DISCOURSE ANALYSIS, LANGUAGE TEACHING, AND SYLLABUS DESIGN: THE GREEK CONTEXT

TRIANTAFILLIA KOSTOULI

Ναπολέων Μήτσης κ.ά.: "Έκθεση Ιδεών: Λόγος δημιουργικός" (Για τη Γ' Λυκείου). Αθήνα: Οργανισμός Εκδόσεων Διδακτικών Βιβλίων.

1. Introduction

This article outlines and discusses a new, discourse-based approach to language teaching, taking as a point of departure the syllabus "Έκθεση Ιδεών: Λόγος Δημιουργικός" that has been used for the past few years in Greek secondary schools and can be, in general terms, interpreted as a specific way of instantiating this language-teaching philosophy. As to be shown below, the above-mentioned syllabus attempts to implement insights from current research in Text Analysis (de Beaugrande and Dressier 1981) and Process Writing (see Grabe and Kaplan 1996 for further discussion) to L1 teaching practice as it pertains to expository/argumentative text production, addressing, thus, issues of central importance in current theorizing concerning L1 (Coe 1986) and L2 (Kroll 1990) writing. The discussion of the pertinent concepts, however, formulated as it is, fails to lead to the emergence of a clear and coherent framework that could be useful to both teachers and students. To this end, in what follows, after delineating the wider context concerning the various approaches to written text production (from earlier syntactically-oriented work situated under the rubric of "composition research" to current genre-based proposals), I single out specific lines of inquiry into language teaching (redefined as the teaching of discourse-level competence) that I deem worth exploring further. It is on the basis of this background that I discuss the syllabus under examination and indicate the reformulations and/or extensions needed to be introduced so that, on one hand, the general framework on written text production emerges clearly while, on the other, the specific activities suggested on the development of variable aspects of textual competence acquire focus and become directly pertinent to the Greek educational system.

2. Communicative Syllabuses and Discourse Competence

Following the paradigm shift noted in theoretical linguistic research, from the initial sentence-based approaches to language as a decontextualized object to current socio-culturally-informed perspectives exploring language as a piece of situated communicative action, respective research in applied linguistics (Berns 1990, Widdowson 1978) illustrated that the focus of language teaching should be similarly redirected from the exclusive concern with grammatical correctness to the examination of the way in which grammatical forms (posited to arise out of functional concerns) interrelate to create socially appropriate units of spoken versus written discourse. Thus, in addition to the acquisition of linguistic competence (defined as the knowledge of the grammatico-syntactic aspect of the language) that was initially suggested as the main aim of language teaching, subsequent research, widening its scope of inquiry, argued for the necessity of developing children's "communicative competence". This is defined after Hymes (1974) as the system of culturally-based knowledge that assigns meaning to the way in which people within and across speech communities actually use and interpret language. Inquiring into its nature, Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) identified the fol-lowing four types of competence as its constitutive dimensions, namely: *Grammatical competence* (defined as the ability to produce and understand the grammatically correct syntactic, lexical, and phonological forms in a language), *Sociolinguistic competence* (the ability to use language appropriately in socio-cultural contexts), *Strategic competence* (referring to the knowledge of the verbal and non-verbal communication strategies which enable speakers to handle breakdowns in communication and to enhance the effectiveness of their message) and *Discourse competence* (interpreted as the ability to recognize different patterns of discourse, to connect utterances to an overall theme and infer the meaning of spoken/written texts).

The teaching of linguistic competence has been implemented in the so-called grammatical or structural syllabuses; these types of syllabuses can be described, in general terms, as inventories of units exemplifying rules of pronunciation, word formation, word meaning, and sentence-level grammatical relationships. The teaching of communicative competence has been associated with the so-called communicative syllabuses, i.e. syllabuses which are basically concerned with outlining the communicative abilities that the learner should be able to demonstrate at the end of a prescribed course. Building on the premise that language is used for communicative purposes in var-

ious interactive situations, these syllabuses (which have been since differentiated into functional and notional ones) require that learners pay attention to the way language structure is shaped by extra-linguistic considerations (social/cultural context, level of formality between interlocutors, etc.). Functional syllabuses are usually concerned with the teaching of the strategies to be employed for the implementation of specific communicative or language functions (Van Ek and Alexander 1980) - usually limited to those performed by a previously-identified set of speech acts. Notional syllabuses (Wilkins 1976) build upon the dimension of notions (that may range from general concepts such as time, and space to more specific topic-related ones such as house and home, weather and personal identification).

Interestingly, both structural and communicative syllabuses, though differing in their core assumptions, seem to have been developed along similar lines; while largely understood to forward two radically distinct approaches to language (as decontextualized object versus situation-specific communication, respectively), both types of syllabuses seem to reinforce the view that communicative (just as grammatical) competence can be compartmentalized in a list-like manner and presented as a set of items, which may be defined in either structural or functional terms. In addition, by developing activities

that conceptualize of the relation between form-and-function through either the "overlay solution" (which suggests that the grammatical structures be presented first, followed by a list of functions), the "label change solution" (which, by retaining the formal aspect of the language, incorporates slight changes in its presentation), and/or the "add-a-component" solution (which incorporates new theory into old practice) (see Raimes 1983), communicative syllabuses seem to have emerged as modifications of the old structural paradigm.

Currently, however, with the exploration of discourse-level phenomena, it has become clear that the inquiry into the nature of communicative competence should subsume wider issues pertaining to the way language in connected spoken versus written discourse may be used and interpreted in relation to its relevant (local and global) socio-cultural context (Tarone and Yule 1989). It should be noted, in this regard, however, that while the acquisition of discourse/text competence may have been recognized as an important - and indeed the central - aspect of language teaching, issues pertaining, first, to the clarification of its nature and, secondly, to its implementation in (discourse-oriented) syllabuses tend to be highly contestable. In general, depending on the definition assigned to the often-interchangeably used terms of "discourse" versus "text", two distinct orientations may

be discerned in the relevant literature, focusing on the clarification and teaching of interactional versus textual competence, broadly associated with spoken and written discourse respectively. It is interesting to note, in this regard, however, that, while the relevant discussion on the form of a discourse-based syllabus has been initiated with regard to second-language teaching (Hatch 1992, McCarthy 1991, McCarthy and Carter 1994), the inquiry into the possible structure of such a syllabus that could be profitably employed in mother-tongue education seems seriously undeveloped. Important attempts to this effect have been undertaken within the past few years in the Greek educational context. One such proposal is outlined in the syllabus "Έκθεση Ιδεών: Λόγος Δημιουργικός", which is discussed in this article.

3. On textual competence

3,1. Approaching writing: The research background

Initially, the issues involved in the teaching of written text production were discussed under the rubric of the sentence-oriented composition research. Directing little attention to the analysis of the product itself, the so-called *expressive movement* that prevailed in the 1970s (Elbow 1973, Macrorie 1980) suggested a concep-

tualization of writing as a solitary activity, i.e. an activity that provides writers with the opportunity to explore their inner feelings and discover theirselves. The paradigm that followed, known as the *cognitivist position,* directed attention to the mental operations taking place during composing. These, as illustrated, may in fact differentiate experienced from inexperienced writers, shaping ultimately the style of the produced text. According to Flower and Hayes (1981a, b), composing should be seen as an exceedingly complex problem-solving activity of responding to a rhetorical situation in the form of a text. Contradicting the assumptions of the traditional pedagogy which suggested that students find a topic, construct an outline, and then proceed to write in an orderly, linear sequence (an approach which, interestingly, is reflected in the syllabus under examination - see 4.1. below), relevant cognitively-oriented research, building principally upon protocol analysis (Smagorinsky 1994) has illustrated that expert writers, when producing a text, may in fact juggle several recursively-occuring processes -such as formulating plans, revisiting plans as ideas are drafted into sentences, reviewing each sentence in the developing text to check its consistency with audience, tone, and discourse-structure considerations. Though the insights of this position have been exploited rather extensively in a few

programs concerned with the teaching of writing -focusing on the teaching of the process of composing (see for instance the 'Computers and Writing Instruction' Project [CWIP] by MacArhur, Harris and Graham, 1994)-, the most insightful conceptualization of writing that has actually illustrated its twofold nature -i.e. as a recursive context-situated *process* leading to a *product* that reflects cultural values and genre-shaped modes of organizing experience- has been outlined by the so-called discourse-analytic paradigm.

It should be noted in this regard, however, that while the basic premise forwarded by Discourse Analysis -i.e. that writing be reconceptualized as a process leading to the production of contextually-appropriate text types (see 3.2. below for further discussion)- is indeed uncontestable, the exploration into its practical implications is not unproblematic. Due to the highly variable definitions that have been assigned to the notion of "text"-defined alternatively as the production of a cohesive unit (Halliday and Hasan 1976) versus a hierarchically-structured sequence of units (Chafe 1980, Fox 1987) versus a genre-specific structure (Berkenkotter and Huckin 1993) created by the interrelationship of discourse strategies (Gumperz 1982), various pedagogical suggestions have been formulated, each entailing a distinct conceptualization of the form and struc-

ture of the ensuing syllabus and curriculum. Given that the syllabus under examination suggests a specific approach to the teaching of written text construction that draws principally upon a specific line of work developed (by deBeaugrande and Dressier 1981) within Discourse/Text Analysis, I regard it necessary to survey the relevant discourse-analytic research up to the currently prevailing genre-based paradigm, and then proceed to indicate its potential application to the teaching of writing in a discourse-based syllabus. It is only when seen against this background that the argument under examination -its aims, major strengths and drawbacks -can be appreciated.

3.2. Text production within Discourse Analysis: From cohesion to genre

In a survey of research carried out on discourse/text production, de Beaugrande (1990) suggested that relevant work in the field be situated into two broad stages, the "text grammar" (from early to mid 70's) and the "post text-grammar" period (from mid 70's onward), characterized by the theoretical versus empirical approach adopted, respectively, toward the analysis of language use at the text level. Initially, and under the influence of generative linguistics, research focus was principally directed to the construction of text

grammars (van Dijk 1972). Despite differences in the unit of analysis (sentence versus text), research in both sentence- and discourse-oriented linguistics was unified under a shared conception of grammar, which was basically construed of as a system of rules operating to generate texts by way of assigning structural descriptions to them. It soon emerged, however, that texts, as socio-culturally situated performances, are not amenable to the kind of context- and culture-free analysis typically applied to single sentences. As a result, the focus of discourse-oriented linguistics shifted toward the identification of the criteria defining textuality, i.e. to those factors that render a string of words and sentences into a unified meaningful whole. The proposals developed initially - typifying what Enkvist (1985) refers to as "sentence-based models"- were limited to tracing the linguistic links situated under the general heading of *cohesion*. Cohesion was regarded to be necessary for rendering a collection of utterances into a text (Halliday and Hasan 1976). As shown by subsequent research, however, cohesion is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of textuality; in contrast, the relation found to be an important one was that between cohesion and text interpretability/ text quality. As illustrated by Biber (1995), cohesive mechanisms should actually be interpreted as one among the (variously interrelated) parameters or dimensions that can be profitably employed for clarifying the notion of text style, elucidating thus readers' assessments of texts as low versus high quality (Connor 1995).

Situating texts in the dynamics of human interaction, subsequent textlinguistic research suggested that textuality may, in fact, be constructed (through the integration of top-down and bottom-up mechanisms) in the interaction taking place between the unfolding semantic macro-organization of the processed text and readers' ability to situate the incoming material into previously-acquired knowledge structures variously referred to as *schemata, frames* or *scripts*. According to one line of work carried out within psycholinguistics, text comprehension depends crucially upon the recognition of the text's macrostructure (van Dijk 1980) that may be expressed in the form of a title, headline or a summarizing sentence. According to a parallel-running line of work that is principally informed by schema theory, a sequence of text-units may actually acquire meaning by way of instantiating (or deviating from) abstract schemata, that have been since differentiated (see Carrell 1987) into *content* versus *formal* ones (including, respectively, background knowledge of the content area of a text versus background knowledge of the organizational structures associated with different

types of texts [see Labov and Waletzky 1967, Longacre and Levinsohn 1978, van Dijk 1980 for narrative texts and Meyer 1975 for argumentative texts). Both content and formal schemata, thus, act as an outline which may guide the language producer during the process of verbalizing experience into the form of a culturally-recognized text type. Likewise, during reading or recall of material read, as illustrated, the skilled reader in order to interpret the incoming information, tends to activate this same kind of superordinate schema. Reader's failure to comprehend a text may either be due to the writer's not having provided sufficient clues in the text for the reader to effectively activate the schemata s/he already possess, or due to the fact that the reader him/herself may not possess the schema anticipated by the author (Meyer et al. 1980).

Building on the above-outlined conceptualization of writing as the production of a socio-culturally-conditioned discourse type (i.e. as the production of a series of utterances the meaning of which is appreciated in relation to schemata appropriate to specific social and cultural contexts), it may be suggested that writing development be redefined not simply as the task of linking utterances to each other but rather as a socioculturally-driven process of constructing a wide variety of text types that instantiate culturally

appropriate schematic or *genre-specific knowledge.* Initially associated with literary texts and often conflated with the notion of "genre", the clear-cut distinction between *genre* versus actual *text types,* drawn by and explored within the ESP framework (Dudley-Evans 1989), has been assigned increasing importance in the language learning and teaching literature. Following Swales (1990), genre is defined as: a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of *communicative purposes.* These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent *discourse community,* and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the *schematic structure* of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of *content and style* (my underlying).

Genre-based approaches have been applied in the analysis of academic writing, English in the workplace, adult second language literacy development, and language development in schools. In what follows, I indicate that this distinction is of particular usefulness to language teaching and can be profitably employed in syllabus design.

4. Teaching textual competence: The Greek context

Formulated within the discourse-analytic paradigm, the syllabus "Έκθεση Ιδεών: Λόγος Δημιουργικός" raises

and aims to provide answers to an important set of questions which capture various aspects of the processes related to the construction and interpretation of school-based expository text, i.e. to a text type that is produced and interpreted within a particular socio-cultural context (Greek high school). These, however, have not been integrated enough to yield a coherent approach to textual appropriateness as it pertains to contextually-shaped expository text production. Despite its shortcoming, which are discussed below, it should be recognized that the activities outlined in the syllabus under examination do not form ad hoc suggestions but rather reflect attempts to implement a specific methodology that has been widely adopted in the teaching of L2 argumentative/expository writing (Kroll 1990). This, essentially, suggests that the cognitively-oriented approach to writing be integrated with the textlinguistic analysis of the product (i.e. the text produced). Succinctly, the main issues addressed in the syllabus under examination may be delineated thus: What are the types of expository texts produced in the school and various other contexts? What are the steps undertaken by a writer in the production of expository written text? Which steps can be taught and how? (addressed in Parts 1 and 2). And finally (in Parts 3 and 4): What are the criteria defining textuality? What are the factors involved in the production of a text versus that of a random sequence of utterances?

While the topics raised may be undoubtedly of central importance in the writing pedagogy, in the syllabus under consideration these seem to be examined in a rather disjoined fashion. It is interesting to note that the discussion in Part 3 which focuses on the criteria defining textuality should in fact have preceded that in Part 2, since knowledge of those criteria is, in fact, a prerequisite for understanding the aspects of text production which are presented and discussed in Part 2; as to be shown below, it is knowledge of the criteria defining textuality that, essentially, guides the successful implementation of the activities of text planning, text revision and indeed of the process of text production itself. Interestingly, no such integrative attempt is undertaken. The textbook is structured in such a way that interrelated aspects of the text production process are presented as running along parallel lines. It is my contention that in any discourse-based syllabus, attention should be directed to the integration of the following aspects capturing:

1. *Text production skills,* which include planning, verbalization, and revision. These operations, though not specific to argumentative text writing, may be facilitated by knowledge of genre-specific expectations.

2. *Mastery of the scripts* or schemata applicable to various text

types (including argumentation) as well as exploration of the processes involved in the realization of such general structures of expectation in the form of specific text types.

3. *The provision of time for writing conferences* which facilitate teacher's - students' negotiation of genre-specific meaning.

4.1. On the writing process: Planning, text production, and revision

According to the discussion in Part 2 of the syllabus, which draws vaguely from the cognitively-oriented research, writing should be seen as a linear process of constructing meaning negotiated during the activities of planning/prewriting. Curiously, the role of revision (defined by Fitzgerald and Markman [1987: 4] as a "cognitive problem-solving process that may appear at any point in the writing process when mismatches are noted between intended and instantiated texts") remains seriously undeveloped. Apparently, the corrections made by the teacher on a student's text (presented in Part 4) may not necessarily lead to its effective revision (Ferris 1995a, b).

While initially examined in a linear fashion as preceding and following the activity of writing, it has been currently acknowledged that pre-writing and revision should, in fact, be seen as central, recursively-occurring components of the "meaning construal" process, all shaped by considerations of purpose, audience, context of writing and genre-specific standards (Zamel 1982, 1987). At the simplest level, planning may consist simply of thinking of the next thing to say (which is usually cued by associative links to the sentence written last (instantiating what Bereiter and Scardamalia 1987 refer to as "the knowledge-telling" approach to writing); planning becomes more complex when students, adopting the so-called "knowledge-transforming" perspective to writing, begin actively to search into and organize (by making notes, outlines, and semantic webs) their repertoire of formal and content schemata. Meyer (1975) has gathered empirical evidence on five basic ways of organizing expository discourse: *collection, description, causation, problem/solution* and *comparison.* While these five types are not meant to be exhaustive or definitive, Meyer's research has shown that these are common in various contexts. A different superstructure analysis, pertinent to argumentative texts suggests a four-unit structure consisting *of situation, problem, solution* and *evaluation.* Applying this model to a cross-cultural study of argumentative essays written by 16 year-old American, Finnish and German students, Connor and Lauer (1988) illustrated that the essays that received highly ratings were in fact the ones that tended to follow this pattern. Yet, according to van Dijk (1980), the

categories constitutive of the schematic structure (or superstructure) associated with argumentative texts are as follows:

Argument: Demonstration + Application

Demonstration: Setting + Inference

Inference: Premises + Conclusion

Premises: Facts + Warrant (Backing)

Despite the diversity of the proposals outlined, the relationship posited between text structure awareness and text planning/revision seems to be an important one. Skilled writers were found to differ from unskilled ones in both the amount of planning they engage in (including the generation of relevant content, the establishment of appropriate goals and sub-goals and their execution in terms of structural units) and the types of revision they perform (which are not limited to simple changes in vocabulary but subsume global changes in the text's organizational patterns). Conversely, immature writers were found to not only have less knowledge of genre-specific requirements (especially for expository writing), but also be less able to use the knowledge they do possess in order to organize their writing (see also Meyer et al. 1980).

The recognition that a conventional element is involved in the production of most texts has led compo-sition-based research to emphasize the use of outlines which help the writer check the produced texts by returning periodically to the content hierarchy. Despite their significance, directions for outlining are often quite vague. This is particularly evident in the syllabus under examination. While the role of text structure awareness in facilitating the generation and structuring of content may be indeed recognized, the posited diagrams seem to be ad-hoc delineations of some hypothetical text structure. The vagueness of the following diagram, proposed in the syllabus (pages 82-83), negates its role:

Η καταλληλότερη μορφή για ένα διάγραμμα φαίνεται να είναι η ακόλουθη:

ΠΡΟΛΟΓΟΣ:

1. Θέμα

2. Προσωπική θέση (κατευθυντήρια ιδέα)

ΚΥΡΙΟ ΜΕΡΟΣ:

I. Κύρια ιδέα ή πληροφορία

A. Δευτερεύουσα ιδέα ή πληροφορία

B. Δευτερεύουσα ιδέα ή πληροφορία

1. Διασάφηση της δευτερεύουσας ιδέας ή πληροφορίας

2. Διασάφηση της δευτερεύουσας ιδέας ή πληροφορίας (Συμπληρώστε το υπόλοιπο)

The basic assumption underlying discourse-analytic research is that discourse does not consist of a

random series of isolated sentences but rather forms a coherent structure containing units of varying size and nature. In light of this, consider suggestions made in the syllabus such as the one cited as (1):

(1)

Το καλό γραπτό δεν είναι άθροισμα στοιχείων, έστω και άριστα επιλεγμένων είναι αρχιτεκτονημένη ολότητα με αρχή, μέση και τέλος (πρόλογο, κυρίως θέμα, επίλογο) που δείχνει συγχρόνως καθαρά τη σχέση των μερών μεταξύ τους και των λεπτομερειών μεταξύ τους και με το όλο. Από εδώ απορρέει η ανάγκη για την εκπόνηση ενός διαγράμματος, πριν ακόμη αρχίσει το γράψιμο (σελ. 82).

While hinting at the importance of text-structure awareness, such suggestions tend to be either formulated in too vague terms (since they essentially fail to specify the exact nature of the relations linking text units to each other), or be underscored by statements such as (2) which, in fact, negate the basic premises of the discourse-analytic paradigm:

(2)

φαίνεται καθαρά ότι γενικά το γράψιμο - όποια μορφή και αν παίρνει (αφήγηση, περιγραφή, εξήγηση, απόδειξη, κλπ.) - είναι, θα λέγαμε, μια διαδικασία πρόσθεσης ή επαύξησης στοιχείων. Μπορούμε να συνδυάσουμε μορφήματα μεταξύ τους για να σχηματίσουμε λέξεις μεταξύ τους, για να συγκροτήσουμε φράσεις ή προτάσεις.

Μπορούμε, συνεχίζοντας, να συνδέσουμε προτάσεις μεταξύ τους, για να οργανώσουμε μια παράγραφο (σελ. 96).

In light of the above discussion, then, what are the steps to be undertaken in teaching planning and revision? While several models of cognitive strategy instruction have been developed (Brown and Palincsar 1989) which apparently cannot be discussed in detail, it might be sufficient to note that the common premise running along all these is one that reinforces the need to model text planning and revision strategies through the provision of extensive periods of *teacher-student interaction*. During this, the teacher provides adjusted support (scaffolding in Vygotskian [1978] terms) to the student while s/he develops academic competence- defined as the flexible use of textual strategies according to task and setting. In interactive situations such as writing conferences, students and teachers essentially negotiate the mismatch noted between the text actually produced by the student and the intended message or *prototypical schema* guiding the teacher.

What is, then, the prototypical schema with regard to expository texts produced in the Greek culture?

While initially (in Part 1) a restricted goal is posited - to help students acquire text-specific knowledge so as to produce texts appropriate to the school context - the data employed in Part 3 seem to suggest that the syllabus under examination attempts to implement a wider, more overarching objective: to help students acquire knowledge as to how to produce and interpret the different types of expository texts which may appear in various contextual configurations. Despite the diversity of the texts employed, however, the textbook fails to illustrate the constitutive elements of "prototypical expository writing" and/or school-based prototypical expository writing. The latter could have been described along either developmental or sociolinguistic lines. "Argumentative stages" have been delineated by relevant research (Crowhurst 1987, 1991, Golder and Coirier 1994, Knudson 1992), extending from an initial stage during which the speaker/writer gives no supporting arguments (and may not even make a claim) to an elaborate end-stage in which the writer supports and negotiates his/her statements. Such research could have been profitably employed in the syllabus to both effectively guide the sequencing of the texts employed and facilitate the understanding of the problems' students encounter in the production of different types of expository texts. In light of the above, and given sugges-

tions (Grabe 1987: 115) that much of the ongoing research on expository prose is in fact characterized by terminological vagueness, it seems that the following issues need to be raised and investigated in detail:

1. Can the notion of 'expository text' be defined in a somewhat objective manner?

2. What sub-types can be identified in the Greek culture?

3. If sub-types do exist, what are their characteristics, and how do they relate to each other?

4.2. On text evaluation: The role of textual functions

The approach to text analysis forwarded by Parts 3 and 4 follows closely on the lines of research developed by deBeugrande and Dressier (1981). According to their proposal, textuality should be examined as the direct application of various, so-called, textual functions, encompassing cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, intertextuality, situationality, and informativity.

While the set of textual functions, per se, may not be contestable, important issues pertaining to the clarification of their nature and actual operation in a specific text type (school-based expository text) remain unanswered. We may begin by noting that, due to its focus on the general notion of textuality, which is presented as the list-like application

of several forces that may be equally applicable to all text types, the syllabus in question fails to address important issues pertaining to the way in which the proposed textual functions operate to give rise to (i) different text types and (ii) texts which, though belonging to the same genre, exhibit divergent text styles. What is, for instance, the relation between intentionality, acceptability and actual text patterns? Is there a direct relation between the use of certain cohesive mechanisms and text quality? How is coherence to be operationalized? How is intentionality deciphered? Is there plausible to suggest the existence of a single goal or can we identify multiple goals? In short, the syllabus under examination can be criticized for approaching textuality in rather general terms and for suggesting the strict application of a framework which was not developed for teaching purposes. It is my contention that when addressing discourse-based concerns, the investigation needs to be directed away from the general inquiry into textuality toward the analysis of more specific issues pertaining to the way in which various factors operate to shape textual appropriateness in different (and increasingly more complex) types of texts.

Secondly, even if the dimensions postulated are widely accepted, problems arise from the insufficient definitions assigned to them. To facilitate discussion, let me begin with the analysis of cohesion. Interestingly, while cohesive relations are operationalized in Halliday and Hasan's work as (i) relatedness of form (characterized by substitution/ellipsis or lexical collocation), (ii) relatedness of reference (characterized by reference or lexical reiteration) and (iii) semantic connection (characterized by conjunction), no such categorization is provided in the textbook which would have, undoubtedly, facilitated students when approaching textual variation. Initially, after Halliday and Hasan's proposal, the exercises developed tended to explore cohesion as a sentence-linking device (Hunt 1983). These were soon substituted with others concerned with exemplifying the relation between the use of cohesive mechanisms and text interpretability and/or text quality. In light of this, I suggest that although the syllabus under examination aims to introduce the notion of cohesion as a parameter defining textuality, the discussion should have been directed to this issue: How does the use of cohesive mechanisms affect text interpretability? Is text quality created by the use of certain cohesive devices? Similar comments can be made regarding the conceptualization of coherence; while coherence cannot be defined but through other concepts (such as those of discourse topic, thematic episode, continuity chains etc.), coherence is presented as a notion that can be easily pinpointed in a text. Finally, the

interaction between cohesion and coherence - a theme prevalent in current research (Fox 1987) - needs to be addressed.

While acknowledged as important parameters that shape the form of a discourse by guiding strategic choice, other factors mentioned such as intentionality and acceptability cannot be pinpointed in the text itself (in a way that cohesive mechanisms can). In choosing a particular genre, a writer makes use of culturally segmented solutions to communicative problems; intentionality, therefore, seems to be created out of the interaction between the expected, genre-shaped purpose and the co-occurrence of the strategies employed. Similarly, while the notion of text acceptability acquires validity only within the framework of genre, depicting the standards of textuality as defined by specific discourse communities, in the syllabus under examination, text acceptability seems to be constituted of content-based criteria alone. To understand both text production and interpretation, it is necessary that we invoke the notion of prototypicality. Discussed largely in lexical and syntactic terms, this notion may have important implications for clarifying the relation between genre versus text types. Just as Rosch's (1977) work suggests that when people categorize objects, they do not expect them to be on an equal footing, so too, as argued, texts tend to be evaluated as instances of genres along a continuum of variation with its poles capturing what is highly complacent with the communicants' expectations versus what is marked (i.e. showing blatant violations of such expectations). Building on this distinction, it could be argued that readers' assessments of the style of a specific text cannot be seen as deriving simply from the amalgamation of linguistic forms; rather, these evaluations are shaped and indeed are rendered meaningful only when the relevant inquiry be linked to genre-specific expectations of text structuring (exposition). Alternatively, it may be suggested that actual texts acquire their effectiveness through their relation to (i) the prototypical instance of the genre in question (the description of which includes the delineation of its schematic structure and associated language forms) and (ii) to similar texts of the same type.

In line with the preceding discussion, it may be suggested that any proposal on the factors guiding the production of texts belonging to a specific text type would need to acknowledge the element of subjectivity - in rendering experience through language, it is the language producer him/herself who makes (conscious or unconscious) choices as to the form and function of the text produced. On the other hand, it is equally important to note that the writer/speaker does not have the freedom to make his/her own meanings. Constitutive conventions (i.e.

constraints associated with a particular situation and/or genre type), fundamentally restrict the set of (structural, lexical, syntactic) elements available for choice in a specific text situation. What is the form of such conventions? How is text information sequenced? How is this micro- and macro-structural information to be presented in a discourse-based syllabus? In light of this discussion, it becomes clear that any discourse-based syllabus concerned with the development of textual competence should aim (1) to exemplify the criteria (which as shown [Connor-Linton 1995] are culture-specific) employed by language producers when making judgments of quality and (2) present the strategies involved in the text construal process encompassing among others: (a) the dimensions (including features of persuasiveness and argumentation) that interlock to give rise to stylistic variation (in Biber's 1995 sense), (b) coherence (including patterns of thematic progression) and (c) genre-specific potential. In the absence of any such prototypical schema, any other instructional approach (that would necessarily focus to low-level aspects) seems to miss its focus.

5. From Syllabus design to classroom practice

As a result of the focus directed to text-mediated reader-writer interaction (that acquires meaning in a specific socio-cultural context), both the role of the discourse community as well as the significance of the genre-shaped standards of appropriateness have been brought into foreground as two important determinants of the writing process (which in fact assign meaning to the text itself). As a result, the issue as to the processes shaping one's initiation into various genres and consequently into specific discourse/writing communities has acquired great importance. By emphasizing the existence of discrete disciplinary communities, on one hand, and linking writing to specific contexts and social situations, on the other, a distinction has been drawn between *literacy* involving the production and interpretation of a text as a coherent unit versus *literacies,* construed of as the acquisition of practices around using language in a way appropriate to the specific discourse community. Following this division, currently within research that explores students' textual competence, the focus has shifted away from the exclusive concern with the students' text (i.e. the analysis of the *product)* toward the investigation of the processes whereby a student gradually acquires genre knowledge, the nature of which is reflected in the

texts s/he produces at various stages in this process. According to these research findings, learning to write is in fact a highly complex, socially-shaped process during which students learn (in interactions with peers or teachers), in addition to writing skills, the values and practices that shape textual effectiveness in a specific genre and define the standards posed by various discourse/writing communities. School/academic writing offers researchers with a unique opportunity in this respect, directing their focus to the problems that student face upon entering into this specific discourse/writing community. If, according to the preceding discussion, expository text writing is a text type whose characteristics are defined by the participants of a specific discourse community -the school community- provision should be made so that, in addition to the processes provided by the writing curriculum itself, other factors (such as peer interaction, and the frequency and style of writing conferences) be attended to; essentially, it is these factors that enforce different realizations of any syllabus proposed, ultimately facilitating or hindering students' acquisition of genre-specific conventions.

Tnantafillia Kostouli
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
e-mail: *kostouii@eied.auth.gr*

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