Establishing a curricular trajectory: A socio-semiotic perspective on text selection and sequencing

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Hiram H. Maxim
Department of German Studies
Emory University
hmaxim@emory.edu
http://userwww.service.emory.edu/~hmaxim/
Outline of presentation

• Issues in collegiate FL studies
• SFL’s contribution to curricular thinking
• Exemplification of functionally oriented curriculum construction
Needs in Collegiate ‘Language’ Teaching and Learning

- Assure an intellectual presence for ‘language’ teaching and learning
- Link humanities interests/approaches to SLA-inspired pedagogical interests/approaches
- Develop advanced levels of multi-literacies: Linked L2-L1 – L1-L2 literacies
- Integrate bifurcated programs conceptually and in educational praxes
- Find a theoretical environment that can sustain a principled, meaning-oriented educational philosophy for all educators in a program
Recent Responses

- Literacy and language learning (Kern, 2000)
- Multiple and cross-cultural literacies (Swaffar & Arens, 2005)
- Translingual and transcultural competence (MLA Report, 2007)

→ Theoretical framework for thinking curricularly about the systematic integration of language and content development
The Contribution by Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL)
(Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004)

Language as social semiotic system that is . . .

– Meaning-focused
– Culturally embedded
– Socially situated
  • Field
  • Tenor
  • Mode
– Choice-driven
– Text-based → genre
Categorizing and Organizing Genres

- Socio-semiotic processes within field (Matthiessen, 2006)
  - Recreating (narrating)
  - Reporting (chronicling, surveying, inventorying)
  - Expounding (classifying, explaining)
  - Exploring (arguing, evaluating)
  - Enabling (regulating, instructing)
  - Recommending (advising, promoting)
  - Doing
  - Sharing (conversing, reminiscing)
- Within mode (spoken vs. written; monologic vs. dialogic)
Genre-based Trajectory of Historical Discourse

(Coffin, 2006)

1. “Recording genres”: Recounting, reporting, and narrating chronological events (e.g., autobiographical recount, historical recount)

2. “Explaining genres”: Presenting and explaining factors and consequences of non-chronological events (e.g., factorial explanation, consequential explanation)

3. “Arguing genres”: Taking a stance and arguing an issue (e.g., exposition, discussion, challenge)

(Christie & Derewianka, 2008; Byrnes, Maxim, & Norris, 2010)
socio-semiotic process

expounding
exploring
enabling
reporting
recreating
sharing
doing
recommending
## Linguistic Realization of Genre-based Trajectory

(Coffin, 2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Tenor</th>
<th>Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recording</strong></td>
<td>Specific &amp; general participants; material &amp; mental processes</td>
<td>Writer-reader engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explaining</strong></td>
<td>Specific, general, abstract participants; relational processes; specialized lexis</td>
<td>Writer-reader solidarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arguing</strong></td>
<td>Abstract participants; Relational, mental, verbal processes; specialized lexis</td>
<td>Persuasion; evaluation; heteroglossia</td>
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</tbody>
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Curricular Implementation of Genre-based Sequencing

• Identify content areas whose primary textual representations exemplify the type of social semiotic practice targeted for a specific curricular level
• Identify typical genres within this content area
• Identify predominant language features of targeted genres to emphasize in instruction
• Select particular genres to model language use and to serve as basis for textual reproduction
Exemplification:
German Studies at Emory University

• First year
  – *Wer ich bin*: Exploring self-identity in the German-speaking world through different roles that young adults assume in society (e.g., student, hobbyist, consumer, traveler, family member, citizen)

• Second year
  – *Erwachsenwerden*: Personal stories of coming of age through the ages in the German-speaking world (e.g., the role that nature, love, war, family, education, travel have on coming of age)

• Third year
  – *Süße Pein*: An examination of the tensions and dichotomies inherent in the portrayal of love at different points in German-language cultural production (e.g., courtly love, motherly love, unrequited love, spiritual love)

• Fourth year
  – The exploration of major cultural and existential questions in the German-speaking world (e.g., notions of space, intimacy, Romanticism, terrorism, modernism)
Exemplification:
Emory German Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field-tenor-mode</th>
<th>Tasks/performances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 YR Chronological narration; specific participants; dialogicality; material &amp; mental processes</td>
<td>Personal letter; personal recount; personal narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 YR Chronological, comparative &amp; causal narration; specific participants; dialogicality; specialized lexis</td>
<td>Personal account; personal narrative; fairy tale; consequential explanation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 YR Narration &amp; explanation; General and abstract participants; nominalization; covert dialogicality; increased lexical density; specialized lexis</td>
<td>Plot summary; character analysis; theme analysis; literary interpretation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Role and Place of Literature

- Selection and sequencing of literary texts according to their socio-semiotic process and linguistic realization
- Distinction between (a) interaction with text and (b) production based on text (i.e., reading vs. writing/speaking tasks)
- Alignment of text-based tasks with level-specific goals and emphases
- Inclusion of models for textual production
  - Recreating → (re)telling a story
  - Reporting → recounting events in time and place (e.g., plot summary)
  - Expounding → explaining events (e.g., character analysis)
  - Exploring → giving evidence to support a claim (e.g., interpretation)
  - Exploring → arguing at metalevel (e.g., review of oeuvre)
Summative Comments

Humanities-based FL curriculum construction necessitates …

• Meaning-oriented theoretical framework
• Systematic textual focus across curriculum
• Conceptual approach to text selection and sequencing
• Coherent pedagogical approach to textuality
• Principled assessment of learner outcomes
Works cited


Thank you

hmaxim@emory.edu

http://german.emory.edu

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