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 ↔ secondary discourses (Gee, 1998)
  • By macro-genre
    – Narrative ↔ expository language (Martin, 2002)
  • By socio-semiotic process (Matthiessen, 2006)
  • By linguistic realization
    – Congruent ↔ synoptic semiotic practices (Halliday, 1993)
Primary-secondary discourse continuum

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lower level</th>
<th>Upper level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary discourses</td>
<td>↔ Secondary discourses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congruent language/verbal paradigm</td>
<td>↔ Synoptic language/nominal paradigm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processes of recreating</td>
<td>↔ Processes of exploring</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
Works cited

Thank you

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