DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 187 146   FL 011 395

AUTHOR   McKay, Sandra Lee
TITLE   A Notional Approach to Writing. CATESOL Occasional
                Papers, No. 5.
INSTITUTION   California Association of Teachers of English to
                Speakers of Other Languages.
PUB DATE   79
NOTE   11p.; Revised version of paper presented at the
                CATESOL State Conference (San Francisco, CA, March
                1978).

EDRS PRICE   MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS   Advanced Students; College Second Language Programs;
                Communicative Competence (Languages); *English
                (Second Language); Grammar; Language Proficiency;
                Peer Evaluation; Persuasive Discourse; *Rhetoric;
                *Second Language Instruction; Teaching Methods;
                *Writing (Composition); *Writing Exercises; *Writing
                Skills
IDENTIFIERS   *Notional Functional Syllabus

ABSTRACT
                Sample notional writing materials for use with
advanced level ESL students are presented. The basic assumption is
that effective writing demands a feel for one's audience and a sense
of purpose, integrating function (what is being said), situation (to
whom it is being said), and grammar (how it is being said). The
functions selected are those that students use in writing academic
papers. Each lesson begins with exercises introducing expressions for
a particular function such as focusing, substantiating, recommending,
or predicting. Within each function, students take the roles of
different speakers/writers with different purposes in order to
practice writing for specific situations. Grammar is related to the
expression of a particular situation, fostering both grammatical and
communicative competency in writing. Following the practice, peer
correction exercises with guidelines reinforce grammatical points and
effective writing techniques. (PMJ)

California Association - Teachers of
English to Speakers of Other Languages

CATESOL Occasional Papers·
Number 5 (Fall 1979)

A NOTIONAL APPROACH TO WRITING

Sandra Lee McKay
San Francisco State. University

*This paper exemplifies and presents the rationale for notional writing materials
which are currently being developed for use with advanced level ESL students.
The basic assumption·of these materials is that effective writing demands a clear
sense of why something is being written and for whom it is being written. The
materials are organized according.to the language functions that typically occur
within academic papers; such as, focusing, substantiating, recommending, and pre-
dicting. Within each function, students are.presented with a variety of voices
and audiences. The main advantage of this approach is that it provides the
teacher and the students with a framework.in which to judge whether or not the
writing is effective in terms of a specific purpose and appropriate in terms of
a specific situation.*

Every new era in materials development brings its own terminology. Today in the
field of ESL, with a shift from a structural approach to a cognitive approach to
language learning, a new set of terminology is being developed. Whereas previous-
ly we spoke of structured, controlled, or grammatical materials, we now have situ-
ational, functional, notional, or communicative materials. There are two dangers
to the coining of a new terminology. First, the terms may provide nothing more
than a new name for an old thing. Thus, although the materials may be labeled
"situational," the only difference may be that the pattern practice takes place
in a restaurant rather.than· in a classroom. Second, the use of the new terminol-
ogy may result in a confused notion of what the basic assumptions are that inform
the new materials. In order to avoid these dangers, an explanation of the theo-
retical basis of notional writing materials is needed.

D. A. Wilkins (1976: 18) in his book, <u>Notional Syllabuses</u>, maintains that in de-
signing a notional syllabus, "instead of asking how speakers of the language ex-
press themselves or when or where they use language, we ask what it is they com-
municate through language. We are then able to organize language teaching in
terms of content rather than the form of the language." The first question that
has to be asked, then, in designing notional writing materials is: What do ESL
students need to communicate in writing? As students they will clearly need to
be able to write academic papers but, in the future, they may well need to com-
municate the concerns of their field to an international audience.

In some ways the assumptions that inform notional writing materials are similar
to traditional rhetorical concerns. They differ, however, in two important ways.
First, they provide a greater variety of writing voices than is included in most
rhetoric books. Secondly, notional writing materials give explicit attention to
relating a particular function, such as predicting, to a particular grammatical

point, as, for instance, the use of models. Notional writing materials, though, share the following rhetorical concern expressed by Steinmann (1967: 21-22): "Rhetoric, then, is concerned with the effective choice of synonymous expressions; but, as the word 'effective' suggests, it is concerned, not with the utterances only, the mere forms, but with some of their relations to other things." (Italics mine.)

Those "other things" which determine effectiveness involve two primary considerations: first; the purpose or function of the discourse; and second, the context or situation. Once these two elements are defined, the question of which form is most effective can be answered. For example, suppose an employer decided to write a short memo to an employee, regarding an alternate time for their meeting. His function or purpose would be one of suggesting (although given the role relationship, it might be closer to directing or commanding).

There are, in English, a number of stock phrases for making suggestions; such as, "May I suggest," "I would suggest," "How about?" "What about?", etc. Given these options, the employer might write.

> Since I have another meeting on Monday at three o'clock, may I suggest that we meet at two o'clock?

Or he might write:

> I'm tied up at three o'clock on Monday. How about two o'clock?

In this instance, the choice of the most "effective" form depends on what the employer wants to say to his employee about their relationship. The first sentence assumes a distant relationship with his employee; the second, a relationship of comradery. Both, however, fulfill the stated purpose of suggesting a change of meeting time. Whereas most native speakers would immediately see the distinction between the two sentences, many international students have not yet mastered this level of language use. To aid international students in developing this skill, textbooks could present lists of items for expressing a particular function, such as making suggestions. This method, however, does little to aid students in knowing when to choose which form, so that their writing would be appropriate in terms of a specific level of formality, and effective in terms of a particular purpose. The basic aim of the writing materials which follow is to help students develop this appropriateness and effectiveness in their writing.

These materials were designed for an advanced writing class in which the students had TOEFL Scores of between 450 and 525. The first step in developing the materials was to determine what type of writing the students were doing and what fields they were in. Questionnaires were distributed to the students which asked them to list their major fields and to describe two writing assignments that they had completed in their other classes during the semester. The survey showed that, typically, the students were either science or business majors, and that, in general, they did very little writing in their other classes except for an occasional term paper.

Although most ESL students need to develop skill in academic writing, very few of them will be writing these kinds of papers once they graduate. Clearly, a well·designed writing course should meet not only immediate writing needs,—but also future needs. One way to accomplish this task is to organize writing materials according to the various uses of language, such as informing, predicting, clarifying, etc., since these functions are present in all types of written discourse. Predictions, for example, can occur in academic papers as well as in business reports and in scientific journals.

The main problem in designing writing materials based on functions is to decide which functions to deal with and how to order these functions. Since one goal of these materials is to develop academic writing skills, one answer to the problem of selection is to determine which functions typically occur in an academic paper, and in what sequence they occur. Within an academic paper, the following functions tend to occur in a fairly regular pattern:

I.   Inform/Focus   What does the paper intend to do?

II.   Clarify   How will the central terms be defined?

III.   Classify   What are the major components of the issue?

IV.   Analyze   How can the components be organized in terms of time, space and/or effect?

V.   Substantiate   What support can be offered for the assertions being made?

VI.   Compare/Contrast   Are there any similarities and differences between the major assertions

VII.   Agree/Disagree   What are the writer's reactions to the issues being presented?

VIII.   Recommend   What should be done in regard to the issues being discussed?

IX.   Predict   What will be the likely results of the recommendations?

This list of functions forms the basis for the organization of the materials. By organizing the materials in this manner, the students have an opportunity to practice writing the central components of an academic paper. The intention, however, is also to meet the students' future writing needs. In order to do this, the situations under each function deal with a great variety of career backgrounds.

Each lesson begins with exercises which introduce the phrases used in expressing a particular function. For recommending, there are exercises using such terms as: I would recommend, May I suggest, It would be best to, etc. The goal of these exercises is to help students become familiar with the forms that are typically used to express a function.

The following is an example of an exercise designed to introduce students to
phrases of <u>definition</u>:

Practice Using Terms: Define the following terms by completing the sentences:

1. Define a non-resident student as the term is used at your university for deter-
   mining tuition rates.

   A non-resident student <u>is</u> anyone who....

2. Define an upper-division student as the term is used at your university.

   An upper-division student <u>is defined as</u> a student who....

3. Define a full-time student as the term is used for purpose of issuing visas.

   For purposes of issuing visas, a full-time student <u>is taken to be</u> any student
   who....

4. Define a grade of incomplete as the term is used at your university.

   An incomplete grade <u>signifies</u> that....

5. Define the meaning of a student in good standing as the term is used at your
   university.

   By a student in good standing <u>is meant</u> a student who....

Following this exercise, there is a list of common expressions used in <u>defining</u>
which can be used as a reference for the student.

These introductory exercises on common expressions are followed by exercises on
the grammar and punctuation which is relevant to the particular function of the
lesson. If a student will need to use quotations in substantiating an assertion,
then punctuating quotations is the focus of the punctuating exercise. If a stu-
dent needs to use models in making predictions, then models are the focus of the
grammar exercise in that lesson. The basic purpose of the introductory exercises
is to provide the student with all the forms that are needed to express a partic-
ular function in a specific writing context.

The next part of the lesson provides situations which involve a number of writing
voices such as a geologist, an advertising agent, a member of a jury, etc. The
various writing contexts allow the teacher or student to select the situation
which is most relevant to the needs and interests of the students. Some of the
situations are highly controlled and provide the student with all of the data,
as well as directions for how to organize the data. The situation listed below
is an example of the ones included in the initial chapter on Inform/Focus.

SITUATION: The Immigration and Naturalization Officer.

You are an officer for the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Recently,
there has been a great deal of discussion about the problem of the illegal entry
of people into the United States. Because of these discussions, the director of

the U.S. Office of Immigration and Naturalization has asked you to submit a report in which you recommend various solutions to the problem of illegal aliens.

TASK:

Write the introduction to your report on illegal aliens in the United States. As background information, you may use some or all of the following information.

In 1967, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service apprehended 100,000 illegal aliens.

In 1977, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service apprehended 750,000 illegal aliens.

The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service estimates that for every person who is apprehended, four to five other persons avoid capture and deportation.

A study conducted for the U.S. Immigration Service in 1976 indicated that 8.2 million people were in the United States illegally.

(Source: U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service.)

Your introduction should have two parts:

Inform: Several general statements about the problem of illegal aliens in the United States.

Focus: A statement of the purpose of this report. To suggest solutions to the problem of illegal aliens.

Other situations are much less structured. For example, the following situation requires the students to gather their own data and to make a limited assertion based on this data:

SITUATION: The Dean's Assistant

You work for the Dean of Academic Affairs. You have been asked to write a report on the cost of textbooks. The Dean believes that, in general, science majors are being asked to pay more for their textbooks than are humanities majors. He wants you to write a report regarding this issue.

TASK:

In order to substantiate the claim that science majors pay more for books that do humanities majors, you need to survey the cost of textbooks. Begin by randomly selecting one upper-division course from each of the departments listed on the following chart. Then compute the total cost of the textbooks for each of the courses that you have selected. Once you have this information, compute the average cost of textbooks for humanities students and science students. Finally, write the Dean a brief report which summarizes the findings of your limited investigations. It is possible that your findings will refute rather than support the Dean's assertion.

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES

Department	Course	Cost of Textbooks
Classics		
Comparative Literature		
English		
Foreign Languages		
Journalism		
Philosophy		
	TOTAL..............	
	AVERAGE COST.............	

SCHOOL OF SCIENCE

Department	Course	Cost of Textbooks
Biology		
Chemistry		
Geology		
Mathematics		
Engineering		
Physics and		
Astronomy		
	TOTAL..............	
	AVERAGE COST.............	

Each lesson concludes with correction exercises of student papers that were written in response to the situations. The exercises have guidelines which ask the students to correct errors that the students themselves are most likely to make, or have made in writing their response to the situation. The following is an example of a peer correction exercise. It involves a situation in which an insurance agent writes a letter to a prospective customer about the types of life insurance offered by his company. The students have been provided with the basic information about the types of life insurance. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1.

PEER CORRECTION OF STUDENT COMPOSITIONS

SITUATION: THE INSURANCE AGENT

PENN MUTUAL LIFE INSURANCE
5678 "C" Street
San Francisco, California   94111

March 13, 1978

Mr. Andrew Smith
1234 "B" Street
San Francisco, California   94103

Dear Mr. Smith:

⒜

In response to your letter, I am glad to let you know that we have three
types of life insurance.

⒝ The first one is term policy. People who purchase a term life insurance
policy just have a temporary protection within a certain period. For example,
the father in the family wants a temporary protection on his life while his
children grow up. If he dies within a specified period, his children will get
the money.

⒞ The second is the whole life insurance. It is the most common type which
provides an insurance protection of the entire life. When the policyholder dies,
the beneficiary will receive the face value of the insurance. It is a fexible
policy that can meet many different needs.

⒟ And the last one is the endowment policy. This type provides a certain
amount of money in the future, besides the life insurance protection. People
can get back a sum of money after the certain time.

In brief, if you check out these types of life insurance, I think you have
some idea about life insurance. Please let me know your decision.

Sincerely, yours.

nc

Practice in Correcting:

Complete the following steps in order to correct the grammatical errors and in-appropriate language in the selection by <u>the insurance agent.</u>

1. In order to practice using common phrases for classifying, write in the space below an alternate way of stating the four underlined phrases.

    a.

    b.

    c.

    d.

2. Wherever there is a circled verb ⬭ , make the correction in subject-verb agreement.

3. Wherever there is an underlined verb ∼∼∼∼ , make the correction in verb tense.

4. Wherever there is an enclosed preposition ▭ , replace it with the correct preposition.

5. Wherever there is a carat ∧ , make the necessary correction in the use of the article.

6. Wherever there is a punctuation mark enclosed in a triangle △ , make the necessary correction.

7. Replace the verb, check out, in the last paragraph with a more formal verb.

These materials attempt to integrate the concerns of function, situation and grammar. By selecting and ordering the functions on the basis of academic papers, the students are learning to write all of the core functions of an academic paper. By expressing these functions in a variety of situations, the students are being exposed to specialized vocabulary that may be beneficial in their careers. Furthermore, the situations provide a specific context in which to decide whether or not the particular form that the writer has chosen to express a prediction or to make a suggestion is appropriate and effective. Finally, in this approach, grammatical concerns are not isolated, but are clearly related to the expression of a particular function. In this way, notional writing materials integrate the concerns of function (what is being said), situation (to whom is it being said), and grammar (how is it being said). In general, they provide an opportunity to meet students' immediate and future writing needs, and to develop both grammatical and communicative competency in writing.

38.

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Table of Contents