

Assignment 2

When confronted with any text, a person inadvertently uses previously formed schemata to identify the type of text it is judging by its content and how it is arranged. Many texts can form their own genre or be classified into one. With a given genre and a specific context the reader/viewer can identify the function of the discourse. When learning a second language many learners refer back to the schemata that they use to understand discourse in their native language. However, it is still important that we are aware of the actual processes we use when interpreting discourse of specific texts. There are two primary ways in which many instructors teach discourse to second language learners. These methods are the bottom-up and top-down approaches. In my lesson I used more of a top-down approach, focusing first on social relationship, and discourse type, then focusing more on discourse structure, discourse function and grammar (Cook, 80). I planned this lesson with the hope that students would identify the genre of the text and reflect on what they know about this genre so that they could then develop an understanding of its discourse and function in order to know how to use the text as a resource. From my experience with second language learning classes, it seems that there is a primary focus on developing a understanding of a text's discourse, however many lessons are only geared toward this goal and don't give students the opportunity to learn how to use materials as resources based on their understanding of the discourse. Although many students could rely on schemata from their native language, I think it is valuable to actually focus class time on learning to use resource texts in order to perform specific tasks.

This lesson focuses on matters specific to a student who is attending the University of Michigan, specifically as a student of the College of Literature, Science and the Arts. This lesson is intended for more advanced students of a second language learning class where the target language is English. The first three parts of the lesson would be done in class (in an hour time frame) and the fourth part would be discussed briefly in class and then be assigned as individual homework.

In class the students will be introduced to this university catalogue which is specific to LS&A. This catalogue provides information such as procedures and policies, degree and graduation requirements, and departments and courses within the College. The objective is for students to be able to utilize this text as an academic resource. The activity emphasizes the breakdown of the schemata for interpreting discourse (from the L1) that a student might use in order to understand the type, content, the senders and receivers, as well as the function of a text that is not written in their native language. It is possible that the most difficult part of the lesson will be the comprehension of particular vocabulary items. However, by doing this task, students will become familiar with some of the important lexicon of this particular genre, an academic resource. I will organize my comments for each section of my lesson the same way that my lesson is structured.

I. In the pre-reading task, I want the students to try to recognize the discourse genre with very minimal input. I wanted them to determine what type of text it is as well as what its function might be only by looking at the title. If they can place this text into a genre, it is evident that they at least have some prior knowledge of this type of discourse. I want the students to build upon their knowledge of the text in order to establish who the senders and receivers are and so they can later determine its function. By realizing that the

text has an academic basis (which is stated in the title), students can make a fairly accurate assumption regarding the roles of sender and receiver. They hypothesize that the sender must be (the faculty) the College of Literature, Science and the Arts, therefore through status and social importance, establishing students as receivers (Cook 89). With this credibility students might assume that the contents are informative, accurate, and important to a student in this particular College.

II. Next I wanted the students to become familiar with the text by skimming through the Table of Contents and the Index. Here the students would build upon their assumptions they made in the first task in order to form their own definition as to what the College of LS&A is and to better determine the function of the book. Now that they have established the senders and receivers and assume that the function is that of an informatory guide, they can now see specifically what the text consists of; courses, degrees, requirements, procedures, admissions and other useful information related to the College. I also want the students to note which chapter, and therefore which subject matter, takes up the majority of the text. By making this note they can be more certain that the main function of this book is that of a course guide that can be used to make a tentative course schedule that would fulfill the requirements and therefore permit the student's graduation with a specialized Degree from the College of Literature, Science and the Arts.

III. The main purpose of this task was to get the students to interact with the text on their own; using it for the function it was intended for, that being a guide and tool. After establishing the basic goals of LS&A, I want the students to learn the specific discourse of the text. There are many topics and terms that are unique to the content of this literature. I

want them to become familiar with the terms so if they ever used a similar academic resource they would already have a well developed understanding of the basic lexicon.

I also want the students to see the functionality of the guide so I pose questions that will make them interact independently with the text. Since there was so much information I try to ask questions for which they can skim through the text to find the answers. I want them to practice skimming for key points this text just as they would skim a text in their native language. I don't want to completely overwhelm the students so I only focus on points that will be necessary in order to successfully complete the comprehension task at the end of the lesson. Since I did not cover all of the information of the text in this lesson, I feel that the students will be able to seek out and apply additional information that the text offers them regarding LS&A (individually or with my assistance) because they understand the discourse and know how to use the text. However, since many students of LS&A don't know many of the more specific facts, I don't see the need to overwhelm my students with more information than is necessary.

IV. This final task tests the comprehension of the lesson and the LS&A Bulletin. It requires that the students use everything they learned in the previous tasks to create a realistic academic plan. This task is quite an extensive process, and I realize that it might be difficult for the students to remember and abide by all of the College's requirements in order to obtain a Degree. What I hope is that once the students have done the first three exercises and read what they are to do in the fourth, they will then refer back to their answers and create a step-by-step plan which will lead from the most basic information to the most complicated and covering all steps, and resulting in the completion of the final task.

I think that lessons like these are very beneficial to students. They not only encourage the learners to understand discourse, but make learning the content and its function a process on which students continually build. A student must first understand the basic content in order to continue progressing through the text. Then, what they learned throughout the lesson is reflected in their ability to complete a specific task. As some students learn best by 'doing,' I also think that it is good for the students to interact with the teaching material. It can become monotonous for students to read materials and answer questions therefore, it is good to introduce tasks that have a functional purpose. A student can also gain a sense of competence in the second language from the completion of this task as they realize that they are able to complete rather elaborate functions in the target language. Although the text I chose may not be the most exciting learning material, I feel that its highly beneficial for students to be able to utilize a text such as this, that is intended to be used as a resource to successfully perform a specific (rather complicated) function.