WORKING IN A WORLD OF MULTIPLE APPROACHES: A MULTIFACETED UNDERSTANDING OF TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract: This essay seeks to provide an overview of current approaches, issues and practices in the teaching of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). Although for much of the twentieth century, a primary concern of the language teaching profession was to find more effective methods of language teaching, by the twenty-first century there has been a movement away from a preoccupation with teaching methods toward a more complex view of language teaching that encompasses a multifaceted understanding of teaching and learning processes. Brown (2002) traces this movement from a concern with "methods" to a focus on "pedagogy". To do so, we review some studies about methods, approaches and methodological perspectives concerning foreign language teaching.

Keywords: approaches; EFL; teaching; learning.

Resumo: *Este ensaio procura apresentar uma visão geral de abordagens atuais acerca do ensino e da aprendizagem de inglês como língua estrangeira. Embora muito das discussões do século XX esteja centrada na procura de métodos eficazes para o ensino de inglês, o século XXI tem se direcionado à procura de entender a complexidade da língua e o processo multifacético de ensiná-la e aprendê-la: um deslocamento do "método" para a "pedagogia" (BROWN, 2002). Para tanto, revisitamos diversos estudos sobre métodos, abordagens e perspectivas teórico-metodológicas acerca do ensino de inglês como língua estrangeira.*

Palavras-chave: *abordagens; EFL; ensino; aprendizagem.*

Introduction

The notion of teaching methods has had a long history in language teaching, as is witnessed by the rise and fall of a variety of methods throughout the recent history of language teaching. Brown (2002) and Kumaravadivelu (1994) discuss a number of reasons for the decline of the methods syndrome in contemporary discussions of language teaching. As they have commented, the notion of all-purpose designer methods that teachers can utilize anywhere and with anyone raises a number of problems: (i) methods are typically top-down impositions of experts' views of teaching with the individuality of the teacher minimized,

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overshadowed by the method to which his or her teaching style must conform. Methods are hence prescriptive, and (ii) methods fail to address the broader context of teaching and learning, and focus on only a small part of a more complex set of elements. Brown (2002) describes what he called a "curriculum development" approach to teaching, which begins with diagnosis (such as needs analysis, syllabus, material development), then moves to treatment (instruction and pedagogy), and involves issues of assessment (testing and evaluation).

In this way, for Brown (2002), the term 'method' is best replaced by the term 'pedagogy'. The former implies a static set of procedures, whereas the latter suggests the dynamic interplay between teachers, learners, and instructional materials during the process of teaching and learning. The author characterizes the basis of language teaching pedagogy in terms of current research and theory about language acquisition.

From this perspective, this essay aims at showing how different conceptions of teaching have led to different understandings of essential skills of teachers, and to different approaches to teacher training and teacher development. In this investigation we are going to present an overview of (a) the audiolingualism approach; (b) the task-based approach; (c) learner training; (d) the communicative language teaching approach; (e) the silent way approach (f) the humanistic approach and (g) the reflective teaching approach. To do so, we are going to review Brown's (2002), Kumaravadivelu's (1994) and Richards' (2002) discussions. Finally, we will discuss an eclectic approach based on theories of language from the perspective of Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL) using examples from our context in an undergraduate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher training program in the Northeast of Brazil.

2 Approaches in EFL: different perspectives

A brief review of the literature on approaches to language learning will result in a myriad of differing and often opposing perspectives. For example, on the one hand we can cite the *audiolingualism approach*, which was derived from research on learning associated with behavioral pedagogy. Laboratory studies from this period presented results showing that learning could be successfully manipulated if three elements were identified: a stimulus, a response and reinforcement. Translated to a teaching method this led to the Audiolingual Method, in which language learning was seen as a process of habit formation and in which

target-language patterns were presented for memorization and learning through dialogues and drills.

On the other hand, a more recent example of attempts to develop a teaching pedagogy from learning research is referred to as *task-based language teaching*. Proponents of a task-based approach point out that second language acquisition research shows that successful language learning involves learners in negotiations of meanings. In the process of negotiating with a speaker of the target language, the learner receives the kind of input necessary to facilitate learning. This approach relies on classroom tasks that involve negotiation of meaning as the basis of the language teaching curriculum through types of tasks like: information-gap tasks, opinion gap tasks, and reasoning-gap tasks.

Learner training is an approach that draws on research investigating the cognitive styles and learning strategies used by learners in carrying out different classroom learning tasks. This research may involve observing learners, asking them to reflection their learning strategies, or probing learners in other ways. Once successful learning strategies are identified, these can be taught to other learners.

Communicative language teaching (CLT), , arose as a reaction to a grammar-based approach to teaching realized in teaching materials, syllabuses, and teaching methods in the 1960's. The proponents of a communicative approach established it through convincing critiques of the inadequacy of the linguistic and pedagogical theory underlying grammar-based approaches. CLT was an attempt to operationalize the concept of communicative competence and to apply it across all levels of language program design, from theory, to syllabus design, to teaching techniques.

A method such as the *silent way*, on the other hand, is derived not so much from a linguistic theory as from a learning theory. It is based on a set of claims and beliefs as to how learning takes place in adults. The classroom procedures distinctive to the method, attempt to draw on the learning principles that there are no really difficult forms that cannot be illustrated through the proper situation involving rods, and actions on them, by which one makes statements by introducing specific words whose associated meanings are obvious. In this way, what teachers must do is to arrange for practice so that student's minds are triggered to use these new words spontaneously.

Humanistic approaches in language teaching refer to approaches that emphasize the development of human values, growth in self-awareness and in the understanding of others,

fostering sensitivity to human feelings and emotions, and activate student involvement in learning and in the way human learning takes place.

The *learner-centered curriculum* is one of a number of terms used to refer to approaches to language teaching based on the belief that learners are self-directed and responsible decision makers. Learners are seen as learning in different ways and to have different needs and interests. Language programs and the teachers who work in them should therefore set out to provide learners with efficient learning strategies, to assist learners in identifying their own ways of learning.

Reflective teaching is an approach based on a belief that teachers can improve their understanding of teaching and the quality of their own teaching by reflecting critically on their teaching experiences. In teacher education, activities that seek to develop a reflective approach to teaching aim to develop the skills of considering the teaching process thoughtfully, analytically and objectively as a way of improving classroom practices.

In conclusion, since these conceptions of teaching offer quite different perspectives on what essential skills of teaching are, it is not the case that they can simply be regarded as alternatives that can be exchanged according to the whims of the moment. The different conceptions represent fundamentally different representations of what teaching is and how teachers should approach their work.

3 A genre-based approach to language teaching: thinking about text and discourse

Recently, among several researches in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics (AL), genre studies have arisen, and branched out in different perspectives. Some of them conceive genres within their socio-semiotic constructions (HALLIDAY, 1994; THOMPSON, 1996), other approaches relate genres with their rhetorical configuration (MILLER, 1989; SWALES, 1990) or their dialogical constitution (BAKHTIN, 2003; 2006). Although we can identify different epistemological perspectives of genre studies, all of them result in a common sense: the social, the historical and the cultural conjectures of genres.

Departing from this perspective, in this paper, we aim at discussing the contributions of discourse genres to the practices of teaching and learning language, specifically English as a foreign language (EFL). To do so, the brief discussion presented will follow the social-semiotic studies based principally on Halliday and Hasan (1989), Halliday (1994), Thompson

(1996) and the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) investigations from Fairclough (1989; 1992).

The preoccupation of studying, researching, explaining and describing the social practices in which we are involved, have been discussed in different study areas such as CDA and AL. In CDA and AL, genre investigations have contributed to develop this path of searching for comprehending our social practices mediated by language. The genres are viewed as mediators of our interactions, actions and social relations, not only regularizing these instances, but also giving them meaning. So, it is from genre studies that we can investigate the inter-relationship among text, discourse, and context.

To better organize this discussion, we aim to explain: (a) what genres are; (b) what constitutes them and how they function in society and (c) what the contributions of genre studies are to EFL. As mentioned before, to do so, we visit some theoretical postulations from CDA based on Fairclough (year) and from Systemic-functional Linguistics in accordance with Halliday (1994).

In relation to the understanding of what a discourse genre is, we can review Swales' discussion (1990) in which the author affirms that a genre is a prototypical text, in different semiotic manifestations (verbal, oral, visual, gestural, multimodal), which has a rhetorical construction recognizable in specific contexts of use. These explanations evidence the inter-relation between text and context: the genres occur in typical immediate situations immersed in determined cultural contexts (HALLIDAY, 1994). In other words, the different texts become typical in different interactive situations mediated by language in which the individuals recognize the situation as a typical context of language in use. An excellent example is the Master's thesis — a typical situation (event) that all students go through at the end of their Master's program. All academic master students have to defend a thesis to a group of professors who are in charge of evaluating the work. What we can observe in this specific event in a social academic sphere is that we have a network of genres mediating this situation: a written thesis, an oral presentation of the thesis, professor's notes about the student's oral presentation and so on. In addition, this event, mediated by genres, is also constituted by individuals playing determined social roles (FAIRCLOUGH, 1992): professors/evaluators; the student; the student's advisor. In sum, we can say that genres are typical texts, which mediate our social practices in different social contexts of interactions,

not only giving meaning to and regularizing our actions, but also legalizing our social roles in these practices.

Along with this first objective, our second aim, to discuss the constitution and the functioning of genres in society, we can affirm, based on Fairclough (1989; 1992) that all of our interactive situations are mediated by language; when we communicate with others, we do it through discourse. In this way, genres are constructed in interactive situations and their role is to mediate through language our social and discourse practices. Based on this, we can affirm that language expresses the cultural reality, not only reflecting this reality but also reconstructing it. Genres have these roles: to construct and reconstruct social meanings linguistically mediated. The discourse is a product of our social relations and these social relations are constituted and function through language by typical discourse practices − genres.

Complimentary to this discussion, we can consider the way genres can contribute to the discussions about teaching and learning language. Concerning the investigations of AL, researches have seen genres as resources to comprehend language in different social contexts of use. According to them, genres can be used in class not only to demonstrate how language can serve to materialize social needs through language, but also how the language can reinforce values and ideologies.

In teaching reading, for example, texts can be used in class to deconstruct the values, ideals, power relations and ideologies, confirming what Fairclough (1992) argues about how discourse (and genre) can maintain or modify social structures. For teaching critical reading, for example, we can plan activities based on several genres, not only those which are typically immersed in our daily life (like recipes, news report, ads, etc), as well as others that can influence our life direct or indirectly (legal correspondence, forms, documents, etc.).

The same procedure can be done in classes of text production. It is very important to consider the students as authors of their own texts. To do so, genres can contribute effectively to this, by serving as typical texts that students can produce in class, by comprehending their function, their text organizations and the social roles individuals play through interactions. Students can be aware of the social use of genres as well as become empowered (FAIRCLOUGH, 1989) in terms of language uses.

Another question is that genres can contribute to the understanding of language forms and structures in contexts of meaningful language use. So, as students begin to understand

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the language use in texts typically constructed in determined contexts, students can read and write, in different ways for different purposes. Genres can be understood as not only typical texts, but mainly as typical interactive situations mediated by language. It can conduct students not only to perceive the language in its several manifestations, but also to make students perceive how these different manifestations can be materialized in different genres.

In conclusion, genres are not only an important path to comprehend text construction and its constitution in terms of immediate and cultural contexts, but also genres can demonstrate how our own society is organized: economically, politically, historically, and culturally.

Genres structure our actions and, consequently, give meaning to our social practices. And they are a relevant contribution to EFL classes in terms of considering the texts that are circulating in class as resources to understand the language as discourse, i.e. language in use in social contexts of interactions.

4 The role of grammar teaching in the EFL classes

Several discussions in Applied Linguistics (RICHARDS, 2002; SWAN, 2002; ELLIS, 2002) have been emphasizing the reflection about the teaching of grammar in EFL classes. Most of them agree that it is perhaps one of the most controversial issues in language teaching. Some researches, in a formal perspective of investigating language, agree that by knowing the language **system**, consequently, the individual will know how to **use** the language (i.e., how to be coherent and understandable in using the language in different contexts). On the other hand, there are those who agree that the language system is not the only central question in terms of using language as a social practice.

In recent years, grammar teaching has regained its rightful place in the language curriculum, not being considered as a set of rules to be learned, but as a parameter of language resources to be used in different social situations. In this way, grammar is presented as a relative, regular set of linguistic rules organized for use in real communication (SWAN, 2002).

From this perspective some questions begin to arise, such as (a) which grammar items learners need to know most; (b) how teachers can deal with grammar in class in a more effective and communicative approach; (c) are grammar approaches in EFL classes important

indeed? In this paper we present a brief discussion concerning the good and bad reasons for teaching/learning grammar in EFL classes. To do so, we intend to introduce some theoretical postulations based on Richards (1986; 2002), Nunan (1989) Swan (2002), and Thornbury (1998) about grammar teaching in EFL classes, to not only reflect upon the role of grammar in classes, but also to investigate its contribution in understanding social values in language in use.

Firstly, we begin by presenting some explanations based on Swan (2002) who debates the positive and negative reasons for using grammar to teach English. According to the author, grammar is important, but people usually (for many different reasons) teach too much of it. Swan (2002) points out seven negative reasons for this. The first one is the *easiness of having the grammar materials available to use in class*.

He postulates that there are many text/student books organized from a grammar based-approach. On this path, teachers commonly follow a straight and narrow road, teaching only grammar, as if it were the central and only way to know how to use language. It is indeed, according to the author, the only way to know **about** language, but not through use of the language. In a quantitative investigation, it is probably right that teachers normally find text/student books designed by taking into account of grammar topics only. These grammatical points are really the conductors of all lessons and activities (NUNAN, 1989; RICHARDS, 1986).

The second bad reason for teaching grammar, Swan refers to as *tidiness,* i.e., while vocabulary is vast and untidy, grammar is systematized. "Grammar looks tidy and is relatively teachable. Grammar can be presented as a limited series of tidy things which students can learn, apply in exercises, and tick off one by one" (SWAN, 2002, p. 149). To the author, learning grammar becomes easier than learning a language.

The third reason is the *testing approach*. Grammar is testable and students can prove or not their comprehension concerning the grammar rules (grammar system). To Swan, "tests show (or appear to show) whether students are learning and whether teachers are teaching properly […]" (2002, p. 149). So, to complement the classes or to create (planning and applying) testing activities, grammar is the easiest path, and one which teachers usually follow. Teachers indeed, "can easily end up just teaching what can be tested (mostly grammar), and testing what they have taught (mostly grammar)" (SWAN, 2002, p. 149).

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Grammar as a safe path/teaching approach is the fourth bad reason. Teaching grammar is comfortable to some teachers as well as to some students. It takes the form of "pretending actions". Some teachers pretend to teach and some students pretend to learn. Some of them (both teachers and students), inclusively are aware that knowing the system, they can use the language, but it is not real. It is observed that in some contexts, mainly in the Basic Education system (Elementary and High schools) it is more and more difficult to plan activities by focusing on the four skills (listening, speaking, writing and reading). We recognize that there are several social, institutional and cognitive aspects that are related to this hard task. So grammar takes the starring role.

Swan (2002) continues this discussion by affirming that the fifth bad reason is that grammar is closely related to *cultural perpetuation*. In other words, teachers consciously (or not) usually perpetuate the normative (traditional) approach to teaching language in a grammar based perspective. The value in grammar teaching is passed from generation to generation. "Many foreign language teachers spent a good deal of time when younger learning about tense, the use of articles, relative clauses and the like […]."(SWAN, 2002, p. 150) and they commonly forget the importance of analyzing language in real use.

In addition to these bad reasons, the author discusses *social power*. Some sociolinguistic researcher has already elaborated arguments about the social values and the power relations that are explicit and implicit in language use. Language use elicits social appraisals, i.e., social judgments concerning how the individuals use language. In light of this, using the language grammatically then allows one to belong to a more privileged social class, than social classes that are underprivileged, marginalized or disenfranchised, and in which language use is ungrammatical. . Knowing how to use the rules of grammar ensures acceptance in privileged social spheres. .

Swan also argues about *professional power (the sixth bad reason)*, "some teachers – fortunately, a minority – enjoy the power" (2002, p. 150). In addition to the previously mentioned bad reason, it is clear that society, in general, likes and appreciates grammar. Grammar involves rules, formativeness, and rules involve correctness. Similar to social power, professional power is a reflection or a result of, the role of teachers as a role in which they have power. "Education is never neutral, and the teaching methods in any society inevitably reflect attitudes to social control and power relationships." (SWAN, 2002, p. 150).

In contrast to bad reasons for teaching grammar, Swan also points out some brief arguments about two good reasons for doing it. According to the author, we can say that there are two good reasons for teaching carefully selected points of grammar in EFL classes.

One of them is the *comprehensibility tenor*. In other words, by knowing how to use some linguistic resources, certain structures, make it possible to communicate common types of meaning successfully. Therefore, in EFL classes, it is important to discuss this aspect with students, not only demonstrating the relevance of grammar in language in use, but also to emphasize the grammar as a comprehensible parameter.

The second one, *acceptability,* is presented by Swan (2002) as a way of being integrated in social groups. The author, notes, "[…] a person who speaks badly may not be taken seriously, or may be considered uneducated or stupid" (p. 152). Subsequently, for professional upward mobility, and personal growth, it is important to know and recognize (social competence) the correct use of some grammatical aspects.

In sum, after presenting Swan's central discussions and other authors' postulations about to teach or not to teach grammar in language classes, as mentioned before, clearly the issue is controversial. It is because teachers do not really know what and how to teach, i.e., the theoretical and the methodological concerns in language teaching are currently difficult or extremely problematic not only in terms of the quantity of scientific discussion (or in favor or against the grammar teaching), but also in quality (some works are really coherent, others not much). For instance, in Brazil, there are several legal documents which regularize the education in the country. These ones, such as the National Curriculum Standards called, "PCN", have been contributing a lot by presenting some parameters in terms of what and how to teach. However, the comprehensibility of the Standards in the schools' daily practices is still vague and incomplete.

In conclusion, it is important to reevaluate the grammar role in language classes not only identifying bad reasons but also good ones, in order to concentrate or to balance this practice in teaching contexts. If we can manage the principles (bad and good ones), we have a better chance of teaching language (in this case English) instead of teaching grammar (specifically and unidirectionally).

5 The role of reading in EFL Classes

In many EFL teaching situations, teaching reading has received special focus of late. There are some central reasons for this. Firstly students in EFL classes usually have more interest in reading (academic, professional, entertaining or other discourse domains) than other communicative activities, making the ability to read the most important goal. They want to be able to read to gather information, for instruction, for learning, for pleasure, for their careers and a variety of other purposes. In fact, in most EFL situations, the ability to read in a foreign language is all that students ever want to acquire.

  Secondly, in EFL classes, written texts can serve several pedagogical purposes. Extensive exposure to linguistically comprehensible written texts can enhance the process of language learning. Teachers can use written texts to improve, for example, the activities that aim at developing other communicative abilities. Moreover, good instances of written texts used in class can contribute to the development of writing, and provide opportunities to introduce new topics, to stimulate discussion, and to study language (lexis and grammar resources). Reading is, therefore, an ability that is commonly valued by students and teachers alike.

From this perspective, we aim at discussing (a) the interrelation between first and foreign language in reading/learning; (b) the role of strategic reading contexts and (c) the importance of extensive reading activities in EFL classes. To do so, we review investigations from Grabe (2002), Richards (2002).

To begin with, we discuss the interrelation between first and foreign language in learning. Since 1980's, a number of advances in reading research in Applied Linguistics have been made, both in first and foreign language contexts. Although the advances in first language contexts have led to a number of improvements in reading instruction, the research in second and foreign language contexts has not made as much headway.

To understand briefly the interrelation between first and foreign language in reading classes, it is relevant to demonstrate the major findings for reading in first language researches and compare with those foreign contexts. According to Grabe (2002), first language reading researches have demonstrated, among other findings; (1) the importance of developing letter-sound correspondences for beginning reading; (2) the importance of word recognition and the relatively complete processing of words in a text; (3) the necessity for a large recognition of vocabulary for fluent reading; (4) the need for reasonable reading rates processing; (5) the usefulness of graphic representations for comprehension instruction; (6)

the value of extensive reading; and (7) the importance of dialogue and teacher modeling in comprehension instruction (JANZEN, 2002).

Although a full review of these general developments is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to recognize that these researches have a significant impact on reading and language acquisition. Besides, what these researches also demonstrate is that these approaches often provide the context for specific strategy instruction and for transforming the student into a strategic reader. Finally, the translation of research findings into realistic classroom settings has led to greater emphasis on content-based instruction as the most effective means for learning from texts and for using text information to carry out other academic activities.

On the other hand, we can also investigate what foreign language reading researches have postulated. These investigations have also provided a number of insights for reading development and instruction. Research insights for foreign language development have informed at least the following issues: (1) the importance of discourse practices to linguistic comprehension; (2) the importance of vocabulary in language learning (NATION, 2002); (3) the need for language awareness and attending to language and genre forms; (4) the importance of metacognitive awareness and strategy learning; (5) the need for extensive reading; and (6) the benefits of integrating reading and writing.

Although, we can observe these different findings, little progress has been made in integrating first language and foreign language research into practice. The most crucial problem pointed out by Grabe (2002) lies in the fact that research in foreign language tends to be short-term and more programmatic.

According to Grabe (2002), we do not have enough convincing evidence to enable us to say, with confidence, what works best in which foreign contexts. The author also argues that results of longitudinal studies are likely to reduce the gap between theory and practice.

To discuss strategic reading as an essential activity in EFL classes, Janzen (2002) attempts to shed light on practical issues of translating findings in reading strategy research to classroom contexts. The author is concerned with two questions: (1) how do we go about teaching reading strategies, and (2) how do we incorporate reading strategies in an ongoing classroom reading program? Drawing on relevant research findings, Janzen (2002) suggests that an effective approach should have the following characteristics: (i) the teaching of strategies is contextualized; (ii) strategies are taught explicitly through direct explanation,

modeling and feedback and (iii) there is a constant recycling of strategies over new texts and tasks.

She then describes how this approach to strategy instruction can be successfully implemented in EFL classrooms. Throughout the whole semester of a reading program, the teacher can organize activities in such a way as to enable the students not only to understand the *whats* and *hows*, but also the *whys* of reading strategies. The author claims that without a solid understanding of the values of reading strategies, students will not get the most benefits of strategic instruction.

Taking extensive reading in language curriculum into account, Renandya and Jacobs (2002) argue strongly in favor of using texts in most activities in class. The authors claim that there is compelling evidence that extensive reading can have a significant impact on learner's foreign language development. Not only can extensive reading improve reading ability, it can also enhance learner's overall language proficiency (e.g., spelling, grammar, vocabulary, and writing). In addition, extensive reading can contribute to students to reading autonomously.

In conclusion, importance of first and foreign language reading research and the interrelation between them is clear, as well as demonstrating the usefulness and relevance of privileging strategic and extensive reading programs in EFL classes.

6. Foreign Language (EFL) teaching/learning from a Systemic Functional Perspective (SFL)

In this section we aim to discuss the possible positive outcomes of using Genre from an SFL perspective, primarily as developed by the Sydney School researchers (MARTIN; ROSE, 2008, 2007; ROSE, 2005, 2006), but having overlapping characteristics with English for Specific Purposes (HUTCHINSON; WATERS, 1987) and Appropriate Pedagogy (KRAMSCH; SULLIVAN, 1995) as an approach to EFL teaching/learning. We perceive multiple benefits of this approach, three being: students acquire fluency in the genres that are relevant to the social practices they engage in or will need (HALLIDAY; MATTHIESSEN, 2004; MARTIN; ROSE, 2008; ROSE, 2005; 2006; HUTCHISON; WATERS, 1987) thereby increasing motivation; class design is facilitated (MARTIN; ROSE, 2008; ROSE 2006); and classes are appropriate, that is, they are appropriate to the culture and situation of the students,

and students can appropriate them in local ways (KRAMSCH; SULLIVAN, 1996, ROSE, 2006). In this section we will use examples from our own EFL teaching/learning context: two groups of students, 49 students total, in an undergraduate EFL teacher training program at a Federal University in Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil, at one of the rural satellite campi, where we have been gauging the benefits of such an approach.

We begin with a functional concept of language as modeled from the perspective of SFL:

> […] that language use is functional; that its function is to make meanings; that these meanings are influenced by the social and cultural context in which they are exchanged; and that the process of using language is semiotic, a process of making meanings by choosing. (EGGINS, 1994, p. 3)

Within the model of language from the perspective of SFL, language is a complex semiotic system, which is stratified (HALLIDAY; MATTHIESSEN, 2004). These strata correspond to expression at the level of phonetics and phonology, to content at the level of lexicogrammar, and to context at the level of discourse semantics and are linked by realizations as illustrated in Table 1 (HALLIDAY, 2004, p.26).

Table 1: From eco- social

[from the environment to] meaning	interface via receptors	**semantics**
[from meaning to] wording	internal organization	**lexicogrammar**
[from phrasing to] composing	internal organization	**phonology**
[from composing to] sounding	interface via motors	**phonetics**

environment to sound waves: speaker perspective (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2004, pg. 26).

The concepts of realization and recoding in a model of language as stratified are of utmost importance; "The second lens we need to consider is realization – the idea that language is a stratified semiotic system involving three cycles of coding at different levels of abstraction." (MARTIN; WHITE, 2005, pg. 8), shown in Figure 1.

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discourse semantics
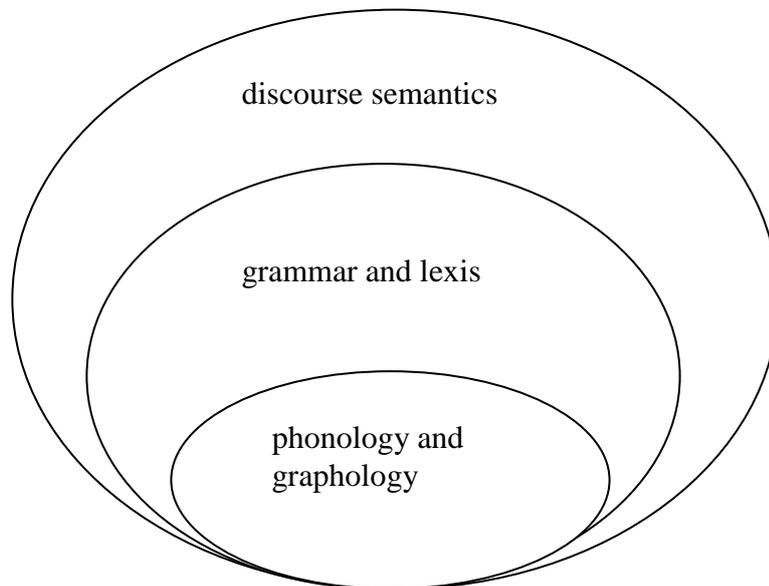
grammar and lexis

phonology and graphology

Figura 1. Language Strata (MARTIN; WHITE, 2005, pg. 9).

In this model recoding means that discourse semantic patterns are realized through grammar and lexis and not merely consisting of them—discourse semantics is a more abstract level. Likewise, lexicogrammar is "a pattern of phonological patterns…it is a more abstract level realized by a more concrete one" (MARTIN; WHITE, 2005, pg. 9). We immediately perceive the dialectical relationship between these realizations.

Returning to our definition of language, the importance of context is paramount. This dialectical relationship between realizations of increasing levels of abstraction extends to the notion of the context-text-language relationship as well (MARTIN; ROSE, 2008). From this perspective, a text is a pattern of linguistic realizations, and the context is a pattern of textual realizations, which allows us to predict one level to the next, or deduce one from the other.
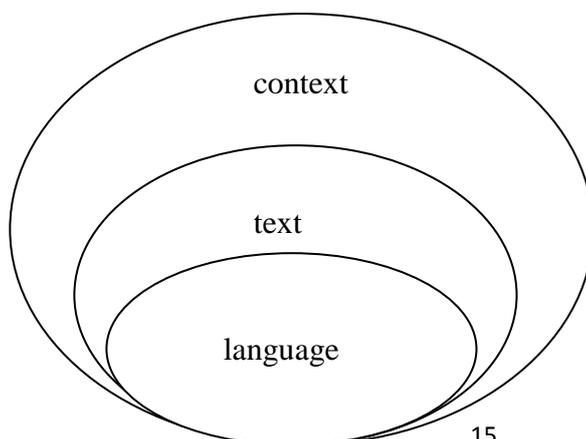
context

text

language

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Ano 08 - n.15 – 2° Semestre de 2012 - ISSN 1807-5193

Figure 2. Adapted from Martin and Rose (2008), pg. 10.

Genre is understood as a "goal oriented, staged, social process" (MARTIN; ROSE, 2007, pg. 8). In other words, it is social practice within a cultural context, and with a potential schematic structure that unfolds in obligatory and optional, stages and phases. To help students with genre awareness, in our teacher training program we ask them to list the staging of a social practice that is common to all of them. Typically they will choose taking the bus. By and large our students come by bus from many different surrounding rural communities, in this semi-arid region, spending at least an hour and a half each way. Students do not have the financial resources to own cars, and the bus system and roadways are relatively precarious. The stages they identify are: getting the fare for the bus, waiting for the bus (this generates laughter as buses are frequently late) paying the bus driver, finding a seat, praying the bus doesn't break (more laughter because busses frequently break, making them late), getting off the bus when it does break (and at this point there are often expletives, and intense evaluative language used when describing this stage), etc. This example may seem whimsical, and yet it perfectly illustrates the context-text-language dialectic for the students. We then ask them if taking a bus in say, a big city in Germany, Munich, for example, would follow these same stages; could we deduce the context from the description of stages and phases of this same exercise by students in Munich if we only had the text and didn't have the geographical information; do they think intense evaluative language would be used by students in Munich to describe the stages of bus taking? This exercise facilitates their understanding of genre as defined by Martin and Rose (2007) "different types of texts that enact various types of social contexts" (MARTIN; ROSE, 2007, pg. 8). They may be oral or written.

After mapping the stages and phases and reflecting on these in other geographical contexts, students then identify which stages are obligatory and which are optional. We explain that the social practice can be understood as a macro structure or, in the terminology of Martin and Rose (2008), macro--genres, which are made up of interdependent genres and micro-genres. For example, in the context of a teacher training course we may have the macro-genre, 'advisor orientation meeting'—a predominantly oral genre. However, within this macro-genre the advisor may be assisting the student practitioner with lesson planning, a

written genre within the macro-genre. Within the lesson plan you may have micro-genres such as written activities, short stories, songs, etc. All of these include staging—at an advisor meeting, the first stage is an introduction stage that includes phases of greeting, reviewing the purpose of the meeting and perhaps the student presenting something he or she has been working on and so forth.

This perspective gives us an efficient framework to both identify the genres that these students will need in their professional and academic lives, and to scaffoldreading, writing, speaking and listening activities for them as EFL learners, as our goal is both pedagogical training, but also English language teaching.. This approach also shares characteristics with an ESP approach and we regularly do an initial Needs Analysis (HUTCHINSON; WATERS, 1987) with our students to identify which genres we will cover during a semester. In addition, this framework also interfaces with Kramsch and Sullivan's (1996) concept of Appropriate Pedagogy, in that the students' particular needs stemming from their socio-geographical positioning are taken into account in the curriculum design so that they may be successful in genres that are relevant to them, appropriate for their grade levels, their cultural context, and effectively contribute to their academic and professional success. For example, lesson planning at the central campus of UFRN, which is in the State's capital city, Natal, will rely heavily on technological support as students will have access to these in their classrooms, whereas, students at the rural campi are training to work under very different cultural, geographical, historical, AND infrastructural conditions, in the Public Elementary and High Schools in rural communities of Rio Grande do Norte. The majority will be in very hot, overcrowded classrooms, without technological support, and which may not even have enough chairs for all of the students, in schools where the teaching of the English language has very low consideration, mainly because many of the teachers who are asked to teach, because of a scarcity of staff and for other reasons, are not trained in this area.

The ideas of Appropriate Pedagogy and the work of Rose at the Koori Center, in the *Learning to Read, and Reading to Learn Project* are models for attending to local needs that provide us with tools to effectively design curriculum in EFL teaching/learning in the context of rural communities in the Seridó region of Rio Grande do Norte   (KRAMSCH; SULLIVAN; ROSE, 2003). Positive outcomes expected are again multiple. Not only do we expect their skills in the English language to rapidly improve, their genre awareness will apply to their native language—Portuguese, as well. Moreover, as future EFL teachers they

will become equipped with a model of language that will make their own curriculum designing easier and relevant to the contexts in which they will be working.

Final considerations

Interests in language skills in teaching and learning foreign language began in several discussions in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics in different subareas, such as: psycholinguistics, discourse analysis and sociolinguistics, for example. The language skills discussions are usually interrelated with learning strategies, a theoretical approach that looks at different aspects of learning strategies and their roles in language learning.

In an effort to make sense of the huge database and numerous research findings in this area, Oxford (1990) differentiates learning strategies into the following categories: (i) cognitive – it involves the identification, reaction, and retrieval of language learning elements. For example, students may use memory-enhancing strategies to help them remember new words; (ii) metacognitive – strategies of this type deal with the planning, monitoring, and evaluation of language learning activities. For example, students may develop a plan for monitoring their progress by constantly comparing their current level of proficiency with the course goals outlined in the curriculum; (iii) affective – strategies are those that serve to regulate emotions, attitudes, and motivation. For example, students may read linguistically simplified books to develop a positive attitude toward reading materials; and (iiii) social – these strategies refer to actions learners take to interact with users of the language. For example, students may seek out opportunities to use the target language with native speakers of the language.

In this way, language learning strategies remain an active area of research. Despite extensive research, many theoretical and practical issues still need to be addressed. Oxford concludes by saying that teachers should routinely conduct research in their own classroom to better understand the numerous factors which affect the choice and skillful use of learning strategies. Besides, it is very important to interrelate learning strategies with language skills. This essay is developed based on the following discussion: (a) teaching grammar; (b) teaching reading; (c) teaching writing; (d) teaching speaking and (e) teaching listening. We shall

explore these topics to demonstrate the importance of the dialogue between learning strategies and language skills in EFL classes.

The *role of grammar* is perhaps one of the most controversial issues in language teaching contexts. In the early parts of the twentieth century, grammar teaching formed an essential part of the language instruction, so much so that other aspects of language learning were either ignored or downplayed. The argument was that if you knew the grammatical rules of the language, you would be able to use it for communication. This concept was strongly challenged in the early 1970's. Knowledge of the grammatical system of the language, it was argued, was but one of the many components which underlay the notion of communicative competence. To be considered a competent user of a language, one needs to know not only the rules of grammar, but also how the rules are used in real communication. During this period, grammar teaching became less prominent, and in some cases, was abandoned.

In recent years, grammar teaching and learning has regained its rightful place in language curriculum. Authors have argued about what grammar we teach and why we teach it, as well as, observed the usefulness of teaching grammar in EFL classes, as, for example in: accuracy, fluency, consciousness-raising and potentially performance, among others. The concern is to develop an explicit knowledge of the grammar of the language, which facilitates the students' abilities to communicate.

In relation to *teaching reading*, since the 1980's a number of advances have been made in research on reading, both in first, second and foreign language contexts. Reading for comprehension is the primary purpose for reading, raising student awareness of main ideas in a text and exploring the organization of a text are essential for good comprehension. Similarly, teachers who model reading skills and strategies overtly, facilitate student performance of these abilities in reading comprehension and provide students with many opportunities for practice and are encouraged in a number of comprehension-enhancing approaches. These approaches often provide the context for specific strategy instruction and for transforming the student into a strategic reader.

There is no doubt that *writing* is the most difficult skill for EFL learners to master. The difficulty lies not only in generating and organizing ideas, but also in translating these ideas into a readable text. The skills involved in writing are highly complex. EFL writers have to pay attention to higher level skills of planning and organizing as well as lower level skills of spelling, punctuation, word choice, and so on. The difficulty becomes even more pronounced

if their language proficiency is weak. With so many conflicting theories around and so many factors to consider regarding implementation, planning and teaching a course in writing can be a daunting task. Which theoretical approaches are we going to adopt? Are we going to use the process approach or the genre-based approach? Or an eclectic approach? What will be the focus of our course? What activities are likely to help students develop their writing skills? How do we treat leaner errors? Do we correct all error types? How do we get students to self-edit? These are some of the issues that teachers can reflect upon and interrelate to learning skills.

A large percentage of the world's language learners study English in order to develop proficiency in *speaking*. The ability to speak a foreign language well is a very complex task if we try to understand the nature of what is involved. To begin with, speaking is used for many different purposes, and each purpose involves different skills. When we use casual conversation, for example, our purposes may be to make social contact with people, to establish rapport, or to engage in discussion with someone, on the other hand, the purpose may be to seek or express opinions, to persuade someone about something, or to clarify information. Each of these different purposes implies knowledge of the rules that account for how spoken language reflects the context or situation in which speech occurs, the participants involved and their specific roles and relationships, and the kind of activity the speakers are involved in. These aspects must be considered for teachers in situations of teaching speaking. Classroom activities should be selected on the basis of problems learners experience with different aspects of speaking and the kinds of interaction the activities provide.

In relation to *teaching listening*, we can say that for many years, listening skills did not receive priority in language teaching. Teaching methods emphasized productive skills, and the relationship between receptive and productive skills was poorly understood. Until recently, the nature of listening in foreign language teaching/learning was ignored by Applied Linguistics, and it was often assumed that listening skills could be acquired through exposure but not really taught. This position has been replaced by an active interest in the role of listening comprehension in second language acquisition, with the development of powerful theories on the nature of language comprehension, and the inclusion of carefully developed listening courses in many EFL and ESL programs.

In addition, we have shown how a Genre approach to EFL teaching/teacher training, from the perspective of SFL, especially as developed by the Sydney School (MARTIN; ROSE,

2008, 2007) can have positive results, using the example of the context of the EFL teacher training program at a rural campus of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil. We perceive the benefits of approaching genre from this perspective, providing explicit scaffolding for these students to develop language skills in oral and written genres that they will use in both their academic and professional lives as future EFL teachers, to provide them with theoretical tools and methods to easily design classes that are relevant and motivating to their students. Aside from also improving their language skills in English, other benefits may include their developing a critical awareness of their own cultural context, and subsequent benefits to the Public Elementary and High School English language programs in the Seridó region where they will be employed, by and large.

Finally, our work has led us to explore the possibility of extending this approach to include an adaptation of the *Learning to Read, Reading to Learn* program as developed by Rose (2005, 2006), which was intended to serve the needs of students in the public school system in Australia who came from communities that are largely organized around oral traditions and were being discriminated against by the very design of the classroom literacy activities aimed at middle class students who typically receive literacy preparation in early childhood, as the culture of reading and books is well established in middle class Australian culture. Thus, the Aboriginal students from communities that function within oral traditions come to formal education without this extensive preparation, and, therefore, struggle in classes that are not designed to make explicit what middle class students have already assimilated by the time they get to grade school, through mother/child reading practices at home. There is evidence that a similar situation exists in the Northeast of Brazil where illiteracy rates are extremely high (NAOE, 2012). Segundo Naoe,

> [...] we are 14 million illiterates, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). Of these the majority is found in the Northeastern region, in municipalities with up to 50 thousand inhabitants, in the population over 15 years of age, among blacks and mestizos, and in the rural zones, in other words, in historically disenfranchised populations. (NAOE, 2012, pg. 1, our translation).

However, if we look deeper than geography, age and race, into the context of the Northeast we also find that oral traditions within this region and among these populations are extremely elaborate social practices integral to the functioning of these communities by

circulating values, judgments and reflections of interpersonal relationships constructing the collective memory: "Brazilian oral literature is composed of elements brought by the three races to the memory of the current population. Indigenous, Portuguese and African populations have songs, dances, stories, war recounts, lullabies, myths, anecdotes, poets and professional singers, an already long and widespread admiration for men who tell stories and sing. (CÂMARA CASCUDO, 2001, pg.27-my translation). Thus there is evidence that in this context literacy rates may not reflect general societal marginalization, but that, similar to the indigenous populations in Australia, reading habits in early childhood are not established in the homes of these communities, nor throughout their school years because oral traditions serve the function of written texts in these communities. It is also clear that public schools have not been successful in creating them. For this reason, we look to adapt the model proposed by Rose (2003, 2008) to this EFL setting. The identification of Genre staging is a central part of this program. It provides explicit scaffolding for these students who do not have this support at home and helps promote successful reading habits as well as providing them will a model for their own curriculum design as future teachers in the Public Elementary and High Schools of the Seridó region. These are just some of the benefits of approaching the teaching/learning of EFL from the perspective of Genre as we have outlined it here. We anticipate that the benefits will extend to the study of their native language as well and their overall success in academic and professional settings.

In conclusion, we recognize the importance of interrelating strategies of learning to language skills, as well as the importance of comprehending the presuppositions implied in each language skill, not only to understand each theoretical perspective, but, in addition, to recognize difficulties and go straight to implementing or improving them.

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