

THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL VIEWS OF THE CONCEPT OF GENRE IN A WRITING COURSE

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ABSTRACT: *The present paper reports the theoretical and empirical conceptualizations of genre by 14 ESL students taking a freshman composition course in a North-American university. This course combined an Australian view of genre with the pedagogical approach of Davydov(1988a,b). The data stem from three sources: a) visual representations of the concept of genre, b) explanation of linguistic phenomena, c) understanding of the abstract communicative principle. From the 14 students 2 showed robust signs of theoretical conceptualization of genre, 3 stayed in middle position, and 3 did not show significant signs of theoretical conceptualization. 6 could not have their development analyzed because they did not do most of these exercises.*

KEY-WORDS: *Genre, theoretical thinking, empirical thinking, Davydov.*

1. Introduction

Genre studies have been acquiring notorious prominence lately, especially due to its adoption by the Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais (PCNs)¹. As a result, a reconceptualization of language from solely a set of grammar structures or communicative functions to social practice has emerged. Basically, there are four schools that study genres and some of them also offer pedagogical guidelines to use them to teach language, be it a first, a second or a foreign language.

¹ National Curriculum Parameters which consist of teaching guidelines for all disciplines of the Brazilian official curriculum.

Swales (1990), the main representative of the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) school, defines genre 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 of the genre” (p. 58). In a later piece Swales revisits the concept of communicative purpose by reinforcing its importance for genre studies but also advocating that it should be conceived as multiple, complex, and highly contextual and, due to these features, should be investigated by ethnographic procedures (Askhave & Swales, 2001).

The notion of discourse community and its role in molding the genre comprises the central issues in this perspective. As academia offers a well established discourse community, which rules the several academic genres, Swales and colleagues have been focusing extensively on the study of the forms of academic genres such as science dissertations, introductions to research articles, and university lectures. Genres should be taught by means of pedagogical materials which emphasize the moves and linguistic features that are needed to write in the genre. Although the author recognizes the relevance of contextual studies of genres (Askhave & Swales, 2001; Swales, 1998), this element is not fully treated in the textbooks (Swales & Feak, 1994, 2000).

The new rhetoric studies argue that genre should be “centered not on the substance or the form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish” (Miller, 1984: 15). As Hyon (1996) points out, this perspective privileges the social context and purposes of genre. Although this school does not disregard form, it does not consider it enough to account for genre since form can only be understood or used according to social rules that constitutes it (Freedman, 1994, p. 60). For this reason, the new rhetoric perspective employs ethnography to study the social activity surrounding a genre. Another relevant feature of the perspective is the consideration of genre as fluid, dynamic, and ever-evolving (Bazerman, 2005; Freedman, 1994; Freedman and Medway, 1994). Regarding pedagogy they do not believe genres can be learned through formal instruction; instead, they should be, through apprenticeship (Freedman, 1994).

The Australian view of genre is based on a systemic functional view of language. Halliday, the creator of this linguistic perspective, assumes that language and social context affect each other. For this reason, the study of register (context of situation) along with the variables field,

tenor, and mode become important. In order to be more in tune with the critical approaches to language, Martin (1993) modified Hallyday's model by adding another level of context: the context of culture, wherein genre operates. Culture influences register and the possible combinations of field, tenor, and mode (Eggin & Martin, 1997; Martin, 1991a) and the purpose of the genre which will be realized in stages called schematic structure or generic moves (Eggin & Martin, 1997; Martin, 1991a, 1991b). In short, this school defines genre as "staged-goal oriented social processes" (Martin, 1993: 142) affected by the context of culture. For Martin (1989:17), genre is the purpose of a text – to describe, to tell a story, to complain, to argue – that can be realized in different types of text. Its pedagogy, with the modeling, joint and individual constructions of texts, values social group relations rather than individual relations and explicit instruction instead of the inductive approach of process writing. Individual relations mean the individual cognition which happens by means of the writer's use of cognitive strategies (planning, drafting, revising) to write.

The EAP, the new rhetoric and the Australian schools have some differences. The systemic perspective, differently from the EAP view, does not conceive of genre only as an identification of generic moves in a sample but also as how the register variables (field, tenor, and mode) combine in the sample or in the different moves of the genre (Martin, 1991). Freedman and Medway (1994) differentiate the Australian and the new rhetoric perspectives. The former prioritizes text analysis over context analysis. It also conceives of genre as static rather than fluid, and as a result, it does not consider the possibility of playing with genres. The latter explores further the interplay of context and genre. The Australian school defends formal instruction of genres to empower people².

Although EAP adopted a more ethnographic account of context, we still need to see how this reconceptualization is transferred to its textbooks.

It is important to remark that if the types of genres studied by the Australians are taken into account (school genres) it is reasonable to conclude that this perspective does not need the New Rhetoric claim of

² In this 1994 text the authors affirmed that this liberationist view was absent in the new rhetoric, but based on Bazerman (2005), it seems this non-critical stance in the perspective has been abandoned.

ethnographic studies of the context surrounding the genres taught. The students were already in schools and experiencing daily the need of writing in the genres taught. Hence, a contextual analysis based on field and carried out as a pre-writing task would suffice. Obviously the need for more contextual studies increases if the genres to be learnt are far from students' lives³. In this way, Swales had a thoughtful decision to start approaching context ethnographically in his studies.

Socio-discursive interactionism (ISD⁴) has gained wide currency in Brazil due to the PCNs. This perspective adopts Vygotsky and activity theory's views on psychological development and is mainly concerned with the linguistic capacities schools should develop in the students in order for them to perform properly in a wide range of social activities. These capacities are nurtured by means of teaching sequences, which employ text analysis (types of discourse, types of sequence and linguistic operations required by different genres) (see Machado, 2005:254, and also Dolz et al (2004:98) for teaching sequences). The types of discourse are of four types (interactive, theoretical, narrative to be interactive and narrative) and the types of sequences are six (descriptive, explicative, argumentative, narrative, directive⁵, and dialogical). The types of discourse and sequence constitute the genre but they are not enough for its taxonomy.

In fact, ISD does not aim at neat classifications of genre (Machado, 2005). Also, it adopts a text-focused, context-recognized view of genre. In other words, the school recognizes the context surrounding the genre through the analysis of the situation of the linguistic acts but without fully exploring the social activity like the new rhetoric does. Similar to the Australian and EAP schools, it works extensively with text analysis based on types of discourse and sequences and on their linguistic properties. In contrast, ISD and the new rhetoric recognize the fluidity constitutive of genres. However, as ISD, like the EAP and the

³ It is important to point out that the Australian school principles are adopted to study other kinds of genre and to teach them in other contexts. In this case, the analyst should be aware of the limitations of each genre perspective.

⁴ ISD is the abbreviation in Portuguese: *interacionismo sócio-discursivo*.

⁵ The term is *injuntivo* in Portuguese. Machado (2005:247) defines it as "to make the receiver act in a certain way or in a certain direction".

Australians, advocate for formal instruction of genres this unstableness is somehow backgrounded in the pedagogy.

To summarize it is possible to identify two broader tendencies in genre studies: 1) pedagogical oriented, 2) non-pedagogical oriented. The text focused feature does not seem to be an adequate differentiating factor since EAP, which belongs to tendency 1, is strengthening deeper social context studies of genres.

Although ISD lies on socio-cultural psychology and is concerned with the teaching of genres and linguistic operations, it does not go all the way through to realize the socio-cultural principle for pedagogy. Vygotsky had a great concern for this field but it was activity theory (Leontiev, 1978, 1981) and its followers (Galperin, 1992; Davydov, 1988a) that developed socio-cultural based pedagogies, or activity-theory based pedagogies (see Ferreira, 2005), with the explicit goal to promote development through learning (which means promoting zones of proximal development - ZDP). Furthermore, this perspective does not have a neat concept of language which could foster the linguistic analysis, and consequently, the linguistic capacities of the students (which is the same criticism the Australian school made to process writing). This kind of analysis has a fundamental role in the teaching sequences nurtured by the perspective.

In our view the concept-based approach to be described below offers a stronger version of socio-cultural pedagogy applied to language learning for adopting Davydov's activity-theory based pedagogy (the movement from the abstract to the concrete -MAC). In addition, adopting the SFL conceptualization of language enriches the linguistic analysis to be taught.

The Australian school of genre focuses solely on language learning; it is concerned with language acquisition, in general, and with language proficiency, in particular. There is no explicit pedagogical action that consciously targets the learner's psychological development. In general, genre-based pedagogies consider development to be a by-product of instruction.

The concept-based approach attempts to directly address the matter of cognitive development during genre-based writing instruction. To this end it supplements the Australian genre-based pedagogy with the pedagogical ideas developed by Davydov and his colleagues – an

approach that focuses on theoretical thinking based on conceptual instruction.

Theoretical thinking searches for relations among things in a system as well as for the role and genesis of these relations (Davydov, 1984: 20-21). Thus, this type of thinking goes beyond sensory perception as it seeks internal relations and interconnections. The reality perceived by empirical thinking is manifested in the superficial observable features present in the concrete, whereas the reality grasped by theoretical thinking lies in the abstract (basic relationship) that composes the transformation, the development of things in its concrete manifestation. Theoretical thinking aims to capture the dialectics (transformation, interconnection, unity of opposites) constitutive of the world. To Davydov (1984: 24), theoretical thinking overcomes the “absolutization of the role of comparison in thinking” and sensualism. Theoretical thinking could be understood as dialectical thinking applied to understand scientific knowledge.

Empirical thinking is ruled by formal logic, whereas theoretical thinking is governed by dialectical logic. In dialectical logic, the concrete is not “an isolated single thing” (p. 294); rather, it is “a unity of singular, particular, and general characteristics, as a unity of manifold aspects, features, relations, etc., as a system (Lompscher, 1984:294). Lompscher also points out that theoretical thinking should not dominate empirical thinking. Instead “ what must be overcome is an absolutization of empirical thinking as the only kind of thinking and of formal logic as the only logic” (p. 296).

Davydov and colleagues (Hedegaard, 1995, 2002; Lompscher, 1984, 1999; Markova, 1979) developed a pedagogy that aimed to develop systematically and since early schooling theoretical thinking in learners. This pedagogical approach is called the “ascent from the abstract to the concrete” in the literature and I simply call it in this paper the “movement from the abstract to the concrete”, or MAC.

MAC lies in Leontiev’s Activity Theory, in Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory and in Hegel’s pedagogical proposal. From activity theory, Davydov assumed that mind and consciousness are a result of the person’s practical activity in the world. Cognition evolves in activity, action upon the world, rather than inside one’s brain. From Vygotsky, Davydov adopted his genetic methodology of studying phenomena in its unfolding rather than in its finished form and the tenet that learning

should lead to cognitive development. Hegel believed that schools should focus on theoretical thinking, which can be obtained by guiding students firstly to identify basic essential relationships (abstract) that govern a discipline and then observe how this principle manifests empirically (concrete).

The basic principle of this dialectical approach to pedagogy is to engage students in problem-solving situations that represent an abridged form of the discovery process of the academic discipline. In other words, no ready-made knowledge is provided; rather, knowledge is acquired through experiential learning. As activity is transformative (Davydov, 1999 a and b) learning activity should also target the transformation of the individual at the cognitive-social level.⁶

The learning activity has two components: learning (educational) actions and tasks. The learning actions constitute phases of the MAC approach and are seven: a) problem situation, b) modeling, c) modifying the model, d) applying the model to solve tasks (problem solving), e) monitoring the actions, f) evaluating them, and g) social interaction. Tasks are exercises aimed at realizing the learning actions (Davydov 1988c: 26) (see Ferreira, 2005 for a distinction of task in TBLT and MAC perspectives).

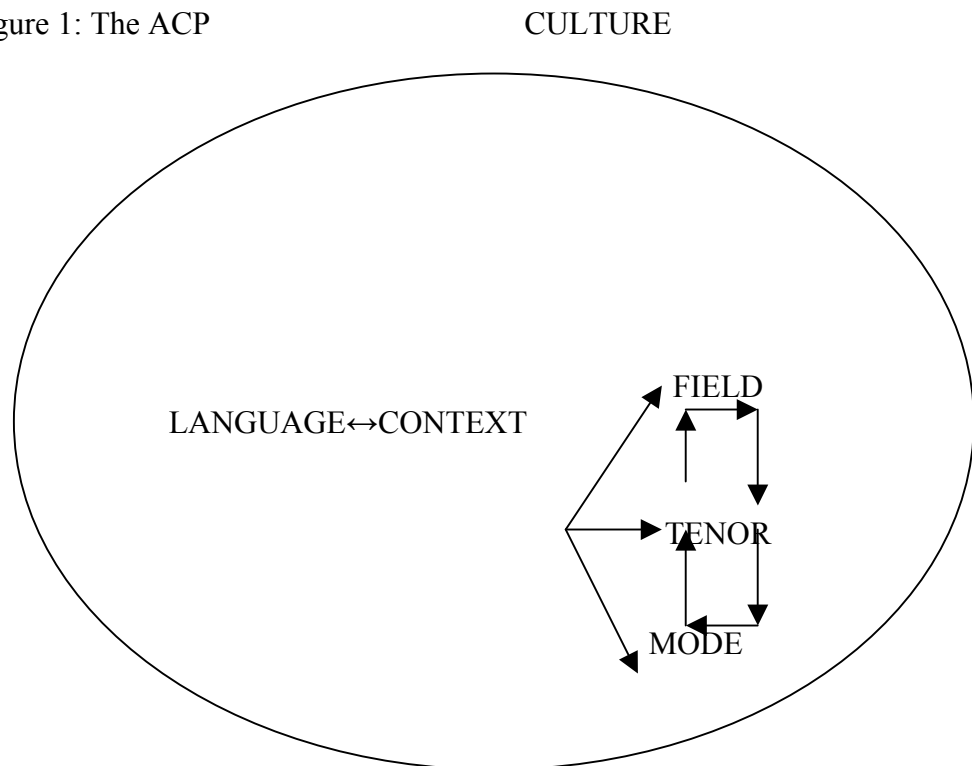
The concept-based approach to writing aims fundamentally to teach genre as a theoretical concept. This perspective implies to adopt Vygotsky's true notion of what a concept is: a tool to solve a problem (Vygotsky, 1987: 164)⁷. By application, genre is a tool to achieve more effective communication and psychological development. It cannot be one more empirical category in foreign language education like functions, notions from the communicative approach to language teaching or grammatical structures. Instead, genre is a manifestation of a communicative principle I call ACP (abstract communicative principle), which is the basic relationship (abstract) of language functioning. As the

⁶ I preferred to use the symbol (-) instead of the connector 'and' to avoid giving the false idea that cognition and society are in opposition.

⁷ Schneuwly (2004) recognizes genre as a scientific (theoretical) concept but does not apply sociocultural pedagogical principles to lead students to acquire this term as a true scientific concept as defined by Vygotsky (1987). In other words, the theoretical conceptualization of genre remains in the theory level but not in the practical (teaching sequences) level.

concept-based approach is based on the Australian perspective of genre, the ACP is defined as follows:

Figure 1: The ACP



Teaching writing in this approach means going beyond linguistic/genre analysis of samples of the genre under focus (the empirical aspect) and joint or individual (re)construction of texts, following empirical principles detected in the analysis. It is also extremely relevant to lead students to perceive that genre is a manifestation of the ACP and that this principle can explain an array of other linguistic phenomena. Thus, the seven learning actions above are implemented.

This paper reports how 14 students of an innovative 15-week course conceived genre empirically and theoretically. This course combined Australian conceptions of genre and language and of MAC pedagogy and was applied in an ESL freshman writing course of a large public North-American university.

To conceive genre empirically means to employ empirical thinking to understand this term. In other words, genre is regarded as types of texts

with certain textual or linguistic features. In contrast, to conceive genre theoretically means to see genre as a linguistic phenomenon ruled by a basic linguistic principle. This principle consists of the dialectical relationship between language and context.

The data derive from three exercises: a) the students' visual representations of the concept of genre (modeling phase), b) written answers to problem-solving exercises (applying the model to solve tasks), c) written answers to an evaluation question (evaluation phase).

In the following sections I will define each exercise, state the questions asked to each type of data, present and discuss to what extent the participants could conceive genre theoretically.

2. Visual representations of genre (models)

Students' visual representations of their understanding of genre took place three times during the course: in the third week of the course, in the 11th week and in the final week. The first modeling happened after an introduction to this topic and as a homework assignment. The introduction consisted of an exposition to different genres from magazines and newspapers and observations of genres read or written daily by students. Students were instructed to use arrows, circles, etc to illustrate their understanding.

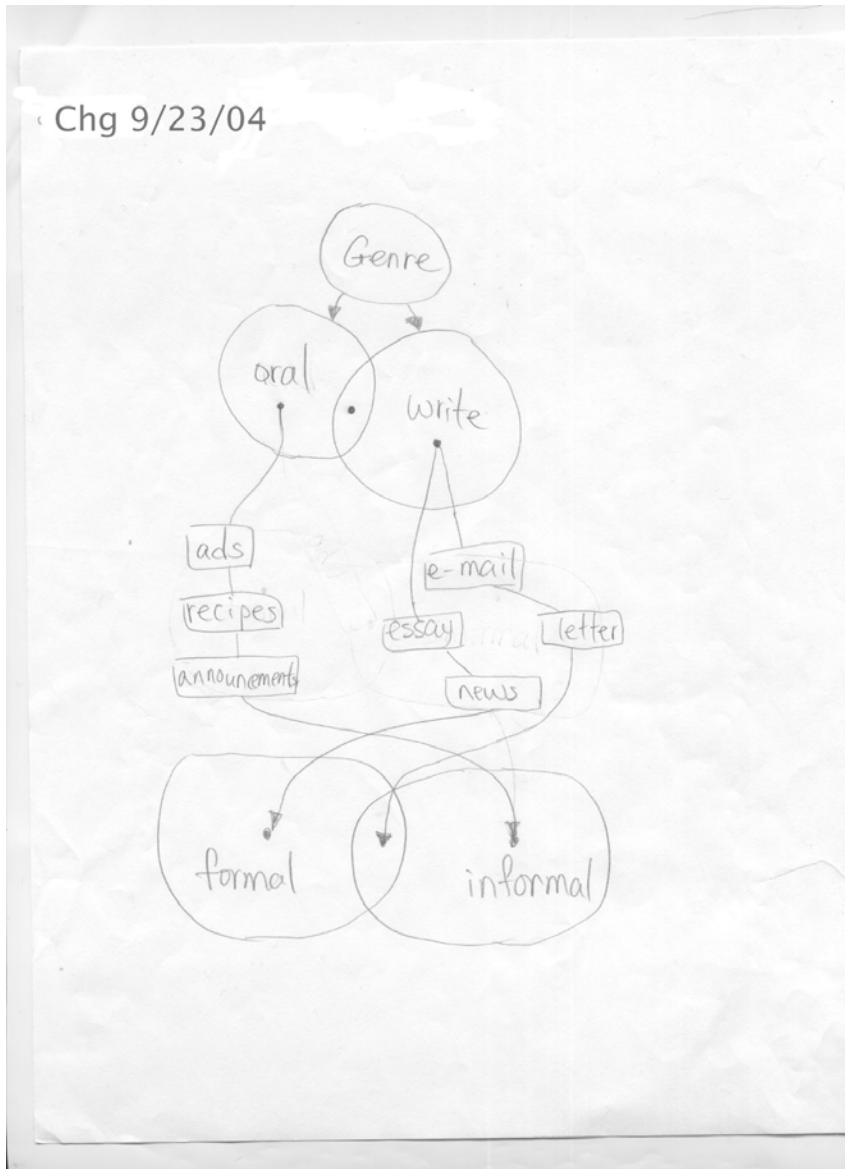
The second modeling occurred in class and after a discussion about discourse communities in different genres. The third model was given as homework during a class session when the instructor discussed with the students about the essential features found in the three genres taught in the course (announcements, cover letters and argumentative texts). In this class there was also a closing session of the course in which the basic relations represented in four germ-cell models were reviewed. The germ-cell models illustrate the abstract component of the course (LANGUAGE ↔ CONTEXT) and its evolution as some genres were studied. The evolution reveals how the concept of context can be branched into field, tenor and mode, followed by the insertion of the element of culture influencing that basic relationship. Finally, the interrelation between field, tenor and mode was approached⁸.

⁸ The germ-cell models were given to spark theoretical thinking development in the students. They represent the abstract element of the course. As students gradually worked with the genres of the syllabus this relationship became more concrete to them.

The questions asked about the models were adapted from Hedegaard (1987, 1995) and were the following: (a) *Does the learner represent relations instead of categories and of concrete examples in his/her model?* and (b) *Does the learner's model change and evolve?* The analysis of the models for the students' understanding of genre reveals a developmental sequence: empirical → empirical and theoretical, but not relational → empirical and theoretical and relational – theoretical but not relational → theoretical (with correct or almost correct relations).

An empirical model shows categorizations, classifications, concrete examples of genre. For example, the model contains a classification of the genre as oral or written, or the citation of many different examples (mostly from the class) such as advertisements, news, and recipes. A concrete model can also attempt to group genres based on superficial features. For instance, some students related ads to announcements, and e-mails to letters.

Figure 2: Chg's empirical model



In contrast, a theoretical model displays signs of theoretical thinking; that is, it relates words present in the four germ-cell models presented in the course; all these relations are correct or almost correct. Moreover, the analysis reveals a type of model called transitional. This transitional type of model constitutes a combination of empirical and theoretical features; it either contains references to concrete examples of genre and words that are part of the ACP but are not related (empirical and theoretical but not relational) or just references to these words, establishing some relations among them (empirical and theoretical and relational), or

references to just the words contained in the germ-cell models without establishing relations among them (theoretical but not relational).

Table 1: Development of theoretical thinking in the students' models for genre

Student	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
K	Empirical	Transitional	Transitional
Cho	Empirical	Theoretical	(←)theoretical
M	Empirical	Empirical	Theoretical
F	Transitional	(→) transitional	Transitional
Xn	Empirical	Transitional	----
Fr	Empirical	Transitional	Empirical
Ma	Empirical	Transitional	----
H	Empirical	Transitional	Transitional
N	Empirical	Transitional	theoretical
D	Empirical	Transitional	Transitional
Chl	Empirical	transitional (→)	transitional
Chg	Empirical	Transitional	Theoretical
X	Empirical	Theoretical	Theoretical
J	Theoretical	Theoretical	Theoretical

(→) = the person moved toward the next subcategory of the transitional phase. F's model 1 was empirical and theoretical but not relational whereas model 2 was empirical and theoretical and relational. Model 3 was the same type as model 2. Chl's model 2 was empirical and theoretical and relational while her model 3 was theoretical but not relational.

(←) = the theoretical model was less relational than the previous one.

--- = the student did not submit his/her model.

no arrows = the student is in the same category; no changes occurred.

Table 1 shows that most of the students (12 out of 14) drew empirical models for model 1. In the second model, most of the students (10 out of 14) had developed to the transitional category. In the third model, there were 6 theoretical models, 5 transitional models, and 1 empirical model. These results indicate that as the instruction progressed, the students were able to move from an empirical to a theoretical representation of genre. Thus, the instruction apparently had a positive effect on the students' development of their theoretical thinking.

Chg manifested smooth development. He began with empirical models, where the focus was on the classification of genres into written and oral, formal and informal. He also mentioned examples of genres (ads, recipes, news). In model 2, he classified genre into formal and informal, and provided a real example of mode (full sentences). This learner empirically represented ways to approach an audience (straightforward, formal or informal, friendly or without emotion). Field, tenor, and mode are dissociated, and the examples of tenor are not actually associated with it (no emotion, friendly, formal or informal). He clearly confuses mode with tenor since he inserted "friendly" and "no emotion" in the mode circle. In contrast, model 3 contains the words field, tenor, and mode, which compose the basic relationship that is constitutive of genre. (see figures 2 and 3)

Figure 3: Chg's model 2

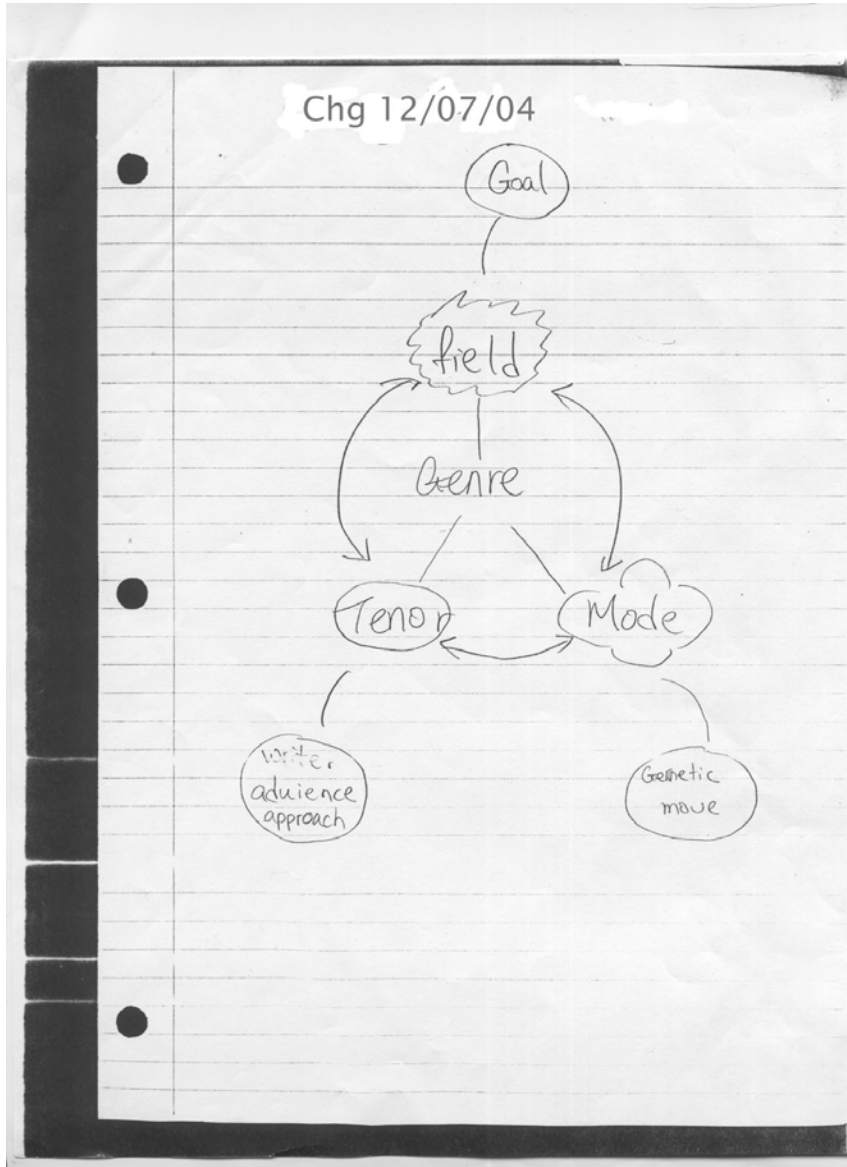
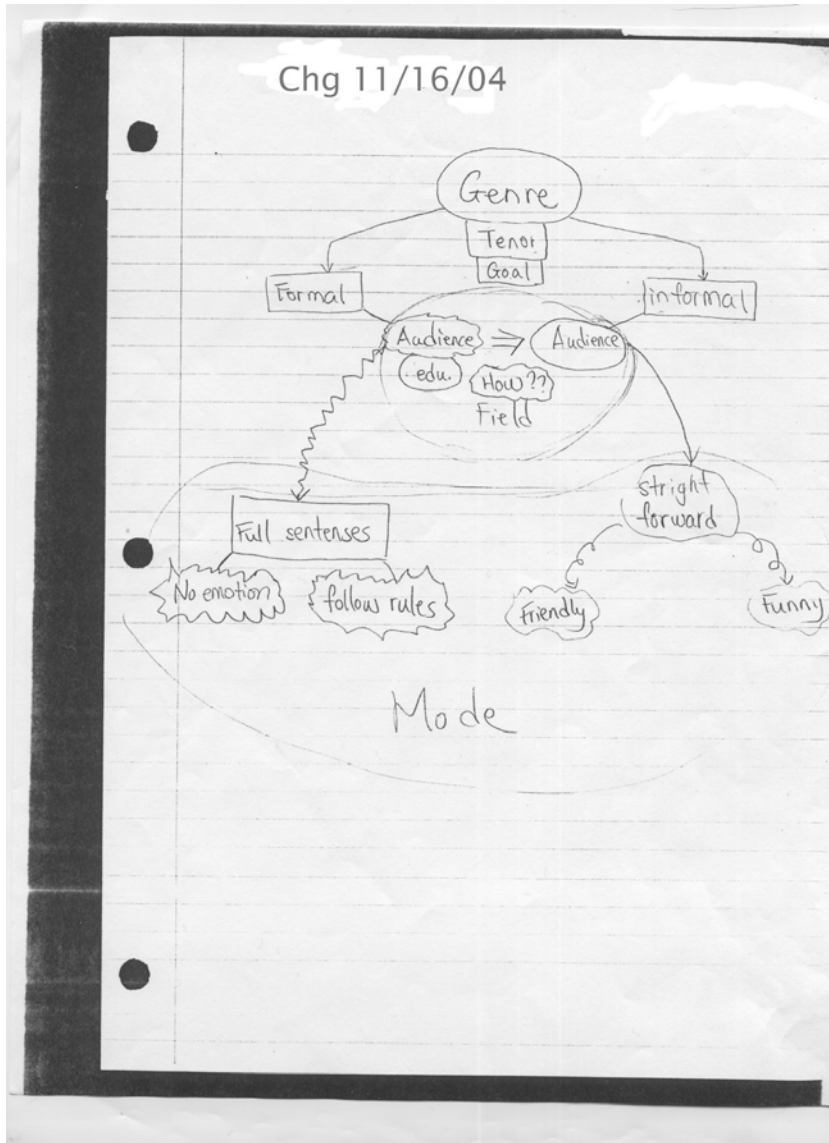


Figure 4: Chg's model 3



The analysis of the three models for genre revealed that the students' models changed and evolved, except for J's. Two students (Cho, Fr) moved forward and then regressed. Five displayed continuous progression (Xn, Ma, N, Chl, Chg). Six revealed stabilized progression; they moved forward and then became stable or they were stable and then moved forward (K, M, F, H, D, X). In all, the modeling phase revealed that six students reached a theoretical thinking stage (Cho, M, N, Chg, X, J).

The quality of the relations represented in the model also developed from being restricted to examples of genre (news, ads, recipes, etc.) or its classification into oral and written to visualizing the interconnections between field, tenor, and mode. The analysis of the models uncovered the developmental path of the students' theoretical thinking in the modeling phase of the course. It showed how development varied according to the individual. The analysis also revealed that as the course evolved the students tended to abandon categories and concrete examples to represent genre with words from the ACP and in a more relational way. However, we should be cautious in interpreting these findings. The model's evolution presumably reveals how students changed their thinking about genres. Yet, if this thinking is not translated into performance, their development of theoretical thinking remains incomplete.

3. Problem solving exercises

The instructor gave three exercises of this type during the course: (a) wedding invitation task, seventh week of the course, (b) Bhatia's exercise, 12th week of the course, and (c) obituary exercise, 12th week of the course. These exercises constitute problem-solving tasks in which the students had to explain a linguistic phenomenon by employing the germ-cell models given in class.

The wedding invitation task asked the students to write about the genre of wedding invitations in their own countries and to explain the differences and/or similarities between the genres in their countries and those in the United States. Through this task, the instructor intended that the students explain a linguistic phenomenon (the differences or similarities) by means of the ACP (LANGUAGE ↔ CONTEXT).

Bhatia's exercise aimed to have students provide reasons for the differences between North- American and South Asian cover letters, describe the cover letters of their homecountry if such genre existed there, and illustrate the interrelationship between field, tenor and mode in these letters. Thus, it was meant to make the students perceive how the ACP, represented in the four versions of the germ-cell model, was realized with a concrete example (cover letters in South Asia). In the third exercise students had to read two obituaries and explain why one had more information than the other.

The unit of analysis for this data was the students' explanation of these linguistic phenomena. Thus, the question used to analyze the data was: *Does the learner explain linguistic phenomena by employing the ACP?* The features of an answer that reveals signs of theoretical thinking are as follows: (a) the answer should start with a reference to the ACP (this would indicate that the student is not linked, restricted, or tied to concrete examples), (b) examples can be mentioned but after the ACP is addressed (this indicates subordination of the concrete to the abstract), (c) the student should reveal understanding of the words from the germ-cell model (how culture affects genre and/or field and/or tenor and/or mode) in his/her answer, (d) the student should ask 'why' questions, and (e) the student should recognize that there is an abstract concept (ACP) as an explanatory principle that accounts for both differences and similarities of the phenomena under scrutiny. Not all these features should be present in an answer in order to reflect theoretical thinking. For example, if an answer first mentions empirical examples followed by a reference to the ACP, this secondary reference is considered a sign of theoretical thinking because there was eventually reference to the basic relationship. The main features of an answer that revealed signs of theoretical thinking were (c) and (e). If the answer revealed all traces, it indicated the students were developing theoretical thinking in its fullest form.

Answers⁹ which emphasize *empirical thinking* focus exclusively on the description of superficial observable features of the genre. The *transitional phase* encompasses answers that refer to the model but without signaling any understanding of it.

Examples of empirical thinking

N: In our culture [Somalia] do not send invitational cards or letters to the people whom we are inviting to the wedding.(. . .) Inside the city the chosen ones in charge of inviting the guests, would go door to door to invite people for the wedding. (wedding invitation exercise)

Examples of transition

⁹ The answers were not edited.

Chg: The text 1 has more information than text 2 because they have different fields, tenors and modes.

H: Because in the first paragraph more field, more tenor, and more mode are used, compared to the 2nd one.

1st paragraph -- the person was more famous

2nd paragraph -- less famous

And they are both aiming to different audiences (obituary exercise)

Chg just repeats what the model says (“because they have different fields, tenors and modes”) and H relates his explanations to field, tenor, and mode (“more field, more tenor, and more mode are used”), but they do not show understanding of these terms. For example, H should have explained how the fame of the person from text 1 affected the text to have “more field, more tenor, and more mode”.

Example of theoretical thinking

Chl/X: In my opinion, the presence of the moves adversary-glorification and self-degradation in South Asian cover letters is due to the tradition or culture of South Asians. The employers are more likely kind-hearted people who have lots of sympathy and willingness to help others. For this reason, once they read about the plight and difficulties of the applicants, they automatically want to try to help them solve the problem. (Bhatia’s exercise)

The first sentence of Chl and X’s comments refer to the ACP and then explain how culture affects the tenor in this cover letter: employees in South Asia are compassionate and for this reason they accept the moves adversary-glorification and self-degradation in the letter. Yet, the interesting ‘why’ question remains: Why would the culture compel the employer to be kind-hearted, sympathetic and willing to help? Since the students explain the phenomenon of the cover letter through elements of the model, but without signaling that this constitutes the basic explanatory principle, they are classified at level 2 of theoretical thinking.

4. The evaluation phase

The questions which follow were aimed at verifying the students' understanding of the ACP that guided the instruction of this course (LANGUAGE ↔ CONTEXT).

We use language in a variety of situations and to achieve a wide range of goals. How do we use language to achieve these goals?
How does the social situation affect our use of language?

The unit of analysis for this data was the students' comprehension of the ACP. The question asked of the data was the following: *Does the student understand the ACP?* The analysis also revealed three levels of development: *empirical thinking*, *the transitional phase*, and *signs of theoretical thinking*. In *empirical thinking*, the students did not refer to the model representing the ACP. In the *transitional phase* the students referred to the model but did not show they understood it. The students who were developing *theoretical thinking* referred to the ACP and revealed their understanding of the relationship LANGUAGE ↔ CONTEXT and/or its variations. As the task does not elicit explanations for a linguistic phenomena but just understanding of the ACP the level elicited by this task was TT1.

Example of an empirical answer

Ma: We use language in a persuasive form of writing or persuasive speech. Depending on whom you are talking to and where you are, people in each area will respond to language on a different way due to some people having different opinions.

Ma does not refer to any of the models' elements to account for the LANGUAGE ↔ CONTEXT relationship. Instead, he refers to people's different opinions to explain different language use. In addition, he restricts himself to a persuasive use of language which is one of the several ways to use language.

Example of a transitional phase

Transitional phase

F: We use language to achieve in diferents ways, depending the on the situation and also the kind of goal. The social situation is

affected, by the use of tenor, field and mode, in the situation or the audience.

F's first sentence is extremely confusing, probably because he either did not have a minimum understanding of the ACP that allowed him to write about it or more probably because he had difficulties in L2 writing that prevented him from expressing properly his understanding of the ACP. The second sentence refers to the elements of the model (tenor, field, and mode) but without further elaboration on this idea.

M: We can say the language refer to the field, tenor and mode from the context. They relate to each other. In a context, we have to have a goal. We can use the language as active to tell people what is the context about. The context of genre is also dependent on the social situation. Like different cultures, they would affect the genres. The genre would be different from the different cultures. Also, we can dependent on what kind of the genre to write. Like the cover letter or wedding invitation, we usually use the formal, and write the sentences in completely. If an announcement, we can do it informal, just use the key words.

M reveals essential relationships in her answer ("The context of genre is also dependent on the social situation. Like different cultures, they would affect the genres. The genre would be different from the different cultures."). She provides as an instantiation of the relation LANGUAGE ↔ CONTEXT the cultural influence on genre ("The context of genre is also dependent on the social situation."); however, she does not understand that field, tenor, and mode constitute the context ("We can say the language refer to the field, tenor and mode from the context.") and does not provide examples of cultural influence on genre; rather she says "Like the cover letter or wedding invitation, we usually use the formal, and write the sentences in completely. If an announcement, we can do it informal, just use the key words".

I use the expression signs of the development theoretical thinking because such development happens slowly and is surrounded, embedded, and dominated by empirical thinking. For example, F repeats the wording of the problem situation question in his answer ("We use language to achieve in diferents ways, depending the on the situation and also the kind of goal.") and in his model, he gives prominence to examples of genre (ads, announcement, recipes, etc) instead of the words that define genre more theoretically (context, field, tenor, mode). To

explain field and tenor, he opens a larger box where he inserts examples of goals (to convince, to persuade, to inform, etc) and of ways to approach the audience (polite, persuasive, formally). Thus, his repetition of the words of the problem situation question of the course in his answer is surrounded by this empirical thinking representation in the model.

According to their answers, some students did not understand what the context or situation was: Ch1 (“Once we know the goals of the context, we should determine what is the purpose of the context and how we approach our audiences.”); F (“We use language to achieve in different ways, depending on the situation and also the kind of goal. The social situation is affected, by the use of tenor, field and mode, in the situation or the audience.”); M (“We can say the language refer to the field, tenor and mode from the context.”). In addition, the students do not perceive that the goal is part of the context as well as field, tenor, and mode, and that the goal could be encompassed by field.

Also, it should be considered that none of the theoretical thinking responses given above explicitly recognized the ACP mentioned as the basic explanatory principle of linguistic phenomena, in other words, no one showed TT4. This is one more reason to claim that the data were revealing signs of theoretical thinking that emerged out of empirical thinking, the students’ main thinking pattern in educational activity.

5. Overview of theoretical thinking development in the three phases

Table 2 provides an overview of the theoretical thinking development of the students in the three phases.

Table 2: students’ development of theoretical thinking across the modeling, performance, and evaluation phases.

	Model 1(the fourth week of the course)	Wedding invitation task ((7th week of the course)	Model 2(12th week of the course)	Bhatia's exercise (12th week of the course)	Obituaries exercise 12th week of the course)	Answers to the problem situation questions (14 th week of the course)	Model 3 (15 th week of the course)
K	ET	ET	TR	TT	TT	TT	TR
Cho	ET	TT	TT	TR	TT	ET	TT
M	ET	TT	ET	ET	ET	TT	TT
F	TR	---	TR	ET	---	TR	TR
Xn	ET	---	TR	---	---	---	---
Fr	ET	ET	TR	---	---	---	ET
Ma	ET	ET	TR	TT	ET	ET	---
H	ET	TT	TR	ET	TR	TT	TR
N	ET	ET	TR	ET	---	---	TT
D	ET	---	TR	ET	ET	---	TR
Chl	ET	TT	TR	ET=TT	ET	TT	TR
Chg	ET	TT	TR	ET	TR	---	TT
X	TR	TT	TT	ET=TT	TT	TT	TT
J	TT	---	TT	ET	ET	TT	TT

TT= theoretical thinking

TR= transitional

--- = student did not submit his/her task

The table indicates that most students, in at least one of the phases, revealed signs of theoretical thinking. No student remained in the empirical mode of thinking. F, Xn, Fr and D did not show signs of theoretical thinking but had instances of the transitional phase. In addition, these students did not submit several of the tasks, which hindered the identification of their level of development.

The data reveals that there was not a definite path of development for the learners; each went through a unique route. All of the students showed regression at some point in their development. This confirms Kussman (1976)'s conception that development evolves in an ascending spiral and Vygotsky's argument that it is revolutionary rather than evolutionary in nature. Figures 4 and 5 illustrate clearly the peculiar paths of development of each participant of the study.

Figure 5: Students' development across the tasks

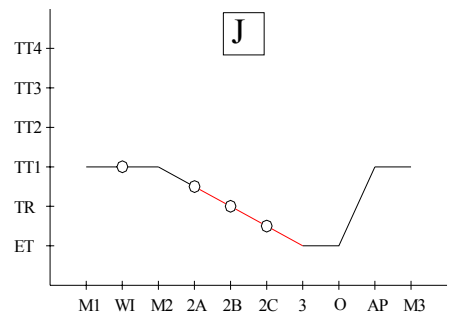
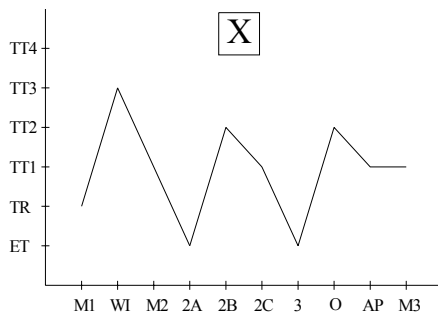
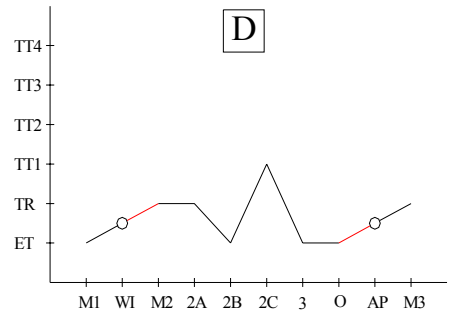
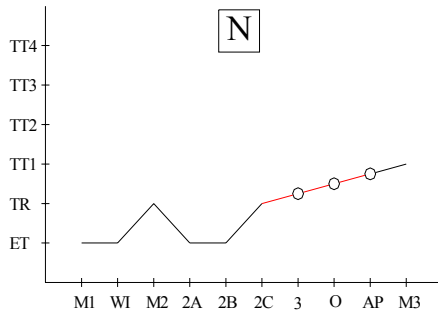
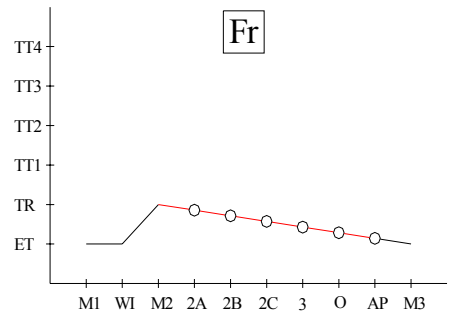
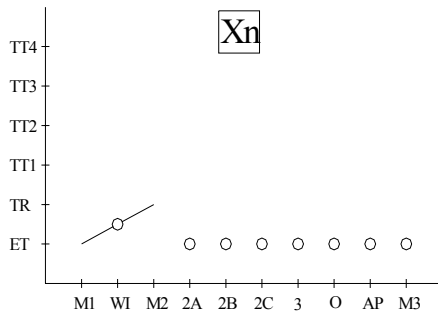
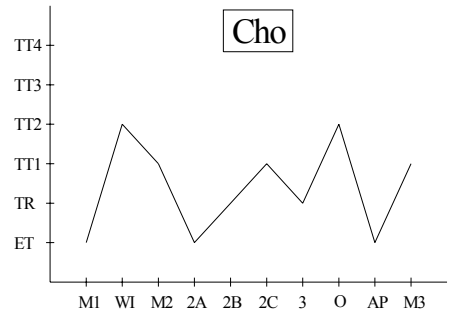
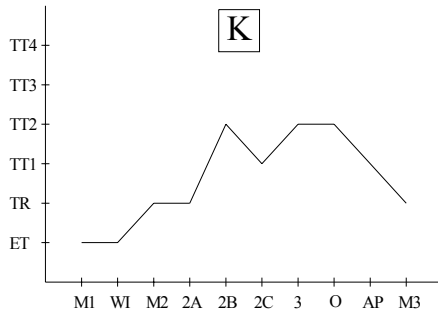
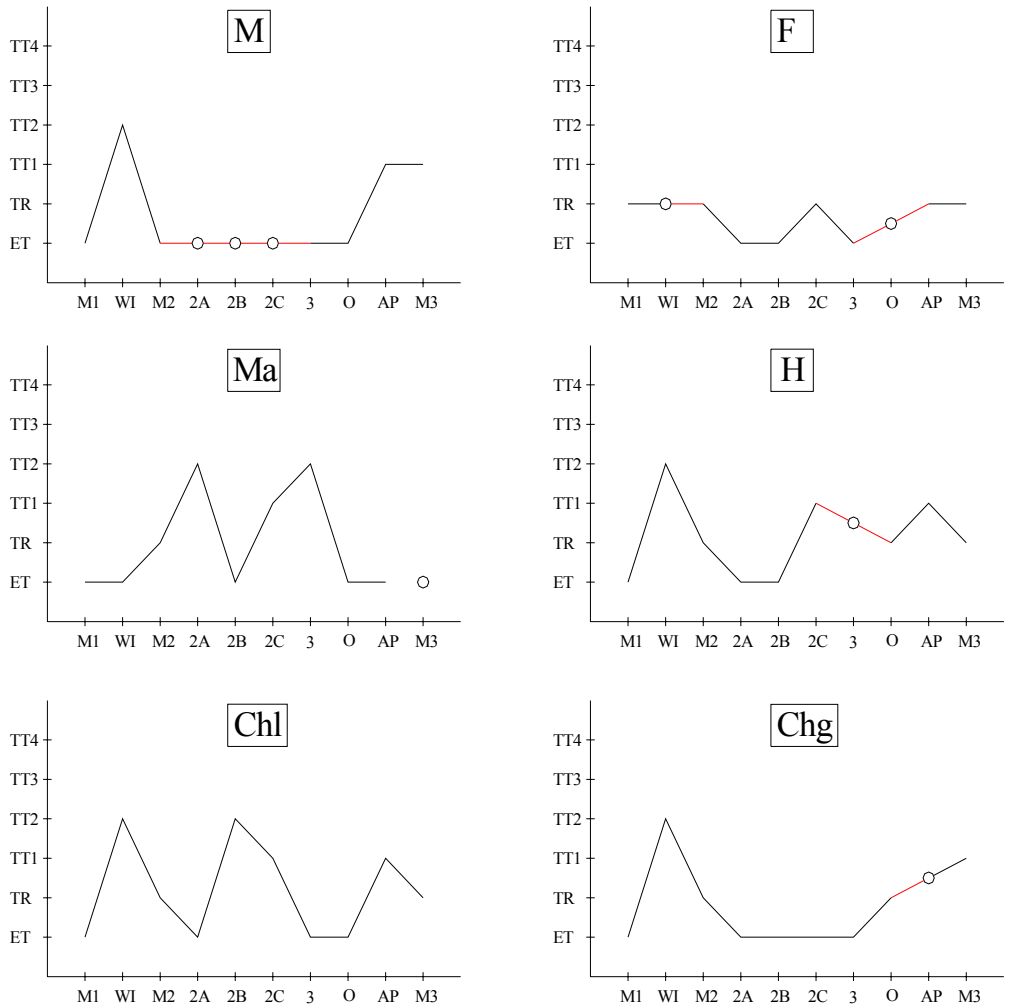


Figure 6: Students' development across the tasks



° = the student did not submit the task

M1= model 1 of genre

WI= wedding invitation task

M2= model 2 of genre

2A, 2B, 2C, 3 = parts of Bhatia's exercise

AP= answers to the problem situation question of the course

M3= model 3 of genre

ET= empirical thinking

TR= transitional phase

Of the eight students (Xn, Fr, N, D, J, F, Ma, and Chg), three (Xn, Fr, and F) showed no signs of this form of thinking. This finding is somewhat compromised, however, since Xn and Fr did not complete most of the exercises. F seems to have developed the least since he did most of the exercises (8 out of 10) but still showed no signs of theoretical thinking. Three students (N, D, and Chg) showed one sign of theoretical thinking but they also failed to complete all of the exercises. N failed to complete three, D, two and Chg, only one of the exercises. This indicates that Chg developed a minimum of theoretical thinking, considering that he only did not do one exercise. Two students (Ma and J) showed three signs of theoretical thinking but J did not do four of the exercises and Ma complete 9 of 10 exercises. For this reason, Ma can be classified as in the middle position. J's classification is compromised since he did not do a considerable number of exercises.

Considering just the students who submitted tasks from all phases of the course (K, Cho, M, H, Chl, and X), Cho and X developed the most with regard to theoretical thinking throughout the course (with 5 and 6 instances, respectively), whereas H and M with just 3 signs of theoretical thinking developed the least during the course. K and Chl remained in the middle position since they showed 4 signs of theoretical thinking each. Although M and H did not have all of Bhatia's exercises analyzed – M's 2a, 2b, and 2c could not be analyzed because they were done with a non-participant, and H did not submit exercise 3 – I selected them because they completed at least part of all of the exercises in all the phases.

Why did the students not reveal more signs of theoretical thinking? First, 15 weeks of instruction is not sufficient to overcome 12 years of empirical thinking in the students' previous schooling. As Hedegaard (2002) points out, theoretical thinking is not the main mode of thinking in schools or in "the scientific traditions of western cultures" (p. 30).

Theoretical thinking takes time and is not easily grasped since “internal, essential relationships cannot be observed directly by the senses . . . they are not given in an available, established resultative, and dissociated being” (Davydov, 1990:255). As was seen in the data, empirical thinking with its sensory, observable features rather than theoretical thinking with its essential relations regulated the students. As a result, not accustomed to this type of thinking, the students might have found it easier to write about superficial, observable features of the phenomenon rather than to think in order to find explanations for them in the ACP.

Another explanation for the few signs of theoretical thinking lies in the students’ goals with the tasks. They could have conceived of them as just practice writing exercises in which the content really did not matter, and that what mattered was to comply with the norms of schooling and obtain a grade rather than to learn, or at most to write better. Most of the students did seem to have writing improvement as their goal for the course, but not development of theoretical thinking. That was the instructor’s goal for the students, but not theirs. Although they were frequently pushed to use more relations in their models and explain linguistic phenomena by means of a basic relationship, they were never told specifically that theoretical thinking was relevant for them. Thus, the students did not have a chance to reflect on this goal¹⁰.

Also, it is important to consider the relationship between the students’ level of writing in English and their theoretical thinking. Their L2 writing hindered the analysis and identification of signs of theoretical thinking. For this reason, further research should either employ more advanced L2 writers as participants or allow students to use L1 as a way to demonstrate the emergence of their theoretical thinking in the verbalization phase.

Despite the time constraints and the fact that the course represented the instructor’s initial experience with the new pedagogical approach, and not to mention the students’ educational history in empirical thinking, two students (Cho and X) showed fairly robust signs of development of theoretical thinking. Three (K, Chl, Ma) were in the middle position and three (H, M, Chg) appeared not to develop very much at all. The other

¹⁰ The fact that I as the researcher/instructor did not clearly reveal to the students the theoretical thinking goal of the course reflects the traditional practices of research in which the participant is seen as a subject rather than as an active participant in the study in which inevitably his/her goals and motives play a relevant role in the research.

six students (Xn, Fr, N, D, J, and F) present a difficult picture to decipher since they did not do some or most of the exercises.

6. Conclusion

This paper analyzed the students' development of theoretical thinking in the genre-based course which adopted Davydov's MAC approach. The analysis focused on the relations the students made in their models of genre, the explanations of the linguistic phenomena in the problem-solving tasks, and their understanding of the ACP in the evaluation phase. Thus, there were three sources of data for the analysis of this topic. The second source of data (problem solving tasks) was revealed to be the best with which to analyze the students' theoretical thinking.

The analysis revealed that the students could be in two stages of development: a transitional phase and a theoretical thinking phase with empirical thinking being the starting point of development. However, the students who showed signs of theoretical thinking did not show it into its fullest extent (TT4). They did not reach the stage of recognizing the ACP as the basic explanatory principle of the communicative function of language in written and spoken modes. For this reason, the data revealed signs of the emergence of theoretical thinking out of prevailing empirical thinking. As Davydov (1988b) and Hedegaard (2002) pointed out, theoretical thinking is not the predominant mode of thinking in schools. As a consequence, to orient late adolescents, who possess a long history of using empirical thinking, into theoretical thinking takes a great deal of time and effort. Nevertheless, a few of the students developed some level of theoretical thinking during the course.

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