

# A genre-based approach to sequencing content

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# Assumptions

A need to integrate curricula in order to

- Reaffirm FL education in the academy
- Provide an articulated learner pathway
- Support long-term process of SLA
- Break down personnel divisions
- Create departmental identity and foster collaboration
- Establish a coherent, meaning-based instructional approach



# Curricular integration of language and content: Got texts?

Language becomes meaningful in/as texts → text-based approach necessitates attention to ...

- Context
- Subjectivities inherent in text
- Text type/genre
- Intertextual nature of textual production
- Textual properties
  - Communicative purpose
  - Contextual environment
  - Authorial stance
  - Schematic structure
  - Linguistic realization



But how to sequence texts to establish an integrated, articulated curriculum that supports learners' longitudinal language development?



# The construct of *genre*

- Definition
  - “staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture” (Martin 1984, p. 25)
- Characteristics
  - Culturally embedded, socially situated
  - Purposeful
  - Staged
  - Conventionalized
  - Linguistically realized
- Examples
  - Oral: eulogy, service transaction, joke, introduction of a plenary speaker, sermon
  - Written: newspaper editorial, job application letter, fairy tale, recipe, lease contract



# What to teach when: Genre-based sequencing principles

- Topological classification of genres
  - By context
    - Primary  $\leftrightarrow$  secondary discourses (Gee, 1998)
  - By macro-genre
    - Narrative  $\leftrightarrow$  expository language (Martin, 2002)
  - By socio-semiotic process (Matthiessen, 2006)
  - By linguistic realization
    - Congruent  $\leftrightarrow$  synoptic semiotic practices (Halliday, 1993)



# Primary-secondary discourse continuum

Primary discourses of familiarity	↔	Secondary discourses of public life
Involve “society of intimates”; personal forms of interaction	↔	Involve social institutions beyond family; public interaction & content
Concrete subject matter	↔	Abstract subject matter
Focus on process & verbal paradigm	↔	Focus on product & nominal paradigm
Self-oriented single perspective	↔	Other-oriented multiple perspective
Familiar conversational partners	↔	More general/specialized audience
Literal meaning	↔	Figurative, metaphorical meaning
Coordination	↔	Subordination, relativization
Oral, dialogic	↔	Oral & written, monologic

# 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)





# Trajectory of socio-semiotic processes

(Matthiessen, 2006)

1. “Recreating”: stories, anecdotes → private, familiar sphere
2. “Reporting”: historical account, biography → attention to time and place
3. “Expounding”: factorial and consequential explanations → cause, rather than time, is the organizing principle
4. “Exploring”: exposition, discussion, metahistory → move from external to internal relations



# Linguistic progression along genre-based continuum

- Increased hierarchical organization of information through increased subordination & decreased coordination
- Increased intra-, rather than inter-, clausal activity via
  - Increased lexical density (content words/clause)
  - Decreased grammatical intricacy (clauses/sentence)
- Increased use of generic and abstract participants
- Increased use of relational processes and decreased use of “action” processes, i.e., “being” vs. “doing”
- Increased possibilities for additional meaning making via metaphorical realizations of meaning at the lexicogrammatical level  
→ grammatical metaphor via nominalizations



# Grammatical metaphor

- A linguistic resource for condensing and restructuring information through grammatically non-congruent language
  - Processes: develop → development
  - Qualities: stable → stability
- Example:
  - Congruent language: We hope that peace will soon be restored
  - Non-congruent (synoptic) language: Our hope for an early restoration of peace ... (Byrnes, Maxim & Norris, 2010)



# Text sequencing criteria

- Length of sentence
- Length of clause
- lexical density (= content words/clause)
- grammatical intricacy (= clauses/sentence)
- participants, i.e., nouns (concrete vs. abstract)
- processes, i.e., verbs (doing vs. being)
- circumstances, i.e., prepositional phrases (simple vs. complex)
- taxis (coordination vs. subordination)
- theme, i.e., first element in clause (simple vs. complex)
- incidence of grammatical metaphor



# Summary of genre-based curricular trajectory

Lower level	Upper level
Primary discourses	↔ Secondary discourses
Congruent language/verbal paradigm	↔ Synoptic language/nominal paradigm
Processes of recreating	↔ Processes of exploring



# Curricular implementation of text-oriented sequencing

- Identify content areas whose primary textual representations exemplify the type of social semiotic practice targeted for a specific level
- Identify typical textual 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: Emory German Studies

- 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, 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 literary 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)



# Summative Comments

- Establishment of shared vision and goals according to local realities and expertise
- Organization of content according to textual properties
- Attention to content from the beginning and language to the end
- Focus on texts for what, how, and why meaning is made
- Assessment of learner outcomes





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# Thank you

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