Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics
ISSN: 2345-3303 – E-ISSN: 2588-3887 – https://rals.scu.ac.ir
Published by Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz

Please cite this paper as follows:

Hassan, S., & Boccia, C. (2025). Recontextualizing primary genres within Instagram photo-stories: an SFL macrogenre analysis and EAL pedagogical applications. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics*, *16*(2), 80-96. https://doi.org/10.22055/rals.2025.50083.3586

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Research Article

Recontextualizing Primary Genres Within Instagram Photo-Stories: An SFL Macrogenre Analysis and EAL Pedagogical Applications

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Received: 10/07/2025 Accepted: 19/10/2025

Abstract

Social media platforms provide ample space for artistic expression, cultural perspectives, and critical discourse. These evolving communicative landscapes foster the appearance of new genres, such as photo stories, as they are posted in Instagram (IG)—brief, image-centred media texts (Caple, 2013) typically accompanied by verbal elements that convey powerful cultural messages. Photo-stories function as macro-genres (Martin & Rose, 2008, 2012), integrating primary genres, including genres that engage and inform, and catering to a wide range of interests and levels of instruction. On account of their generic features, they are potentially valuable for students' genre literacy development, particularly in EFL contexts. This article analyses the generic structure of these macro-genres, especially the critical role played by the primary genres embedded in photo-stories. Texts by professional photographers whose work is featured on platforms such as NatGeo Your Shot are examined in terms of i) the critical role embedded primary genres play in fulfilling the purpose of photo- stories; ii) how values and higher-order ideas (Hasan, 1996) are construed in the texts and, iii) how these texts can be effectively integrated into EAL classrooms to promote students' genre literacy.

Keywords: Primary Genres; Macro Genres; Photo-Stories in IG; Teaching and Learning EAL.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary landscape of digital communication, social media platforms have emerged as fertile ground for the production and dissemination of multimodal texts that blend visual and verbal resources in innovative ways. Users deploy these affordances not only to express personal experiences but also to communicate cultural values, ethical stances, and artistic visions/ expressions. Within this context, Instagram (IG) photo-stories have evolved as a distinctive form of digital narrative, characterized by the centrality of images accompanied by concise yet impactful verbal elements. These multimodal ensembles resonate with what Hasan (1996) describes as "contextual configuration," where the interplay of semiotic modes supports the enactment of complex social purposes.

Photo-stories are also interesting in terms of their generic structure. While genre theory has frequently been applied to the study of academic texts to clarify how generic structure, coherence, cohesion and evaluative meanings, for example, contribute to textuality (Ravelli & Ellis, 2004; Hood, 2010; Khany, 2017), we extend this by considering a non-standard digital genre, the photo-story, which combines verbal and visual modes. Drawing on Martin's (1992) notion of "macro-genre," Instagram photo-stories can be viewed as higher-order genre complexes that incorporate a range of primary genres—including descriptive passages, recounts, narratives, and exempla—to achieve layered communicative goals. This configuration allows photo-stories to traverse multiple registers and fields, enabling them to engage diverse audiences across cultural, educational, and professional domains. Muntigl (2006) further reinforces the idea of such macro-genre formations as sites for negotiating interpersonal meanings, where authors and audiences co-construct values and attitudes in a dialogic space.

Photo-stories are media stories of around 900 words, varying between 125 and 1200. They are image nuclear texts (Caple, 2013, p. 5) that consist of an image (or several images included in a carousel) to the left of the screen and a verbal section that occupies about one third of the screen. The design of Instagram photo-stories reflects a purposeful orchestration of semiotic resources: the photograph, typically placed to the left of the screen, offers visual salience that evokes emotions and draws readers' attention, while the accompanying verbal text—positioned to the right—expands or reframes the visual message, adding interpretive depth.

The photo-stories we have examined and now propose as compelling texts to be used in the EAL context are not confined to personal accounts; they are also a favored medium for publications like *National Geographic YourShot*, as well as for independent photographers and writers seeking to document pressing social, cultural, and ethical issues. In this way, Instagram photo-stories exemplify the potential of digital genres to mediate between private expression and public discourse, aligning with Hasan's (1996a) insight into the "generic structuring of meaning" in diverse communicative contexts.

Photo-stories, characterized by their visually engaging format and brief, vivid text can be easily and productively adapted to the teaching and learning of EAL across different ages, interests and proficiency levels. Their bimodal nature encourages students' creative interpretation and design of texts. The wide array of themes that can be explored - personal and social - also make it a context in which to explore themes that matter to students and foster their communal awareness and values. In this article, we report the results of a qualitative analysis of 35 National Geographic *YourShot* photo-stories using an SFL-informed genre analysis i) to model their Generic Structure Potential (GSP), more particularly, to analyze and describe the primary genres most frequently embedded within the SLICE OF LIFE stage; ii) to show how embedded genres contribute to realizing higher-order meanings (theme/values) and, iv) to illustrate how the analysis can be used to inform genre-based EAL instruction. The next section describes the methodology we used in the analysis of the photo-stories.

2. Methodology

Given the interest of photo-stories both from a descriptive and applied perspective, we undertook the study of a sample of 35 photo-stories published on Instagram by *National Geographic* Your Shot. The sample texts were collected manually. We used external criteria—that is, factors not intrinsic to the texts themselves—and selected 15 texts by the Canadian photographer and activist Justin Anantawan and 20 by other photographers, also from the *National Geographic* publication, chosen randomly to assess variation, even if minimally. Texts were all selected from the same publication to ensure editorial consistency as much as possible. As the data were publicly available posts, no ethical concerns arose in our data collection.

The analytical relevance of photo-stories is very much related to the multimodal nature of these texts, yet this article will concentrate on the contribution of verbal semiosis to the generic structuring of the photo-story and how it contributes to the attainment of the higher-order ideas these texts typically construe. As we analyze some sample texts, we will show how the generic choices which are at the service of the overall purpose of the genre both have an impact on and are impacted by the more concrete situational variables that specify it, mainly those related to field and tenor. The visual component to the right also contributes to attaining the purpose of the genre and relates to its generic structuring. Even if the contribution of visual semiosis is not the key interest in this article, brief reference will be made to its role.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Generic Structure of Photo-stories

The generic structure potential that seems to capture "the total range of textual structures available with [this] genre" (Hasan 1996, p. 53) is associated to a variety of actual or 'schematic structures' that reflect varied, creative and effective instantiations. This makes this genre particularly interesting in descriptive and applied terms. Understanding how the genre is put together to fulfill its social purpose is a key step to moving on to understanding how the world is represented, how the author/photographer relates to its audience and expresses higher-order ideas both visually and verbally. Our proposal of a Generic Structure Potential for photo-stories echoes comparative analyses such as Soodmand

Afshar, Doosti, and Movassagh's (2018) study of research article discussions, where careful attention to move structure illuminated how genres achieve their social purpose.

We first briefly present the overall structure that we propose for photo-stories that captures what we have observed in all our sample texts, before moving through each stage with examples.[1]

PHOTO DATA ∧ [(< CONNECTION WITH PHOTOGRAPHER>)] ∧ STATEMENT ∧ HASHTAG

All these stages, except the CONNECTION WITH PHOTOGRAPHER, appear in 33 of the texts in our sample and are, in Hasan's view, genre defining.

The following text effectively fulfils the social purpose of photo-stories as it unfolds in stages:

Text 1. *Justin Anantawan's Photo-story at: https://www.instagram.com/p/CNkmiNqgzrM/*



justin_anantawan New feature for National Geographic Yourshot: Photos by @justin_anantawan / Recently a cow living on the Maasai homestead of my adopted Kenyan son, Borniface Kurash, gave birth for the first time and was ready for milking. As is natural for new cow mothers, she was reluctant. However, it was important for her to be milked because she had colostrum and was at risk of developing a bacterial infection in her udder. So, using ropes, Borniface's family members worked together to hold the cow steady as they drew milk. Borniface's father stroked her skin as she was being milked, whispering to her in the Maasai language to calm down and telling her the family loved her. / These milking practices have been passed down from generation to generation by the Maasai, who have a pastoral way of life. #YourShotPhotographer #kenya #maasai #cow #milking	PHOTO DATA STATEMENT HASHTAG

This photo-story opens with an initial stage we have called PHOTO DATA that includes details about the photographer, the publication, and some information on the circumstances of the shooting of the photograph. It is associated with the domain of experience that connects the experience of shooting the photograph and what follows, the experience that is captured in it. It also functions to articulate the visual and the verbal semiosis in the text. PHOTO DATA is a stage we have observed in all the texts in our sample. It sometimes merges into the next stage, the SLICE OF LIFE, by including details that already 'orient' the events told in this next stage. The SLICE OF LIFE is the core stage in photo-stories. In this particular instance, we are told about the Maasai homestead and the experience of a cow mother having difficulties feeding her baby calf. As the SLICE OF LIFE unfolds, we are told about the challenge faced by the mother cow and by the

keepers and how, through their kind, patient care they soothe the cow and can draw milk. Within this stage, the photographer can include references to his own experience of the events told (CONNECTION WITH THE PHOTOGRAPHER), although this is not the case in Text 1. Text 2 illustrates this practice:

Text 2. *Navin Kumar's photo-story at: https://www.instagram.com/p/CV00s6nvIm7/*

> Photos by Navin Kumar @navinvatsa / Seeing the truth and living in truth are two different things. I shot these images from the flooded zone of a rural part of India this year during the monsoon. I often entered the water to capture these emotions. The flooded zone stretched more than 500 meters (1,640 feet) and at some locations it went on until the horizon. Nature's rage causes so much loss to mankind and other life. I learned from how people accept these conditions and deal with them with patience and perseverance until the water recedes and life can get back to normal. During these encounters I witnessed the close relationship between humans and animals. These moments remind us to find calmness during difficult situations in life. I hope life will go back to normal soon. #YourShotPhotographer #flood #India

In Text 2, the writer not only provides his contact information, he also tells us briefly about the circumstances under which he took the photograph and continues to be a participant experiencing the events as they are told throughout the text.

After we are told about the concrete, here and now events that give us access to a , the text typically moves on to make a STATEMENT that captures the idea the events just told stand symbolically for, or the higher-order ideas, in Hasan's view (1996b). Hasan (1996b) describes this as "double articulation" (p. 51): the literal field of the text (what happens) symbolically conveys a second, thematic field (what it means). Text 2 right above beautifully illustrates this double articulation: we are told about the floods in rural parts of India, shown a powerful picture of a girl carrying and saving a goat (the events) and are then told about the author's thoughts on nature's rage, people's patience and perseverance, the close relationship between humans and animals and the hope for a return to normality (the ideas the events stand for symbolically). We draw upon Hasan all along in our account of how the central purpose of photo-stories – that of representing concrete experience and relating it to higher-order ideas it stands for symbolically- is realized in these texts.

Additionally, photo-stories are typically wrapped up with a HASHTAG which facilitates engaging with social media content and text internally, it fulfils the function of distilling key ideas the text has built, both visually and verbally. Technically, we can call it a macro-Theme, that is the distillation of the key themes or ideas in the text.

3.2 Embedded Genres

In order to illustrate the embedding of primary genre in photo-stories, we now move on to open up in delicacy what we have observed happens as the SLICE OF LIFE is represented in the nuclear stage in the text.

In text 1, we are told about the problem or the challenge that both the mother cow, Borniface and his family face. The text tells us about their disposition to deal with the problem and to solve it. This is typical of one of the story genres, the narrative (Rothery & Stenglin, 1997; Martin & Rose, 2008, 2012), a genre that typically represents a problematic experience (a complication) that characters attempt to deal with and that comes to be partially or completely resolved (resolution). This particular narrative talks about a challenge, how characters attempt to deal with it, how it is resolved and the higher-order ideas that these events stand symbolically for: the close bond between people and animals as they partake in 'a pastoral way of life', typical of tribal traditions.

Other photo-stories make different choices as they instantiate the SLICE OF LIFE. Once the initial data on the photograph is provided and we are about to be told about people and their experience of the world, we come to read a narrative, or a recount, or a profile that gives us access to concrete experience that, as we have said, stands symbolically for higher-order ideas. These genres seem to work effectively to represent people and the events in which they are involved, that have some special significance. The inclusion or embedding of a genre, typically a primary one, is what makes photo-stories as a whole function as frames, as it were, in which other genres are embedded; technically, as macro-genres: "texts which combine more fundamental elemental genres such as recounts, narratives, explanations, and so on" (Hyland, 2002, p. 123; Martin 1997). These primary genres are 'embedded' in the macro-genre that holds together the other embedded genres, each of which fulfils a role, sometimes the role of an entire stage. This is a feature that is

interesting in descriptive and applied terms: among the choices made as photo-stories are created is 'how' to communicate the snapshot of the world that is assigned special significance: perhaps by telling a narrative foregrounding the conflict and solution, or by foregrounding events themselves as they follow each other sequentially in a recount, or by putting together a profile that highlights special features and experiences of a character. These are, of course, important decisions that are very educational in terms of language and multimodal genre literacy development.

3.2.1. Embedded Narrative

We now move to illustrating how embedded genres function in photo-stories and how they contribute to fulfilling the social function of the genre. We return to text 1 and observe how the photo-story is put together and how the narrative embedded into the SLICE OF LIFE stage works toward building higher-order ideas and, in so doing, to the fulfilment of the function of the text. We repeat Text 1 here:

> **justin_anantawan**
> New feature for National Geographic Yourshot:
> Photos by @justin_anantawan / Recently a cow living on the Maasai homestead of my adopted Kenyan son, Borniface Kurash, gave birth for the first time and was ready for milking. As is natural for new cow mothers, she was reluctant. However, it was important for her to be milked because she had colostrum and was at risk of developing a bacterial infection in her udder. So, using ropes, Borniface's family members worked together to hold the cow steady as they drew milk. Borniface's father stroked her skin as she was being milked, whispering to her in the Maasai language to calm down and telling her the family loved her. These milking practices have been passed down from generation to generation by the Maasai, who have a pastoral way of life.
> #YourShotPhotographer #kenya #maasai #cow #milking

The text opens with data on the photo that builds one of the first domains of experience in the text, which concerns the relationship between the photograph, the photographer and the circumstances around the shooting of the photo. This stage often merges into the first part of the SLICE OF LIFE, as in this case, including information on the characters and circumstances (time and place) in the narrative. The second stage and the experiential domain opens as the narrative begins with an Orientation, followed by the Complication (the mother cow's reluctance to feed her calf) and the attempts by Borniface's family to milk her and avoid her getting udder infection. These are contextualized, here-and-now, one-time events that involve actions carried out by participants and are associated with temporal, location and manner circumstances. As we read what occurs and view the image (Cf. Text 1.) we are given direct access to the events that unfold towards the resolution of the problem. The experience construed both visually and verbally is a powerful recreation of the real-life events at the Maasai homestead and, at the same time, reflects the ideas for which the events stand symbolically. The events themselves and the attitude expressed and invoked towards the behaviour of the family – 'Borniface's father stroked her skin as she was being milked, whispering to her in the Maasai language to calm down and telling her the family loved her'- already construe the higher-order ideas that the text moves on to explicitly ground in the next stage, the Statement. Reference to the milking practices passed down from generation to generation and to the pastoral way of life they lead explicitly nat uralizes in the text the higher-order ideas that the photo-story is most significantly about. The narration that is embedded in the verbal text as the SLICE OF LIFE, complemented by the image – we see the hands of a member of the family, part of the body of mother cow and the head of the calf all working in unison – construe the Resolution stage of the narrative and powerfully invoke the harmony of the pastoral way of life they lead.

Photo-stories are most centrally about giving us powerful glimpses into the lives of people that are in some way inspiring, moving, heartening. A narrative, simple as it may be, can be most effective in leading the viewer/reader towards the consideration of the higher order idea the author wishes to communicate. Its role as a 'shower' of reality that effectively invokes values and ideas is as natural as it is powerful.

3.2.2. Embedded Recount

We now turn to another story genre that is one of the first primary genres that students produce at their first levels of instruction, the recount. Let's consider text 3 below.

Text 3. *Justin Anantawan's Photo-story at: https://www.instagram.com/p/CUap4_ercOY/?img_index=2*



https://www.instagram.com/p/CUap4_ercOY/?img_index=2

Photos by @justin_anantawan / These are portraits of my new friend Abdul Basit, a 20-year-old Deaf man living in Nairobi, Kenya. Being a former teacher of the Deaf in Kenya, I still love to use sign language, and whenever I see Deaf people communicating with each other, I say hello. I was walking through Nairobi when I saw Abdul chatting with another Deaf woman, and I started up a conversation. They both seemed to be surprised that a hearing foreigner like me knew Kenyan Sign Language. (Contrary to popular belief, sign language is not universal, and every country has its own distinct sign language.) I exchanged phone numbers with Abdul and later invited him to come to my studio to take his portrait. He comes from a family of Deaf people: His mom, baby brother, two uncles, and one aunt are all Deaf. They also all share the same distinct blue eye color. In the second photo he is making the sign for "Deaf." #YourShotPhotographer #deaf #signlanguage #blueeyes

This text opens with data from the photo and establishes early in the text the connection between the events told and the photographer himself. As this occurs, we are invited into the SLICE OF LIFE, more specifically into the recount that is embedded into the stage, fulfilling its role. We come to know about the photographer's fondness towards sign language and to those that use it. The recount tells us about the photographer's deliberate attempts to approach and connect with two individuals who are using Kenyan Sign Language. The interests of the recount are the events themselves, typically 'without significant disruption' (Martin & Rose, 2008, p. 51). Attitudinal meanings are typically spread across the record of events prosodically, interspersed with or invoked by experiential meanings. In this particular text, the strong inclination of the photographer the uniqueness and beauty of the deaf participants are both invoked and inscribed along the text. No explicit reference to higher-order ideas is made, yet this does not mean the text is 'pointless'. As we share experiences that occur to us or to others and concentrate on the events themselves, important meanings can be construed, step by step, as the uniqueness, beauty and exceptional quality of the language of the deaf and of Abdul and his family. Interestingly, as the recount gives us access to a SLICE OF LIFE and gets 'recontextualized' in the new environment of the photo-story, it is somewhat adjusted. One interesting adjustment is the report that is embedded (as a second level embedded genre) to specify the special nature of Kenyan sign language: '(Contrary to popular belief, sign language is not universal, and every country has its own distinct sign language.)'. In this way, the typically personal, one-to-one recount that we are more familiar with becomes, in the context of this public genre, momentarily more factual as we are told important background information that actually highlights the uniqueness of the sign language used by the participants. As the SLICE OF LIFE wraps up, there is no Statement explicitly made and the text moves on to provide additional PHOTO DATA on the second photograph.

This text is a clear example of the embedding of a very primary genre, typically one that is shared in the context of family and friends, to fulfil a central role in a more public genre that is reaching out to an audience that is unknown (or

relatively so) and that requires certain adjustments to effectively fulfil its role. A recount seems a very sensible genre to resort to in order to give access to events, just as they occur in the world, for the reader to have access to. The photograph takes up the key function of foregrounding the uniqueness of the subject and what is remarkable about sign language in an attempt to call our attention, to make us listen with deliberation, just as the photographer does. In turn, the brief report on Kenyan Sign language foregrounds the uniqueness the text is expressing prosodically.

We have come across beautiful examples of other story genres that are embedded and very effectively contribute to fulfilling the function of giving readers access to a SLICE OF LIFE. Observations and exempla are two genres that blend in, become recontextualized and offer a 'snapshot' of events from a distance or centrally portray and evaluate the behaviour of participants (Rothery & Stenglin 1997; Martin & Rose, 2008), respectively. In so doing, they function effectively to give readers access to a window into reality from a distance (as we sometimes appreciate or recollect experience ourselves) or as a way to recall, foreground and share accounts of behaviours that stand out and deserve to be shared. Observations and exempla do exactly that as they become parts of photo-stories. Space constrains the number of genres we can illustrate.

3.2.3. Embedded description

We now move on to observe the role of other primary genres that are embedded in the SLICE OF LIFE stage, becoming recontextualized in order to serve their role effectively. One such case is description, as in the photo-story included as Text 4.

Text 4. *Justin Anantawan's Photo at /https://www.instagram.com/p/CbQklf9unLz/*



Photos by @justin_anantawan / These are photos of a street exhibition by Sun Valley Art Collective, an organization in Kibera that was initiated by youth residents Wyclife Oluoch, Saviour Juma, and Wycliff Okoth. They engage youth in classes to teach them skills for a career in art. They also earn income from their sustainable art. They write: "We created art made from beer cans, which was a cheaper solution for us … It allowed us to participate in the movement against pollution, which has been a major problem in Kibera … We have been teaching youth from our community techniques such as painting, cartoon making, carving, and metalwork, sharing the ideas with them and giving them a chance to express themselves … However, this process has been slow because of a scarcity of resources …. Hopefully in the coming future we will be able to increase our membership. Engaging more youth in the arts will help turn them away from drugs and crime." #YourShotPhotographer #sustainableart #kibera #nairobi #kenya

Right after mentioning the photographer, the key interest of the text is identified: a street exhibition by Sun Valley Collective, in Kibera. This is the SLICE OF LIFE we 'see' in the photographs in the carousel of pictures and it is the key participant in the verbal text. The SLICE OF LIFE stage is, in fact, a description of the Art Collective. The starting point or Theme of most clauses is 'they' that is, those who run the collective and the activities they are in charge of. Key participants are also the youth that benefit from a career in arts that can earn them an income, educate them in sustainable art and keep them away from dangers such as drugs and crime. The main interest is actually both the 'entity' that is being described and its impact on the people involved. Photo-stories are, in fact, mainly oriented to human experience and its

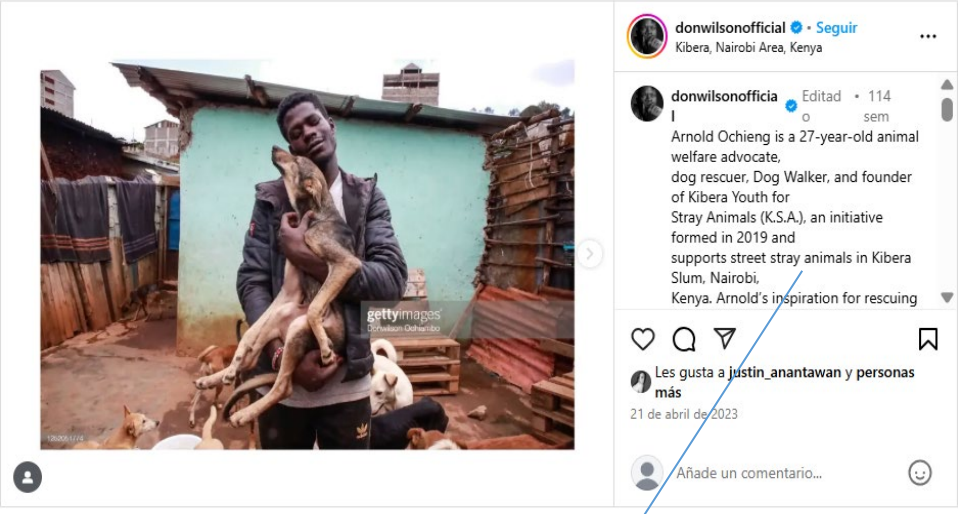
impact on other humans or the natural world. So this description is very much about the art collective and its impact on those involved. Aspects of the collective taken up in the description are: its respect for the environment; the art techniques it teaches youth; the impact of their art on the environment; the income they can earn; ways to express themselves; and safety from dangers that can affect them. Human interest drives the description as it is recontextualized in the photo-story to show us a SLICE OF LIFE of those who run and take part in the collective. The photograph, in turn, contributes by foregrounding the heart-warming portrait of one of the youths in the program as he exhibits his art both intently and serenely, surrounded by a grim background. Even when the text does not include a STATEMENT, it can be easily unburied from the description: collective initiatives; expressive art; sustainable art; safe youth; escape from drugs. One of these ideas is, in fact, picked up in the HASHTAG at the very end of the text.

This photo-story is an example of a text in which the author/ photographer has chosen to focus not on events and their significance but rather, on an entity, an art collective. And, as the entity described is at the service of a photo-story, it makes a lot of sense that its main interest is the impact it has on humans. Here again, a primary genre, description, is chosen on account of its potential to adapt itself to the role of enabler of the representation of a SLICE OF LIFE which can, in turn, stand symbolically for higher-order ideas. In terms of literacy development, we come across yet again, a genre that is foundational, one of the first ones taught in EAL instruction and gets revisited to be used in a genre that is rhetorically more challenging, that functions in a context that is not personal but public, with the potential of standing symbolically for higher-order ideas.

3.2.4. Embedded Profile

We now move to considering one more example in which the photo-story acts as a frame for other genres that become embedded. Consider Text 5:

Text 5. *Don Wilson's Photo-story at* https://www.instagram.com/p/CrT6gnsoVJS/



Arnold Ochieng is a 27-year-old animal welfare advocate, dog rescuer, Dog Walker, and founder of Kibera Youth for Stray Animals (K.S.A.), an initiative formed in 2019 and supports street stray animals in Kibera Slum, Nairobi, Kenya. Arnold's inspiration for rescuing stray dogs comes from his love for animals, especially those that lack shelter and have nowhere to go. With the help of his team at Kibera Youth for Stray Animals, locals, and friends around the community, Arnold has been able to rescue over 30 dogs and give them out for adoption after receiving free medical care. Arnold's mission is to help spread awareness on stray dogs vaccination and have them vaccinated to help prevent various diseases and viruses.
Photography by Donwilson Odhiambo/Getty Images.

As the text opens, we are not provided with photo data, as is the case with the examples we have discussed above. It is briefly included at the end of the text. The photo-story opens giving us direct access to the SLICE OF LIFE in which Arnold Ochieng is and remains the clear point of departure for all the information we get throughout the text. This orientation is also very clear in the salience he has in the photograph. As the text unfolds, we get to know about the

foundation he created for stray dogs, yet he and his efforts and achievements remain the central focus of the text. We call this text a profile, a descriptive sketch of a subject (most typically a person) that can include descriptive and eventive details, even direct access to the voice of the subject. All this information is oriented to foregrounding what is particularly significant or distinctive about the subject (key features of the character; highlights of his or her life; area of expertise) and his or her relationship with or view on the human experience that the text attempts to foreground. This is the case of Text 5: it clearly revolves around Arnold Ochieng, his initiative, his aspirations and achievements and what his mission continues to be. The SLICE OF LIFE we are told about does not relate centrally to a sequence of events in Arnold's life or an experience he has had. Rather, it tells us about him, what is remarkable about his life, what some of his values are. Even when profiles are not among the primary genres typically identified in SFL literature, we very often come across them in mass media and in EAL course books as well. A profile typically moves along the following stages: the subject is identified, his/her distinctive quality or trait is mentioned and then aspects of his/her life are described or brief events are included that underscore what makes this character stand out. There is typically a rounding off, highlighting his/her contribution. In this particular text, the descriptive sketch in the text 'shows' once and again all the actions that support his 'love for animals' and his desire to inspire others' awareness of the needs of stray animals. The contribution of the photograph to this bimodal genre is clear: the expression of his face and the vectors of his head, arms and hands embracing one of his rescue dogs embody the same feelings and values that the written text expresses verbally.

4. Photo-Stories: Moving to Pedagogy

4.1. Opportunities for Genre-based Pedagogy

We have reviewed the key features of photo-stories analyzed as macro-genres that draw upon, revisit and maximize the potential of elemental genres to represent meaningful slices of life. Story genres in particular – anecdotes, narratives, recounts, exempla and observations - are frequently observed as they are embedded in the nuclear stage of photo-stories. Reports, descriptions and profiles can also be found. We now review the key consequences that photo-stories and their status as versatile macro-genres have in the applied context of EAL teaching and learning, ideas which we have suggested or explicitly mentioned through the discussion of the photo-stories. We take them up with a view to preparing the grounds for the concrete teaching and learning suggestions that follow.

Photo-stories offer compelling opportunities for multimodal genre literacy development because their creation involves interconnected layers of choice. These layers illustrate why photo-stories are pedagogically valuable: they require students to work explicitly with multiple levels of meaning-making, from generic framing down to visual and lexical detail. We outline four key layers below.

4.1.1. Generic Structuring

The overall challenge of choosing among generic selections to put the text together. This opens up the possibility of making students explicitly aware of how a photo-story achieves its purpose as it fulfills the contextual demands of the social activity. It becomes a puzzle-like activity in which different pieces, visual and verbal, are to be chosen and strategically put together. For example:

4.1.1.1. Considering familiar genres–such as short narratives, recounts, descriptions or reports–and how suited they are to create the SLICE OF LIFE they wish to represent.

4.1.1.2. Revisiting these primary genres to assign them a role in another, more sophisticated text in terms of social purpose and rhetorical functionality. Primary genres that become embedded will be adapted, recontextualized to fit the new generic context in which they are embedded.

4.1.2. Register Choices

Moving down the stratification layers to **register**, choices will be made related to: i) **Field**—how common-sense, specialized, particular, or generic; concrete or abstract they wish their representations to be. ii) **Tenor**—as selections are made among voices that are more or less subjective, more about 'telling' or 'showing,' and drawing more or less upon experiential semiosis to invoke the significance they wish to assign to the SLICE OF LIFE they have created. iii) **Mode**—how to distribute semiosis among the rich affordances of both the visual and the verbal; what part of the generic structuring of the text will be construed visually and verbally; and how narrative or descriptive they wish their photographs to be

(Kress & van Leeuwen 2006; Kress 2010; Painter et al. 2013) as they represent either the SLICE OF LIFE or the higher-order ideas in the texts.

4.1.3. Semantic and Lexico-Grammatical Choices

These are related to lexical choices to build **field**; **transitivity choices** involving participants with more or less agency to invoke different types of behaviour; **pre- and post-modification** to express attitude; choices of **epithets** that are explicitly attitudinal or **behavioural processes** that afford attitude. These are just a handful of the rich array of choices that will need to be made to put together a SLICE OF LIFE that is vivid and effective, one that can, in a brief text, stand symbolically for powerful ideas.

4.1.4. Visual Choices

These involve visual resources—**representational, interactional, and compositional**—that must be chosen, and, equally importantly, the ways in which the visual and verbal semiosis will be designed to complement each other dynamically (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Kress, 2010; Painter et al., 2013; Boccia, 2025).

Again, this is a review of some of the key ways in which both interpreting and creating a photo-story offers rich, varied and compelling opportunities for literacy development. We now move on to propose concrete ways in which these ideas can take the shape of classroom activities for the EAL context creating opportunities for teaching and learning.

4.2. Teaching-Learning Strategies for Classroom Practice

So far, we have foregrounded the appealing nature of photo-stories and their aesthetic and pedagogical value, which makes them an excellent choice for language teaching. The combination of engaging visuals with concise, thought-provoking texts naturally draws the reader's attention, making photo-stories especially effective in maintaining readers' –and in a teaching context, learners'-- interest, as well as being very appropriate for written production. Bearing these ideas in mind, this macro-genre may certainly appeal to young learners, and offer an effective entry point, motivating students to explore language through real-life stories and events and their visual interpretation, and they can be taken up at higher levels of instruction implicating more sophisticated visual, verbal resources at the service of more complex rhetorical functions. Thus, language learning may become more dynamic and accessible. This application resonates with the work of Jodairi Pineh (2017), who examined how genre-based pedagogy can be productively adapted to new instructional contexts and work as an instrument for increasing cultural and linguistic awareness.

In this section, we include activities we have worked with in EAL classes, at the upper intermediate level (B1-B2 classes) a point in their instruction at which some of the primary genres have already been introduced. As the photo-story macro-genre offers the possibility of embedding primary genres within its structure, it fits smoothly into the progression of students' transition from personal, everyday narratives (recounts, anecdotes, even exempla) into more public, socially engaged discourse.

The teaching and learning suggestions we include presuppose familiarity with Genre-based Pedagogy and the Teaching Learning Cycle (TLC). The Sydney School Genre Pedagogy was developed within SFL by educational linguists led by Rothery and Martin in the 1980s. It is informed by SFL's social and functional conception of language and a social constructivist view on language teaching and learning. Notions like Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (1978, p. 86) resonate with Halliday's (1975) and Painter's (1986) idea about the importance of close guidance in learning. Rothery applied this idea to literacy development as "guidance through interaction in the context of shared experience" (Martin & Rose, 2012).

The pedagogy proposes a cyclic model that leads students gradually to the production of texts, originally designed to be used in primary school contexts and gradually extended to secondary, tertiary and university levels. The frame includes well defined stages from an initial approach to the subject matter students will be writing about, through an exploration of a sample text, to the joint writing of a first version of the text, to the final independent construction of the text by students. These stages are called: **setting the context or building up field, modelling or deconstruction, joint construction, and independent construction.**

In the following section we propose activities we have used in our EAL classes at intermediate/upper intermediate level, leading students to write and produce photo-stories, mainly focusing on building a SLICE OF LIFE and

how that may reflect higher-order ideas. We organise activities following the Teaching Learning Cycle, in the hope that teachers may guide students to a successful elaboration of this genre.

Considering the ideal age and level of instruction, given that this is a social media genre, we can certainly think of intermediate and upper-intermediate teenage students, and young adults, who can already effectively interpret and produce some of the primary genres (e.g. recounts, anecdotes, descriptions, reports, profiles), and language resources This genre can encourage active social engagement, inviting students to make critical and aesthetic observations, express and comment on ideas and real-life experiences that are either close or removed from their own experience and are relevant to them. Which interests or worries are they concerned with? Which communal values, environmental, or urban topics would they choose to discuss and exhort others to reflect upon and take action on?

At what point in the curriculum or course plan to include photo-stories would depend on i) the content area we are working on; and ii) the lexico-grammar that students can use effectively or are learning and practising. One possible context for the development of photo-stories, and certainly not the only one, is to derive topics from reading material in their classes, either literary or non-literary texts, which may include such ideas as difficulties in education, family bonds, inequality, ethnic customs, and social justice. We will show activities following the teaching learning cycle that are initially related to a model text and then a joint construction of a photo-story on a topic derived from the discussion of a literary text.

4.3. Sample Unit - Seeing the Unseen: Stories of Struggle, Resilience, and More

4.3.1. Building up Field /Setting the Context

We plan to read and work with the photo-story on the **Maasai People** (Text 1 above). This is a topic that may easily be included in classes and textbooks at various levels of instruction with the purpose of discussing diverse global cultures.

We need to tap on the students' prior knowledge of African tribes and culture. To this end, we can begin by showing photos and/or videos of this Eastern African people, their nomadic and ancestral pastoral life. As we get ready to read and analyse the photo-story, we can focus on this tribe's customs, social organization, system of age-sets, physical description, traditional clothing and main activities. We can ask students to draw vocabulary and expressions from the video or find up words to name what they see in pictures and start to build this area of experience. We can give students small cards for them to write words and expressions they identify and later post them on the board, either mixed up naturally or already organized in areas of experience related to these people (family organization, physical description, customs, pastoral activities, etc.).

This class will move along the activities below.

Silent viewing first	We show them a set of carefully selected photos and/or videos.
Find words	Students write down words and expressions they identify.
Working with vocabulary	Students are invited to organise lexical charts/ sets around ideas on the people involved in the photos, their features, activities, traditional clothing, and words that relate to the idea of maturation, animals they raise, family bonds/ties.

This work with vocabulary will help students incorporate and increase the range of ideas they can express and also work with field in terms of tribal customs, people, their places and activities. This is a very important preparatory stage as they get ready to read or write. The vocabulary they build will be commonsense, but also specialized, as the topic might be somehow alien to them.

4.3.2. Modelling or Deconstruction

Modelling or deconstructing involves three main steps and their purpose:

Reviewing the genre: Photo-story	Making the structure of the genre (in this case the macro-genre photo-story) visible
Analysing tenor and mode of the text	Calling students' attention to how visual (the photo) and language work together to build the text
Working with lexicogrammar	Working with the language resources they need to efficiently write the text (e.g. present and past tenses)

For the sake of focus of this article, we will explain steps **reviewing the genres** and **working with lexicogrammar** in turn. Even when we leave the visual mode aside, we need to acknowledge that the meaning-making labour of these texts is distributed between the two modes—visual and verbal.

4.3.2.1. Reviewing the genre: Photo-stories

We illustrate reviewing the genre here by using Text 1. On the Maasai People.



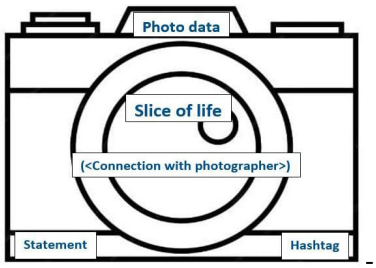
justin_anantawan
New feature for National Geographic Yourshot:
Photos by @justin_anantawan / Recently a cow living on the Maasai homestead of my adopted Kenyan son, Borniface Kurash, gave birth for the first time and was ready for milking. As is natural for new cow mothers, she was reluctant. However, it was important for her to be milked because she had colostrum and was at risk of developing a bacterial infection in her udder. So, using ropes, Borniface's family members worked together to hold the cow steady as they drew milk. Borniface's father stroked her skin as she was being milked, whispering to her in the Maasai language to calm down and telling her the family loved her. These milking practices have been passed down from generation to generation by the Maasai, who have a pastoral way of life.
#YourShotPhotographer #kenya #maasai #cow #milking

What questions can we ask of the text?

- Who's the photographer?
- Is there a title?
- What/ who does the photo show/ reveal?
- Who are involved?
- What are we told about the image / person / people in the photo?
- What happened?
- What else happened?
- Are emotions involved?
- What has happened now?
- Is this part of the story? Is it a final comment?
- What do the HASHTAGS relate to?

Do these questions help us label sections in the text? (e.g. name of publication/ photographer/ events/ disruption/ complication/ participants/…)

We review the generic structure of a photo-story. We offer a graphic representation:



We then ask questions to help students focus on the different purposes of the different stages:

- Which information gives us PHOTO DATA?
- What information builds the SLICE OF LIFE?
- What values or higher-order ideas are expressed? What values do the actions symbolise?
- How are they expressed in the STATEMENT?
- How do the HASHTAGS reinforce the higher-order ideas or values?

4.3.2.2. Working with Lexicogrammar

Photo-stories--combining their verbal and visual mode--invite students to explore lexical and grammatical resources to construe higher-order ideas, similar to how Jodairi Pineh (2022) showed the role of nominalization in helping EFL students construct more abstract, evaluative meanings.

The main question we ask here is: **What linguistic features help us express different ideas in the photo-story?**

This is an important step as we prepare our students to read or write a photo story. We work with lexico-grammatical structures to reflect the specific SLICE OF LIFE being represented; to refer to actions; participants; to express some of the attitudes (either explicit or suggested through the family's actions). Students will need to express or understand key meanings such as: **identifying participants** (concrete and specific people through relational processes and deictics/noun groups); **representing experience in the past** (past tenses, material/behavioural processes); **representing experience in the present** (present tenses, material processes) to express customs or habits; and **expressing attitude** (particularly emotions). They will work with narrative tenses in the past and the use of temporal linkers, as they must have done before with other primary genres (recounts, anecdotes, narratives). We will also need to elaborate on **expressions of attitude** (deictics, material/behavioural processes). As we identify these key meanings, we will be organizing and listing ideas in a table. Examples are included in Table 1.

Table 1. Working with Lexicogrammar

Concrete and particular participants	To refer to activities that occur in the here and now	a cow my adopted Kenyan son Borniface Kurash
Abstract and generic participants	To relate to more decontextualized, general non-individualized participants	generations people the Maasai
Narrative past tenses	To talk about activities in the past	**gave** birth **was** ready for milking **worked** together **drew** milk
Present and perfect tenses	To talk about customs and communal life of the Maasai people	**have been passed** down **have** a pastoral way of life
Expressions of attitude	To show compassion Collaborative work	Stroked her skin Whispering To calm down Telling her the family loved her
	To express fear, anxiety	reluctant

4.3.3. Joint Construction

Once we have made sure students understand how photo-stories work, what the main stages are, what key meanings are made and what linguistic resources can be used to express those meanings, we should be ready to write a photo-story.

In this stage, students jointly write the text as an 'approximation to the text' with the teacher leading the class, ideally writing the photo-story with the whole class. We will refer to the graphic representation of the text, the tables with the key meanings and linguistic resources they may use; set the context, as we work with a topic different from the model.

We will propose two possibilities:

1) Work with a special feature of a local community (particular instance of their own neighbourhood, district) where some communal value is highlighted;

2) Work with reading material students and teachers have used in previous classes.

We outline below the main steps to be followed and how to work within each of them:

Setting the context	Working in pairs and small groups, students revise ideas and events in the assigned text
Reelaborating on ideas and events Revisiting the model	What is the topic now? What is the context? What are the main stages in a photo-story? What is the function of these stages? How do they help to put the text together?
Working with lexicogrammar	Working with the language resources they will need to efficiently write the text, describe the characters on it: Present and past tenses Concrete vs. abstract participants Expressions of attitude, particularly emotion …
Joint writing	Writing together with the teacher guiding the task. The whole class contributes ideas that the teacher can edit slightly so the text effectively unfolds along the established stages and the values or themes are expressed.

4.3.3.1. An example task on option 2 above. Seeing the Unseen.

Our classroom context is intermediate/upper intermediate college students. We analyse and discuss literary and non-literary material on a variety of topics; on this occasion we will consider work on *The House on Mango Street*, by Sandra Cisneros, which portrays the life, hardships, fears and concerns of a 12-year-old young Latina girl, growing up in a Latino neighbourhood in Chicago. She interacts with and learns about the life and difficulties of various characters in the neighbourhood, mostly women. Many of the topics in the novelette, which deal with ethical, social, cultural themes, resonate with real-life stories students might feel are familiar or close to personal or communal experience.

Students will be working in pairs or small groups. They will be asked to re-elaborate ideas and events in one or two vignettes. Students will be 'photographers' reporting on such topics as women's strength/ fears in a Latino community, difficulties of adaptation, girls' ambitions vs cultural impositions.

Visual Gallery Walk / Visit Silent viewing first	Teachers show them a set of photos (either selected from photo archives or AI generated) on different events or participants in vignettes in *The House on Mango Street*.
Responding to the photos	Students respond to such questions as Can you identify the vignette the photo relates to? What do you see in it? Who are the characters on it? Can you describe the scene? ...
Working with vocabulary	Students are invited to organise lexical charts/ sets around ideas on the people involved in the photos, their features, attitude, activities, mood; and words that relate to ideas of dignity, resilience, shame, oppression, homesickness, family bonds/ties
Connect with the text.	No Speak English, Geraldo No Last Name, Chanclas. They may consider Who is invisible? Who feels ashamed/ estranged/ frustrated? Who is willing to improve their life?

Students will need to work on the area of experience they will be writing about. Teachers will need to tap on students' former experience, refresh knowledge of the main events, participants and issues at stake in the text we have selected to reelaborate on. We list below the main activities and their main focus.

As soon as they have built up new field, they will continue with this joint construction.

Teachers show students a set of photos (produced with the aid of AI) showing participants and events in *The House on Mango Street*. Students are given a few minutes to revise the material in the vignette and the questions they had already elaborated in the previous stage. They then write a response to the following task:

Task: You are a photographer/journalist portraying women in the Latino neighbourhood. You have the chance to interview Mamacita, an unhappy Latina immigrant in the United States. You learn about her story of moving reluctantly to the States, her daily struggle with the new home, her rejection of the new language and culture. At home, she fights with her little boy who enjoys repeating jingles from TV. Write a photo-story which accompanies the AI-generated photo below, where you comment on the young mother's attitude to her experience.



Guiding questions for this task include:

- Who are the participants involved?
- What is the general and special context?
- What events are being told?
- How will you organise events in the SLICE OF LIFE?
- What main ethical or emotional ideas are at stake?
- Which are the higher-order ideas we will be elaborating on?

Now, having refreshed ideas on the vignette that has been chosen, activated information on the participants and events they are involved in, elaborated on powerful expressions they may use, considered the guiding questions they used in the deconstruction stage, students start writing together the photo-story on Canva or Google document. The teacher acts as a monitor and editor of their production, and provides encouragement, resources – experiential, interpersonal and textual -- guiding students to follow the organisation that has already been described and analysed in the deconstruction stage, now working on the special incident and ethical and emotional values that these vignettes inspire.

This is quite a challenging stage, and one that many teachers are afraid of facing, as it may become somehow messy, or loaded with unexpected difficulties as collaborative, real-time writing is conducted. We may decide to start with only one section of the whole genre, the SLICE OF LIFE, which may include an anecdote or an exemplum to accompany ideas in these texts; or the STATEMENT, where students will have to make explicit the higher-order ideas or values that the SLICE OF LIFE is representing.

4.3.4. Independent Construction

At this stage, students write a new text independently, and the teacher acts as a consultant. As mentioned, photo-stories are an engaging genre where students may express their ideas, observations on relevant topics in their own community. This is a special moment for students to make their own decisions on the photo-story they "want to tell", and the Teaching-Learning cycle as explained here scaffolds their efforts as they move along. This aligns with findings from Rashidi and Mazdayasna (2016), who demonstrated that genre-based instruction significantly improved students' ability to produce effective letters—suggesting similar gains can be expected when learners are scaffolded into composing photo-stories.

The main activities and their corresponding details now are:

Setting the new context	Working individually or in pairs they make decisions on the new topic they would choose
Preparing the field	What is the topic now? What is the context?
Plan the new text	What are the main stages used in a photo-story?
Revising the model	What do they represent?
Working with lexicogrammar	Working with the language resources they will need to efficiently write the text. Present and past tenses, etc.
Writing their own photo-story	Write their text expanding on the ideas they have decided upon. Revise their own text - peer edit the text Receive feedback
Publishing their photo-story	This might be done as part of an end-of-term project. Photo-stories are collected and exposed in either the school digital platform or on Instagram.

Further work on photo-stories may continue with topics students may be concerned with, such as the following:

Community and Belonging

- **Friendship and solidarity**: how young people support each other through challenges (study groups, sports teams, art projects)
- **Neighbourhood initiatives**: young adults running soup kitchens, after-school activities, street art to inspire change
- **Cultural identity**: celebrating local traditions (folklore dances, mate circles, community festivals) while navigating global influences

Photo ideas: shared *mate* rounds, a small community library, young artists painting a mural, teenagers playing football in the street

5. Conclusion

The emergence of new genres which are compelling due to their structure, the verbal and visual aesthetic possibilities they allow for, inspiring content, and potential for teaching and learning application opened up the space for this descriptive and applied study of **photo-stories**. In this article we have explored photo-stories as a macro-genre that frames and accommodates several foundational genres typically included in EAL instruction at lower levels. The manner in which these genres—both narrative and informative—contribute to the overall macro text, by opening vivid windows to the "here and now" experiences of peoples around the world living in diverse circumstances, makes them particularly effective pedagogical objects. They can be revisited, recontextualized, and given the compelling potential to stand symbolically for the **higher-order ideas** we care about in an increasingly complex world.

We hope that fleshing out in delicacy how photo-stories are put together, describing explicitly the generic choices that are available, addressing some of the linguistic and visual resources that are also at play and offering concrete suggestions for classroom practice, may help both teachers and students as they experience the journey of learning English as one in which they can become **keen observers of reality**, both near and far, **active creators of representations** of that reality and **promoters of reflection and action** upon it. A vital part of this process is becoming explicitly aware of how culture has shaped and can be shaped through these captivating and delightful texts.

Notes

[1] The round brackets () enclose elements that are optional; the carat sign ^ indicates the relatively fixed position of the element; the angled carats <> enclose elements that are typically interspersed within the boundaries of the square brackets [].

[2] The following links give access to two such texts in the National Geographic publication:

Observation https://www.instagram.com/p/Cll7o3vAR-W/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==

Exemplum https://www.instagram.com/p/CPWZbu6tOmS

Acknowledgments

We have written consent by the author/photographers to use their texts for research and educational purposes.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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