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# Integrating Textual Thinking into the Introductory College-Level Foreign Language Classroom

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One of the characteristics of the well-documented bifurcation in collegiate foreign language (FL) instruction is the difficult transition from lower- to upper-level instruction. Particularly pronounced are the expectations placed on readers at the upper level. No longer engaged in surface readings and sentence-level exercises that stay focused on everyday situations with clear intent and unambiguous meaning, learners at the upper level must shift to supersentential and discourse-level processing of texts that contain a significantly higher level of abstraction and ambiguity. Recognizing that preparation for such an approach to reading requires long-term attention, this article explores the pedagogical feasibility of implementing in beginning instruction the type of textual thinking and reading practiced at upper levels. Implemented in two sections of first-semester German ( $N = 27$ ) while students read a full-length novel, this pedagogical approach centers on developing beginning learners' ability to see texts as message systems that reveal cultural significance.

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DESPITE REPEATED AND PERSUASIVE CALLS for change over the past 15 years (e.g., Bernhardt & Berman, 1999; Byrnes, 1998; James, 1989; Kern, 2002; Swaffar, 1991a), the predominant structural paradigm in collegiate foreign language (FL) departments today continues to be a distinct shift from "language" courses at the lower levels of instruction to "content" courses at the upper levels.<sup>1</sup> More than just a distinction in the types of courses offered, the language-content split in FL departments is part of a much larger bifurcated departmental structure that marks collegiate FL instruction and is illustrated by the following characteristics: (a) the split between graduate student teachers, part-time instructors, and untenured professors teaching lower-level courses and tenured or tenure-track faculty teaching upper-level courses (Pfeiffer, 2002); (b) the emphasis on spoken language at the lower level

and written language at the upper level (Byrnes, 2001; Kramsch, 1995); (c) the use of short, simplified texts at the lower level and the predominance of literary texts at the upper level (Maxim, 2002); (d) the linear- and additive-oriented approach to language acquisition at the lower levels that leads to the erroneous assumption that students have in fact "mastered" the language by the time they enroll in upper-level courses (Weigert, 2004); and (e) the emphasis on explicit, form-focused instruction at the lower level and more naturalistic acquisition environments, exemplified by study abroad, at the upper level (Maxim, 2004).

Because of these curricular and structural dichotomies, it is only logical that the goals of collegiate FL instruction are in large part also bifurcated. Not just a phenomenon at the post-secondary level, the absence of consistent and articulated learning goals across all levels of instruction has characterized much of FL instruction for quite some time. Mohan (1989), for example, in his discussion of theories of acquisition within the context of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) instruction cited Cummins (1984),

who distinguished between two basic types of language proficiency: basic interpersonal communicative skills and cognitive academic language proficiency. Although Cummins was not referring specifically to collegiate FL instruction, interpersonal communicative skills and cognitive academic language proficiency represent in many ways the widely held goals of collegiate FL learning at the lower and upper levels, respectively.

Despite these different goals, one could craft an argument in defense of developing interpersonal communicative skills at the lower levels and academic literacy at the upper levels, particularly in light of how collegiate FL instruction was structured before the so-called communicative turn in the 1970s. In addition, the emphasis on interpersonal communicative skills at the lower levels reflects in large part the learning goals of the learners themselves (Harlow & Muyskens, 1994; Horwitz, 1988; Martin & Laurie, 1993). Furthermore, one could argue that the actual effect of bifurcated learning goals on the learners is minimized because the majority of students in upper-level courses place into that level and therefore do not experience a shift in learning goals in their collegiate FL studies.

However, even if one were to take into account these rationalizations for maintaining a dualistic approach to FL study, the one central issue that is overlooked in these discussions is the long-term nature of FL learning. In other words, even if one were convinced about the rationale behind such a departmental division, the 2 years typically allotted for lower-level instruction are simply insufficient for fully developing students' interpersonal communicative skills.<sup>2</sup> The same holds for upper-level instruction. As has been convincingly argued in the burgeoning research on the advanced learner (e.g., Byrnes & Maxim, 2004; Leaver & Shekhtman, 2002; Schleppegrell & Colombi, 2002), attaining academic literacy in a FL in just 2 years of upper-level study is highly unrealistic. In addition, for those lower-level learners who wish to continue at the upper level, they are unfairly expected to be able to make the transition without having any prior exposure to extended discourse and textual thinking commonly found in advanced-level classes. A potential solution to this predicament of bifurcated approaches and limited contact hours at the collegiate level is to integrate the two approaches and attend to them for all 4 years of the undergraduate curriculum and thereby acknowledge the long-term nature of language acquisition, something that the recent focus on the transitional "bridge" course

has not considered.<sup>3</sup> That is, learners would continue to develop their interpersonal communicative skills at the upper levels, which in many cases happens by default anyway (see Byrnes, Crane, & Sprang, 2002), and perhaps more importantly, would begin to develop their academic literacy already in beginning-level instruction. It is also worth noting that within such an integrated, coherent curricular framework there is no longer the pressing need for so-called bridge courses.

Before outlining what such an integrated pedagogical approach might look like, it is important first to clarify the central characteristics of "interpersonal communicative skills" and "academic literacy." Published more than a decade ago, Swaffar, Arens, and Byrnes's seminal work *Reading for Meaning* (1991) still provides one of the most effective characterizations of collegiate FL instruction and the ever-present division between communicatively-focused lower-level courses and literacy-oriented upper-level courses (see Table 1 for a summary).<sup>4</sup> In many ways, the central distinction is the role that texts play at the two levels. At the lower level Swaffar et al. (1991) asserted that learners use language to convey concrete information about the real world and their immediate physical environment, a process that does not inherently require interaction with texts. When there is textual interaction, learners typically engage in surface readings and sentence-level exercises that stay focused on closed, everyday situations with clear intent and unambiguous meaning. In sum, this learning

TABLE 1  
Differences between Lower- and Upper-Level FL Instruction

| Lower-Level Instruction                      | Upper-Level Instruction                |
|--|--|
| Tangibles                                    | Ideas                                  |
| Sentence-level focus on isolated information | Supersentential focus on discourse     |
| Simulate real-world situations               | Alternative realities                  |
| Language of everyday communication           | Language of texts                      |
| Unambiguous meaning; clear intent            | Ambiguity; covert, unstated objectives |
| Literal meaning                              | Metaphorical meaning                   |
| Closed, concrete situations                  | Open-ended situations                  |
| Spoken language                              | Written language                       |
| Emphasis on language detail                  | Emphasis on meaning creation           |

Note. Adapted from Swaffar et al., 1991.

context “necessarily emphasizes the tangible” (p. 39).

At the upper level, however, Swaffar et al. (1991) pointed out that learners work extensively with texts and based on that textual interaction are “expected to be able to negotiate and articulate alternative realities” (p. 2). No longer centered on the learners’ immediate physical environment, upper-level instruction emphasizes the verbally created and imagined world of texts that inherently contains a level of abstraction and ambiguity not found at the lower level. In addition, such an emphasis implies supersentential and discourse-level processing of a message system within a text rather than the sentence-level registration of isolated details.

Because of the linguistic challenges involved in recognizing and articulating the coherence and systematicity of discourse, researchers and practitioners have long considered such textual thinking and engagement to be appropriate only at the upper levels of instruction. However, as Swaffar et al. (1991) reminded us, because of the cognitive maturity and the extralinguistic capabilities that adult learners bring with them from their first language (L1) to the FL classroom, thinking textually in the second language (L2) is not necessarily a cognitive challenge. The premise of their argument is that “adult students reason considerably in excess of their L2 linguistic capabilities” (p. 57) and that they can use these reasoning abilities to offset their linguistic limitations. Speaking from the English as a second language (ESL) context, Cummins and Swain (1986) echoed this sentiment and go so far as to argue that “minority students’ L1 cognitive/academic skills are just as important as L2 exposure for the development of cognitive/academic skills in L2” (p. 94, cited in Mohan, 1989, p. 100). Based on this approach to instructed language learning, then, engaging texts at the discursive level does not need to be postponed until learners’ linguistic competence has reached an advanced level; it can begin sooner in the instructional sequence by taking advantage of learners’ cognitive maturity. Moreover, extending textual engagement into lower-level instruction is consistent with the repeated calls for viewing academic literacy as a long-term undertaking that needs to be fostered before students enroll in upper-level courses (e.g., Byrnes & Sprang, 2004; Maxim, 2004).

To allow for such textual engagement at the lower level that will prepare students for extensive reading at advanced levels, however, instructional strategies need to be implemented that take advantage of adult learners’ cognitive abilities. In

other words, textual thinking in the L2 can only function within a pedagogically supportive framework that makes use of learners’ extralinguistic capabilities. In addition, such preparation need not interfere with acquisition of language fundamentals if structured with systematic use of the text(s) being read.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, much of the research into skill and strategy instruction from the late 1980s and early 1990s (e.g., Barnett, 1988; Carrell, 1992; Kern, 1989; Oxford & Crookall, 1989) was based on the premise that readers’ extralinguistic, top-down reading abilities could enhance reading comprehension. That research, conducted primarily with shorter texts, has been complemented by the growing scholarly support for extensive reading, which also draws on the notion that L2 readers’ L1 cognitive abilities can assist their L2 reading (e.g., Day & Bamford, 1998; Dupuy, 1997; Rodrigo, 1997). In collegiate FL education, the positive findings from both strands of reading research have resonated primarily at the lower level because of their emphasis on the type of concrete, tangible readings and discrete reading abilities (e.g., vocabulary development, grammatical knowledge, reading for gist, and reading for detail) that characterize the interpersonal communicative focus of that level. Assuming that academic literacy is still considered one of the end goals of collegiate FL education and, as indicated above, that literacy development needs to begin sooner in the collegiate curriculum, the next step in collegiate FL reading pedagogy, therefore, would likely be to integrate into the lower level an approach to reading that expands learners’ existing reading abilities so that they gain experience in comprehending and expressing meaning in the imagined worlds of texts they will encounter at the upper level.

In light of this need to foster literacy at the earliest levels of FL instruction, this article explores the following issues related to the promotion of text-level thinking from the very beginning of instruction: (a) what a literacy-oriented pedagogy for beginning instruction looks like; (b) whether such a pedagogy is feasible at the collegiate level; (c) how students respond to the pedagogy; and (d) whether the time needed to develop textual thinking at the beginning level takes time away from and thereby adversely affects the development of interpersonal communicative skills.

Specifically, this article presents the implementation of a textually-oriented approach to language learning in two first-semester German classes as part of a larger classroom-based study that investigated the effects of reading extended authentic discourse with beginning learners (see

Maxim, 2002, for description and results of the larger study).

## LEARNING CONTEXT

Implemented in two out of seven intact first-semester German classes ( $N = 27$ ) at the University of Texas at Austin, this textual approach to reading did not commence until the 4th week of the semester. Until then, the students followed a standard linguistically-oriented syllabus and the traditional Presentation-Practice-Production model of instruction.<sup>6</sup> Using the communicatively-oriented textbook *Deutsch zusammen* (Donahue & Watzinger, 1990), students spent time outside of class reading grammar explanations, learning vocabulary lists, and completing exercises in a workbook that practiced recently introduced grammar points and vocabulary items. Class time focused on using this newly learned information in a series of textbook activities to activate the students' knowledge of specific grammar and vocabulary. Stressing accuracy as much as fluency, the activities, although requiring meaningful communication, placed great emphasis on grammatical mastery.<sup>7</sup> In Loschky and Bley-Vroman's (1993) terms, the in-class activities were, on the one hand, not simply language exercises because they held meaningful communication as one criterion of success. On the other hand, they also could not properly be considered tasks because they focused on a specific grammar point and typically lacked a meaningful context.

During these first 4 weeks, all 27 participants were introduced to the following grammar topics: present tense of regular and irregular verbs, nominative case, negation, imperative mood, pronouns, plural forms of nouns, and question words. In addition, they were to learn about 350 vocabulary items necessary to perform the following functions: talk about yourself, other people, and the classroom; greet and take leave of people; talk about likes and dislikes; describe the weather; identify and describe clothing and people; and ask and answer basic questions. Students also practiced pronunciation daily through a series of short exercises that focused on a new vowel or consonant sound each day. At the end of the 4th week of instruction, all students completed a 50-minute departmental exam on the material covered in the textbook to that point in the semester. As reported in Maxim (2002), there was no statistically significant difference between (a) the two classes' performance on the exam and (b) these two classes' performance and the performance in the other five sections that followed

a standard instructional approach for the entire semester.

Following the departmental exam, the students in the two targeted classes continued using the same linguistically-oriented syllabus and receiving their initial exposure to linguistic data through traditional textbook explanations and exercises outside of class, but they limited their practice of communicatively-oriented grammar exercises to the first half of class, spending the second half of each class reading a 142-page German romance novel. The key change between the first 4 weeks and the remainder of the semester, therefore, was that the students spent the second half of each class reading the novel and using it as the basis for exploring alternative realities instead of performing more interpersonal communicative activities.

The instructors for the two sections adhering to the pedagogy described here were two graduate student instructors. Both were American nonnative speakers of German at the "All But Dissertation" stage of their graduate studies in the German Department at the University of Texas at Austin. Both had taught extensively in the lower-level program and completed the required teaching methodology class together 4 years before this pedagogy was implemented. During the semester, the instructors met before each class to discuss the upcoming lesson and to review the overall trajectory of the semester. In addition, the instructors visited each other's class several times during the semester to compare and maintain pedagogical consistency.

The text that the students read was a romance novel entitled *Mit dem Sturm kam die Liebe* (With the Storm Came Love) by Marianne Andrau (1981). The novel is part of the monthly *Baccara* series, a staple at most German newsstands and generally directed at an adult female readership. Students read it in its original German format without modification. As is the case with many of the novels of this kind in Germany, it was originally written in English and translated into German for further distribution. Despite its non-German origin, the novel can still be considered authentic because its intended audience was native speakers of German.

The choice of a popular novel for this study was intentional. Because this novel was originally written for a North American audience, it contains a culturally familiar context and formulaic, predictable content that is especially accessible to American university students who are familiar with soap operas, romance films, and TV movies-of-the-week. In addition, such texts follow a predictable structure and adhere to the expected

moves of the genre so that readers are able to identify story and character development from a mere global grasp of events. Without such predictability, learners with limited linguistic abilities cannot perform top-down processing and thus can become both overwhelmed and sidetracked by chunks of the text that are not only unintelligible but also not necessary to understand. As Swaffar (1991b) summarized, a text's familiarity "eases the cognitive load because the second or foreign language learner can anticipate ideas rather than rely exclusively on language to convey ideas" (p. 255).

The choice of a relatively long narrative was equally important. L2 learners appear to benefit from being exposed to the semantic and contextual redundancy available through extended reading about one topic (Cho & Krashen, 1994; Elley, 1991; Krashen, 1989; Lee, 1996). Totalling 142 pages in length and containing roughly 40,000 total words, the novel provided students the opportunity to become familiar with the characters, their behavior, the locations, and the language used to characterize these recurring images. Arguably, such redundancy is analogous to the notion of reading new texts containing old elements (Hulstijn, 2001). Thus, although such a text would be considered difficult by more traditional readability formulae that rely on word count and sentence length,<sup>8</sup> its cultural familiarity and narrow focus were major assets for the readers. A more detailed discussion of the novel's role in facilitating learners' attention to the textual/discursive/imagined world of reading follows.

#### TEXTUALLY-ORIENTED PEDAGOGY

The instructional approach to the reading of the novel rested on three premises. First, to compensate for learners' limited language abilities and to foster a positive collective spirit in the class, particularly in light of what initially seemed like a daunting undertaking for first-semester FL learners, most of the reading (80–85%) occurred in class in pairs and small groups under the supervision of the instructor. By working collaboratively, students had available to them an in-class network of peers and instructors who provided them with important support and assistance in their reading. Such support was considered essential because the classroom pedagogy was new to all students. Any misreadings as well as lexical or linguistic difficulties that arose were dealt with immediately either through students' pooling their knowledge, teacher assistance during

pair work, or subsequent class discussions. In addition, once learners became used to the notion of collaborative reading after the first 2 weeks, they began to use the target language regularly during their group reading, thereby negotiating and interacting with each other to come to some textual understanding.

Second, students were continually asked to examine and evaluate their textual comprehension. Based on the premise argued by Swain (1993, 1995) that students need to have the opportunity to reflect on and reprocess their output in order for their interlanguage to develop, learners typically shared their findings from the readings first in groups and then with the entire class.

Third, following a prereading introduction of the novel, a sequence of four stages guided the students' reading of the text. Drawing from Swaffar et al. (1991), these tasks were designed to complement stages in the cognitive development of beginning language students:

1. Initial student reading of the text guided by attention to major events, their organization in the text (i.e., identification of the macrosemantics and macrosyntax of the text), and the textual language used to convey these events;
2. Student location of microdetails in the text and their accompanying textual language that reflects and exemplifies the central topics and their organization;
3. Student articulation of these events achieved by reproducing textual language;
4. Student application of their real-world knowledge to textual information in order to assess the implications of the text.

#### *Pre-Reading: Introducing the Novel to Beginning Learners*

On the 21st class day during the 5th week of the semester, the 1st day of reading the novel began with a brief brainstorming session in which students related their experiences and knowledge of the romance novel genre. Although only 5 of the 27 students acknowledged having first-hand knowledge of romance novels, the genre was culturally familiar enough through exposure to soap operas and romance movies that all of the students had a preconceived notion of what types of characters and behaviors are typically found in such works. When asked what topics could usually be expected in romance novels, they almost unanimously mentioned sex. They then offered additional topics such as romance, disappointment, intrigue, murder, travel, and wealth.

Following the opening discussion, students received a copy of the novel and made some educated guesses about the novel's context and content based on their interpretation of the title *Mit dem Sturm kam die Liebe* (With the Storm Came Love). Because the title does not reveal much about the characters or where the novel is set, students focused their comments on what kind of storm might take place or how the storm might affect a love affair or a relationship. In addition, adhering to the belief recently articulated by Swaffar (2004) that "awareness of who has written a text and for what audience remains the framework for any use of texts and textuality as the basis for language acquisition" (p. 40), the discussion also included speculation about the text's function and audience.

A final component of the first day was an open discussion in English with the class about their notion of reading comprehension. The teachers asked the students what they felt was needed to comprehend a text and what it meant to understand a text. For the most part, the students had not considered these questions before, and there was the general feeling initially that comprehension could only be achieved by understanding every word on the page. Students quickly realized, however, that such an approach to reading would not be viable when faced with a 142-page novel. As the class period ended, then, there was some apprehension, but for the most part the students appeared willing to place their trust in the instructors and their decision to implement a novel into the course. Both instructors would revisit this discussion about reading comprehension several times more during the first few weeks of the reading.

#### *First Stage: Attention to Major Events and Their Organization as a Message System*

In the next class and again at the start of each new segment of the novel, students worked in pairs to identify the people, location, time, and major events of the passage, that is, the who, where, when, and what. Analogous to a text reconstruction task (Kowal & Swain, 1994; Wajnryb, 1990) in that students worked in pairs to reconstruct textual events, this task differed in several key areas to meet the needs of the beginning learners. To begin with, the learners had full access to the text to locate information they considered important. Next, they had to identify only the text's major events and figures, thereby avoiding a close reading of the text that would have placed

a considerable linguistic and cognitive burden on them.

In the early stages of reading, the main goal was to familiarize students with the characters, the setting, and the general premise of the novel. On the 2nd day of reading, for example, the class had established that three characters were named Wolf, Lisa, and her brother Randy. Drawing on the language that the students already knew, the teachers then asked them where Wolf, Lisa, and Randy lived, what the weather was like on that particular day, and what kind of people they were. Text segments during these classroom sessions varied in length from one to three pages and often were determined by the action in the novel. A change of setting or a break in the action typically served as a logical place to begin or end a reading. Time permitting, more than one text segment was read in class each day.

A central component behind this initial exercise was to direct students to begin associating specific language use with certain events and people in the novel. Students were therefore reading to access both textual information and the lexical and linguistic components necessary to describe their newly found information. Instead of having to come up with language on their own to discuss the text, students were trained to use the text language itself as the key to their lexical and linguistic expression. To describe the weather on the 2nd day of reading the novel, for instance, students located the expression *ein Sturm braut* 'a storm is brewing' from the novel, and to characterize Wolf, they found the word *Gentleman*.

In order to foster textual thinking, however, students were asked not only to register isolated information about characters, events, and locations, but also to begin thinking about how the different pieces of textual information were organized and related. In other words, learners were encouraged to begin viewing the text's message as having a logic or pattern that could be identified. Therefore, students began to see how Wolf the gentleman was also in love with Lisa and terribly jealous of any other man with whom Lisa associated. Lisa, meanwhile, was seen as the strong-willed, independent American who spurned Wolf's love yet who also frequently took on the stereotypical female role of the caregiver. The tension between these two characters combined with Lisa's love for Luc, a character recovering from an auto accident and suffering from amnesia, frames the entire novel and serves as the chief narrative strategy for developing the plot.

Establishing the textual logic at this early stage accomplished two important objectives. First,

readers now had a significant aid to guide their reading of the rest of the novel. Whenever they encountered Lisa or Wolf in subsequent passages, for example, they had a good sense of which kind of behaviors to expect from both of them, particularly in a genre as predictable as a romance novel. As Swaffar (2004) pointed out, the inherent predictability of genres creates what Jauss (1982) termed horizons of expectation within the reader that are highly facilitative of comprehension. Second, by recognizing the logical system for presenting information within the novel, readers were developing a nascent textual awareness that admittedly would need to be reinforced in subsequent semesters but that would potentially serve as powerful strategy for reading and comprehending future texts. As Swaffar et al. (1991) persuasively argued, it is the identification of "information systems and their implications" (p. 190) that defines comprehension rather than the registration of isolated pieces of information.

Because of the learners' limited FL abilities, however, all the work at developing an understanding of the text's information system took place in class under close teacher supervision. As mentioned above, one central activity for aiding beginning readers was doing all of the in-class reading in pairs and groups. By bringing differing reading styles together and pooling background knowledge, reading with a partner often initiated a candid discussion about the events of a particular passage and what that might imply for future events. Students working in pairs or groups typically checked their partners' comprehension, a process that often resulted in extraneous or wrong information being omitted from their discussion. At times, of course, when a group of students could not agree on their findings or relied too heavily on one reader, faulty information was accepted as valid.

In such cases, the ensuing class discussion served to correct any misreadings. Important also in guiding students' reading was making sure students were aware of how they misconstrued information in the text. Especially for *nonintegrative* readers who, as characterized by Block (1986), were prone to make unfounded extrapolations about the text by focusing on their own prior knowledge and failing to attend to textual data, class time had to be spent pointing out the specific places in the text where their reading went awry. Misreadings typically surfaced when students did not integrate the newly read material with preceding events and behaviors. They viewed an event as being singular or independent of prior actions

and did not attempt to make any connections between events within a particular text segment.

As a second activity for guiding students' reading, the instructors displayed overhead transparencies of each passage, adopted the persona and proficiency level of a first-semester student, and then conducted for the class a think-aloud protocol of their own reading of the chapter. This way, students began to see how best to take advantage of any information that resonated with them and to see how events in the novel were interrelated. This technique was also used to help students see how to deal with unfamiliar morpho-syntactical structures or lexical items that were critical to understanding a major event. Thus, the language classroom with its peer readers and facilitating instructors became a vital resource for students as they worked through an extended text.

#### *Second Stage: Attention to Relevant Details and Textual Language*

Once the students identified the major events and the logical orientation of a passage, they turned to reading for details that related to these events and to locating textual language used to convey those details. A central prop for guiding this in-class work was a worksheet that asked students to look for the textual language used to characterize details about major events and people. Used on a daily basis, the worksheet consisted of two to three columns that asked the students to identify people or situations, their specific characteristics, and any resulting actions. In addition to having students work in pairs, the instructors implemented several strategies to assist them in their completion of these worksheets. First, instead of recommending that students formulate their answers in their own words, the instructors encouraged them to use actual, unedited textual language to complete the worksheets. Second, the instructors completed the first couple of worksheets with the class as a whole and modeled how to identify and borrow effective and appropriate textual language. Third, during the first few weeks of reading the novel, the worksheet was partially completed ahead of time by the instructor to help guide the students during the early stages of their reading. For example, in the worksheet in Table 2, half of it was filled in and students had to supply textual information and language that formed a logical pairing to characterize the scene in which the amnesiac character Luc remembers killing his wife. Items in roman typeface were provided by the instructor; italic typeface indicates student work.

TABLE 2  
Event Worksheet: Luc's Memory Returns

| Statement                            | Subsequent Action or Observation  |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Luc says, "I killed my wife."</i> | Dr. Stöller gives him a sedative. |
| Luc: "I remember my wife."           | Luc: " <i>She is dead.</i> "      |

By being able to complete the worksheet, students in effect confirmed their comprehension of the passage and reproduced textual language in a meaningful context.

As the semester progressed and the learners became used to the worksheets' format and procedure, more and more information was deleted from the worksheets to the point where they were blank without any information filled in. Because students were asked to supply actual, unedited textual language to complete the worksheet, they were not limited by whether or not they had covered the grammar contained within their selection. In the examples above, neither the dative (*Dr. Stöller gibt ihm ein Beruhigungsmittel.* 'Dr. Stöller gives *him* a sedative.') nor the past tense (*Ich habe meine Frau getötet.* 'I killed my wife.') had been covered, yet students were able to understand the language and use it to make logical pairings on their worksheets. At this point in the task sequence, students were merely demonstrating their comprehension of the input and tacitly recognizing the form of that input.

Although students were largely successful in quickly adapting to this approach to locating textual details, they did face some difficulties. Because the text was presented in its unedited form without marginal glosses or vocabulary lists, students were faced, especially initially, with a considerable amount of unfamiliar vocabulary. The class discussions about comprehension served as a first step toward helping students overcome this potential lexical overload. Effectively reinforcing these discussions was the aforementioned procedure that students followed when reading the text. By being directed first to identify the text's macrotopics before locating more specific information, students did not feel the need to know the meanings of many unfamiliar words. Instead, they relied on their ability to piece together information based on their own prior knowledge and previous events in the text. In certain cases when knowledge of a particular word or expression would facilitate the students' reading, the teachers either provided them with a translation or spent class time helping them see how the context revealed the word or expression's meaning.

Another potential problem for students was the syntactical and morphological complexity of the authentic text. When they began reading the novel, students had only been exposed to the nominative and accusative case and simple, declarative sentences but the procedure students followed when reading the text combined with teacher guidance helped readers overcome most of the linguistic difficulties they encountered. By having to read initially only for the macrotopics, students did not need to attend to morpho-syntactic features that they had not yet learned. Tense, for example, could generally be predicted from the story context. Especially at the start of the reading, the teachers spent class time highlighting key sentences and asking students to examine the syntactic variation that the German language allows. Sentences that did not follow standard subject-verb-object word order caused students the most difficulty. In the following excerpt from the novel, students were quick to point to *Mann* as the subject because of its position in the sentence: *Den Mann, der da zusammengekrümmt vor ihr lag, hatte sie noch nicht gesehen* (She had not yet seen the man who lay doubled over in front of her, Andrau, 1981, p. 11). Because the students were learning the accusative case when they began reading the novel, sentences that did not follow subject-verb-object order actually helped them see the function of the accusative case and the syntactic freedom that a language with case declensions offers. A standard in-class exercise directed students to identify all direct objects in a given paragraph and then note their function and order in the sentence. Structures that the students had not yet learned, these were handled on an as-needed basis. If a particularly important text segment contained a form that was new to the students, the teachers typically asked the class as a whole to speculate on what that form might mean and what its function in the sentence was. That speculation posed very little difficulty for students. They were not yet in the position to produce this form accurately on their own, but they were developing the ability to comprehend the meaning and purpose of the new structures.

Upon completing a passage, that is, after identifying the major events and the textual microrealizations of those events, students drew on their developing understanding of the textual logic and their increasingly clearer horizon of expectation to predict upcoming episodes and thereby contemplate the text's episodic structure. The central technique behind the attempt to have students read for events or ideas and then look for

their logical consequence was Stauffer's (1977) Directed Reading, Directed Thinking Activity. In this approach students predicted logical, potential outcomes based on the passage that they just had read and then checked their predictions as they read the subsequent passage. To aid students in this activity, instructors spent class time pointing out how discourse markers are often used to introduce a new setting or episode. In particular, students' attention was directed to how adverbial phrases or clauses, such as *later in the day* or *when Lisa arrived at the hospital*, were common devices for making a transition from one scene to another. Those students who were able to integrate their real-world knowledge into new textual information, characterized by Block (1986) as *integrative readers*, were very effective in their ability to anticipate future events. Others, however, made far more subjective predictions that strayed greatly from what the text had just said. Thus, this portion of in-class reading was characterized by a recurring need to remind students of the text's logical orientation and to draw on that when making predictions. Subsequently, students were asked to point to specific textual information that either confirmed or contradicted their predictions.

### *Third Stage: Reproduction of Textual Language*

For this stage, students wrote one-paragraph chapter summaries in German after completing each chapter. To assist them in working toward a literacy that incorporated the language of the text, teachers stipulated that students had to borrow five different phrases or expressions from the chapter and use them in their summaries. By having to use five phrases or expressions from the novel in their summaries, the students needed, first, to review the text for five central and important phrases and, second, to examine both their function and form in order to use them properly in their summaries. Requiring the recycling of textual language was also seen as a way to help beginning learners overcome their limited proficiency. This assignment followed VanPatten's suggestion that efforts to develop students' fluency should be based on improving their ability to access and use "chunks of language" rather than forms or rules (1998, p. 122). The summaries were graded on a 5-point scale with 2 points awarded for sufficient summarization of the chapter's key events, 1 point for incorporating five expressions from the text, 1 point for using those expressions accurately, and 1 point for grammatical accuracy in the rest of the summary.<sup>9</sup>

At the lexicogrammatical and sentential level, despite the overt directions to use at least five phrases from the chapter, students struggled with this assignment initially because they tried to summarize the events in their own limited German. For example, in the summary of the very first chapter after just 5 weeks of German instruction, one student attempted to describe the scene in which someone gets run over by a car with the following formulation: *"\*Lisa sucht jemand fährt ein Mann über"* (Lisa is looking for someone drives a man over). Instead of recycling textual language, the student tried a word-for-word translation from English into German. Others tried to access the textual language but were not aware enough of how form was functioning to create meaningful utterances and thus produced sentences such as *\*Lisa hat ein Mann überfahren wird sehen* (Lisa has a man drive over is seen). This particular student recognized that the auxiliary *wird* somehow belonged with the past participle *überfahren* to form the passive voice in German, but was not able to produce a meaningful statement. Were it not for the instructors' experience with deciphering American students' attempts at expressing themselves in German, many of these sentences would have been incomprehensible. It is interesting to note that copying or borrowing from a text is seen by researchers (Barks & Watts, 2001; Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, & Rosen, 1975) as an initial stage through which all writers must pass on their way to developing their own voice, yet some students early in their first semester of German study were either not proficient enough or not sufficiently comfortable with this approach to writing to make good use of it.

In response to situations like these, the instructors spent class time with students going back to the text and locating textual language that expressed what they had tried to say in their summaries, and then examining this language for how it was used to create meaning. Having students juxtapose the target language model with their interlanguage output to highlight the gap between the two languages has been seen as an effective tool for enhancing the learning of certain forms, and as an approach that is similar to providing recasts of learners' errors (Izumi & Bigelow, 2000).

The more successful students were the ones who incorporated longer portions of the text into their first summary. Unlike the examples above, these students let the language and structures of the text do most of the work for them by lifting an entire phrase or even sentence from the novel, making minor alterations, and then using it in the summary: *Er hat Blut auf seiner Stirn und in seinem*

*Haar* (He has blood on his forehead and in his hair), *Lisa fährt ihren Volkswagen durch die kurvenreiche Waldstrasse hinauf in die Berge* (Lisa drives her Volkswagen along the winding forest road up into the mountains), or *Sie bringen den Verunglückten in ihr Feriendomizil* (They bring the injured person into their vacation home). In each of these examples, the students correctly transformed the sentences from the past into the present tense and then included them appropriately in their summary. In an effort to encourage more of this recycling of existing language, the instructors used these examples to show the students that much of what they wanted to say in their summaries was already present in the text, providing students once again with a type of recast. This type of illustration took place frequently in the early stages of the semester so that students noticed that they did not need to “reinvent the wheel” when perfectly appropriate authentic language already existed for their use and manipulation.

Some students followed yet another approach to writing summaries by manipulating textual language into forms that were understandable and manageable for them. For instance, the verb for *to run over* had been explained earlier in class during the sharing of answers from the worksheet, and some students simply used the verb correctly in a simpler, more straightforward sentence: *Ein Auto überfährt einen Mann* (A car drives over a man). This manipulation of textual language involved recognizing that *Mann* needed to be in the accusative case and that *überfahren* was both an irregular verb and one with an inseparable prefix. Other examples of students using textual language in a more simplified form include the sentences: *Randy ruft einen Arzt an* (Randy calls a doctor), *Lisa beobachtet einen Unfall* (Lisa observes an accident), or *Lisa und Randy machen Urlaub in Österreich* (Lisa and Randy are on vacation in Austria). Despite their simplicity, each sentence demonstrates the students’ knowledge of verb conjugation, subject–verb agreement, and case (nominative vs. accusative).

At the textual level, students’ initial summaries often resembled simply a list of the chapter’s major events. However, as students gained more experience in identifying discourse markers and recognizing their significance as signals of transitions or connections between ideas or episodes, their summaries also began to include such markers as a way of indicating chronology (e.g., *later*, *then*, *the next day*, *after that*), contrast (e.g., *but*), or causality (e.g., *because*, *for*). A detailed qualitative analysis of the discursive devices employed in the summaries is beyond the scope of this

article, but through the students’ exposure to the novel and to their textbook, their repertoire of discourse markers expanded over the course of the semester to include an ever richer array of adverbs (e.g., *therefore*) and conjunctions (e.g., *before*, *until*, *while*, *whereas*) that they used to indicate relationships and connections between characters, events, and behaviors. In addition, the nature of the summary itself promoted text-level thinking in that students had to focus on the major ideas in each chapter and then indicate how they related to each other in some coherent fashion.

#### *Fourth Stage: Assessment of Text’s Cultural Implications*

Up until this point in the pedagogy, students had focused on using textual language to replicate the textual message. In this final stage, they related the text to their own world view by examining the text’s cultural implications and significance. This process began at the end of each of the first two chapters when students were asked in English to consider which characters and behaviors achieved prominence, what men and women were allowed to do, and who the winners and losers were in the chapter. Unfortunately, because of the time needed at the start of the semester to familiarize students with the text-based pedagogy, there was not enough class time to discuss the students’ responses in any detail. Following subsequent chapters, however, these same issues were raised in German, and because students were now more familiar with the pedagogy, more class time was freed up to discuss their findings. As students noted which characters and behaviors achieved prominence, what men and women were allowed to do, and who the winners and losers were, they were in effect identifying how characters and behaviors were assembled and weighted in the text and which ones had the most social and political capital. Those characters and behaviors with the most capital enjoyed a certain legitimization, an authorized position that granted them what Bourdieu (1994) calls *symbolic power*. By starting to recognize the utterances, characters, and behaviors that exercised symbolic power, students began to gain access to the underlying system of thought within the novel. They could also start relating the novel’s system of thought to their own understanding of the predominant value and belief systems within their own culture.

In their response to these issues in the novel, the students expressed some initial confusion. They had not necessarily considered such questions before and were therefore unsure of how

to proceed. To remedy this situation, the teachers focused first on having students list what the men and the women did in the novel. Then, these activities for men and women were characterized as being what either the working or leisure classes perform. Last, the students identified which activities were granted the most prominence. By breaking down the events, characters, and behaviors into these categories, the students began to see that not all characters were portrayed in an equal manner. They noted, for example, that all of the leading characters were members of a privileged class, that they all appeared to have unlimited disposable income and free time, and that they all had servants who performed their menial daily chores. They also noted that although the lead female character (Lisa) displayed some independence, her actions were determined by her love for one of the lead male characters (Luc). After just a couple of chapters of discussing these issues, students were able to note a pattern in the novel's presentation of men and women.

Students found further support for this pattern in the remaining chapters of the novel. For example, they noted additional instances of Lisa's being portrayed in a stereotypical role, and of the upper class's tendency to prevail over their less wealthy compatriots. Students pointed out Lisa's interest in having children, her determination to get her man (Luc), her willingness to sacrifice her future for him, and her rash, emotional outbursts in the face of threatening situations. Students noted that characters who held subservient positions or who were involved in illicit activities such as drug smuggling were not from the social elite. The upper classes, students observed, were portrayed as being morally superior, conscientious, and instinctually able to recognize good from evil. Through such analysis, students uncovered characters and behaviors that exercised symbolic power within the novel, and they began to see the system of thought that such a text perpetuates. Central to these discussions was an emphasis on having students use text-based references to support any inferences they made about the novel's take on reality and truth. By requiring text-specific inferences, this approach served to prevent students from making claims that were based on their own presuppositions rather than on the value system presented in the novel.

In order to foster a more nuanced understanding of their cultural analysis, students were asked to put their inferences into perspective by revisiting their initial discussion at the start of the semester about the text's intended function and audience. In other words, they considered how

a text's cultural significance corresponds in large part to its reception in the target culture. Specifically, they discussed the implications for a culture in which a predominantly female readership is exposed to the type of reality portrayed in the novel. It should also be noted that because of the novel's origin and its Western, formulaic content, the discussions of the novel's cultural implications were not about German culture *per se*. Rather, the discussions aimed to develop students' ability to recognize and identify the symbolic power system inherent in any cultural artifact and the implications for any culture that legitimizes such power.

As a final step in this last pedagogical stage, learners related the novel's system of thought to their own reality by comparing and contrasting the degree to which the novel perpetuated or reconfigured predominant value systems in their own culture. As they considered whether the novel presented an alternative reality or mirrored their own, students had to examine the beliefs and values prevailing within their own culture. Although these discussions by no means arrived at a consensus, they aimed to promote in students an understanding of texts as message systems that carry cultural meaning.

## OUTCOMES

Having presented a detailed description of a literacy-oriented pedagogy for beginning instruction, this article will now focus on the remaining issues mentioned at the outset, namely, the feasibility, outcome, and effect of such a pedagogy. As the preceding presentation indicated, this literacy-oriented pedagogy was implemented in two intact first-semester German classes for the final 10 weeks of the semester. In addition to being able to read a full-length romance novel beginning in the 4th week of instruction by following a guided procedural approach consisting of extensive in-class and group-work reading, the students also performed at least as well on departmental exams and a posttest of reading recall and vocabulary knowledge as students who followed the standard syllabus for the entire semester (see Maxim, 2002, for a detailed discussion of results). In other words, spending time in the beginning collegiate FL classroom developing textual thinking does not have to come at the expense of the development of interpersonal communicative abilities as measured by traditional departmental language exams. Furthermore, the relative ease with which this pedagogy supplanted the standard first-semester pedagogy for 20 minutes each class period, combined with the systematic nature of

the four-staged pedagogy, indicates that the pedagogy is not only a feasible option for beginning instruction, but also a manageable one. Indeed, by adhering to this pedagogy each day, instructors were spared from having to spend their time outside of class developing supplementary materials such as glosses, vocabulary lists, or comprehension questions.

Student response to the pedagogy was generally positive. Although both instructors registered some initial apprehension among students who were not sure about the task of reading a full-length novel in their first semester of German, the pedagogy was very well received by the end of the semester, as indicated by the results of the standardized course evaluation administered in all lower-division FL classes at the University of Texas at Austin. For the question that asked students to give the course a rating from 1 (*lowest*) to 5 (*highest*), all students gave the course a 5. In addition, on a 5-point, posttest Likert scale attitude survey, students indicated the following attitudes toward the novel and the accompanying pedagogy: "I enjoyed the reading assignments this semester" ( $M = 3.96$ ;  $SD = .71$ ); "I benefited from the in-class reading of the novel" ( $M = 4.41$ ;  $SD = .57$ ); "The novel's subject matter was appropriate for first-semester students" ( $M = 4.19$ ;  $SD = .62$ ).

A final issue that remains to be researched further is whether the aforementioned pedagogy in fact resulted in increased textual thinking among students. Although no specific data were collected to address this issue, it would seem that interacting with extended discourse for 20 minutes each class period according to a systematic and procedural literacy-based approach would seem to provide the type of environment that fosters the discursive thinking emphasized in upper-level instruction. In addition, the fact that the students who took 20 minutes each day to read the novel in class were as prepared for the departmental exams and the standard course the following semester as students who spent the entire class period practicing material covered on the exams suggests that a degree of implicit learning was taking place. Further research would have to examine whether that learning resulted in increased literacy.

## CONCLUSIONS

The four-staged pedagogy outlined in this article consists of a series of tasks that aims to help learners begin thinking and using language on a textual level in the first semester of language study. Seen as a complement to the standard word- and sentence-level focus of beginning language

instruction, this pedagogy acknowledges the long-term nature of academic literacy acquisition and therefore looks to initiate novice learners to the types of thinking required at advanced levels. In order to foster literacy acquisition systematically, however, textual thinking needs to be emphasized repeatedly across curricular levels and across genres. Although the study exemplified the pedagogy with one extended text, the four stages can be adapted to other texts at other levels. In fact, an alternative option for lower-level instruction (rather than reading one longer text) would be a narrow reading approach in which learners would read thematically related texts containing redundant vocabulary but varying ideas and intent. Regardless of the text or genre, the pedagogy outlined here—first situating the text in terms of its function and audience, then guiding the reader in registering and replicating the texts' systematic presentation of information through language, and culminating in an analysis of the text's cultural significance—provides an initial step in developing practical models for integrating textuality into lower-level FL classrooms. It is also important to recognize that because this approach was integrated into a standard, communicatively-oriented first-semester class, it should be viewed as a complement to, rather than as a substitute for existing approaches. Nevertheless, if collegiate FL departments truly aspire to establish consistent, coherent curricula spanning the entire 4 years of undergraduate study, integrating textual thinking into lower-level instruction should not simply be viewed as complementary, but in fact essential to accomplishing this goal.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> One notable exception is the German Department at Georgetown University, which has implemented an integrated, 4-year undergraduate curriculum.

<sup>2</sup> See Norris and Pfeiffer (2003) for an overview of studies examining students' level of proficiency after 2 years of collegiate FL study.

<sup>3</sup> See Swaffar and Arens (in press), particularly the first chapter, for a detailed argument for coherence within collegiate FL departments.

<sup>4</sup> For a complementary characterization of the distinction between lower- and upper-level instruction that draws on systemic-functional linguistics, see the

“Continua of Multiple Literacies” in Byrnes and Sprang (2004).

<sup>5</sup> Maxim (2002), for example, demonstrated that beginning students who read extensively were not disadvantaged on standardized, communicatively-oriented yet grammar-driven language exams.

<sup>6</sup> All students in first-semester German were considered true beginners because they either had no prior instruction in German or their score on the department’s placement exam did not qualify them for a higher-level course. First-semester German at the University of Texas at Austin meets for 50 minutes each day, five times each week. The textbook used was *Deutsch zusammen* (Donahue & Watzinger, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> Detailed lesson plans of each class meeting are available at <http://www3.georgetown.edu/departments/german/faculty/hhm2/>

<sup>8</sup> To determine the novel’s readability according to traditional readability formulae, the Flesch Reading Ease score (48.84) and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score (8.89) were calculated for one chapter of the novel (chapter 6).

<sup>9</sup> This exercise was developed in consultation with Janet Swaffar and Katherine Arens.

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