language exchange is not accompanied by the actions it refers to; the process sharing is most passive¹² as the reader only reads the finished text; the channel is graphic, and it is a written monologue as the reader only reads.

When it comes to the generic structure potential (GSP) of the texts developed by the students, it is as follows: $T \wedge I (\wedge X) \wedge R \wedge C$. Each letter represents one obligatory element, the symbol $\wedge$ indicates order restraints and the round brackets indicates an optional element. Here, T means the title, which

¹² The term used by Hasan (Halliday & Hasan, 1989:58) refers to the interaction between peers, and is not a direct application of Saussure's floating heads diagram (Saussure, 2006) – and it is a point in a continuum and does not form a relation of dichotomy.

presents the topic to be addressed in the Proposal. The next obligatory element, I, is the introduction, making explicit the text purpose as a Proposal. The X represents a myriad of additional information which three of the four students chose to include in their texts to support their arguments and will be detailed in the analysis ahead. Then, R is the core of the Proposal, the part in which the recommendations are made. Finally, the C represents the conclusion of the text, in which the writers round up their arguments.

For a clear analysis of the students' texts, I will present the data separated individually and identified by the line number (L#) in which each example can be found. Here the texts are presented mostly unedited. The only alterations made were for the sake of the analysis, which are the numbering of the lines and the underlining of specific examples to be focused on.

4.2. Student 1

1	Preparation for the CAE – writing paper
2	Introduction
3	This proposal addresses the suggestions to a <u>better</u> preparation for
4	the CAE aimed to the writing paper.
5	Resources
6	To the writing paper part it is <u>important</u> to have a <u>good</u> material which
7	contains <u>good</u> examples and models of the different types of compositions
8	that are in the exam.
9	Recommendations
10	<u>It would be advisable</u> to have debates about <u>possible</u> themes and the
11	structures of the different types, as well. Apart from that, practice at home
12	is <u>vital</u> so the teachers <u>can</u> evaluate the progress of the students.
13	Moreover, <u>it has to be mentioned</u> the teaching of <u>appropriate</u> vocabulary,

14 then students will have all the ____ they need.

15 Conclusion

16 To conclude I strongly believe that a good material allied with debates,
 17 practice and vocabulary will help all types of students on the preparation to
 18 the writing part.

In this text, the T element is a nominal sentence but very straightforward, thus not leaving room for misunderstanding the topic of the text: *Preparation for the CAE – writing paper*. Nonetheless, the distinction of the purpose of the text is not clear as a title such as this is also suitable for the genre Report, usually more descriptive than argumentative.

The element I presents the first case of evaluation of the text (L3), *a better preparation*, thus indicating the initial degree of the writer's commitment to the argumentation being built: she openly considers that her text will contribute to the improvement of the preparation course, so here there is the first evidence that the genre she is working on is argumentative and persuasive.

The element X is present in this text under the heading *Resources*, referring to class resources to be used by the teacher, and the writer chose to continue here (L6) the use of modality from L3, indicating first the writer's responsibility for the relevance (modulation) of the use of materials and then her evaluation of the quality of this material and its content (L6-L7). However, arguments supporting these views were not presented, and this indicates that the writer is relying on common sense: nothing further is said on the matter because it is universally assumed to be true.

The following element, R, is the part of the text with the greatest number of modality examples, as follows. She starts in L10 by taking a step back from the high value of modulation used in L6 (*it is important*) in order not to overstep the authority of the reader, and she does it by saying that debates *would be advisable* instead of just stating it as a fact. The *themes* she mentioned in the same line (L10) are the possible topics for the compositions, but she does not commit to identifying which they can be – rather, she writes vaguely about *possible themes* and leaves it open to the reader as to find out about them. The *types* she mentions in the same clause (L11) are a reference to the possible

genres to be present in the CAE exam – but she once again leaves it up for the reader to find out about which they can be. L11-L12 present what resembles a cause-consequence construction: the first, high-value modulation in *practice at home is vital* is a pre-requirement for the action indicated by the low-value modulation *teachers can evaluate the progress of the students*. This is a very clever form of argument building, as the teacher's assessment of students' progress is the cornerstone of any course. In L13 the pattern of L6 is repeated in combination with the cause-consequence aspect from L11-L12: the authority of the reader is observed as it is not the writer who stated the importance of the next argument, as she resorts to common sense in *it has to be mentioned* as if the argument would speak for itself. Still in the same line (L13), the writer evaluates the teaching practice by referring to class content as *apropriate vocabulary*, but the outcome of such teaching she committed herself to predict cannot be known as there was a gap in the her text: *then students will have all the --- they need*. It can only be inferred that she meant to look up for some synonym to express lexicogrammatical resources but somehow forgot to do so before handing in the text. With this the writer wraps up the arguments presented in this section of the Proposal and, as stated above, the section R is the core of a Proposal and in this text this is the longest section. However, the writer leaves too much for the reader to find out and develop as she presented reasonable suggestions but vaguely and without any examples as to which procedures could be adopted.

In the final element, C, we see for the first time the writer inserting herself in the text, as L16 starts with the subject pronoun: *I strongly believe*. The choice to put herself forward in the final section may represent that, after the arguments have all been presented, the writer can leave their shadow and be identified by the reader as someone worth paying attention to. Throughout this paragraph (L16 to L18) she makes use of the high value of modalisation (*I strongly believe*) to reaffirm her evaluation of the classroom resources (*a good material*) and briefly sums up her arguments from the previous section in order to conclude her text: *[the practices] will help all types of students*.

It is important to state that this is the shortest of the texts, with only 142 words instead of the 220-240 words that were expected. This means that the overall impression of the text is rushed and superficial, as most sections contain only one sentence. Due to this, the arguments presented are not very strong and consequently not as convincing as they could be, despite seeming reasonable enough. Nonetheless, the relationship developed between the writer and the

intended reader is clearly marked in the text and was well constructed so as not to overstep the hierarchic dyad.

4.3. Student 2

1 CAE's Writing Paper

2 Introduction

3 This proposal addresses the improvement in the preparation for the
4 CAE exam and will be focused on the writing paper.

5 The present classes

6 The pilot programme was designed as a twice a week class, held by
7 and expert teacher, who has taken the CAE exam and got the notion of its
8 structure.

9 However, the students have never taken a Cambridge exam and
10 most of them work or study all day long. Therefore, they must practice
11 more in their limited time.

12 Recommendations

13 First of all, Cultura Inglesa should offer extra classes to review the
14 topics which have already been taught. Apart from that, it should provide
15 on-line past papers so the students could actually realize the exam's
16 structure.

17 Also, as the books are not completely available, Cultura Inglesa
18 should be responsible for buying them and selling to the students.

19 In order to improve specifically the writing skills, the students should
20 be encouraged to write their texts during the class, at least once a week,
21 for the exact period of time that they will have then they take the actual
22 exam. Moreover, writing texts should be an every week homework.

23 Conclusions

24 To conclude I strongly believe that the pilot programme will be
 25 successful and the suggestions above will improve it and prepare the
 26 students for higher grades.

Once again, this text starts (L1) with the element T containing a nominal sentence, *CAE's Writing Paper*, clearly outlining the text's topic but without much reference to its purpose. This is solved in the beginning of the next element, I, as the writer refers to the text as a Proposal (L3). Next, the writer takes responsibility for the content of the Proposal by the indication that the text aims at the *improvement* of the preparation course (L3). Following that, the use of *will* signals a high degree of modalisation referring to the content of the text to be developed in the subsequent sections. However, to this point there is only the intention of argumentation aiming at convincing, so the reader should expect to see it in the next following sections.

After this, the next element is X and in this text it refers to the preparation course as a whole as a means of presenting a panorama of it under the heading *The present classes*. Here it is interesting to point out that, despite being herself a student in the course she writes about, the writer only refers to the students in the third person (they/them). This can be an attempt for her, as a writer, to be perceived by the reader as a neutral party who is advocating in favour of the preparation course and not solely in her own benefit. This is also evident in L10 when she makes use of a high degree of modulation to refer to students' preparation (and her own): *they must practice more in their limited time*. This choice gives a sense of urgency to the preparation and to this Proposal, as time is limited and the teacher deemed *expert* (evaluation) in L7 has to provide the students with thorough practice.

This sense of urgency of this text continues in the next element, R, with recommendations made directly to the institution (language school) which offers the preparation course, thus overstepping the intended reader who is a coordinator. Normally the use of *should* (L13) would indicate a medium degree of modulation, but here this degree is much higher as the absence of supporting arguments give the recommendation an imperative tone. The following line (L14) is much similar with the same modulation with the use of *should*. However, in this second clause the value is a bit less high as there is a supporting argument: so

the students could actually realize the exam's structure (L15). In the next paragraph, L18 presents another case of high value modulation with a similar imperative use of *should* as in L13. It is only in the third and final paragraph of this section that the writer addresses directly the development of writing skills, but the urgency and the imperative tone continue with the use of *should* in L19 and L22. The modulation is even higher in L22 as it is introduced by the additive conjunction *moreover*.

The final element C is where the writer finally reveals herself by the use of the first person pronoun *I*. The clause starts (L24) with a high level of modal responsibility, *I strongly believe*, indicating the repetition of the main points of the Proposal, with added modalisation due to the use of *will* in L24 and L25 to indicate the results the writer expects to have if her *suggestions* (L25) are followed. This modal choices add up to the sense of urgency perceived throughout the text, closing it with the impression that, even though the writer seems optimistic, there is still much to be done and the sooner the better.

As a whole, this text is virtually within the number of words expected in the exam, with 219 of the 220-240 words which are expected. Nonetheless, instead of using this space to develop sound arguments, the writer spent the whole text being prescriptive in a very urgent and imperative tone which is unlikely to be well received by the expected reader in a hierarchic dyad such as this.

4.4. Student 3

1	Proposal on the <u>best</u> form to prepare students for the writing paper of
2	Cambridge English: Advanced certificate
3	Introduction
4	The aim of this proposal is to adress some suggestions for the pilot
5	programme of preparation for the CAE test, focusing more espezifically on
6	the writing part of the test.
7	As this type of course has no precedence I <u>will</u> try to suggest some
8	actions that <u>might</u> be successful.

9 Suggestions

10 Firstly, I strongly advise that the institution adopt a highly qualified
 11 material, as the CAE Result, which has been used and recommended by
 12 other English schools that teach similar courses.

13 It is also advisable that the students produce as much written work
 14 as possible and, if doable, be graded by other teachers apart from their
 15 own.

16 Another point that needs to be mentioned is the range of themes of
 17 the assignments given, it is crucial that we deal with real examples from
 18 previous tests.

19 And last but not least, it would be of great value that the best works
 20 (chosen by the teacher in charge) are displayed in somehow, through an
 21 online blog or around the branch on the boards, so the students feel
 22 rewarded and thrilled about taking the assignments more seriously. It
 23 would be a great boost in their morale.

24 Conclusion

25 We, as a group, hope that you, and the academic team, can
 26 sincerely listen to our suggestions and put them in practice the earlier
 27 possible, for we do not have so much time, and money, to waste on failed
 28 tentatives.

In this text, the modality is present from line L1, the title, which composes the element T: *Proposal on the best form to prepare students*. This means that the writer loses no time in stating the content and purpose of the text, and he is not humble when doing so as his suggestions compose *the best*, not a better, form to improve the preparation course. The second element, I, is less direct, presenting the content to be detailed in the rest of the text also in a direct way, but with a more neutral tone. This element is closed in a rather humble way in L7-L8, which contrasts with the aggressive title: *I will try to suggest some actions that might be successful*. It is relevant to notice here that the writer puts himself forward as he presents his own voice in the text, but contrast in tone indicates a lack of planning when writing – if he had been a more meticulous writer, he would have noticed the discrepancy in tone.

Different from the other texts analysed here, this one does not present the element X. Going straight into the element R, under the heading *Suggestions*, is a bold move suitable to the tone of the title, but which might not have the desired effect upon the reader as the skipped section usually contains information about the context the suggestions will act upon. Nonetheless, this lack of context was announced in the previous section: *the course has no precedence* (L7); thus indicating that the suggestions made will be based on the writer's expectations as to what the preparatory course ought to be like. Line L10 opens this section with high modal responsibility, as the writer puts himself forward once more (*I strongly advise*) to present his evaluation of the material to be used in the course, a *highly qualified* one. Here we see proof that all recommendations are made based on the writer's expectations: he suggests a course book which is used by other schools when teaching similar courses, so the starting point for *the best form to prepare students* (L1) is to start from what others already do well and make it better. He continues from L13 to L23 with a medium level of modality to present his actual recommendations for the writing practice. The suggestions in L13 (*It is also advisable that the students produce as much written work as possible and, if doable, be graded by other teachers apart from their own*) and L17 (*it is crucial that we deal with real examples from previous tests*) are not grounded on solid arguments, but seem reasonable enough through the use of common sense. Only the suggestion in L19-L20 is promptly followed by a grounding argument, thus helping to build a course of action by mixing extensive practice with the building of a sense of achievement in order to lead students to their best performances.

It is also interesting to notice the shift from the use of *I* (L7, L10) to *the students* (L13) to *we* (L17) to *the students* (L21) again, as in an argumentative hide-and-seek in which the writer presents himself both as a neutral party and as an interested student taking part in the preparation course.

In the final section, element C, the writer presents himself as the voice of the group of students (L25), thus bringing closure to the shifting voices from earlier in the text, and addresses the reader in a very respectful tone: *we, as a group, hope that you, and the academic team, can sincerely listen to our suggestions* (L25-L26). He concludes by briefly mentioning time and money constraints that strengthen the urge for the improvements in the course. The lexical inaccuracy (*tentatives*) which closes the text (L28) is a mistake motivated by the writer's native language, Portuguese, which presents a false cognate to

attempt – it would translate as the noun *tentativa*, which resembles the English adjective *tentative*. This mistake might slight the text's positive reception as it was made in a clause with great visibility and relevance to the text.

From all the four texts analyzed here, so far the one by Student 3 seems to be the one with most chances of having a positive reception by the part of the reader, as the use of common sense and argumentation is more in balance than in the previous texts by Students 1 and 2. Besides, here the hierarchy of the dyad is reasonably respected despite the incisive tone of the beginning of the text, which also contributes to a positive reception of the text.

4.5. Student 4

1	Proposal for preparing to write <u>properly</u> on Certificate in Advanced English
2	writing exam
3	Introduction
4	The aim of this proposal is to provide clues on preparing a <u>good</u> writing
5	paper for the students who have enrolled for the Cambridge Advanced
6	English exam (CAE).
7	Facts regarding the Exam's procedures
8	The candidates <u>will</u> be headed to four different tasks which consist in:
9	writing an Essay, a Proposal, a Report or a Review. There are two parts on
10	the writing exam and the first one is compulsory: writing an Essay. The
11	candidates <u>will</u> be asked to present ideas using 220 to 260 words as a limit.
12	This part takes 45 minutes of the whole writing exam, which is 90 minutes.
13	On part two the candidates <u>have</u> to choose between the three other
14	tasks mentioned above and it also lasts 45 minutes and <u>has</u> to be written
15	between 220 to 260 words. When reading the instructions for the tasks, the
16	candidates are keen on starting to write their papers.
17	Clues for writing the tasks

18 Either if the candidates have chosen to do the part 2 or 1 firstly, they
 19 have to organize their answers in a logical way. It is important to avoid
 20 writing drafts, but it is interesting to underline or highlight the most important
 21 points in order to not forget the ideas proposed. It is also fundamental to
 22 express opinions clearly and support them with reasons and examples. The
 23 candidates might even be persuasive, depending on the task but they
 24 cannot use inaccurate English as well as contractions, otherwise they will be
 25 penalized.

26 Conclusion

27 I suggest students who are enrolled for the Advanced English Exam to
 28 read previous paper exams which are available on Cambridge University's
 29 website. It is an excellent strategy to be fully prepared when students take
 30 the exam.

This text opens with the usual nominal sentence composing element T (L1). It starts by stating clearly the content and objective of the text and contains a case of modal evaluation: students are to be prepared to *write properly*, though there is no indication as to what it would mean exactly. By this the reader is to expect an argumentative-persuasive text, and may well hope to find out what the writer means by *properly*.

The element I of the text repeats what was stated in T, but instead of a plain Proposal it identifies the text as with an aim *to provide clues on preparing a good writing paper* (L4). The word *clue* was a very interesting choice, though unexpected, and indicates that the text aims at helping the reader solve a problem as in a detective story or mystery game. Also, the aforementioned *proper* writing becomes *good writing* in L4, but still none on the matter has been detailed and the reader must read on.

The element X starts in L7 by stating *facts regarding the exam's procedures*, and the writer makes use of high-level modulation throughout this section to describe in detail how both parts of the Written Paper are to be answered (L8, *the candidates will be headed to four different tasks*; L10-11, *the candidates will be asked to present ideas*; L13, *the candidates have to choose*;

L14, *it also lasts 45 minutes and has to be written between 220 to 260 words*). The opening of this section, however, is quite misleading, as it states that *the candidates will be headed to four different tasks* (L8). Only later he mentions that Part 1 is one Essay (L10), but he never mentions that, from the three options presented in Part 2, the candidate must choose one: *on part two the candidates have to choose between the three other tasks mentioned above and it also lasts 45 minutes and has to be written between 220 to 260 words*. In addition, he briefly alludes to the possible Genres to be included in the exam, the textual length the candidates must observe and the time candidates will have to complete both tasks, though this final information is presented in a rather confusing way – he states that each part takes 45 minutes from the whole 90 minutes available, but does not mention that this division is only a suggestion (*this part takes 45 minutes of the whole writing exam, which is 90 minutes and [part two] also lasts 45 minutes*). Though in an overall perspective this section is unclear and puzzling, at the same time it shows that the writer knows the exam in detail, so his recommendations should be worth following. Unfortunately, nothing in the text makes reference to a preparation course as he dwells only on the exam procedures.

On section R the writer makes use once more of *clues* to refer to his recommendations (L17), as if how to sit the written exam was a puzzle he would help to solve. Here he starts with the high-level modulation *they have to organize their answers in a logical way* (L19). From this point, the level of modulation decreases: in L19-L21, *it is important to avoid writing drafts, but it is interesting to underline or highlight the most important points in order to not forget the ideas proposed*. This use of *this is interesting* resonates a medium-level modulation and is not an indication of evaluation as strong as we see in *the most important points*. The modulation increases in L21, *it is also fundamental*, and decreases again in L23, *the candidates might even be persuasive*, to rise again in the same line with *they cannot use inaccurate English as well as contractions, otherwise they will be penalized* (the latter is an example of high-level commitment as he predicts the outcome of not following these rules). This oscillation in the level of modulation alleviates the prescriptive tone of this section, as there are only rules present but without arguments or examples. This is quite ironic, in fact, as the writer actually highlights in his text how important it is to *express opinions clearly and support them with reasons and examples* (L22).

After referring multiple times only to the candidates sitting the exam, in the final element C the writer presents himself with the use of the pronoun *I* in L27. Here, instead of presenting the instructions for the exam, he finally addresses the issue of preparation, but he only recommends the candidates to *read previous paper exams which are available on Cambridge University's website* (L27-L28), instead of prescribing extensive writing practice as it was seen in the other three texts. Nonetheless, he presents his evaluation of this practice as *an excellent strategy to be fully prepared* (L29), but once again there are neither reasons nor examples, thus ending the text in a rushed tone.

Overall, this text seems to have failed to be a Proposal, as its writer does not attempt to convince the reader of a certain way to improve a preparatory course. Rather, he addresses individual preparation in a self-study basis, but he does not follow his own recommendations once again as he stated in L18 that *candidates might even be persuasive, depending on the task*: his task asked him to be persuasive but he was not, as could be seen in this analysis. As there was mostly a description of facts, then, the text Student 4 produced is much closer to a Report than to a Proposal, and this leads to a totally different impact on the reader, as this reader is not led on any course of action but rather is informed on a situation.

4.6. Data discussion

Based on these four students' responses, it can be said that it is still difficult for most of them to thoroughly observe all the details of the CC throughout the text, or maintaining them in uniformity. An example of this is the relative positions in the hierarchic dyad in these texts, as the subordinate writer tends to approach the superordinate reader too boldly and to do so very frequently. This can be seen in the big number of cases of high-level modulation, which indicates a command-like interaction not totally suitable for a Proposal. In a genre such as this, the reader ought to be inspired, influenced and convinced, which are features more easily carried out by low-level and medium-level modulation. The problems with the features of the CC can also be seen in the number of arguments which are supported by common sense instead of the writers presenting their own sets of arguments. This undermines the connection between

writer and readership as much is left to the reader to figure out about the topics presented in the text.

In addition, the prominence of high and medium-level modalities represent the writers' confidence on the topic they are addressing and, when made use of, strengthen the arguments. This means that the students are already aware of the importance of developing the context upon which their recommendations are to act and of the importance of having a clear outline of the text right from its beginning, both steps aiming at creating the ideal context for their recommendations to receive the necessary attention.

Besides, another interesting feature noticed in the texts is the explicit insertion of the writers' own voices in their texts. This is mostly seen in the last part of the text, which was identified as element C, and is the section in which the writers concluded their arguments and presented their final considerations. After thoroughly presenting the context and the recommended improvements to it, the writers finally felt confident enough to step up to what they believe to be the right course of action and to clearly state so. From the whole group, only Student 3 inserted his own voice throughout the entire text, but did so in a way not to overwhelm the reader with his presence, by alternating his own voice with the role of spokesman for the group of students he belongs to.

Nonetheless, after my analysis I perceived that the students seem to be developing their own approaches to the issue, analogous to Devitt's (2004) proposition on the acquisition of genre awareness described in chapter 2. I could notice that Student 1 presented sound recommendations, but I believe she still has to strengthen them with arguments. Similarly, Student 2 also developed sound suggestions, but my analysis demonstrated that the overall tone of the text is aggressive as it is perceived as urging the reader to action. Student 3 seems to be the closest to the standard outlining of what a Proposal is, but I believe that he still has to work on finely tuning his relative position regarding the readership, particularly in the opening of his text. Unfortunately, according to my analysis, Student 4 seems to be the one still farthest from the lesson goals outlined in chapter 3, but he has already developed an adequate textual layout and has a good flow of information placement.

5. Results and Final Considerations

With the conduction of this work and the pedagogic benefits my students may have gained, I expected to potentially empower students along the same lines of the Freirean approach to teaching, which is “not transferring knowledge but creating possibilities to its production or construction”¹³ (Freire, 2014:24). The principles of SFL were the guidelines to the pedagogical approach adopted and the students were the centre of the lessons taught, as I intended to help them develop some *genre awareness* (Devitt, 2004) which would let them become more communicatively effective writers (and communicators) outside the classroom environment.

Throughout the research and the entire course I expected to find in the students some increase in their confidence towards not only writing for the upcoming exam but also the use of EFL as a whole. Evidence of the writers' confidence could be seen in their production through the use of elements such as cases of modality, responsibility, commitment and evaluation, as they give evidence of the writer's standpoint in relation to the topic addressed. Student's increased confidence could also be perceived in the multiple insertions of their own active and present voice in the text, stepping forward for what they believed to be the best courses of action to be taken. Perhaps this improved attitude can be also related to a growing sense of ownership of the language, as students are starting to be able to make informed choices as to which lexicogrammatical items to use to generate the desired effect upon their readership.

From the beginning of my research project, I have claimed to have the intention of helping my students in the process of development of genre awareness. However, the actual discussions related to this development – which naturally must include the students who participated in the PEPA and which would better determine the extent of their actual progress – were not part of my linguistic analysis and are a possible topic for the further development of the present work.

Regarding me, their teacher, this research contributed greatly to my ongoing development as a practitioner. From the in-depth study of Halliday's and

¹³ From the original “ensinar não é *transferir conhecimento*, mas criar as possibilidades para a sua produção ou a sua construção” (Freire, 2014: 24; italics in the original)

Hasan's works to the development of the PEPA I used following the Neo-Vygotskian approach, I had the chance to deeply re-evaluate my practice and much was added to it as well.

All in all, I hope to have contributed positively to the field of studies on EFL Writing and hope to see further enquiries on the production of other genres in similar and analogous contexts, such as other levels of the same exam or completely different EFL proficiency exams.

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7. Appendix 1 - PEPA

Read the text below and answer the following questions. Do not forget to justify your answers.

Film Club

Introduction

This proposal addresses the problem that the Saint Mary's college pays a lot of money in order to fund the Film Club although it has very few members.

Positive aspects

First of all, it has to be mentioned that every day in the Film Club quiz evenings are being held which have great appeal to the students of the college. Apart from that, over the last month we have welcomed 15 new members which means that the popularity of the club is being increased.

Recommendations

Firstly, as the entry fee is very small we could charge the students who come in order to enjoy their evenings in the Film Club a little more, so as to earn more money. Secondly, we could attract more people by organizing disco nights after 10pm. Also, as all the movies in the DVD library are old, it would be advisable to replace them or just add new ones which will definitely have an appeal to the college's students.

Conclusion

To conclude I strongly believe that the Saint Mary's college shouldn't reduce the funding to the Film Club because many of its students have a great time there and this is the only way for them to let off steam and escape for a while from the demanding subjects of the curriculum.

1. What is the writer attempting at with this text? Was the objective achieved in the end?

2. Have you ever been in a similar situation? Were you communicating orally or by writing? Do you believe you were successful?

3. What do you believe is necessary for succeeding in a situation like this? What should be avoided? Complete the table below to help organizing your ideas:

You should:	Please, avoid:

4. Focus again on the text.

a. Who wrote it? Why?

b. Who was expected to read it? Which were the reader's expectations at facing this text?

c. What is the relationship between these two participants?

d. Does the writer involve the reader in the text? Why? How is it done?

e. Why did the writer decide to write to this specific reader?

5. Identify the stages of the construction and development of the message in the text. What effect does the alteration of the order of the stages have in its communicative goal?

6. What is the importance of the headings? What can be the effects of omitting them?

7. Highlight key language items used by the writer in the construction of the text. Think of similar (or better) items to express/introduce the same ideas. Use the box below to organise a word bank for similar texts:

8. The text we are working on is a sample answer to the Advanced Writing Paper. Which marks from 1 to 5 do you think it received in the following criteria?

- a. Content
- b. Communicative Achievement
- c. Organisation
- d. Language

9. Based on the text, which were the instructions for this task? Was there input material?

10. Work with a partner and create a similar task but which involves your present situation as an English student.

11. Read the task below and develop your answer in 220-240 words in an appropriate style.

*Your English class has been selected to participate in a pilot programme of preparation for the Cambridge English: Advanced certificate. There are four papers in exam for the certificate, and you were selected by your classmates to write to the course coordinator on the best form to prepare students for the Writing paper. Write your **proposal**.*