Where to begin: Principles for selecting and sequencing content in collegiate FL curricula

Invited Presentation
Vanderbilt University
October 21, 2011

Hiram H. Maxim
Department of German Studies
Emory University
hmaxim@emory.edu
Outline of presentation

• Issues in collegiate FL curriculum construction
• Rationale behind curriculum construction
• Process of curriculum construction & articulation
Our challenge / opportunity

Four years to begin developing competent, culturally literate users of the language in an educational context characterized by

- Limited contact hours
- Focus on literary and cultural study within humanistic educational tradition
- L1 literate learners
- Beginning through advanced levels of instruction
- Long-term, non-linear nature of second language acquisition (SLA)
Historical developments in collegiate FL education

• Communicative turn (1970s)
  • Emphasis on meaningful oral communication as a response to previous approaches (e.g., audiolingualism; cognitive code)

• Proficiency movement (1980s)
  • Codification of learning outcomes
  • Inclusion of cultural competence as instructional goal

• Area studies (1980s – 2000s)
  • Interdisciplinarity
  • Deconstruction of literary canon

• Content-based instruction (1980s – 1990s)
  • Language for Specific Purposes (e.g., German for Engineering)

• Language technology (1980s – 2000s)
  • Diversification of instructional delivery

• National Standards (1990s)
  • Articulation of learning goals across levels
  • Recognition of contextual nature of language use

• Study abroad (1990s – 2000s)
The next challenge …

- Two-tiered departmental structure
  - Instructional approach
    - CLT vs. literary and cultural study
    - Orality vs. textuality
    - Bridge courses
  - Personnel configuration and background
    - Non-tenure track vs. tenure track
  - Assumptions about language acquisition
    - “language” vs. “content” courses
And a response ...

“Content from the beginning of language acquisition until the end of the undergraduate sequence” (Byrnes, 2002)

“The development of a unified language-and-content curriculum across the four-year college sequence” (MLA Report, 2007, p. 3)

→ Learning to use language and using language to learn
In addition . . .

An integrated curriculum needs to . . .

– Reflect departmental consensus & expertise
– Pursue humanistic inquiry
– Follow a principled trajectory
– Acknowledge longitudinal nature of SLA
– Be validated through principled assessment
– Remain open to further enhancement
Curricular integration of language and content: Why?

- Addresses problematic “two-tiered” departmental structure
- Acknowledges centrality of meaning making for language learning
  - Language as a meaning-based, rather than a rule-based, system;
  - Language learning = learning how to mean
  - Grammar as a resource for meaning making
- Reaffirms centrality of FL education for humanistic education
- Establishes an articulated program for developing advanced L2 abilities
- Supports learners’ long-term and non-linear language development
- Creates departmental identity and fosters departmental collaboration
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
Implications of text-based curricular integration for language learning

- Language learning as
  - Learning how to mean in a variety of contexts
  - Building up “meaning potential” in a range of registers and text types/genres
  - Thinking intertextually, i.e., filling our utterances with others’ words (Bakhtin, 1986)
    - Textual borrowing ⇒ Renting vs. owning meaning (Holquist, 1981)
  - Developing a voice within socially situated, socially preferred forms of language use
  - Understanding why language choices are made (Hyland, 2003)
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 1:
Berlin across Curricular Levels

• First year:
  – Immediate environment (e.g., daily routines; social engagements; free-time activities; family events)
• Second year:
  – Contemporary personal stories (e.g., East-West; Majority-Minority; Male-Female; Young-Old; Left-Right)
• Third year:
  – Publicly framed personal narratives (e.g., Diaries from 1920s, 1930s, 1945; literary and non-literary accounts from divided Berlin, unified Berlin, “costalgic” Berlin, Turkish Berlin)
• Fourth year:
  – Public debates (e.g., literary and non-literary expositions on political, economic, cultural, and societal issues)
Exemplification 2: 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)
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)
Outcomes

• Statement of outcomes expectations
  – Level-specific goals/profiles in terms of
    • Content
    • Language
    • Situational and cultural context

• Assessment of learner outcomes
  – Collection of learner performances
  – Analysis of correspondence between expectation and performance
  – Adjustment, as needed, of tasks, texts, pedagogy
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
Thank you

hmaxim@emory.edu

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