



Assessing the Development of English Learners' Understanding of the Discussion Genre

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This study used a genre-based approach within a systemic functional linguistics (SFL) framework to assess the development of English learners' understanding of the discussion genre. Fifty-two undergraduates participated in a semester-long course, divided into three groups by English proficiency level. They were administered surveys at the beginning and end of the semester to assess their choice of appropriate lexicogrammatical features. A structural move analysis of their pre- and post- discussion genre writing task was conducted, and the frequency of -ly adverbs was analysed. The results indicated that learners' understanding of discussion genre structure improved regardless of English proficiency. Depending on English proficiency, different features of lexicogrammatical functions, especially related to interpersonal meaning improved. The post- survey showed that higher-English-proficiency learners' use of auxiliary verbs such as should, will, and can dramatically improved.

Keywords: L2 writing, genre-based approach, discussion genre, systemic functional linguistics

Introduction

Research on English as a foreign language (EFL) or second language (L2) writing in general often focusses on the writing process and strategies applied by L2 writers, and usually involves the following, typically non-linear and recursive, features: planning, reading, summarising, revising, and editing. Many L2 writing studies target error analysis in essays composed by L2 learners and provide effective feedback on this writing, even though L2 writing may be influenced and need different assessment approaches depending on classroom teaching methodologies (Leki, Cumming, & Silva, 2008). The framework of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) was applied in this study using a genre-based approach (GBA) combined with the teaching-learning cycle for L2 writing classes within the Japanese context. This approach exposed Japanese university EFL learners to various tasks: analysis of sample texts, searching for target text genres online, deconstructive tasks such as analysing peers' essays, receiving feedback from teachers and peers, and revising their own essays.

Literature Review

The Concept of Systemic Functional Linguistics

The main concern of SFL is to clarify how language users such as writers and speakers, make meaningful,

appropriate choices (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Within the framework of SFL (Halliday, 1994), language has three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. We can encode the grammatical patterns of clauses as interpersonal meaning, which explains how we represent the significance of experiences in context. We consider language to be a semiotic system, construed as a coding system in that semiotics is influenced by writers' and speakers' choices in context. Ideational meaning refers to how people represent or reflect experience in language and how the symbolic is construed in discourse communities (Halliday, 1994). The interpersonal metafunction (i.e. modal adjunct, modal auxiliary, mood) allows for enactment of social reality, provides resources for valuation, judgement, and acknowledgement, and expresses the writer's assessment in terms of probability and attitude (Holsting, 2013; Martin, 2002). The textual metafunction organises words in a coherent manner in a specific situation, generating something recognisable as a text (White, 2001).

SFL Framework and a Genre-Based Approach

According to the theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), languages are used by people in their social contexts in order to achieve particular goals (O'Donnell, 2011). ESP and SFL have in common a clear focus on teaching a genre's characteristics; however, they differ in (1) analytical focus, (2) genres covered, and (3) target learners. First, ESP focusses on discourse communities and move analysis (Lieungnapar & Todd, 2011; Swales 1990), while SFL focusses its analysis on genre use and language function (Christie, 2012; Trappes-Lomax, 2004). Second, ESP covers academic and professional genres such as research articles and essays, while SFL covers elemental genres such as expository, narrative, and discussion genre. Third, target ESP learners are usually university-level or higher, while SFL typically focusses on elementary, middle, and high school learners, up to university learners.

Previous SFL research provides explicit scaffolding and support for language learners studying form-meaning connections in texts (Gibbons, 2006), and can help language learners develop reading and writing skills with more conscious control. Using SFL metalanguage can increase learners' focus on the lexicogrammatical features of target genres and improve their control over their writing (Lap & Truc, 2014; Polias & Dare, 2006). In Polias and Dare's (2006) study, learners conceptualised SFL metalanguage to analyse a text's meaning and structure and to seek more effective ways to compose their own texts. This is because SFL does not separate content and language but considers language the realisation of meaning in context. SFL-related research shows how learners learn genres in the classroom as well as their linguistic disciplinary expectations (Moore & Schleppegrell, 2014). However, little research explores how learners' ability to write in target genres develops as assessed by the SFL framework and its rubrics, or investigates development of EFL/ESL learners' writing skills within an SFL framework.

From this perspective, this study takes up two questions: How do understandings of basic text structure and lexicogrammatical features differ between novices and experienced learners? How does EFL learners' understanding of choosing appropriate lexicogrammatical features (ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions) differ depending on their English proficiencies?

Methods

Context

This study exposed learners, grouped according to English-language proficiency, to different text types during a 15-week genre-based L2 writing course, provided in the international studies department of a private Japanese university. The author taught the course using an SFL framework, which covered three different text types: narrative writing at the beginning of the semester, expository (analytical) writing

towards the middle, and discussion genre writing at the end. Through stage-by-stage instruction, the genre-based approach afforded learners the opportunity to demonstrate an understanding of specific texts through a variety of tasks: modelling texts, deconstructing texts, identifying and analysing target-genre texts, writing their own texts, genre analysis of peers' writing, and data analysis of basic structure and lexicogrammatical features. The learners repeated these tasks three times during the semester.

The Teaching Framework: SFL Genre-Based Approach

The teaching-learning cycle (Feez & Joyce, 1998) contains five different stages: (1) building a context, (2) modelling and deconstructing an existing text, (3) joint construction of the text, (4) independent construction of a target-genre text, and (5) linking to related texts; this was applied to the 15-week writing course. During stage 1, the instructor explained the target genre's purpose, structure, and language features (Aunurrahman, Hamied, & Emilia, 2017). In stage 2, the instructor performed a genre analysis of a model text. In stage 3, a reading portfolio was assigned, and learners were asked to find target-genre texts from online resources and analyse their schematic structures and lexicogrammatical features by referring to the model text. During stage 4, the learners participated in a 50-minute timed writing task and provided feedback on their peers' target-genre writing using a rubric provided by the instructor (Deng, Yang, & Varaprasad, 2014; Hodgson-Drysdale, 2013; Melissourgou & Frantzi, 2017; Pessoa, Mitchell, & Miller, 2018; UNSW Department of School Education, 1989; Whitfield, 2010). In task 1, the learners deconstructed and analysed peers' essays to understand the uses of lexicogrammatical features and the basic structure of the discussion genre; they had opportunities to revise their essays before peer analysis. In task 2, the learners summarised the comparison results of the genre analysis of their peers' essays. Finally, in stage 5, the teacher explained the relationship between the next genre's text and the current genre's text.

Participants

The participants ($n = 52$; female $n = 35$, male $n = 17$) were first- to fourth-year learners who took a 15-week writing course. In Group 1 ($n = 21$), 50% of the learners were experienced writers of multiple types of texts, including the discussion genre, and had previously taken this course; Group 2 ($n = 14$) and Group 3 ($n = 17$) were novices who, as first-year learners, had received limited exposure to the variety of genre texts and had not been taught explicitly how to write in target genres. The higher-proficiency groups (Group 1 and 2) had International English Language Testing System (IELTS) scores of 5.5 on average, while the lower-proficiency group (Group 3) had IELTS scores between 4.5 and 5 on average. The rationale and purpose of the study were explained to all participants beforehand, and informed consent forms were collected.

Data Sources

Pre- and post- surveys

These were conducted to understand changes in learners' understanding of target-genre structural and lexicogrammatical features. The pre- survey was administered before stage 1 of the teaching-learning cycle. The post- survey was administered when all participants had completed stage 3 of the teaching-learning cycle: that is, after writing their peer genre analysis. The survey questions (referred from Deng, Yang, & Varaprasad, 2014) were divided into three parts. Part 1 (questions 1 through 3) evaluated the learners' understanding of the target text genre's structure and lexicogrammatical features; learners assessed each statement using a 5-point Likert scale. Questions were qualitatively analysed to explore how the learners conceptualised the target text genre at the beginning of the course. Part 2 (questions 4 through 12) consisted of multiple-choice questions designed to assess understanding of the target genre.

For instance, question 1 asked ‘What’s the purpose of this essay genre? 1. The purpose is to describe the details of a particular person/people, places, and objects; 2. The purpose is to convince readers of something and to take some action; or 3. The purpose is to explain processes of natural and social phenomena.’ The content of these questions was adapted from Derewianka and Jones (2016), Hodgson-Drysdale, (2013), Pessoa, Mitchell, and Miller (2018), UNSW Department of School Education (1989), and Whitfield (2010).

Pre-instruction/noninstructional and post-instruction essays

To elaborate the qualitative insight into learners’ awareness of basic text structure and lexicogrammatical features, discussion texts written by the learners at the beginning and end of the semester were collected. At the beginning, participants were assigned a pre-instruction/noninstructional timed writing task for 50 minutes during the class. Group 1 was asked to respond to the following prompt: ‘Some people believe that getting work experience immediately after graduating from high school is better, while others believe that obtaining a degree is the best way to get a good job. Discuss both sides and give your opinion.’ Groups 2 and 3 were asked to respond to the following prompt: ‘Does the individual have the right to privacy? Discuss both sides and give your opinion.’ At the end of the semester, the participants had been exposed to stages 1–3, building the context, modelling and deconstructing the target genre, and jointly constructing the text through the teaching-learning cycle, respectively. They had been taught the discussion genre’s structure and lexicogrammatical features. In stage 4, independent construction of the text consisted of a timed writing session. Learners in Groups 1, 2, and 3 wrote discussion texts on the topic of euthanasia with the following prompt: ‘Some elderly people claim to have the right to euthanasia. Discuss and then write your opinion regarding whether you support or refute their claim.’ Pre-instruction/noninstructional writing and post-instruction writing sessions were conducted during regular class time, and the remaining 50 minutes were spent on the writing tasks.

Target text genre: Discussion

Three genre texts were introduced during the semester: narrative writing at the beginning of the semester, expository (analytical) writing in the middle of the semester, and, finally, discussion genre at the end of the semester. A discussion genre is similar to an argumentative essay, and both possess similar features. However, in an argumentative essay, the writer uses various arguments to convince the readers of their perspective on the issue, whereas in a discussion genre, two sides of an issue are explored objectively and then the author chooses a side. Further details concerning the purpose and lexicogrammatical features of discussion genres are explained here. The discussion genre was the target genre of this study. In the SFL framework, the purpose of the discussion genre is to present two points of view on a topic in four paragraphs, where the first paragraph introduces the issue, the second and third paragraphs explain arguments for and against it, respectively, and the fourth paragraph expresses the writer’s opinion on the topic (Hyland, 1990; UNSW Department of School Education, 1989). As for the lexicogrammatical features of the discussion genre, the following three macrofunctions of language from the SFL framework were emphasised: ideational meaning (how language represents a writer’s experience), interpersonal meaning (how speakers and writers act through language), and textual meaning (how language is organised and how languages relate to contexts) (Arancón, 2013; Butt et al., 2002; Davidsen & Simon-Vandenberg, 2015; Halliday, Matthiessen, & Matthiessen, 2014).

Data Coding and Analysis

Phase 1: Pre- and post- surveys

In part 1, questions no. 1 to no. 3 were 5-point Likert scale questions (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The descriptive statistics results are displayed in Appendix Table A1. The difference was calculated by subtracting the mean value of the pre- survey results from that of the post-survey results. To assess the statistical difference, a paired t-test was applied (Appendix Table A2). I found a significant difference between pre- and post- survey scores for each group ($p < .05$). For part 2, which contained multiple-choice questions 4 to 12, the difference in responses to each question before and post instruction was analysed to confirm the statistical differences. A comparison of two paired correlated proportions (McNemar's test) was applied (Appendix Table A3). Six out of 12 questions were found to be significantly different.

Phase 2: Pre-instruction/noninstructional and post-instruction essays

To assess the learners' language choices in writing, their discussion texts, basic structure, and lexicogrammatical features were analysed. First, to assess their understanding of the essay's basic structure, a structural stage/move analysis of each paragraph was conducted (Hyland, 2000; Kanestion, Singh, & Shamsudin, 2017; Terauchi, Maswana, & Yamada, 2017; Zand-Moghadam & Mihami, 2016). In part 1, the genre analysis included a move analysis to help the researchers understand what text structure can lead to successful L2/FL writing and help readers understand text objectives comprehensively (Nodoushan, 2012). This approach involved identifying meaning and ideas in the target texts using a top-down approach by analysing a sequence of moves (Swales, 1990). A move analysis of the learners' discussion genre was performed to identify the moves and steps used in their essays; UNSW Department of School Education's (1989, p. 8) basic/schematic structure and Hyland's (1990) framework were employed. The analytical framework suggested that there are certain main moves involved in producing a discussion text. Hyland's (1990) framework was adopted in this study in part because it is comprehensive and clear as a framework of analysis—each move is clearly explained—and because it was developed on the basis of the L2 learning context (Kanestion, Singh, & Shamsudin, 2017). The analytical framework, which combined concepts from Hyland (1990) and the UNSW Department of School Education (1989), is displayed in Table 1.

TABLE 1

The Analytical Framework for Discussion Texts Used in This Study

	Stage	Move 1	Move 2	Move 3
1st paragraph	Issue	Gambit: Attention grabber	Information: Presents background for topic and introduces argument topic	(Marker) Introduces and/or identifies
2nd paragraph	Argument for	Marker: Signals the introduction of a claim and relates it to the text	Claim: States reason for acceptance of the reposition	Support: Provides data or cites references
3rd paragraph	Argument against	Marker: Signals the introduction of a claim and relates it to the text	Claim: States reason for acceptance of the reposition	Support: Provides data or cites references
4th paragraph	Recommendation	Marker: Signals conclusion boundary	Consolidation: Presents the significance of the argument	Recommendation: States the author's opinion

Note. Adapted from the UNSW Department of School Education (1989) and Hyland (1990).

Results

Phase 1

Part 1: Questions 1 to 3

Question 1: “How much knowledge do you already have about writing a target essay?” The data showed that the learners in Group 1 and Group 2 had some previous exposure to the discussion genre through the GBA and SFL framework of L2 writing lessons, while most of the learners in Groups 3 had limited experience writing in this target genre. Thirty-three percent of the learners in Group 1 chose item 3: *I have studied this target-genre essay before* (50% understanding). Learners in Group 2 chose either item 1: *I have not studied it at all* (0% understanding) or item 3: *I have studied this target-genre essay before* (50% understanding) (35.7%; n = 5). This finding suggests that there were two main groups in this class: one group comprising those with some learning experience of the target essay and another comprising those with no such experience. Most of those in Group 3 admitted to their limited experience with the target genre (64.7%, n = 11).

Table 2 shows the changes in learners’ understanding of the basic structure of the discussion genre. Notably, understanding of this structure increased among most of those in all groups ($p < .01$). The largest change in understanding occurred in terms of structure among the learners in Group 2; in the pre-survey, 71.4% of learners responded that they did not understand the structure of the target-genre essay, while in the post- survey, 50.1% of those in the same group res

ponded that they mostly understood the structure of the target-genre essay (answer 4: approximately 75% understanding). In summary, the learners’ understanding of the text structure increased, especially among novice learners (Groups 1 and 2) after taking this 15-week course that employed a genre-based approach to instruction.

TABLE 2

Learners’ Understanding of the Basic Structure of the Discussion Genre: Pre- and Post- Survey Results (%)

Scale	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
1	28.6	0	71.4	0	64.7	0
2	38.1	0	14.3	0	17.6	11.8
3	19	33.3	14.3	42.9	11.8	35.3
4	14.3	57.1	0	50	5.9	35.3
5	0	9.5	0	7.1	0	17.6

Note. 1 = 0% understanding, 2 = 25% understanding, 3 = 50% understanding, 4 = 75% understanding, 5 = 100% understanding.

Next, changes in learners’ awareness towards lexicogrammatical features of the discussion genre were examined (Table 3). The results indicated that most learners showed slight improvements in terms of their understanding of the lexicogrammatical features of the target genre in the post- survey ($p < .01$). Forty-three percent of the learners in Group 1, approximately 25% understanding of the lexicogrammatical features in the pre- survey, chose 2, whereas 47.6% of the learners in Group 1, approximately 50% understanding in the post- survey, chose 3.

TABLE 3

Learners' Understanding of the Lexicogrammatical Features of the Discussion Genre: Pre- and Post-Survey Results (%)

Scale	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
1	28.6	0	57.1	0	64.7	0
2	42.9	14.3	35.7	0	23.5	17.6
3	23.8	47.6	7.1	85.7	11.8	41.2
4	4.8	33.3	0	14.3	0	35.3
5	0	4.8	0	0	0	5.9

Note: 1 = 0% understanding, 2 = 25% understanding, 3 = 50% understanding, 4 = 75% understanding, 5 = 100% understanding.

Part 2

In part 1 of phase 1, the data showed significant improvement in terms of the learners' understanding of the structure and lexicogrammatical features of the discussion genre. In part 2 of phase 1, the following three features were assessed: (Q4) understanding of genre purpose, (Q9) understanding of words related to ideational meaning, and (Q10) understanding of words related to interpersonal meaning ($p < .01$ or $.01 < p \leq .05$).

Q4: Understanding genre purpose: In the SFL framework, the purpose of the discussion genre is to present both sides of an issue, such as the pros/cons or advantages/disadvantages of an issue. In the conclusion, the writer offers his/her opinion or recommendation based on the evidence presented in the essay (UNSW Department of School Education, 1989). In question 4, the learners were asked to select appropriate answers about the target essay's purpose from ten different choices. In the pre- survey, 81% ($n = 20$) of the learners in Group 1 chose the correct answer, item 5, *to introduce both sides and then write the author's opinion at the end*, while in the post- survey, 95.2% of learners in Group 1 chose the correct answer. In Group 2, 71.4% ($n = 10$) chose the correct answer in the pre- survey, and 86% ($n = 12$) chose the correct answer in the post- survey. In Group 3, 70.6% ($n = 12$) chose the correct answer in the pre- survey, and 77% ($n = 13$) chose the correct answer in the post- survey. These findings suggest that the learners' understanding of the text genre's purpose significantly improved in the novice learner groups (Group 1 and 2).

Q9: Understanding lexicogrammar: Ideational meaning in the discussion genre. This question assessed the learners' understandings of experiential metaphor in the ideational meaning of the discussion genre. One of the meanings of an experiential metaphor relates to ways of making meaning through an adjective in lexicogrammar (Martin, 1992). To assess learners' understanding of ideational meaning in the discussion genre, we asked them to choose an appropriate definition related to the features of ideational meaning (Table 4). In the pre- survey, the prediction/hypothesis was that most learners were not familiar with the idea that lexicogrammatical features influenced the discussion genre and that, therefore, they would possess a limited understanding of correct answers regarding this feature. In question 9, correct answers by item were item 1. general impersonal nouns (e.g., *euthanasia*), 2. mental verbs/processes (e.g., *permit, forgive, like, feel*), 3. verbal processes (e.g., *say, talk, speak*), 5. nouns and pronouns (e.g., *everyone, most people, we, he, a woman, you, people*), 6. action processes/verbs (e.g., *mix, make, fall, reach, bring*), and 9. abstract nouns (e.g., *a more important point*). Overall, the responses showed that understanding of item 1, the uses of general impersonal nouns (e.g., *vapor, rain*) ($p \leq .01$) had improved among learners in Groups 1 and 2. In the pre- survey, the most-selected answer was item 5, the uses of general nouns (Group 1, 81% [$n = 17$]; Group 2, 64.3% [$n = 9$]; and Group 3, 58.8% [$n = 10$]); in the post- survey, the most-selected answer was item 1, the uses of general impersonal nouns (Group 1, 76.2% [$n = 16$]; Group 2, 78.6% [$n = 11$]); for Group 3, item 5, general nouns, was the most-selected answer (70.6%, $n = 12$).

TABLE 4

Learners' Understanding of the Ideational Meaning of the Discussion Genre: Pre- and Post- Surveys (%)

	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
1	28.6	76.2	35.7	78.6	35.3	58.8
2	38.1	57.1	42.9	35.7	35.3	41.2
3	9.5	33.3	28.6	14.3	35.3	35.3
4	23.8	19	21.4	7.1	41.2	29.4
5	81	66.7	64.3	71.4	58.8	70.6
6	47.6	33.3	57.1	28.6	35.3	17.6
7	33.3	14.3	0	14.3	47.1	29.4
8	14.3	42.9	35.7	21.4	17.6	5.9
9	0	33.3	0	28.6	0	11.8
10	0	23.8	0	35.7	0	47.1

Note. 1. General impersonal nouns (e.g., *euthanasia*), 2. mental verbs/processes (e.g., *permit, forgive, like, feel*), 3. verbal processes (e.g., *say, talk, speak*), 4. substantive verbs to describe location (e.g., *is located*), 5. general nouns (e.g., *everyone, most people, we, he, a woman, you, people*), 6. action processes/verbs (e.g., *mix, make, fall, reach, bring*), 7. adverbial phrases to describe situations (e.g., *in the form of gas, in lakes*), 8. nominalisation, 9. abstract nouns (e.g., *a more important point*), 10. personal pronouns (*I* should not be used in this essay because there is no need to describe the writer's opinion).

Q10: Understanding lexicogrammar: Interpersonal meaning in the discussion genre. The function of lexicogrammatical features related to interpersonal meaning is to maintain social relationships and indicate the roles of participants in communication (Halliday, 2002). According to the results of McNemar's test (Table 5), significant differences were observed regarding the following items: 2. use of auxiliary verbs (e.g., *should, need to, will, can*) ($p < .05$); 4. use of exclamatory and interrogative sentences ($p < .05$); 7. use of adverbs with *-ly* (e.g., *absolutely, always, surely*) ($p < .05$); and 8. adjectives (e.g., *certain, necessary, usual*) ($p < .05$). The results of item 7 (use of adverbs) were analysed. In the pre-survey, 52.4% ($n = 11$) of learners in Group 1 and 57.1% ($n = 8$) of learners in Group 2 chose the use of adverbs as the appropriate lexicogrammatical feature for meaning-making in the essay, while only 23.5% ($n = 4$) of learners in Group 3 chose item 7. In the post-survey, most learners in Group 3 chose the use of adverbs as the appropriate lexicogrammatical feature for meaning-making in the essay. These findings suggest that learners in Group 3 showed the greatest improvement in understanding the uses of adverbs with *-ly*.

TABLE 5

Learners' Understanding of the Interpersonal Meaning of the Discussion Genre: Pre- and Post- Surveys (%)

	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
1	85.7	4.8	57.1	7.1	64.7	17.6
2	9.5	95.2	7.1	71.4	17.6	58.8
3	90.5	47.6	42.9	57.1	70.6	76.5
4	4.8	47.6	14.3	21.4	23.5	41.2
5	14.3	23.8	28.6	14.3	11.8	35.3
6	81	66.7	57.1	35.7	58.8	64.7
7	52.4	66.7	57.1	71.4	23.5	70.6
8	66.7	85.7	42.9	85.7	17.6	41.2
9	0	33.3	0	28.6	0	35.3

Note: 1. no use of auxiliary verbs; 2. use of auxiliary verbs (e.g., *should, need to, will, can*); 3. use of declarative sentences; 4. use of exclamatory and interrogative sentences; 5. use of past tense; 6. use of present tense; 7. use of adverbs with *-ly* (e.g., *absolutely, surely*); 8. use of adjectives (e.g., *certain, necessary, usual*); 9. use of the word *probably* to indicate weakness.

Q11: Understanding of lexicogrammar: Textual meaning of the discussion genre. The function of textual meaning is related to the coherence of the text in terms of organising and structuring linguistic information, which is language-oriented (Eggins, 1994; Halliday & Hasan, 1985). There was no significant difference between the pre- and post- survey results related to textual meaning. For example, in Group 2, the result was 64.3% in the pre- survey and 78.6% in the post- survey.

To summarise the results of phase 1, part 2, changes in understanding of the lexicogrammatical features related to ideational meaning, interpersonal meaning, and textual meaning were seen, and differed depending on the learners' English proficiency level. The greatest improvement in learner understanding was in lexicogrammatical features related to interpersonal meaning, following by those related to ideational meaning (especially experiential meaning). By contrast, changes in understanding of textual meaning showed the least development, which is possibly because most learners had previous learning experience concerning how to use words for textual meaning.

Phase 2

Structural move analysis of pre-instruction/noninstructional and post-instruction essays.

Learners' understanding of the lexicogrammatical features of the discussion genre were analysed using pre-instruction/noninstructional and post-instruction essays, the results of which are shown in Table 6 and Table 7.

TABLE 6

The Results of the Structural Move Analysis (Pre-Instruction and Noninstructional)

		Pre-instruction or noninstructional essay		
		Group		
	Feature	1	2	3
1st paragraph	(1) Introduction of the issue or topic	14	2	0
	(2) Argument for and disadvantages	1	0	0
	(3) Argument for	3	0	0
	(4) Writer's opinion	0	6	9
	(5) Reasoning of argument for	0	3	2
	(6) Introduction of the topic with examples	0	0	2
	(7) Examples	0	0	3
	(8) Introduction of the topic and the writer's opinion	3	3	1
2nd paragraph	(1) Argument for	13	3	2
	(2) Argument against	5	2	1
	(3) Blank	3	5	5
	(4) Supporting evidence 1	0	1	8
	(5) Writer's opinion	0	1	0
	(6) Example and writer's opinion	0	0	1
3rd paragraph	(1) Argument for	2	0	0
	(2) Argument against	11	2	3
	(3) Writer's opinion	2	2	0
	(4) Supporting evidence 2	0	1	0
	(5) Blank	6	9	14
4th paragraph	(1) Writer's opinion	4	0	1
	(2) Second evidence for argument against	3	0	0
	(3) Blank	14	13	16
	(4) Supporting evidence 3	0	1	0

TABLE 7
Results of the Structural Move Analysis (Post-Instruction)

		Post-instruction essay		
		Groups		
Features		1	2	3
1st paragraph	(1) To introduce issues and topics	21	14	8
	(2) To introduce/mention essay topics for readers	0	0	9
2nd paragraph	(1) Argument for	12	8	15
	(2) Argument against	3	3	1
	(3) Advantages	3	2	1
	(4) Characters	3	0	0
	(5) Writer's opinion	0	1	0
3rd paragraph	(1) Argument for	1	3	0
	(2) Argument against	13	6	14
	(3) Disadvantages	4	1	0
	(4) Writer's opinion	2	3	3
	(5) incomplete sentence	1	0	0
	(6) Blank	0	1	0
4th paragraph	(1) Writer's opinion	20	10	16
	(2) Blank	1	4	1

In Group 1, in the pre-instruction/noninstructional essay task, 14 learners introduced the topic/issue in the first paragraph, three learners stated the arguments for it, and several learners wrote their own opinions about the topic. In the second paragraph, approximately half of the learners wrote some sentences related to arguments for the issue, many learners wrote arguments against it, and most learners left it blank. In contrast, in the post-instruction essay task, most learners managed to successfully write the discussion genre following the model structure.

In Group 2, the results of the pre-instruction/noninstructional essay task showed that six learners wrote their own opinion in the first paragraph instead of introducing the topic to their readers. In the post-instruction essay task, however, most of the learners introduced the topic in the first paragraph. Most learners did not write the second or third paragraph in the pre- essays. One of the highlights of the data was that student number five in Group 2 wrote their pre-instruction/noninstructional essay according to a different genre's structure, namely, that of the expository (analytical) genre, introducing the writer's opinion of the topic in the first paragraph and offering support and evidence in the second, third, and final paragraphs. It is possible for writers to introduce their own opinion in the first paragraph of an expository (analytical) essay. However, again, our target essay in the present study was not in the expository (analytical) genre, but in the discussion genre. In the essay, the writer should relate their own opinion in the last paragraph. This suggests that this student had some prior experience with expository (analytical) writing, which was a different genre than the discussion genre, and the learners in this study were taught how to write it in the middle of the semester. In the post-instruction essay task, most learners demonstrated an understanding of the discussion genre and its four-paragraph structure.

In Group 3, in the first paragraph of the pre-instruction/noninstructional writing task, nine learners wrote their own opinion on the topic or related it to their personal experience without telling readers whether they were for or against it. However, in the first paragraph of the post-instruction essay task, most of the learners in this group introduced the issue and some of them also explained the structure of the essay. In the pre-instruction/noninstructional essay, a few learners related their experiences of the topic in the second paragraph and several learners managed to write the third and final paragraphs. In the post-instruction essay task, none of the learners introduced their own opinion in the first paragraph; rather, they began with an introduction to the topic for the benefit of their readers' understanding. Most of the

learners managed to produce discussion genre texts according to the required basic structure in the post-instruction essay task.

Discussion and Implications

How do understandings of the basic structures and lexicogrammatical features of texts differ between novice and experienced learners? The pre- and post- survey results of the present study indicated that the learners' understanding of the structure of the discussion genre improved, regardless of whether the learner was a novice or an experienced student of genre-based writing, which is consistent with the findings of Nagao (2017). In addition, the results of our analysis of the learners' pre-instruction/noninstructional and post-instruction essays showed that their structural understanding had also improved, although in this regard there were differences between novice and experienced learners. Before the learners had an explicit understanding of how to write the essays (pre-instruction/noninstructional), that is, when they were novices (who were first-year students), most of them wrote the essay in only one or two paragraphs. There are many possible reasons for this result: insufficient time for them to complete the task, limited understanding of the basic structure of the essay, and little high school experience or training in essay writing. Miyata (2002) found that in classroom activities in Japanese high schools, English lesson tasks related to learning grammar were introduced the most frequently, followed by training in reading English texts. In contrast, exposing learners to practices related to writing occurred only rarely. Within the writing tasks, learners were mainly exposed to the following two tasks: memorisation of sentence patterns and fixed phrases, and Japanese-to-English translation activities, with free-writing activities (Miyata, 2002). Overall, the learners' poor performance on the pre noninstructional instruction essay task can be linked to a limited amount of previous instruction on English-language texts (Watanabe, 2016; Watanabe, 2017). Such a limited understanding of basic text structure, according to the results of the structural genre analysis, can also be seen in the results of the pre-instruction/noninstructional essay task among learners in Group 3, who were novices, with lower English proficiency. Approximately 70% of the learners in Group 3 wrote only one or two paragraphs in the pre-instruction/noninstructional essay task, and 50% of learners in Group 3 started the first sentence with the phrase '*I think ...*', expressing the writer's opinion directly (e.g., *I think individuals don't have the right to privacy*: extracted from student number 11's essay). Subsequent sentences offered support for the first sentence. Many learners did not mention both sides of the topic in their pre-instruction/noninstructional essay. However, although learners in Group 2 were novices (albeit with higher English proficiency), few of them ($n = 3$) wrote a first sentence beginning with the phrase *I think*. Moreover, none of the learners in Group 1 (experienced learners) began the first sentence with the expression *I think*. Learners who did not write an *I think ...* sentence as the first sentence of the first paragraph generally instead explained the background information related to the topic being introduced. As for learners' understanding of lexicogrammatical features, the results suggest some degree of similarity between Group 1, comprising higher-English-proficiency learners with some experience in genre-based writing, and Group 2, consisting of novice learners with limited genre-based writing experience. Their understanding of the lexicogrammatical features showed slight improvement in the post- survey, when most of these learners showed an understanding of approximately 50%. Novice learners, with lower English proficiency, tended to show slightly better understanding in terms of lexicogrammatical features in the post- survey. Overall, the learners' awareness of the essay's structure and lexicogrammatical function improved after instruction, which is consistent with the findings of Yasuda (2015).

Does learners' understanding of the meaning-making process and of choosing lexicogrammatical features (ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions) change depending on whether they are novice or experienced learners?

The concept of the three functional modes of meaning within the SFL framework—ideational (experiential and logical), interpersonal, and textual—was applied in this study to understand which lexicogrammatical features were improved through a GBA L2-writing teaching methodology. The pre- and post- survey results found that learners' understanding of ideational and interpersonal meaning had improved ($p < .05$). Depending on the learners' English proficiency, different features of lexicogrammatical functions related especially to interpersonal meaning improved. As for the higher-English-proficiency learners (Groups 1 and 2), the post- survey showed that their understanding of the uses of auxiliary verbs such as *should*, *will*, and *can* had markedly improved ($p < .05$). While we did not see such improvement in the use of auxiliary verbs among lower-English-proficiency learners (Group 3), their understanding of how to use adverbs with *-ly* (e.g., *absolutely*, *always*, *surely*) significantly improved ($p < .05$). However, there were no significant differences in improvement among the three groups in terms of the use of vocabulary related to textual meaning. Still, a limited number of words with the textual meaning function (i.e., constructing conjunctions; *however*, *in contrast*, *on the other hand*) appeared in pre-instruction/noninstructional essays, especially those of Group 3.

Conclusions and Limitations

In conclusion, according to these results, EFL learners exposed to GBA L2-writing instruction with an SFL framework tended to improve in their choices of lexicogrammatical features with interpersonal functions. Through this research framework, we found that the general tendency of the changes in understanding depended on whether learners were novices or experienced and whether they had high or low English proficiency levels. Future studies are needed to investigate patterns of development on each metafunction among individual learners at different English proficiency levels.

Other possible factors might have affected the learners' writing development, such as degree of prior knowledge, prior experience writing similar genre texts, and potential bias in the feedback and grades on each assignment (although the instructor tried to treat each student as equally as possible). Conclusions about the effectiveness of the genre-based approach to instruction are also limited because there was no control group available to compare with the intervention group. Further research should thus include a control group to better understand the effects of the genre-based approach to writing instruction.

Despite these limitations, the findings of this study do provide some support for the role of explicit disciplinary writing instruction with a focus on basic structure and lexicogrammatical features of the target genre in helping to narrow down the gap between the improvement levels of different levels of learners regarding meaning-making choices in their essays. Furthermore, the results of this study highlight the value of collaboration between top-down learning systems (an SFL genre-based approach to language learning) and bottom-up learning systems: (traditional English-language education in Japan). Such collaboration might also be useful in introducing this writing instruction method in other learning contexts, such as English-language classrooms in Japan.

The assessment process in this study involved the analysis of discussion genre among both higher- and lower-English-proficiency learners to identify the valued features of the particular written text. It also involved a longitudinal analysis of meaning-making choices and understanding of the lexicogrammatical functions within the essay structure. The study included quantitative analysis, using the pre- and post-surveys, and qualitative analysis, examining student writings produced during the pre-instruction/noninstructional and post-instruction essay genre tasks. The study focussed mainly on changes in learners' understanding and awareness of genre-based writing and focussed less on changes in the learners' English proficiency levels. Based on the results of this study, we have developed a new approach to assessing learners' understanding of their metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual meaning within the SFL theory framework. This, in turn, can help us recognise EFL learners' understanding of strong and weak uses of resources in their essays. By locating classroom writing

instruction methods within the SFL framework, we hope to introduce educators familiar with SFL theory to examples of its educational application and encourage them to use SFL as well.

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Appendix

TABLE A1
Descriptive Statistics for Each Group (Q1 to Q3)

Groups	Q1. Pre-			Q1. Post-		
	1	2	3	1	2	3
(A)	1.91	1.50	1.24	3.05	2.14	1.47
(B)	1.00	1.00	1.00	3.00	2.00	1.00
(C)	1.22	0.76	0.56	1.20	1.03	0.72
Groups	Q2. Pre-			Q2. Post-		
	1	2	3	1	2	3
(A)	2.19	1.43	1.59	3.76	3.64	3.59
(B)	2.00	1.00	1.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
(C)	1.03	0.76	0.94	0.62	0.63	0.94
Groups	Q3. Pre-			Q3. Post-		
	1	2	3	1	2	3
(A)	2.05	1.50	1.47	3.29	3.14	3.29
(B)	2.00	1.00	1.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
(C)	0.86	0.65	0.72	0.78	0.36	0.85

Note. (A) Mean, (B) Median, (C) Std. Dev., Group 1: n = 21, Group 2: n = 14, Group 3: n = 17

TABLE A2
Test Results of the Population Mean of Each Group (Q1 to Q3)

Q	Mean	Mean difference	Std. Dev	Stat.	Degrees of freedom	p	Lower	Upper	±	
1	Pre	1.58	0.71	1.27	4.03	51.00	0.00	0.36	1.07	0.35
	Post	2.29						0.24	1.18	0.47
2	Pre	1.79	1.88	1.06	12.82	51.00	0.00	1.59	2.18	0.30
	Post	3.67						1.49	2.28	0.39
3	Pre	1.71	1.54	0.98	11.33	51.00	0.00	1.27	1.81	0.27
	Post	3.25						1.18	1.90	0.36

Note: Confidence interval (Upper : 95%, Lower : 99%), $p \leq .01 \rightarrow **$, $.01 < p \text{ value} \leq .05 \rightarrow *$, n = 52,

Q1: How well did you understand about how to write discussion texts before and after instruction?

Q2: How well did you understand the basic structure of the target essay?

Q3: How well did you understand the lexicogrammatical features of the target genre ?

TABLE A3
McNemar's Test Results for Q4 to Q13 (Only Significant Results)

	Questions	Ratio	diff.	statistic	p	
Q9.	1. Pre-: Uses of general impersonal nouns	32.70%	38.50%	13.885	0	[**]
	1. Post-	71.20%				
	6. Pre-: Action verbs/process	46.20%	-19.20%	4.05	.044	[*]
	6. Post-	26.90%				
Q10.	2 Pre-: Auxiliary verbs	11.50%	51.90%	21.806	0	[**]
	2. Post-	63.50%				
	4. Pre-: Uses of exclamatory and interrogative sentences	13.50%	25.00%	6.261	.012	[*]
	4. Post-	38.50%				
	7. Pre-: Adverbs with -ly in mood adjunct	44.20%	25.00%	6.857	.009	[**]

7. Post-	69.20%				
8. Pre-: Adjectives	44.20%	26.90%	6.5	.011	[*]
8. Post-	71.20%				
9. Pre-: The word <i>probably</i> categorised in the low degree group	.00%	32.70%	15.059	0	**]
9. Post-	32.70%				

Note: Confidence interval (Upper: 95%, Lower: 99%), $p \leq .01 \rightarrow **$, $.01 < p \leq .05 \rightarrow *$, $n = 5$, Q9= Choose all items related to lexicogrammatical ideational meaning for the discussion genre, Q10. Choose all items related to lexicogrammatical interpersonal meaning for the discussion genre