FILS-UPB, BLURRED LITERARY GENRES OF TODAY – FOCUS ON COPY WRITING IN ENGINEERING HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: The literary genre landscape of the current period is quite difficult to define, with a lot of emerging types of fiction, with blurred boundaries among classical/traditional genres and the new ones, respectively, and with the continuous emergence of rather unusual types, such as graphic book lit, Oz lit, blog lit, digi-fiction, Manga etc. Against such a picture, it is important that foreign language teachers using fiction in the classroom with various, more or less hidden, aims on their agenda, should be aware of the phenomenon dynamics and include in the course materials a range of newly emerged genres, certainly with a view to provide the trainees with a fresh contemporary perspective and an understanding of the world they are to live / work in. One such newly emerged but well-defined already genre is the copy, with a new profession being established with most major companies and / or advertising agencies, viz. that of a copywriter. In the educational setting described in this study, i.e. engineering higher education, a proposal of an approach to raising the students' awareness of the main characteristics of the copy as a genre, has sound grounds and justification, as more and more employers cannot afford investing in their staff training in terms of soft skills that are required at the workplace. It is then one of the roles of the academia to provide at least some background information to the future technical graduates who will be in the position of either selecting from among potential clients' offers in function of their advertising campaigns quality, or, quite frequently these days, will be in the position of even creating such copies that should contribute to their products being sold better. The approach rationale and original tasks designed and implemented with the bachelor engineering students are presented and discussed.

Keywords: blurred literary genres, copy writing, ESP, engineering higher education, soft skills development

Paper background and aim

In a world of widely spread and more and more easily accessible to the public literary products of any kind, the issue of *defining* new literary genres has come to the fore in an acute manner, not only for literary criticism, but also for other, mainly interdisciplinary, fields of research.

The phenomenon of occurrence of new genres in fiction is a fully dynamic one, with a variety of additions being due to the implementation of new technologies, already accessible to most readers worldwide. There are major changes taking place today, with traditional genres such as poetry, drama or novels changing in depth, while new surprising forms of literature emerging, reflecting the relentless modifications in both readership expectations and authorship (technical) possibilities. At the same time, the notion of *pure* genres tends to get dissolved into a range of rather *blurred* new artistic products that are trying to gain full status as genres.

As reality around points to the fact that major employers can no longer afford to invest in staff in-service training, and, therefore, they raise expectations from the academia to "deliver" highly skilled new employees, it has become quite clear that among the roles of a university foreign language teacher in higher technical education *raising learners' awareness* of the features specific to the present-day economic and social landscape in all its components has become a must.

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The university provides graduates with the necessary *hard skills* – this is a given and accepted fact. What else is needed, then?! As very well put in the literature (Paramoure, 2012), nowadays "the *soft skills* are the hard skills." In fact, this quote, in turn taken over from Amy Edmondson, professor of leadership and management at Harvard Business School, published in "Has Executive Education Gone Soft?" by Frank Kalman, for Chief Learning Officer – fully reflects the need for reconsideration of what the main content of the curriculum should be, in order to yield the engineers of tomorrow, able not only to apply their hard skills in the real working conditions, but also capable to discern, select, filter, evaluate, and even generate, items whose creation and / or design is based on their high level of *soft skills*. Paramoure (op. cit.) adds that the "true leader" today can only be a person possessing: *self-motivation, effective communication, learning agility, self-awareness, adaptability / versatility*. We should comment on this opinion, by adding that the students should be given full support in order to develop their soft skills – and the foreign language class is indeed such a favourable environment.

Perhaps not all of the young graduates, particularly upon their first employment identification stage, will be required to display *leadership* qualities, as those mentioned above, from the very beginning, but it is to be expected that promotion chances and their fulfilment of a successful career will significantly depend on their ability to perceive and select from the plethora of marketing and advertising offers surrounding, or rather assaulting them permanently, and also on their ability to join creative teams in their companies, supplying good ideas and developing coherent sales campaigns.

Consequently, such reasons provide sound grounds for embedding an approach to increasing the engineering students' awareness of the new forms of fiction which have occurred in recent decades, with a practical focus on the *copy*, as an important part of an advertising campaign creation.

The *genre* panorama of today, with focus on the *copy* – theoretical perspectives

The literature focused on discovering, defining, grouping and discussing new literary genres is quite vast, therefore it is rather difficult to consider the phenomenon in brief. However, for the purpose of our study, the notion of *literate* (Friesen, 2011) and that of *new literacies* may be of help. The author points out to the fact that literary genres such as: *illustrated novels, digi fiction, graphic novels, manga, doodle fiction, blog, email, IM novels* etc. are all interesting to analyse, and even incorporate, in teaching, as they reflect "what means to be literate in our current culture". Thus, among the traits characterizing a literate person nowadays, those that seem to be of real significance are centred around "designing information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes", by creating and / or evaluating multimedia texts.

From the reflections of a professional editor (McCrum, 2012) on the *changes* undergone by the literary world over the past three decades in terms of genres, mostly due to the role of trade and its demands in "a market-savvy creative economy", that actually keeps pace with reality, one can pinpoint a list, comprising the following 15 *X – lit* types, i.e. literary genres:

1.Litlit
2. Ghost lit
3. Graphic book lit
4. Chick lit
5. Gran lit
6. Erotic lit
7. Booker lit
8. US lit

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9. Commonwealth lit
10. Oz lit
11. Indian lit
12. Kids' lit
13. Translated lit
14. SF / fantasy
15. Blog lit.

Not only is it today quite hard to list all the new forms of literature, but it is equally difficult to keep pace with the occurrence of new forms at any moment – which is, we believe, a mirror of the reality of the world in which our students of today and engineers of tomorrow are going to live and work, a world growing multicultural, global, technical – this is called a "silent revolution" in the literature (Fernandes, 2017), which "doesn't involve guns and swords but something considered mightier: the pen (or its modern equivalent, the keyboard)". Here are some of the newly emerged genres, which may "give a much-needed adrenaline dose to the world of fiction that wasn't evolving as quickly until recently":

Mythopoeia
Cli-Fi
Bizarro
Interactive Fiction
Minimalism
Fanfic
Gran-Lit.

At a deeper level of the paradigm of change concerning *genres* today (Geertz, 1980), we can identify some of the explanations of the genre diversification phenomenon in what the author calls the "refiguration of social thought", seen as an effect of the alterations taking place in social science and "in intellectual life in general".

As far as the genre under focus is concerned within the proposed approach to using literary genres in the teaching of English in courses of CLIL or ESP type, viz. the *copy*, all the traditional rules and canons have been broken, with contemporary copywriters finding inspiration in graphic books, blogs etc. Thus, an interesting study (Foster, 2017) presents the *evolution* of copywriting. This is - in broad lines - a real "earthquake"-like shift, from "captivating content and sellable stories" written by talented writers, such as John Emory Powers, Bernice Fitz-Gibbon, Stan Freberg, David Abbott, and even successful novelists of the Salman Rushdie standing, towards the Internet-created copywriters, "bringing with it blogging, SEO, social networking and ecommerce". It is clearly pointed out that at present old-fashioned type of copy content would no longer have any response to its main function of selling the product advertised for, as the consumers of today would mostly respond to forms of persuasion that are familiar to them from everyday uses in a very technologized environment. Today emotion and appeal of an advertisement, and implicitly of the copy in it, rely on *speed of impact* and *emotional effect* – the winners are those brands that can "provide

useful, actionable, relevant and entertaining content, which draws customers in because it's inherently *valuable".*

*Therefore, modern copywriter, while preserving some of the qualities traditionally attached to this profession, will have to adjust to the new reality around, turning into digital copywriters – adaptable, using the tools of today, ready to be flexible and to sense change. The number of freelance copywriters and that of agencies has increased considerably, with expectations in front of them that can be easily seen from a definition provided quite recently of copywriting (*ROCKET | copywriting & marketing, 2019), as being the "evolving, cumulative knowledge around how to most effectively use language to compel audiences to

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act on what they see". Their tools are now "e-books, e-newsletters and social media messaging".

There are several *types of copywriting* (Madison, 2019), seen as elements of marketing or advertising, with *Marketing copywriting* referring to those who prepare the text used in various forms of adverts circulated via emails, online ads, billboards and so on. *Creative copywriting* is focused on designing slogans and unique concepts for commercials, while other forms, such as *Search Engine Optimization - SEO copywriting* or *Technical copywriting* are more specialized forms. Finally, the portfolio of categories also includes *Content copywriting*, comprising "how-to articles, blogs or newsletters", therefore concentrated more on providing information on one topic than on stimulating sales.

The literature currently available on good practice examples and valuable tips in the copywriting profession is indeed very rich, therefore an engineer who would assume the role of a copywriter can follow those pieces of advice and develop a career in this respect. An example (Reimherr & McCoy, 2018) of some *basic principles of modern copywriting* is selected as an illustration – it can also be used as input content in the classroom approach proposed:

1. Always focus on who you're writing for.
2. Think about how to write high quality, relevant material.
3. Learn how to use social media platforms.
4. Everyone loves a good story.
5. Learn about content form trends and find out which appeal to your audience.
6. Ask: how can I create something that a robot can't?
7. Break the rules to make progress."

The facets of a copywriter's job today are complex, according to the literature (WriterAccess, 2011), with "many hats copywriters have to wear", for instance they have to:

write marketing copy.
write public relations material.
write instructional material.
write speeches.
[understand that] *copywriters can be ghostwriters.*
write online copy.

To conclude at this point, for thosewho may wish to develop a career and even become "killing copywriters", which actually means extremely successful convincing professionals, the literature (Farnworth, 2013) offers a variety of principles and tricks of the trade, such as the following ones – also representing useful content and language input in the proposed approach:

Treat sales copy like a salesman
Sell in person first
Use copy that would help a salesman
Clear, concise, and compelling conversation
Literary writers are rarely good copywriters
Ignore the "Brief Copy" thumpers
Avoid the strange and unusual
Don't think of your audience — think of her
Study your customer.

3. The classroom approach – a proposal

The approach to integrating information about new forms of copies and copywriting rules and techniques described in brief in what follows can be inserted, in function of the course objectives, needs analysis and time available, in many educational contexts, by

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operating the required adjustments prompted by the framework of pedagogical principles underlying the course and the real context profile features.

The time given to this topic within the course economy is justified by the fact that employers would expect young graduates to be able to work in Sales departments of (multi- or inter-)national companies, and even participate in marketing and advertising campaigns, providing specialist advice to the teams of (non)-technical advertising professionals involved in designing such campaigns.

The linguistic and stylistic components of the cycle of tasks proposed will justify its place within the syllabus of a course which is basically a language focused one, as will be seen from the rationale of the activities presented.

The core of the *methodological* approach is the communicative one, with some eclectic elements, based on a logical integration of skills, similar to that required in real life situations. An element of *authenticity* of both the tasks and the content is ensured, and progression of the task challenge goes from *controlled* towards *free* production.

The essence of the approach main stages is presented below, together with the rationale underlying each task; possible alternative treatment is discussed, as well.

The context for the six-hour long *Copywriting Module* is provided by course book units dealing with marketing and advertising techniques and principles, which is a mandatory component in most courses of the *English for Science and Technology* or *English for Business* type.

Thus, at *Stage 1* the main purpose is that the students should get familiar with various new literary genres, with the teacher providing input for analysis first. Then the trainees are asked to provide such examples, by searching the Internet resources – homework is designed around such searches, with the students having to read not only on the new types, but also to select some illustrations, such as pieces of texts that they should read and sum up for their peers in class, in oral or written form. The rationale of Stage 1 tasks is to sensitize the learners with respect to the diversity of genres existing today, giving them examples and getting them to attune finely to the dynamic phenomenon of genre development / modification in general. Additionally, tasks combining reading sub-skills, as well as grammar, lexical and stylistic foci can be embedded, should the level of the group require it. Inventories of new forms of language occurring in such text types can be yielded by some activities, thus turning the students more open-minded as far as the idea of novelty in literary forms is concerned.

At *Stage 2* the focus will go to the new genre represented by the *copy*, together with the *copywriting* (sub)skills that are of interest for engineering students. Firstly, there will be tasks requiring the learners to compare / contrast various examples and forms of copies taken from authentic contexts, in terms of their structure, as well as their linguistic and stylistic components. The best method of developing the trainees' understanding of the various types of copies is, in our opinion, the *genre awareness raising questions*, a method derived from the much better-known *language awareness questions* that have been around for some decades now. The manner in which examples of *copies* are chosen, and the genre awareness raising questions are formulated, is quite important for the success of such activities, which are best carried out in pairs, as they generate good quality discussions in English, and each peer can contribute with their knowledge to the increase of information amount elicited by means of the questions. In terms of the rationale, the stage will develop the knowledge of the students from the level of mere *receivers* of advertising campaigns to that of *quality judges* in this respect, providing them with criteria of selection and assessment of such products, a skill that may prove useful in their working places after graduation.

The last phase, *Stage 3*, turns the learners, now possessing sufficient data to create their own *copies*, particularly in the field of their scientific and technical interest, into *copywriters*, in a *contest* of advertisements requiring them to work in groups on such a

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campaign, that should include: the creation of a product to be advertised, of a brand name and logo of the product, of a slogan - if necessary, and especially the design of a *copy* that would be integrated in the advertisement. They should be encouraged to freely select the type of advertising concept, as well as the style and format of the vehicle for the advert. As a final phase in the module, it is almost *free production* of a copy, which is integrated logically in the holistic concept – a quite difficult task - that is the reason why *group work* is recommendable at this stage. There are multiple learning opportunities for the trainees, who will discuss, select, read outside the class, work collaboratively, exchange views and opinions, will have to agree on issues so as to obtain the final product. All these roles they have to assume are as many hats that will make them realize the complexity of copywriting, as well as the importance of personal contribution in team work. The final vote for the best advertisement is an element that has good chances to increase the challenge, and, consequently, the students' motivation – which actually happens, as by that moment the students would have already perceived the importance of building up new soft skills that are required in their future jobs as engineers.

Open conclusions

The proposed approach to the teaching of new genres, such as the *copy*, in its new formats and technical supports, has been applied in class, with positive response from the students. Perhaps the fact that the groups where the approach was piloted are IT students, therefore in possession of high computer literacy skills, has contributed to the success of the proposal.

However, with engineering students of today, irrespective of their profile, such a cycle of activities could be of use, in our opinion, as they will all have good chances to develop increased awareness of the phenomenon of new genres occurrence, with particular focus on copies, given the fact that most of them will find employment with companies that manufacture and sell a variety of technical products.

The main beneficial elements in the approach are, beside the genre awareness raising, the development of linguistic and stylistic aspects, as well as an openness of mind and attitude in terms of detecting new phenomena, keeping informed and tuned to the dynamic evolution of reality, and, last but definitely not least, understanding the significance of putting one's soft skills at use in order to get professional status and prestige, and why not – collecting money for this.

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