

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/>

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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 . . .

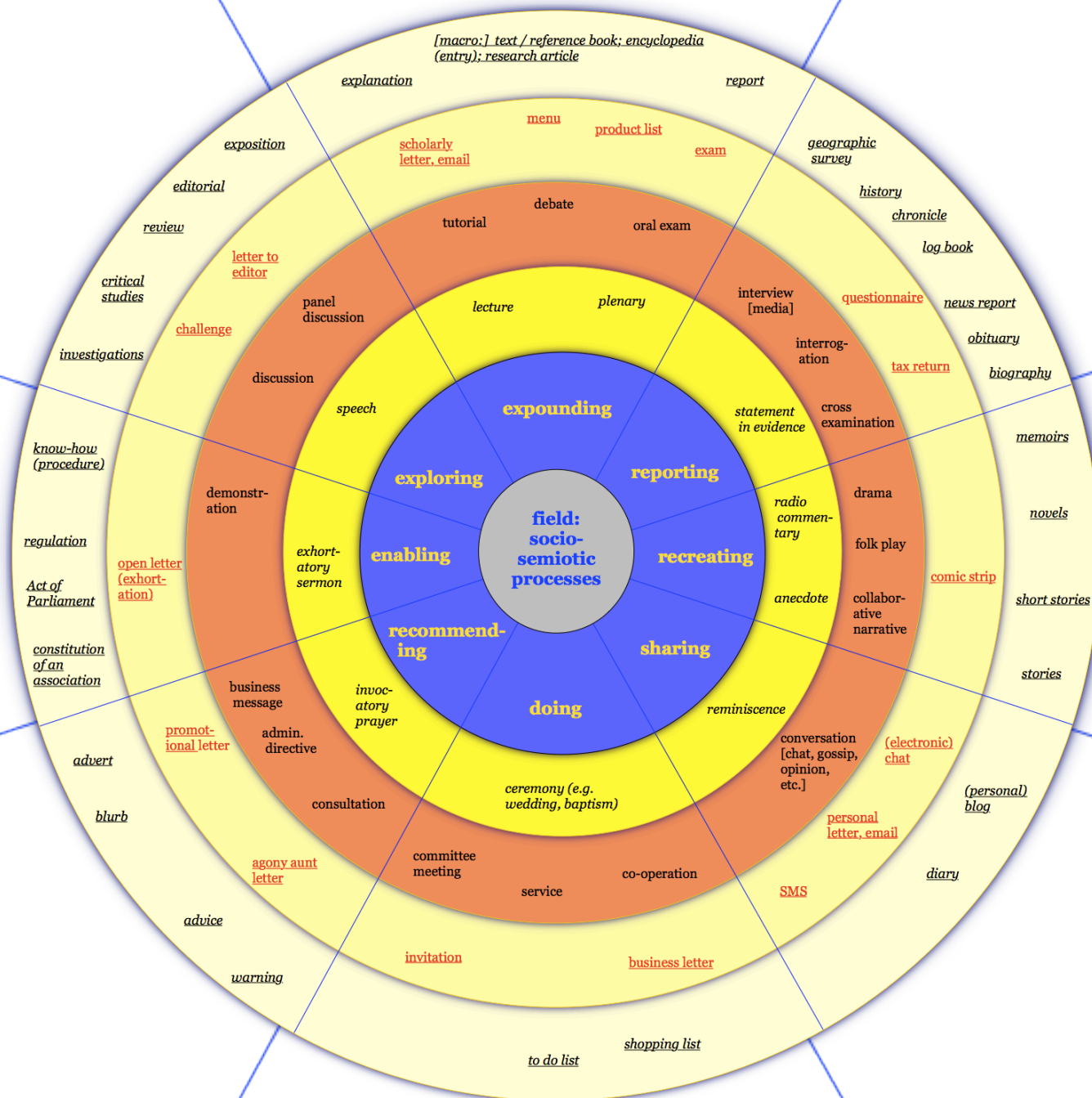
- Meaning-focused
- Culturally embedded
- Socially situated
 - Field
 - Tenor
 - Mode
- Choice-driven
- Text-based → genre



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)



Linguistic Realization of Genre-based Trajectory

(Coffin, 2006)

	Field	Tenor	Mode
Recording	Specific & general participants; material & mental processes	Writer-reader engagement	Dialogic; field time; chronology
Explaining	Specific, general, abstract participants; relational processes; specialized lexis	Writer-reader solidarity	Cause-effect; causes as theme; text time
Arguing	Abstract participants; Relational, mental, verbal processes; specialized lexis	Persuasion; evaluation; heteroglossia	Arguments & supporting evidence; nominalization



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

	Field-tenor-mode	Tasks/performances
1 YR	Chronological narration; specific participants; dialogicality; material & mental processes	Personal letter; personal recount; personal narrative
2 YR	Chronological, comparative & causal narration; specific participants; dialogicality; specialized lexis	Personal account; personal narrative; fairy tale; consequential explanation
3 YR	Narration & explanation; General and abstract participants; nominalization; covert dialogicality; increased lexical density; specialized lexis	Plot summary; character analysis; theme analysis; literary interpretation



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



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Thank you

hmaxim@emory.edu

<http://german.emory.edu>

<http://userwww.service.emory.edu/~hmaxim/>



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