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Speech genres as an input to teach French as a foreign language

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ABSTRACT: Teaching a foreign language means enabling students to interpret and produce texts. The basic unit of communication is text, regardless of its physical size. Teaching French as a foreign language is traditionally based on literary texts. However, the approach recommended by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages favours the texts which are used in the current communication. This article raises the issue of didactic modeling of texts and discourses circulating in the circumstances of the daily exchange.

KEYWORDS: Discourse genres, Communicative Approach, CEFR, Action-oriented Approach

I. INTRODUCTION

The primary genres, commonly called "speech genres", tend to substitute for the second genres "literary genres", historically considered as the reference activity of teaching texts and speeches. The action-oriented perspective advocated by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages [1] (*based on the principle of maximum homology between the use situation and the learning situation*) is based on the primary genres as the main support for which the activities teaching are articulated (*news item, story of life, anecdote, newscast ...*) to teach text types (*narrative, descriptive, argumentative, etc.*)

In addition to the fact that these genres are closer to current communication, they are more suited to the implementation of the action-oriented approach used in CEFR. Through this contribution, we will propose a didactisation approach, inspired by the communicative approach, concerning the news item as a genre at the service of the teaching of narration. Thus, the news item will be modeled as consisting of a series of discursive acts (*situate an event in time and space, report the consequences of an event, inform about events related to a news item, report testimonials to illustrate an opinion*). Students will have to read texts and do language exercises not to answer questions (communicative approach) but to develop the resources required to complete the task (*action-oriented approach*).

II. FROM LITERARY GENRE TO ORDINARY GENRE

Bakhtin (1986) [2] distinguishes between two types of social spheres, different from each other in the nature of the exchange they involve. Primary genres that appear during a spontaneous verbal exchange are to be dissociated from the second genres that appear in the circumstances of a cultural exchange.

The notion of speech genre is traditionally associated with the field of literature. It refers to the discursive form of literary writing (*novel, short story, play...*). Literature constitutes an area of specific social activity. It stands out by its second genres which are marked by their degree of elaboration. These are specific forms of discourse designed to meet the demands of communication in the circumstances of cultural exchange.

Bakhtin is the first to have brought the notion of speech genre from the field of literature and rhetoric to the diversity of the spheres of human activity and its verbal and written practices. Text genres are as varied and diverse as the domains of social action. The primary genres refer, in short, to the discursive forms that structure speech in the circumstances of spontaneous exchanges (*replicas of dialogue, stories of manners, letters, diaries, documents, etc.*).

The notion of an act of speech, referring to communication units that are limited in time and space, does not make it possible to account for the complexity of discursive activities. In fact, there are few communication situations in which we can identify speech acts used separately. Language activities cannot be reduced to a simple addition of speech acts. Certainly, all language activities mobilize speech acts, but these cannot function as isolated units of meaning during actual communicative practices. In other words, the attempt to link language to social action imposes on linguists to recourse to higher-level pragmatic units. It is a question of articulating statements more closely to the situation of their production and to the purpose to which they are linked.

The notions of communication event (*introduced by Hymes: 1972*)[3] and discursive genre (*borrowed from Bakhtin: 1986*)[2] allowed discourse analysts to consider language productions in their relationship with the spheres of social activity that mobilize them.

III. MODELING DISCOURSE GENRES FOR A FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASS

By didactical modeling, we mean the process of transformation a language practice from the reference use situation to the learning situation (*Sahnoun: 2006*) [4]. The modeling corresponds to an engineering process aimed at designing a didactic model of language practices through the identification of the teachable dimensions. The identification of these dimensions implies the use of the descriptive tools provided by the linguistics. The language is updated in almost unlimited situations and contexts. Sociolinguists define communication skills in relation to specific communicative situations. Nobody can master a language in its totality. The command of a language for communicative purposes is by definition partial: it depends on the individual's areas of experience and the extent of his activity as a social actor.

As *Beacco(2007)*[5] has pointed, it is possible to delimit the verbal material to be implemented in a program according to the following approach:

- 1) Define the communicative situations and the contexts of the language use according to the targeted public concerned with the training envisaged.
- 2) Inventory the types of texts that are likely to be produced in these areas and contexts of language use. As we communicate by texts and not by isolated statements or words.
- 3) Define the kinds of discourse to which these texts belong. The speech we produce is not only structured by rules of syntax but also by rules of the discursive type.
- 4) Identify the most recurrent discourse functions in these texts. Each text is structured by a coherent core of speech acts. These acts depend on the genres of speeches to which the texts belong.
- 5) Delimit the grammatical and lexical resources necessary to carry out these acts of speech.

1.1. The case of news item

The news item as a discursive genre presents regularities and variations. Teaching a foreign language class aims primarily at stabilizing the norm. We will see in the following a sample of discursive functions that characterize current news item.

1.2. Proposing a description of a news item in terms of speech acts

The news item as a discursive genre can be described as composed of the following speech acts:

- 1) Situate a main event in time and space
- 2) Report the consequences of an event
- 3) Report on the follow-up (police investigation - judicial verdict) related to a news item
- 4) Report a testimony

The elements we have proposed above do not claim to exhaust the mass of speech acts implemented in the news item genre. It is simply a didactic variant of the reference text genre.

IV. CREATING AND IMPLEMENTING A DIDACTIC SEQUENCE

A didactic sequence is a group of learning activities defined in a specific order that takes into account the needs of the students, who are called upon to perform a complex task at the end of the teaching unit.

The task to be performed in the case of a news item constitutes the element of coherence of the sequence. All the activities implemented during the sequence will be at the service of the competence the pupils will develop (Dolz and Schneuwly: 1998)[6].

1.3. From linguistic description to didactic design

We will try to illustrate this approach of implementation of the action approach by an example of a learning scenario (a didactic sequence), (Sahnoun and Benaiissa: 2010)[7] which will be organized as follows:

- 1) Presentation of the project (*writing project*)
- 2) Delimitation of micro-tasks and their functions in relation to the realization of the project
- 3) Realization of the micro-tasks (*development of the resources necessary for the realization of the task*).
- 4) Final task: the task, to be carried out by the learners, serves as a framework for learning related to the facts of grammar, vocabulary and textuality. Students can realize it during the teaching unit.

1.4. The writing project as an entry in the sequence

Your class is responsible for writing the news items of the week that will be published in a daily newspaper. Here is the raw material that your special correspondent gives you in relation to the two main facts of the week.

Fact 1:

- 1) Event: fall of an 11-month-old baby from the balcony of an apartment
- 2) Causes: lack of the aunt's surveillance - spaced bars: 14 cm
- 3) Damage: serious injuries
- 4) Aftermath of the events: opening of a police investigation

Fact 2:

- 1) Fall of a piece of the balcony in a very busy street
- 2) Death of a 65-year-old pedestrian (inhabitant of the district)
- 3) Setting up a security perimeter
- 4) Closed shops at the bottom of the building
- 5) Appearance of two unions in the court

1.5. The didactic sequence as a resource of the development unit

The reading session will be aimed at discovering the textual and discursive stylistic characteristics of the genre to work in the classroom, in case of the news item. Students cannot be asked to produce a kind of text that they have not been exposed to beforehand.

From the above language functions, grammar and vocabulary lessons could be designed to develop the resources needed to perform the verbal task. Each speech act mobilizes specific linguistic resources. We could, thus, make students work on:

- 1) Vocabulary related to the theme of the news item to be produced.
- 2) Language facts such as the passive form (*the consequences of a news item are generally introduced in passive sentences*), the reported speech (*the writers of the news items generally report testimonials*)

As Richer (2012) [6] has shown, the discursive genres have the advantage of making the notion of the linguistic task operational and of removing the conceptual vagueness that surrounds it. According to this author, the definition that the notion of task receives is too vague to be operative pedagogically.

V. CONCLUSION

The action-oriented approach advocated by the CEFR favours the didacticisation of current language practices. The use of the notion of discourse genre and that of speech act constitutes an operational entry to set up communicative programs. It should be noted, however, that the didactic model remains a simplified variant of the reference model. The goal of language teaching is not to enable students to master the discourses, as they operate in the socio-cultural reference environment which inspires them, but to master the simplified variant.

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