MODES OF DISCOURSE IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Tetiana Maslova
National Technical University of Ukraine "Kyiv Polytechnic Institute"

The term "mode of discourse" may be used synonymously with "text type", and traditionally falls into narration, description, exposition, and argument. The idea of employing modes of discourse for educational purposes, especially for teaching writing, was introduced in the late nineteenth century. Since then, there has always been some criticism of this approach, so the objective of the present paper is to summarize the variety of modes of discourse identified by different classifications, point out the possible drawbacks of mode of discourse pedagogy, and finally give recommendations on how to make the most of it in the English language classroom.

Considering the classic linguistic studies of text typology, one finds out that, although the classification principles can widely vary, there are a few types of written communication that are easily distinguished among the others (see Table 1).

Table 1. Traditional text types classified in terms of communicative intentions.

Classification by Text type	James Kinneavy	Eron Werlich	Robert Longacre
1	2	3	4
Narration	Changes are discussed from a dynamic view of reality, indicating causality as well as chronology of events.	Perceptions of factual, conceptual phenomena are differentiated in the temporal context.	Temporal succession and agent orientation are both evident.
Description	Focus is on individual characteristics of an object, studied in a static view.	Perceptions of factual phenomena are differentiated in the spacial context.	
Evaluation (argumentation, behavioural mode)	The potential for the reality to be different is considered, with the aim to "pronounce judgment".	Relations between the concepts are evaluated through finding similarities, contrasts, and transformations.	It is the identity of the agent(s) that matters, rather than the chronology.

1	2	3	4
Exposition (explanation)		Comprehension of general concepts is achieved through differentiation by analysis and/or synthesis.	It is neither temporally sequenced, nor agent oriented.
Instruction (procedural mode)		Planning of future behavior is conducted.	There is temporal succession, but no agent orientation.

In the 80ies and the following years James R. Martin in collaboration of fellow researchers elaborated a generic schemata of "large families of texts", possessing prototypical functional, structural and linguistic features. This originally developed in the Australian tradition taxonomy has consequently resulted into a language-based approach to teaching and learning, and has been widely used up to now.

In particular, academic texts are divided into those which (either in a certain successive order, or not) express personal experience (*narrative, recount*), present factual information (*procedure*, *report*), contain analyzing and debating (*explanation*, *exposition, discussion*) (see Table 2).

Table 2. Academic texts classification by James R. Martin

Text type	Purpose	Genres	Linguistic features
1	2	3	4
narrative	to entertain the reader, introducing characters in some setting and telling a story, unfolding a series of events, and eventually bringing about some resolution	jokes, anecdotes, stories, novels, literary texts of different kinds	a variety of process verbs and verb tenses, clauses, adverbs of time and manner
recount	to reconstruct experience in temporal sequence and tell what and when occurred, with the aim to inform the reader.	newspaper and television news, history reports, autobiographies, diaries	past tenses, proper nouns, personal pronouns, descriptive words, additive and temporal conjunctions, process clauses
procedure	to direct one's behaviour in undertaking activities	directions, rules of games, regulations, itineraries, recipes, instructions, manuals	present tenses, imperatives, adverbs, impersonal pronouns, diagrams, schemes or other illustrations, short sentences
report	to classify phenomena, and describe characteristics by organizing all the facts clearly	scientific reports, book reviews, newspaper articles	the third person, action verbs, specialist (technical) language, few evaluative words

1	2	3	4
explanation	to identify a phenomenon or historical event, and explain how or why it occurs, what its consequences are	textbooks, scientific articles, entries in encyclopaedias and dictionaries	technical language, specific-subject vocabulary, words to show cause-effect relationship
exposition	to put forward an argument and try to persuade the audience, relying on generalization, classification, and categorization	opinion essays, advertisements, editorials	abstract nouns, markers of contrast, logical sequence; emotive and qualifying words, modals of probability, visuals
discussion	to explore issues, and arrive at opinions or recommendations on the basis of evidence	for-and-against essays, newspaper articles, speeches, (radio) debates	formal language, linking words of compare and contrast

The greatest problem with this classification, as with many others, is that it concerns ideal texts, which can be rarely encountered in practice, displaying all the features in question. Thus, it is a false pedagogy to restrict the learners only to the models of organizing a paper, offered as examples of a limited number of texts, and suggest copying the language and structure involved. Text types should be instead viewed as broad communicative functions, realized on the linguistic surface structure as modes of discourse, which acquire specific functions within a certain genre, and tend to interact, depending upon the choice of discourse strategies. For example, the mode of descriptive discourse can be found in narrative genres, serve as exposition in scientific prose, or be part of instructions, or manuals.

As a result, it is practicable to let the English language learners progress through the modes, moving from a simpler one, say personal narrative, to a more sophisticated one, such as argument, always making sure that there is enough exposure to real-life texts, in which modes of discourse combine to perform entirely different functions in various generic contexts.

References

1. Aumüller, M. (2014). Text Types. Handbook of Narratology. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, pp. 854-867.

2. Cappelli, G. (2007) Sun, Sea, Sex and the Unspoilt Countryside: How the English language makes tourists out of readers. Italy: Pari Publishing, 352p.

3. Fludernik, M. (2000) Genres, Text Types, or Discourse Modes? Narrative Modalities and Generic Categorization. Style 34 (2), pp. 274-292.

4. Foley, J.A. (2012). Teaching to write right: looking at the "process". EAU Heritage Journal, Eastern Asia University, Vol 6.1, pp. 1-18.

5. Trosborg, A. (1997). Text typology: register, genre, text type. Text Typology and Translation. Amsterdam: John Benjamin's Publishing Company, pp. 3-23.

6. Tsiplakou S., Floros, G. (2013). Never mind the text types, here's textual force: Towards a pragmatic reconceptualization of text type. Journal of Pragmatics, 45(1), pp. 119-130.

7. Woodward-Kron, R. (2005). The role of genre and embedded genres in tertiary students' writing. Prospect Vol. 20, No. 3., pp. 24-41.