

The teaching of textual genres through the "Portal for the Greek Language". An inductive method of acquiring writing skills: The textual genre of the Letter.

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the methodology of using the tools provided by the "Greek Language Portal" for teaching textual genres to High school students with the goal of exercising and improving their writing skills. The educational material provided in 'Portal' helps the language teacher to rearrange and manage in the best possible way the daunting and sometimes dense and hard to organize, educational material of the existing textbook. Teachers are able to delve deeper into the methodology of speech production by inductively guiding students to understand the basic structure of the textual genre being taught, to consciously choose the appropriate style and vocabulary, drawing on a variety of textual examples. In practice, this combination helps to carry out a student-centered teaching that makes the educational mediator that helps students to acquire knowledge through the use of searching techniques and teamwork. Within this context, an example of teaching the textual genre of the Letter is proposed.

Keywords: Genres, Letter, Portal for the Greek Language, Inductive teaching approach

Introduction

According to the theoretical model developed here, "text" is the set of phrases that make up an integrated meaning and constitute a socially defined message. The text, as Kress (1989, 18) says, is what constitutes the important unit of language, regardless of whether we deal with it in its aesthetic, social or educational dimension. Each text is formed by the discourse in which it is included, echoing the social contexts of communication and the concepts developed by participants in those contexts. The concepts are negotiable within the texts during the social interaction. In other words, the text is a material realization of the word. That is why the meanings of the texts are partly the meanings of the reasons from which they originate and are formed.

By adopting this particular concept of text, we understand that we can talk about "genres" of texts. That is, we can speak of "textual genres" - a term rendered as genre (French and English) and which refers to texts that each fall into specific categories. The textual categories are defined on the basis of the conventions under which the text is composed. Textual species contain forms and concepts that derive and document the functions, purposes, and meanings of social circumstances. They are thus a kind of index and list of all the social circumstances of a community at a given historical moment. Among the many textual types that we encounter daily, we can mention interviewing, advertising, newspaper article, preaching, anecdote, memoir, short story, class lesson or lecture, instructions for using an object, cooking recipe, textbook of physics textbook, history, etc.

Each textual genre, as defined here, is a special form of knowledge and action, characterized by a specific thematic content, style and structure (Bakhtin 1986). To function constructively in any communication situation, it is not enough to know the rules of grammar, to have rich vocabulary and writing and reading skills. He / she must be aware of the rules and conventions of writing different kinds of text, which are intertwined with the cultural dimension of the language, in order to be able to participate in social activities. To learn their

rules, conventions and techniques, one must learn how to acquire types of rules and knowledge. To be able to prepare an article, a brochure to promote or present an event, to conduct an interview, to produce a text similar to that appearing in a sociology or biology textbook, one must know how these textual texts are structured and what rules apply.

The concept of textual genre, as mentioned here, developed significantly in the context of systematic functional linguistics and was defined as a culturally and ideologically defined textual social process, used for various purposes in various contexts. Several scholars (e.g. Cope & Kalantzis 1993; Hasan 1995; Martin 1989; Rothery 1996; Threadgold 1989) have worked with primary and secondary education teachers in Australia to develop educational programs, where texts are an integral part of the curriculum. studies at school.

Text-based instruction has in some cases become the main purpose of the school curriculum in the language teaching of pupils through the whole course, on the grounds that the textual types of pedagogical discourse vary according to the subject being taught. This type of education is seen as a means of empowering students with linguistic "resources", not only for their school success but also for their future social success. Adopting the view that the teaching of texts is a matter of social justice, the promoters of "genre-based education" argue that as long as the student population is not familiar with the social uses of language, there will be a significant problem of social justice. The above assumption stems from the finding that certain textual types give their users access to specific areas of social influence and authority. In their effort to provide all students with equal opportunities to learn the techniques and rules governing different textual types, teachers who applied such research-based programs developed a specific approach to teaching their mother tongue, which was then used for education of new immigrants in the language of the place of residence.

The purpose of this approach is to transfer knowledge of reading and writing successfully from school to work, as well as to various other social activities. The process of "from teaching to learning" (Rothery 1996) is divided into four stages: First is the stage of presenting the "model", in which the teacher explains what are the characteristics of a textual genre and its subcategories, functions. what these features of the elements accomplish, the ways in which information is organized and structured. It also explains the kind of vocabulary choices that are common in the particular textual genre. Second is the "co-synthesis" stage, where the teacher helps students develop their own text based on the principles that apply to the particular textual item. The third is the stage of "autonomous synthesis", where students attempt their own, independent writing of text, while the fourth and last stage is the stage during which the development of knowledge of the social conditions of production of the textual component is sought. Of course, this does not mean that language education should focus on sterile reproduction of the predetermined form and structure of the textual species. On the contrary, the textual genre should be approached as an ever-changing category, which is entirely related to the also constantly changing social factors.

The philosophy of the Greek Curriculum and the Interdisciplinary Unified Curriculum Framework, the structure of the Greek language textbook and the multiple objectives.

The Modern Greek Language textbook taught in the First Grade in Greek High School, is one of the textbooks that have been written to serve the new Curriculum which was implemented since 2003, and to support and promote the goals of the Interdisciplinary Unified Curriculum Framework which points, among other things, to the acquirement of the essential communication tools of the language community in order to help students develop mentally and emotionally. (Government Gazette 303B / 13-03-2003, p. 47). In addition, with regard to the specific achievement of reading / comprehension objectives, learners through language courses should be able to easily recognize messages from written codes and communication signals by identifying each time the intentions of the transmitter, distinguish the differences between textual genres, understand their organization and particular style, and evaluate their effectiveness, depending on the context of communication the text offers.



Finally, as far as the speech production is concerned, students should be able to understand and write texts that belong to different genres, taking into consideration the recipient of the message and the communication situation, gradually adjusting and customizing their personal style depending on the text (GG 303B / 13-03- 2003, p. 48).

We note, therefore, that the language course aims for the students to acquire language skills through studying multiple text genres. In order to achieve this goal, the new curriculum gives the instructor great flexibility as far as the educational material is concerned so as to enable him/ to choose from a huge variety of textual types depending on the interests of his class. (Government Gazette B 2334 / 03-10-2011) <http://ebooks.edu.gr/new/ps.php>

The philosophy of the 1st Grade High School textbook could be described as an effort to abolish teacher-centered orientated teaching by promoting inquiry, discovery processes and critical thinking, especially since the texts cover a wide range of communication skills (Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1992: 65; Georgakopoulou & Goutsos, 1999: 36; Korres, 2010: 52-58). The first grade Language textbook is of immense importance as it introduces students to a multifaceted yet demanding learning environment. This difficulty is largely due to the abundance of new elements being massively introduced as the first three chapters which deal with the issues of oral-written differences, concepts such as multimodality, communication conditions, textual genres, narration and description, as well as making text summary. If we take into account the huge divergence in the level of achievement of linguistic goals of pupils coming from primary education, but also of the increasingly complex conditions in the classroom (increasing bilingual and foreign students, children with learning disabilities) which are a large part of school reality, we realize the difficulty of managing the dynamics contained in the school textbook. In many cases, teachers themselves have expressed their dissatisfaction or embarrassment at managing the material in the book. The book is characterized as "dense", the issues raised are many and important so that the teacher can only address them in the extreme. (Lakassas, A. 2007).

The criticism expressed, explicitly or implicitly, could only be described as fair if we received the textbook as a self-contained, closed-ended book. However, its philosophy, as we have already mentioned, is not that at all. The textbook is actually structured to allow the teacher to self-act. Self-action requires clear targeting, always taking into account the goals and objectives of the Curriculum and the communication objectives that need to be achieved, depending on the potential of the classroom team. It also requires selection and redirection. The problem that arises, in other words, stems from the textbook itself. Diversity creates ambiguity in goals, which can, however, be circumvented in a very creative way. Combining the manual with Web.02's dynamic online research environments, such as the 'Portal for the Greek Language', can be a great help in such a way.

The advantages of the "Portal for the Greek Language" tool

The modernization of language teaching in secondary education is a very important issue. Curricula attempt to introduce Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) into schools and link them to everyday teaching practice. One of the goals of the "Portal" tool is the functional integration and effective utilization of ICTs. in education. Its use, of course, is by no means an end in itself, but a framework for the creation of a unified pedagogical environment with the aim of transforming the content of teaching. This may be because the Portal provides digitized authentic material with sophisticated inquiry tools that allow students to escape the passive position and become actively involved in the research and reasoning process by developing their own strategies (Cohen, 1988: 9, Chamot & O'Malley, 1990: 3-8). Among the many tools it offers, we will focus on "Text Corpora", which draw on material from two Greek newspapers "The News" and "The Macedonia" while, at the same time, encompassing the educational discourse of all of the Greek Institute's textbooks. What is offered is the unity of textual genres in authentic communication conditions. The utilization of the 'Portal' tool therefore contributes to the linguistic-learning environment and helps to

exploit it as a functional technological literacy environment (Koutsogiannis, D., 2007) which at the same time offers a way to differentiate teaching (Tomlison, 2010: 6). It familiarizes students with the new practical literacy tools and enables them to acquire, in addition, metacognitive skills by fostering inquiry and critical approach to linguistic phenomena.

Students, especially in the first grade of high school, should practice through a text-centric and communicative approach (McCarthy & Carter, 1994: 32 Matsangoura, 2001: 28) and on the basis of linguistic literacy considerations (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000: 10) not only in the structure of language, but also in its use at various levels and types of discourse through the observation of texts. In other words, students need to study texts at a long-term level by associating the characteristics of the organization with their logical form (Georgakopoulou & Goutsos 1999: 23, 97-100) in order to be able to compose their own texts. That is to say, a constructive view of knowledge must be pursued (Vygotsky, 1993: 30). This dimension that is often not achieved as a goal, particularly when teachers are restricted only in the use of the mail textbook, can prove particularly successful when the book is combined with online textbooks or language tools.

The teaching approach below demonstrated is intended to propose a way / example of approaching the textual genre of the "Letter" contained in the 2nd chapter of Modern Greek Language textbook of the 1st Grade, through the online portal tool. The approach follows the inductive discovery method, while proposing to organize the class based on heterogeneous groups. The use of a computer lab is a prerequisite for students to access a computer and internet connection.

The reason the textual genre of the Letter was chosen is because its structure is easily detectable by students, and it offers a variety of stylistic variations depending on the transmitter, the transmitted message and the recipient (friendly letter, official letter, protest letter). By this approach in the awareness of the learners could easier realize that texts are the product of social choices and power relations. Therefore, it is easier to achieve metacognitive goals. In addition, it puts students at the forefront of real-world communication and offers learning strategies that make it easy for them to produce personal reasoning because it is easily linked to their personal experiences.

Teaching proposal based on the "Portal of Greek Language" Text Corpora.

Phase one: Students, having elaborated on the differences in oral and written language in the previous section, are motivated by the teacher to be divided into five to four-member groups that are not homogeneous in terms of language proficiency. The teacher presents five envelopes of different colors that have the students' details written in the standard mail order and distributes them to the leader of each group. Children are invited to look at the envelopes and fill in a worksheet that has been distributed to them, in which they must carefully observe and then describe the layout used to record the sender and recipient information. With the help of the teacher they should link the role of the sender to the transmitter and the receiver to the receiver and categorize this type in written communication. Then they are invited to open their envelopes. Each group is given a short letter by the sender who in this case is the teacher who explains using different style in each letter the mission of the different groups. The mission is described as decoding and synthesizing letters. For this reason, they should visit the "Portal of Greek Language" website, following the route: Modern Greek→Tools→Text Corpora→Institute of Educational Policy Books. There they should study the site and pay attention to the multiple textual genres that exist. Then, they will have to choose the textual type of the Letter.

The letters contained in the Portal are eight in all, a sufficient number so as to help the students come into conclusions as far as the main characteristics of the textual genre is

concerned, and not too large to overwhelm them. The Letters included have a variety as far as their content (friendly, formal / formal, letter of protest), their style (some appear in a thoughtful, literary or even simpler, everyday style) and the goal for which they were written. While in all, with one exception, the basic structure of the Letter is easily detected, something which could help the students in their research.

Phase two: All groups are asked to study the eight letters and complete electronic worksheets, which in fact guide them gradually as to what to look out for when editing. Each student in the group reads two letters, while the fifth member records the conclusions in the first worksheet. The first worksheet deals with the structure of the letter. Thus, students having read the texts will have to answer whether each letter sets out a) the spatial context b) whether it contains an address c) if the address is always expressed in the same way d) if it has multiple paragraphs e) what is the content / goal of the first paragraph f) what is the content / goal in the second paragraph g) how the letter ends h) if there is a decree i) if there is a signature.

After completing the worksheets in pairs in each group, they are then asked to observe whether there are convergences in their observations. Once they understand the structure of all the letters they share, they are asked to record the basic structure of the letter in their worksheet. They then proceed to the second Worksheet, which seeks to separate letters based on their style, their vocabulary, and the way sentences are linked to one another. This activity aims at helping students to classify letters in two big categories, that is into friendly and formal. Again, the group works on two letters, different this time compared to the ones processed previously and they are asked to answer questions which will help them realize the different styles of the letters according to the writer and the receiver, such as: a) What relationship does the transmitter and receiver of the letter seem to have? B) What particular words do they use to indicate their relationship? C) Do all the letters deal with a single central theme or do they spread to other sub-topics? d) Record keywords from each letter in the table given to you. How would you characterize the vocabulary used in writing the letter? Simple or complex? E) Observe the sentences. Are they short or long? F) In which letters do you meet the second plural and in which the second singular? G) By what words are the sentences linked? H) Which punctuation points are used?

Phase 3: Upon completion of the 2nd Worksheet students will be able to classify the letters into two main categories, formal / informal - friendly. They should present their conclusions in the classroom where they should be aware that formal / official letters are addressed to recipients who hold some office / authority, are older, or belong to a specific social group, while the friendly letters are addressed to relatives or friends. The presentation will also show the conquest of formal structure as well as linguistic differentiation, the thematic rigor of the formal letter and the openness of friendliness of the informal letter where slight deviations from the main theme are more easily observed while the expression of personal emotions are welcomed.

Phase 4: The groups will complete the third Worksheet where they will write two letters in a collaborative document. The subject of the letters that the groups will be working on should be the same for everyone. The first will be a letter to a friend who is invited to visit for the Christmas holidays. The second will be formal and will be addressed to the headmaster on a matter that concerns the students. Students should write the collaborative document using the preceding worksheet details. At the end of the process they give their letters to the members of the other groups, who should evaluate the letters of their classmates based on the criteria given by the teacher. The rubrics evaluate in depth the effort to produce an informal and a formal letter by examining a) structure compliance b) selecting appropriate

stylistic addressing depending on the communication situation c) correct paragraph structure (clear expression of the topic - process analysis - objective / (d) adapting the vocabulary, type of proposals and writing to the type of letter; (e) choosing an appropriate statement. Hetero-evaluation helps significantly in the self-assessment and achievement of meta-objective goals.

Phase 5: At the end of the process, the best letters will be used as templates and after they are carefully selected, will be posted on the school's website, or given directly to the headmaster so as to display the link between the text and its communication function. Finally, all the students will be asked to write a responsive letter to their teacher in order to express, in formal way, what they have learned from the process that was followed and will be invited to comment on the learning process itself expressing their opinion according to the skills they believe they acquired.

Conclusions - Suggestions

The foregoing tutorial leads students to the inductive approach and the acquisition of knowledge by helping them to comprehend the textual context of the letter and to understand its communicative role. The combination of teaching with the inquiry / induction method gives them an active role in the learning process, while the 'Portal' environment provides them with a sufficient number of authentic texts, which they collectively process by comparing and quoting elements that concern them. At the same time, they integrate ICT, which emerge as a literacy and research medium in their work creatively. They understand the social and communicative dimension of language and its usefulness, as well as the fact that the production of texts is an important social act. They understand that speech production can be a result of fruitful cooperation, which, in order to be achieved, students must adopt specific strategies. In addition, special roles are assigned to all students something that gives the opportunity even to the "weak" students to integrate into the educational process. As a result, the development of both linguistic and interpersonal intelligence is achieved (Gardner, 1999; Flouris, 2006). Gradually, the students' cognitive and metacognitive skills are cultivated, while their critical thinking and their social development are developed.

On the other hand, by applying this teaching method the teacher saves ways, approaches and procedures that can not only be selectively followed in the following sections, but they can also be applied in the subsequent classes. Also, regarding the value and role of the goals achieved, it must be pointed out that the "deciphering" of the text genres could successfully guide, but also ensure the cultivation of both the analytical and synthetic method, in the basis of the student-centered organization, facilitating and renewing the educational process itself. In this way, the "dense" book is harnessed and used as a means of realizing the spirit of the general and specific aims of the Curriculum (Government Gazette 303 / 13-03-03: 3778, 3779-3780) which will be transformed from theoretical to practical tool.

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