

own samples of "junk mail," analyzing them, and then using the convention of letter writing itself to share with their classmates and teacher their discoveries, students may teach themselves about writing. For as Ann Berthoff points out in *Forming, Thinking, Writing: The Composing Imagination*, "Whatever you really learn, you teach yourself. . . . What you really learn is what you discover—and you learn to discover by questioning" (9). Study of unsolicited letters collected by students and teachers may naturally lead to students' composing still other letters. For example, Mimi Schwartz has developed an excellent sequence of letter writing assignments that enable students to define their voices effectively, and some teachers may find the ungraded weekly letter assignment I describe in *Rhetoric Review* to be of use.²

Certainly paying mind to "junk mail" may make us, students and teachers alike, more keenly aware of the multitude of letters all around us, from those mechanical ones on milk cartons and grocery sacks to Andrei Sakharov's thoughtful "open letter" concerning the danger of thermonuclear war, from those succinct, incisive letters on "60 Minutes" to those powerfully evocative ones comprising Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Moreover, the obviousness of this resource for teaching writing should not deter us, for poet Howard Nemerov has imaginatively suggested that "a part of teaching ought to consist in making the familiar strange," and Annie Dillard, in her chapter "Seeing" in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, recommends our creating the "artificial obvious" so that we may see, really see.³ Coming to see more clearly, to understand more fully, the process of writing through study of unsolicited mail may lead us toward that sense of genuine discovery that Nobel Laureate Albert Szent-Györgyi defines as "seeing what everybody has seen and thinking what nobody has thought."⁴ And that goal, many of us would argue, we may prize more than the new Chevrolet Camaro which, in our case, we have not got.

Notes

¹James J. Murphy, "The Art of Letter Writing (*Ars Dictaminis*)," in *Medieval Rhetoric: A Select Bibliography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), pp. 55-70.

²Mimi Schwartz, "Defining Voice Through Letter Writing," *The English Record* (First Quarter, 1984), 10-14; Bob J. Frye, "A Habit of Being: Some Uses of Personal Letters in Freshman Composition," *Rhetoric Review*, 1, No. 2 (January 1983), 89-119.

³Howard Nemerov, *Figures of Thought: Speculation on the Meaning of Poetry and Other Essays* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1978), p. 106; Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (London: Pan Books, 1976), p. 29.

⁴*Search and Discovery: A Tribute to Albert Szent-Györgyi*, ed. Benjamin Kaminer (New York: Academic Press, 1977), inscription opposite the back of the title page.

COMPOSITION AND LANGUAGE SCIENCE

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I. Rhetoric and Grammar

The teaching of English as part of a university education is a relatively recent practice. With the general acceptance of the scientific method and the establishment of practical courses in the curriculum, the structure of higher education in America had drastically changed by the end of the nineteenth century. America was changing from an oral to a print culture and by the beginning of the twentieth century classical languages were no longer required in universities. With the necessity of teaching the print code conventions of the native language, the focus of rhetoric shifted from oratory to composition (Berlin, 1984: 34). By 1924, with increasing specialization of knowledge, English teachers and linguists were recognized as members of separate communities (Parker, 1981: 14).

Since English has become part of a university education, rhetorical approaches have dominated the teaching of writing. Even today, many teachers and researchers in the field of composition offer the western rhetorical tradition as their heritage (Lunsford, 1984; Berlin, 1984; Herrington, 1983). This tradition dates back to the Greeks, who viewed language from the practical standpoint of its use in oratory and verbal art. The rhetoric of Aristotle, which was designed for public speaking situations involving small groups of the ruling elite, remained the most influential throughout the Middle Ages (Berlin, 1984; Pearson, 1977: 15).

A rhetoric is defined as "a social invention arising out of a particular time and place, a peculiar social context, establishing . . . the conditions that make a peculiar kind of communication possible . . ." (Berlin, 1984: 1). This "peculiar social context," otherwise known as a rhetorical context, is defined by four basic elements that are thought to constitute the communication process in any given circumstance: reality, interlocuter, audience and language. Rhetorical theories are thought to differ in their basic definitions of reality, human nature and language, thereby lending a different significance to the rhetorical elements defined in each theory (Berlin, 1984: 1-10). Seen in this light, rhetoric seems to emphasize the belief system of the community more than the verbal behavior in the practice of communication.

The traditional grammar model can also be traced back to Greek culture. In principle, this grammar was designed as a descriptive science, though it was a static model. Such concepts as "parts of speech, subject, predicate, etc.," along with the basic technique of "paradigm analysis," began with Greek and Roman scholars. The scholars of the Middle Ages followed the Roman tradition, except that they added the notion of a "universal grammar"—a grammar inherent to all languages, one that was based on logic. Believing Latin to be best suited for expressing abstract, logical thought, they took the grammar of Latin as representative of this universal language pattern. Throughout the Middle Ages, Latin continued to be used as the language of educated Europe. The traditional grammar model, which continues to influence the teaching of language skills in today's schools, is based on a model that was developed for Greek, adapted to Latin, and later imposed on European national languages (Pearson, 1977: 1-15).

An interest in the study of national languages came about with the invention of the printing press, the rise of a literate middle class, and the scholarly community's acceptance of literary works written in national languages (Pearson, 1977: 23-33). In American universities, the dialect of the upper middle class, the dialect of those in power in business and government, eventually emerged as the standard and was accepted as a convention of written form. In keeping with the needs of a socially mobile community, the pedagogies in rhetoric and grammar were designed as prescriptive, emphasizing the "correct" use of language (Pearson, 1977: 24). The mastery of superficial correctness was offered as the key to the command of print code conventions. By the end of the nineteenth century, composition textbooks emphasized stylistic matters: forms of argumentation, principles of unity, coherence and emphasis, and discussions of usage and grammar (Berlin, 1984: 73).

Traditional grammarians, who remain prescriptive in their approach, have historically presented grammar to students in the form of rules of usage and diagramming exercises. However, research in writing has repeatedly shown that studies in grammar do nothing to improve a native speaker's writing, and that it is not necessary to call student's attention to either prescriptive or descriptive grammar (Sipple, 1983: 3).

According to De Beaugrande, attempts to apply linguistics to the teaching of writing have failed because attention was not given to the "motivations" of writers, nor were attempts made to relate different language structures to the conventions of particular communities (1978: 136). However, the primary reason that studies in linguistics have not been applicable to the teaching of writing is that the concerns and goals of the linguist are different from those of the rhetorician. The approach of linguistics is descriptive, with emphasis on language as it is produced spontaneously. Human language, especially syntax, is viewed as a universal and innate function, a result of the biological and genetic heritage of the species. The focus has been on describing the elemental structures of language and their interaction; describing the formal properties of syntax apart from meaning and context. However, rhetoric has also failed to be sufficient for understanding writing. With its emphasis primarily on the belief system that the community holds, and not the interaction of its participants, rhetoric offers no systematic analysis of the distinctions between and the interactions of "knowledge," knowledge of language, knowledge of the world, knowledge of how to use language in general and knowledge of how to use language in particular situations (see Green, 1982).

In linguistic study, a concern with the formal principles of the syntax of the sentence has also necessarily led to a neglect of the study of language as a way of representing meaning and as a communicative tool. However, while the concepts of transformational generative grammar may be far removed from the teaching of writing, the notion of linguistic competence is perhaps the best evidence for not offering students any formal instruction in grammar (Sipple, 1983: 4). But those who design writing pedagogies base their decisions on their basic assumptions about language. Even though syntax is not a component of the native speaker's language that is learned or taught, much has been borrowed from the linguistic formalization of the sentence and misapplied in composition. Sentence combining exercises were designed in an attempt to increase the "syntactic fluency" of the writer, which was measured by the number and length of T-units per sentence. As it turns out, not surprisingly, imitated learning is not relevant to the acquisition of syntax, and this syn-

tactic yardstick is not an appropriate measure for what writing teachers evaluate as good writing (Neilsen and Piche, 1981).

Distinguishing language from communication, linguistics has not been of much use to the understanding of written academic discourse. Distinguishing language from thought, meaning has been defined in terms of semantic interpretations or logical propositions. However, writers and speakers begin with a thought that they want to express or convey, which may be conceived in other than verbal form, and then encode that thought, or a portion of it, through strings of natural language (Schank and Abelson, 1977: 7). The problem of how writers generate ideas and an overall plan for the production of discourse is crucial to the writing teacher (Matsubashi and Quinn, 1984: 315).

II. Discourse Processes and Cognitive Science

The process of human understanding that occurs with the structuring of discourse, specifically "composition in the English language," should be of major concern to writing teachers (Dowst, 1983: 13). Studies in cognitive psychology and artificial intelligence, which address the question of human understanding specifically with respect to language, may provide some answers. Cognitive psychologists are concerned with how concepts are structured in the human mind, how these concepts are developed, and the pragmatics of using them in understanding and behavior. Researchers in artificial intelligence are attempting to devise a computer program that can interpret and interact with the environment through language. A major task of cognitive science is to "indicate the types of knowledge people have, (and) how that knowledge is represented, organized, accessed and used" (Bower and Cirilo, 1985: 77).

In common with the sentence level model in linguistic study, the information processing approach aims to make explicit the tacit system of rules that all language users share; it attempts to describe the cognitive processes that give rise to discourse (Matsubashi and Quinn, 1984: 308-315). Furthermore, it is assumed that rules are arranged in both a hierarchical and linear order. The two dominant forms of representation and description of such systems are in terms of procedural systems and semantic networks.

Both procedural and network models rely heavily on ideas about the construction and operation of memory for their definition. Memory allows one to play back or recall past experiences or events, along with the elements that compose them, in order to understand past and present events, to predict future or possible ones, and to act on that knowledge. However, within these theories, memory is looked at as a cognitive function primarily with respect to its interaction with language. This does not necessarily entail that memory would operate in the same manner for functions besides the verbal representation and communication of meaning, or that the model indicates or describes all types of memory. Though visual imagery is part of the thought processes, visual and kinesthetic responses cannot, as yet, be described or represented adequately to be integrated with the verbal form of the theory (Schank and Abelson, 1977: 5).

In cognitive science, perception and learning are represented by a series of stages during which particular mechanisms perform basic functions. The components of memory are long term memory (LTM) and a central processor. Long term memory stores more permanent kinds of knowledge that are not being used, while the central processor comprises short term memory and working memory. Though the component model is a useful tool for the representation of structures of memory, long and

short term memory can also be viewed as different states of the same basic memory schema (Bower and Cirilo, 1985: 71-79).

A schema-theoretic approach to discourse describes the procedures of working memory. Within this model, the reconstruction of elements of memory with respect to comprehension or production in the verbal code is represented in an arrangement of linear and hierarchical sequencing. Working memory, a set of conditions and procedures, operates according to general and specific plans for performing some task. A plan is a structured set of goals, subgoals and anticipated actions (Schank and Abelson, 1977: 70-108; Bower and Cirilo, 1985: 71-79).

On encountering new information or a new situation, a general schema is utilized through the process of "instantiation" (Bower and Cirilo, 1985: 78). A schema is similar to a frame, a prototype, a structural description of general knowledge about an object or event. When an input is identified through processes of pattern recognition, its internal representation becomes active in short term memory. Working memory then acts on that internal representation, to assimilate it with present knowledge.

One of the principle operations of working memory is a procedure for recognizing repeated or similar experiences. When the pattern of enough episodes is alike, they are remembered in terms of a standard, generalized script—an operational sequence of events. On another level, each event within a schema or frame can be seen as an episode with its own subscript (Schank and Abelson, 1977: 17-19). A script represents a stereotypical sequence of events for a familiar situation (Schank and Burstein, 1985: 147). Plans, which are made up of general information about how to achieve goals, are the mechanism that underlie scripts and allow people to comprehend situations that they have never before encountered.

The procedural model of cognitive processing was developed according to the model of the digital computer . . . "with all of its symbolic rule-based method of processing knowledge" (Allman, 1986: 24). However, new computers are also being developed that work according to a networking system, where memory is stored throughout the network. Unlike a sequential operation, the machine acts collectively on all the data at once through an associative network. Many researchers, even among those who are developing network models, believe that the processes of understanding and/or production of language probably work through a combination of serial based procedures and "parallel, connectionist networks" (Allman, 1986: 31).

Some of this research in cognitive science has been applied to theory and teaching in composition. By providing a description of sequential operations, schema theory can be a tool for analyzing invention strategies, interpretive strategies, and production, all in relation to verbal representation (De Beaugrande, 1978: 137-140; Mills, 1984). Dillon seems to follow an associative network model of cognition in his *Constructing Texts: A Theory of Composition and Style*. Emphasizing the higher level processing that occurs with the instantiation of a schema, he notes that it is a "faulty assumption" to see reading as occurring by way of bottom-up processing (1-3). Schemata are of prime importance because they perform three functions: organization, integration, and prediction (1981: 51-52):

. . . All writing is interpreted against a background of beliefs, knowledge and concerns that the writer believes are accessible to the reader (59).

Flower and Hayes call on the significance of long term memory, working memory, goals and plans, in their "Cognitive Process Theory of Writing." They see writing as a goal-oriented pro-

cess, as both a "strategic and a thinking problem" (1977: 449). Goals are arranged in a hierarchical network and are of two kinds; process and content. An instructor who approaches writing as a problem solving situation must help students set up goals and find operators—directions or procedures that will help them reach these goals.

Finding or generating ideas for writing involves the retrieval of information from long term memory. As an alternative to traditional invention strategies, Flower and Hayes outline heuristics that embody problem solving strategies (1977). In this model, writing is not taught as a linear sequence of stages involving prewriting, writing and rewriting. In fact, the reestablishment of goals is part of a continuous plan.

The problems of writers are also partially explained in terms of problem solving strategies. According to this model, good writers work well at different levels of goals simultaneously, and that they regenerate plans in light of what they learn. In contrast, poor writers are thought to work on only one goal level; they either remain with a top level goal that is so general that it prevents them from developing specific operational goals (for example: write an essay about the changes in your life since you started college), or they depend on low level goals and devote all their attention to such things as sentence structure or spelling (1981).

A schema-theoretic approach to writing is valuable because knowledge is defined in procedural terms, as a means of construction or composition (Mills, 1984: 5-7). As a representation of knowledge, and in the acquisition of knowledge, scripts provide a schematic representation of events, their component parts, and the props and roles associated with the event, allowing people to organize and interpret their experience. They constitute a "cognitive context within which relatively advanced cognitive and linguistic skills can be displayed" (French, Lucarillo, Seidman and Nelson, 1985: 1-3).

However, communication always takes place in an environmental or social context as well. Cognitive science aims to make explicit the cognitive processes that give rise to discourse, but it is not concerned with the particulars of an individual discourse community or the initiation of new members. The relationships between and among the writer, the language function and context, and the subject matter, are important to the composition teacher. A writer, drawing on his knowledge of language, his knowledge of past experience and his expectations for future events, composes a discourse within a distinct language community. How can a social reality be incorporated in a procedural design for writing?

III. Discourse Form and Sociolinguistics

Because the choices that writers make are not only influenced by cognitive factors, research that focuses on the social nature of the act of writing provides a useful complement to research in cognitive science. Such research would focus on the social environment as a context for one's writing: "e.g., the particular social purpose to be accomplished, the expectations of the audience, and the knowledge of what counts as good reasons in a given context" (Herrington, 1983: 305). However, within the traditional rhetorical approaches to teaching writing, the notion of context is often simplified and described as being composed of three basic elements: purpose, audience and thesis (Cowan, 1983: 48-52).

Our knowledge of the recurring typical aspects of context guides our action in particular cases. It seems important,

then, to study what conventions we learn as we participate in various communities and also how we learn them (Herrington, 1983: 307).

Within a social context, language not only has to be appropriate for the speaker using it, but also suitable for a community, a particular occasion and situation. Variations in language that are linked to occupation, profession, topic or situation have been termed registers (Trudgill, 1974: 100-107). All languages and cultures have register variation. The terminology of rhetoric, which is virtually the same as it was when developed in the Renaissance, is not explicit or extensive enough to adequately describe "context" (Hymes, 1972: 51).

A speech community (a term that is used here interchangeably with discourse community, language community, interpretive community, etc.) is defined as a community that shares rules for both the conduct and interpretation of speech acts, sharing at least one common linguistic code. In this definition, the description begins with the social rather than the linguistic reality. That is, one first looks at the social psychology of the group, and then at the functions, forms, purposes and features of language use therein (Hymes, 1967: 18).

The notion of a speech community implies certain assumptions about the members that constitute such a community. It is assumed that an individual can participate in more than one community, and that to participate in any community he must know the conventions for the use of the language. The tacit knowledge of members of a community makes communication possible by serving as a guide to the linguistic choices that individuals make in specific situations, a guide for both the speaker/writer and the hearer/reader (Herrington, 1983: 40-43).

Shared knowledge is a necessary condition for any communication. Notions about norms of interpretation imply that a community shares a common belief system. The shared presuppositions of an interpretive community include knowledge of the social purpose for the communication, lines of reasoning, roles of the speaker and hearer, and typical community expectations (Herrington, 1983: 307; Fish, 1980: 94).

Norms of interaction are the specific behaviors and properties of such that accompany acts of speech (Hymes, 1967: 24-25). A community is a social structure whose members have particular roles, and therefore norms of interaction. The appropriateness and effectiveness of language use, the particular significance of language and language features, are to a large extent governed by the purposes and concerns of a particular community.

Speech events are activities that are directly governed by rules for the use of speech. Ethnographic studies show that communities differ significantly in the roles and meaning of speech, its value or significance in the community, and the interaction of the members of the community. For example, among the Araucanians of Chile, the best orator was the leader, while the Abipon of Argentina chose their leader on the basis of his skill in battle. The Iroquois leaders were chosen on the basis of eloquence and skill in both oratory and battle (Hymes, 1972: 42-44). Furthermore, within the linguistic community of the Yakan of the Philippines, a taxonomy of four levels of speech event has been differentiated in terms of the purposes and outcomes of language use (Frake, 1972).

The categories of purpose and outcome are crucial to distinguishing the varieties and significance of speech events within a community. Research in writing shows that the function and significance of writing differs between disciplines, serving problem solving processes that are specific to a community (see Mallet, 1977; Collins and Seidman, 1980). Writing in the sciences

is seen as mere "reporting" in comparison to the "restructuring" of knowledge that is thought to take place during the activity of writing within English departments. That is, within a community of English teachers, the writing process itself is viewed as an experience of gaining knowledge, whereas in the sciences, most of the learning has taken place in the form of experimentation and analysis before the organization into written discourse, the writing process, actually begins (Herrington, 1983: 26-29).

Perhaps scientific communities are subcultures that are bilingual with print codes, where the formal language of the science is functioning in a prestige role. Though every discipline has a lexical pool that is common, the "jargon" of the discipline, in the sciences there is more than jargon, there are formal or procedural languages. This could be any one of the formal languages of logic, linguistics, statistics, chemistry, etc., that are generally incomprehensible to the rest of the English speaking community. Most of the learning or work could take place in the formal language, while the reporting for a broader community of interest takes place in English. In contrast, the only language used in a community of English teachers is English.

Implicit in sociolinguistic study is the assumption that social context contributes to the form and meaning of language. Focusing on the aspect of role relationships, some research in language learning reports on the interaction of teacher and student. Studies of the verbal interaction that takes place in learning contrast those situations in which teachers dominate the discussion with those in which teachers encourage student participation, and suggest that by limiting the student's verbal interaction to brief comments, a teacher limits their learning. However, the two approaches can also be viewed as alternative communication strategies, perhaps serving different functions in different situations (Kantor, Kirby and Goetz, 1981: 298-299).

In the analysis of a community, and the conventions within a community, notions of norms of interaction would implicate a social structure, the categories of roles within such a structure, and the norms of interaction between them. Questions of variations in verbal behavior assume that we live in a world in which communities have a plurality of code varieties, and in which language serves several roles (Hymes, 1967: 10-24). A sociolinguistic study of written composition would first take into account the community. How do community values and practices impinge on the use of written language and on the acquisition of such use? What function does the language serve in the community? In this particular situation? Is there only one written language? What community or personal value is placed on the language(s) and its function? Who uses it? When? Where? With whom? What are the norms of interaction with the community? Within this particular situation? How is the non-member initiated into the language community? What are the characteristic forms and features of the written discourse?

An environmental or social context subsumes information about presuppositions, setting, participants, roles, purpose, outcome, etc. Within communities, each speech event has a characteristic structure, a subset of these principles that apply in regular sequences, with typical participants. Structural rules, conventions, the norms of interaction, all refer to the salient patterns of the behavior of participants in a speech event, and the verbal patterns in the discourse that are characteristic of such an event. Written language use is governed by the structures and processes of language, cognition and culture. Given this, the study of language science has much to contribute to both theory and teaching in writing.

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TRAGEDY IN THE CLASSROOM

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This is a small story about the murder of one of my colleagues at a small state school in the West. (You may have heard about the incident. It made the wire services at least once, although the death of an academic in a small Western town is hardly good copy in New York or Baltimore.) I share the story here because my colleague's death is important to *all* academics—and writing teachers in particular. In many ways, his is our life. His are our concerns. But his is, hopefully, not our fate.

I did not know Jack Filby personally. His death, in fact, gave me the opportunity to teach at the University for the first time. I inherited his office with two shelves of old student notebooks, a drawer of old papers, and underneath the desk, two cardboard apple boxes of old letters and memos to various people, including many of his students. He was an incredible letter writer and apparently encouraged many of his students to develop long-term relationships with him through various letters and memos passed back and forth during and between classes.

Of the papers, by far the most important were those that related to Melvin Potts, a thirty-seven-year-old student enrolled in one of Jack's introductory English 110 classes. From these papers, I was able to piece together at least part of Jack's story, and just this year, I had the opportunity to interview Melvin himself at a state correctional facility in Boise, Idaho, where he was serving time for some recent embezzlement and mail fraud. To my surprise, he was particularly candid with me and even instructed his mother to allow me to look through some of the boxes of his life stored in her garage.