Explaining: a central discourse function in instruction

Christiane Dalton-Puffer
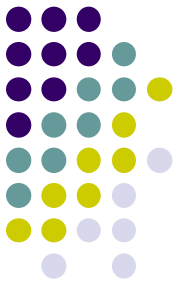## University of Vienna

Learning as interaction

Locke

Vygotsky (1930s; 1978)

Tomasello (1999)

- language as a special instrument for social cognition
- Lg. = symbolic artefact to construct the world for interpersonal communication
- categorising, relational thinking, perspective taking

Applied Linguistics & CLIL

- How can we support CLIL / L2 learners and teachers?

- What are the linguistic correlates of learning in the classroom?

- What instruction-specific language functions are there?

Overview
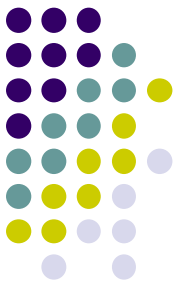
1. Conceptual background

2. Explaining - an academic discourse function

3. Micro-structures & semantic relations

4. Macro-strucures & model 2

5. Explaining in oracy and literacy

6. Concluding remarks
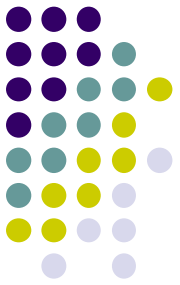
BICS
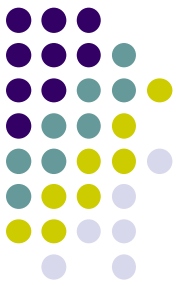
Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills

CALP

Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency

(cf. Cummins 1991)

CALP

← context-embedded .... context-reduced →

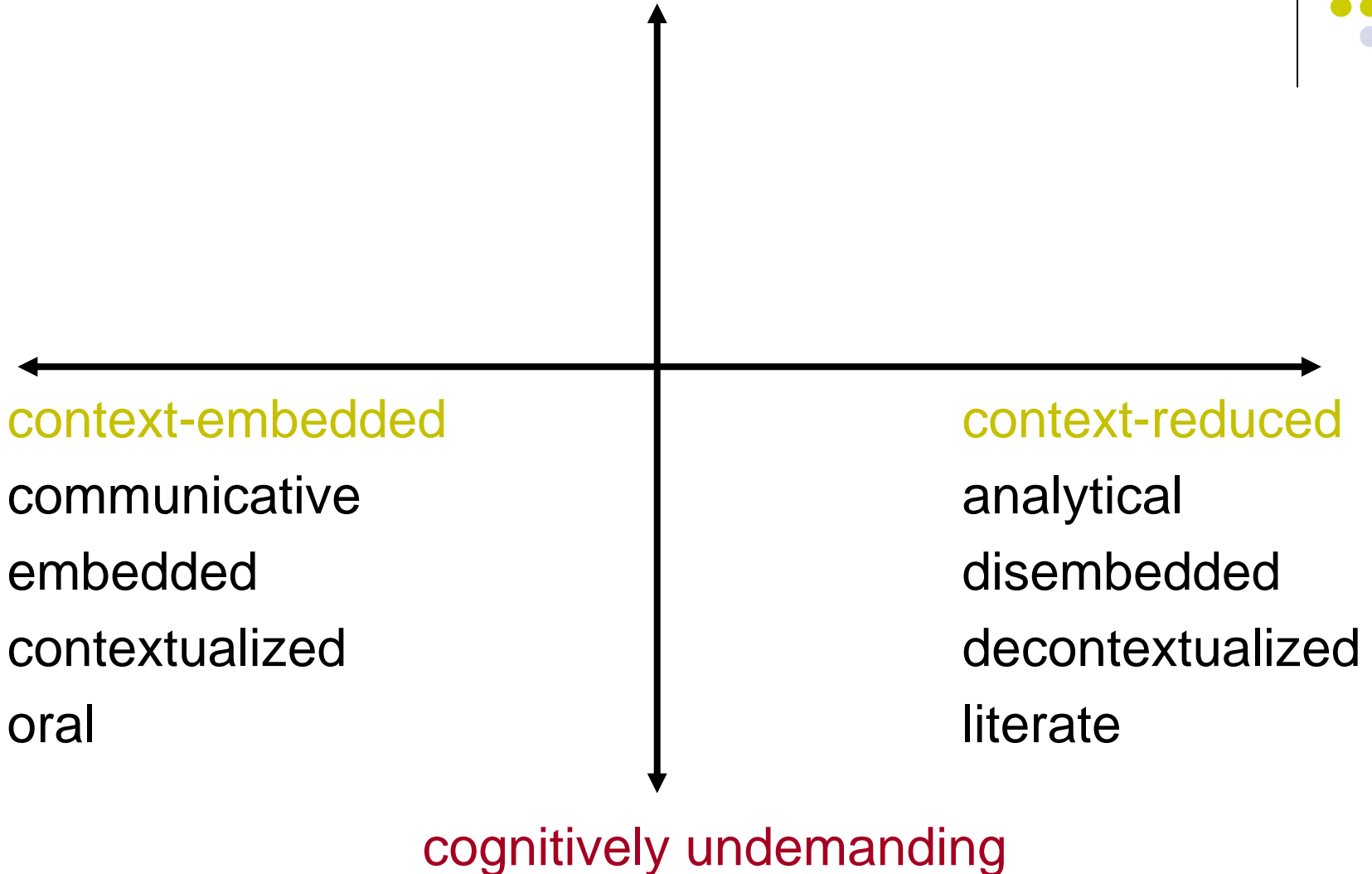| context-embedded	context-reduced
communicative	analytical
embedded	disembedded
contextualized	decontextualized
oral	literate
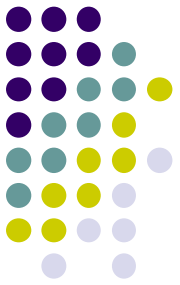
cognitively demanding

context-embedded

communicative

embedded

contextualized

oral

context-reduced

analytical

disembedded

decontextualized

literate

cognitively undemanding

communication/
language

knowledge structures &
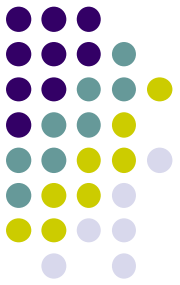cognitive operations

subject-specific
notions

content

cognition

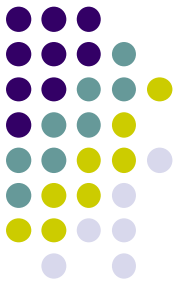discourse functions
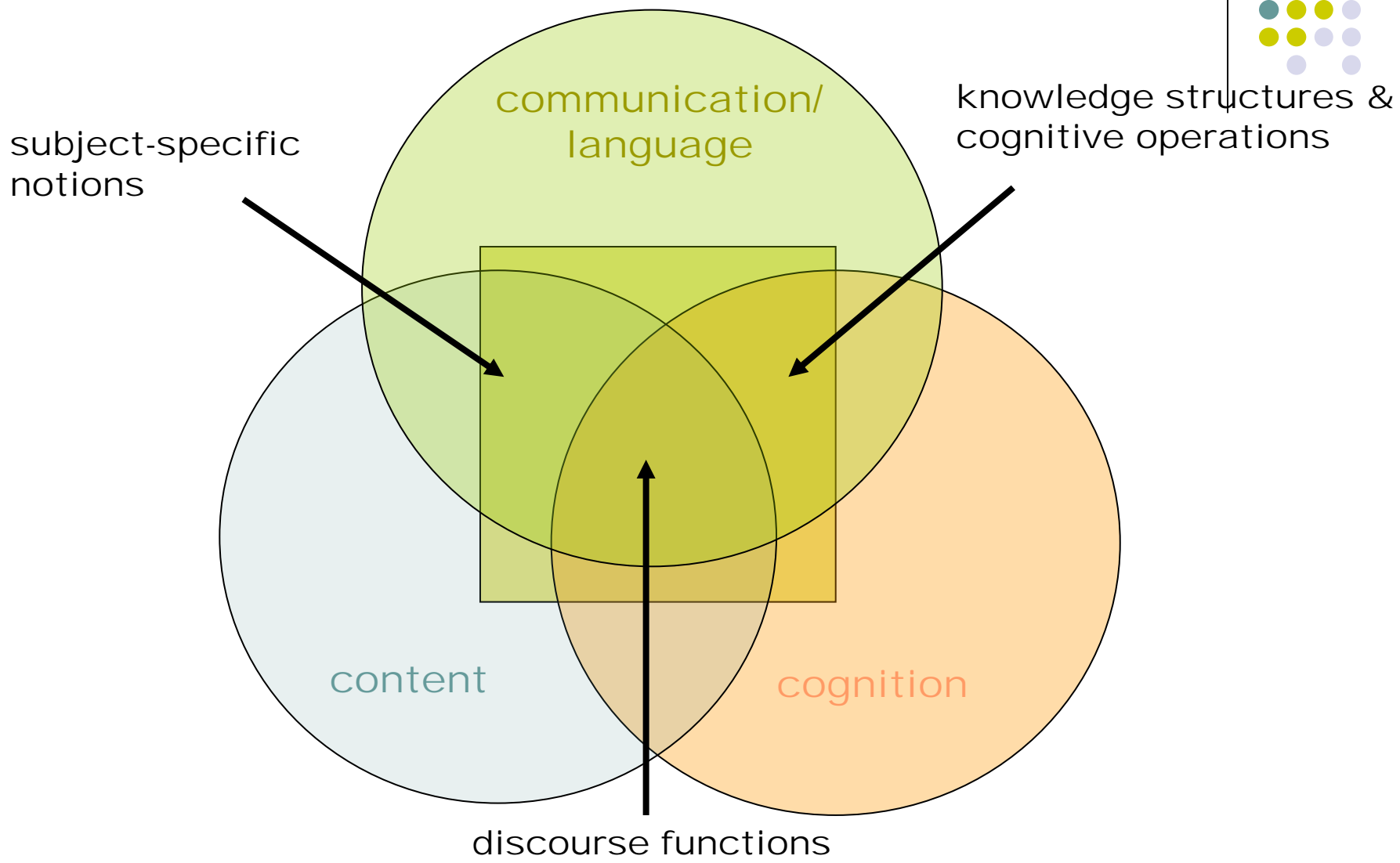
(adapted from Wildhage 2003,90)

Discourse functions

- Analyzing
- Classifying
- Comparing
- Defining
- Describing
- Drawing conclusions
- Evaluating & assessing

- Explaining
- Hypothesizing
- Informing
- Narrating
- Persuading
- Predicting
- Requesting/giving information

(cf. Dalton-Puffer 2007, Zydatiß 2007)

Focus on classroom talk

- 40 CLIL secondary school lessons

<div align="right">(Dalton-Puffer 2007)</div>

- 12 tertiary hotel management lessons

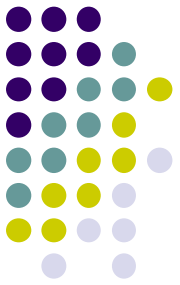<div align="right">(Smit 2008)</div>

physics, biology, geography
history, music
business studies, accounting
tourism, international marketing, law
hotel operations, PR, human resources

"dire ce que toi,
    tu ne sais pas"

telling you
what you don't know

"dire ce que
    je sais moi"

telling you
    what I know

(Gaulmyn 1986, 125)

Explanation

statements made in an attempt to account for, or show the cause of, a state of affairs

(Govier 1987, 159)

statements made in an attempt to make certain objects or facts (explanandum) more easily comprehensible by connecting them with one or more familiar object(s) or fact(s) (explanans/explanantia)

(cf. Smit 2008, 277)

Explanation 1

Explanandum

O

S1 ——————————— **S2**

Explicator   Addressee
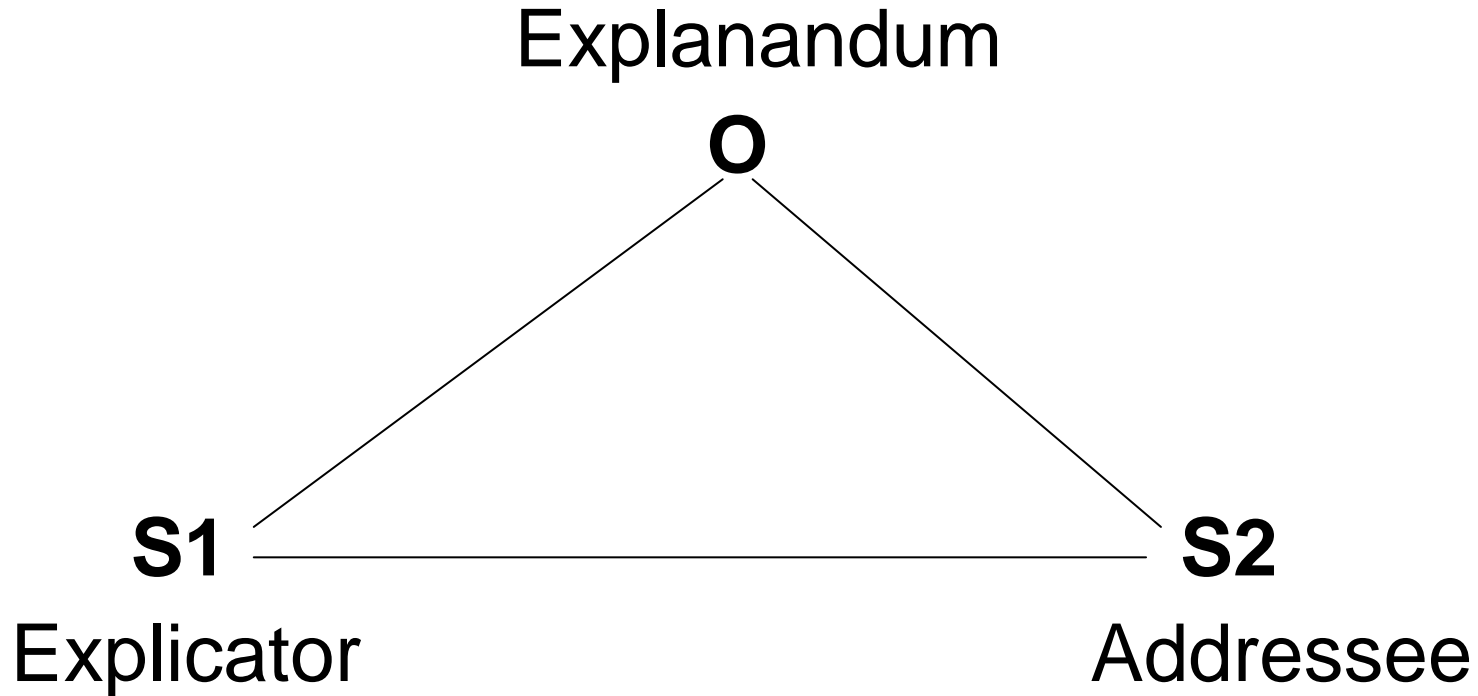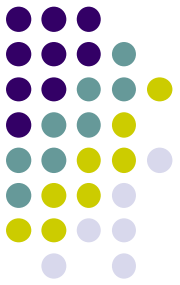
(Gaulmyn 1986)

Example 1. Comecon

Comecon was some kind of an economic cooperation between the Soviet Union and the other ah so-called East Block countries …so while the western countries formed the European Union or the forerunners of the European Union which was the so-called

5 European Community ah the East Block countries together with the Soviet Union formed the so-called Comecon.

Example 2. Early Adopters

Early adopters tend to buy new products quite early, then only few people have it and so they can buy the new things and they have enough money. I think my aunt is an early adopter and for example she really likes to watch videos and when the dvd players er went er

5 were put on the market she was er she first waited some time and then she said I really want to have such a dvd player and also only few people have one and the dvd players are very expensive she she said she wanted to try it and so she bought the dvd player er but it was still more expensive than nowadays but she was really
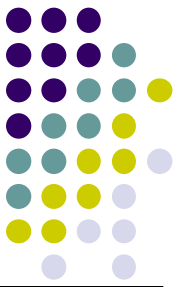
10 satisfied with it and she always told her family and all her friends that she has a dvd player and that it's really super and that everybody must have one.

explanation 1
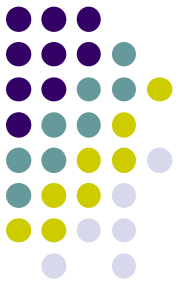
- type-token - ‚some kind of‘

- analogy ‚parallel‘

- elaboration

- exposition: A, that means …

- rationale

- example

semantic relations

Relation Type	Brief Description	Subtypes
Taxonomic Relations	relationships btw. entities	Token, Hyponym, Synonym, Antonym; Translation, Glossing
Logical Relations		
Elaboration	A, i.e. B - A, e.g. B – A, viz. B	exposition, exemplification, clarification
Addition	A and B - not A, nor B - A, but B"	conjunctive, negative, adversative
Variation	not A, but B – A but not B – A or B	replacive, exceptive, alternative
Connection	relations of the parts of various forms of argument	cause/consequence, evidence/conclusion, problem/solution, action/motivation
Analogy	transfer from one particular to another particular	structure, surface, effect…

(Lemke 1990)

Example 3. Diarrhea

1   a diar-diarrhea this is ..if you if you empty the .. your bowels .. very rapidly ...you can throw up like that if you're very thick-sick but it could also go the other way. so it's durchfall,

4   and dysentery is an extreme case of durchfall, of diarrhea. it's very extreme and many people die from that because they.. ja they become dehydrated .. sind zu sehr entwässert. in the book you find

7   a translation for that ah f- ruhr, ja? the word would be ruhr

Semantic relations

Example 3. Diarrhea

1 a diar-diarrhea this is ..if you if you empty the .. your bowels .. very rapidly ...you can throw up like that if you're very thick-sick but it could also go the other way. so it's durchfall,

4 and dysentery is an extreme case of durchfall, of diarrhea. it's very extreme and many people die from that because they.. ja they become dehydrated .. sind zu sehr entwässert. in the book you find a translation for that ah f- ruhr,

7 ja? the word would be ruhr.

exposition – **translation** – **token** – **cause/consequence**

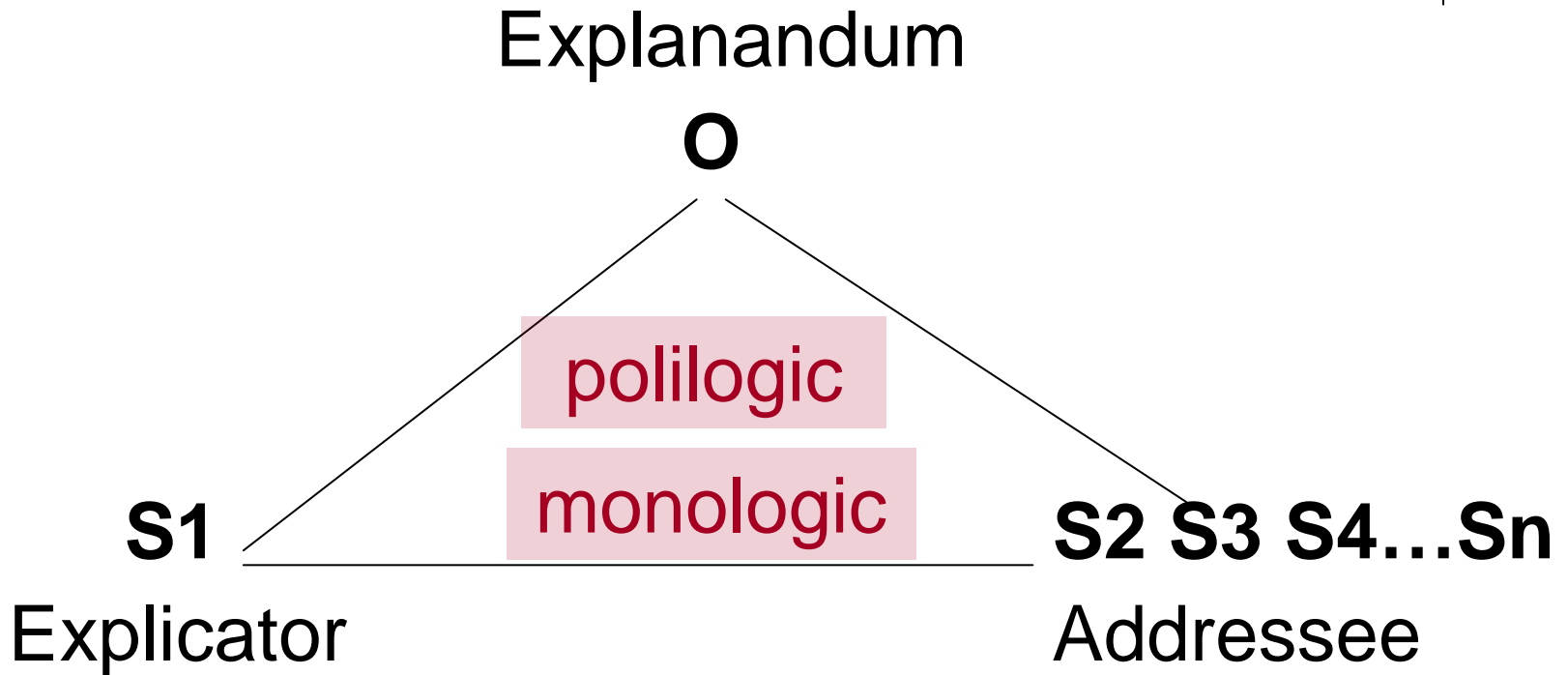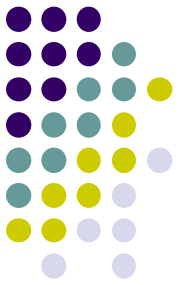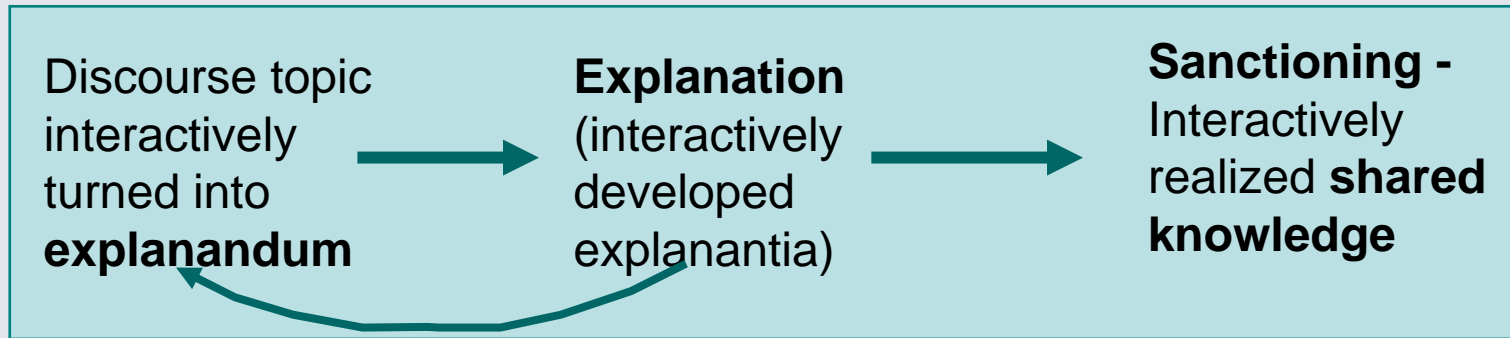| 1 | T | because you sai- ah I mean .. it is - do you know what diarrhea(/i:/) is? |
2	S1	ja (XXX)
3,4	S2,3	tagebuch
5	T	no, this is a diary (picks up register). a diar-diarrhea this is ..
6	S4	durchfall
7	T	if you if you empty the .. your bowels[.. very rapidly ...
8	S3	[was?
9	S4	durchfall?
10	T	you can throw up like that if you're very thick-sick but it could also go the other way
11	S4	durchfall, oder?
12	T	so it's durchfall, and dyséntery [is an extreme case of durchfall, of diarrhea
13	S5	[wooos?
14	S6	dünnschiss
15	T	it's very extreme and many people die from that because they .. ja they become dehydrated. .. sind zu sehr entwässert
16	S6	wasser-wasser(XX)
17	T	in the book you find a translation for that ah, ja? the word would be ruhr.
18	S	° da gibt's ein Ruhrgebiet°

Explanation 1a

Explanandum

O

polilogic

monologic

S1

Explicator

S2 S3 S4…Sn

Addressee

(Gaulmyn 1986)

Classroom discourse = social activity

Student 1

Teacher   Student 2

Discourse topic interactively turned into **explanandum** → **Explanation** (interactively developed explanantia) → **Sanctioning -** Interactively realized **shared knowledge**

Student 4

Student 5

Student n   (Teacher 2)

Cf. Smit 2008

				extract: testimony
		1	XEN	(4) we need a testimony , who is a testimony ? who is testimony ? (3)
exm		2	Jenz	what ? testimony ?
		3	XEN	that's what does a testimony do ?
exp	ie	4	Crek	attended the (.) happening and has to say the truth in front of the court . (.) <1> testimony /1>
exm		5	Jenz	is this <1> a (xxxx) </1> ?
exp	eg	6	XEN	no . (.) testimony . testimony , you for example , you have been out there (.)
		7		while the other guy crashed his car into the other car . (1) and you where there
		8		just waiting for the bus and you say , <QUTOTATIVE squeaky voice> oh terrible
		9		, terrible , </QUOTATIVE> (1) and you saw the whole thing , with police came
	glos	10	Jenz	witness
		11	XEN	=to witness it .
exm		12	Jenz	is called testimony ,
exp	viz	13	XEN	you come and give your testimony . (.) so you are (.) erm asked to <QUOTATIVE>
		14		tell the truth , nothing but the truth </QUOTATIVE> (.) in front of your (god) , (what)
		15		you've witnessed , (.) and not (.) tell a little better in another way to make it better
		16		for one of them . (1) so you're ,
		17	Jenz	I do
		18	XEN	you d- you do it ,
		19	Jenz	mhm testimony
		20	XEN	yeah testimony

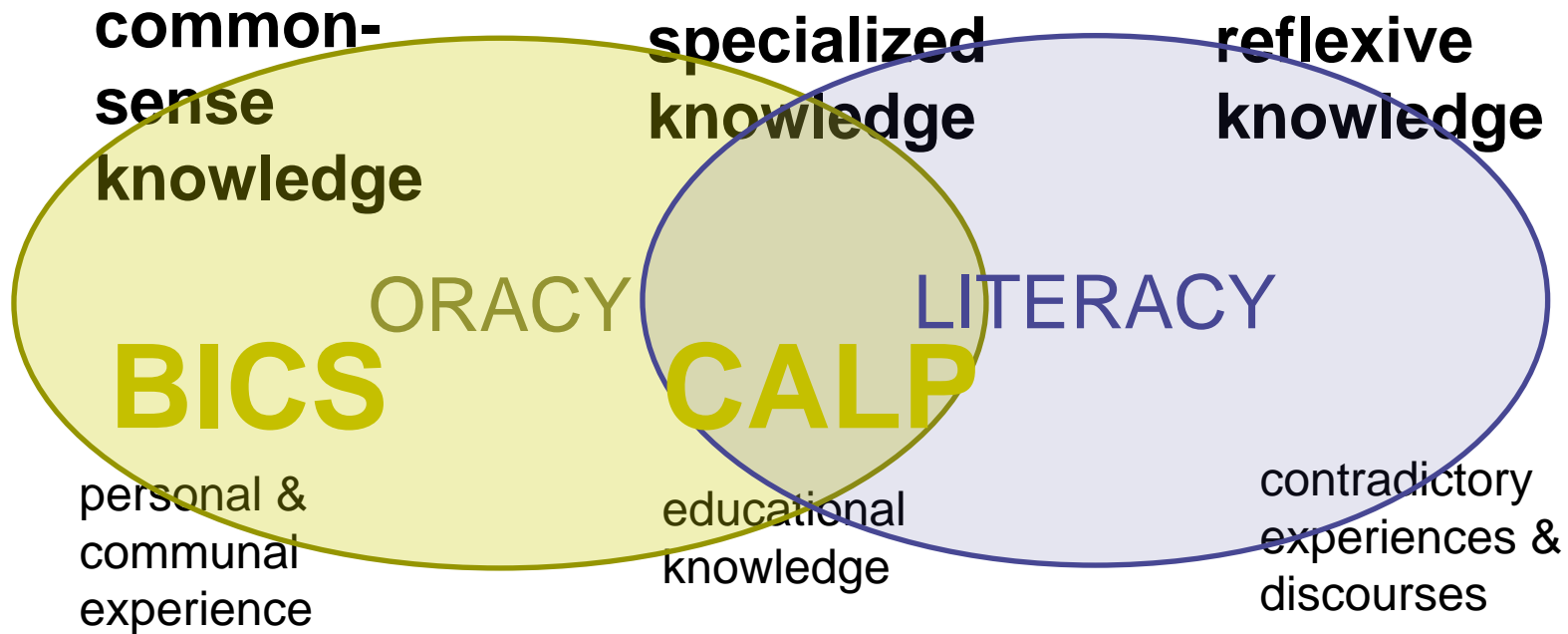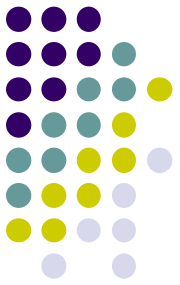explanandum

explanation

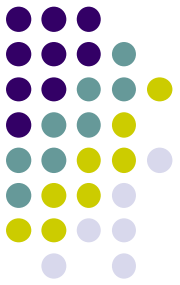sanctioning

preliminary conclusions
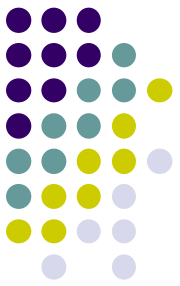
explaining in instruction is on-line & interactive

- preference for deictic anchors *here/now*
- addresse orientation *you, I/me*
- shifting boundaries: openings?
- explicit sanctioning often missing
- absence of meta-language > incidental teaching and learning

CALP & literacy genres

common-sense knowledge

specialized knowledge

reflexive knowledge

ORACY

LITERACY

BICS

CALP

personal & communal experience

educational knowledge

contradictory experiences & discourses

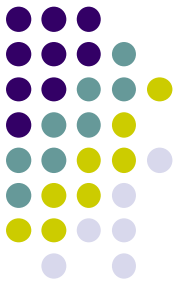# CALP & literacy genres

different genres "have", convey and give access to different degrees and kinds of social power   (cf. Feez 2000,54)
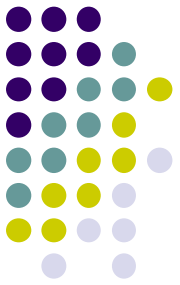

explicit introduction into „genres of power"

                                    (cf. Macken-Horarik 2000, 17)

pedagogical measures

- from incidental to intentional
  > „visible curriculum"
- boundaries and sanctioning
- meta-language and meta-level
- oral production
- transfer to written medium
- textbooks and student writing
- model genres

christiane.dalton-puffer@univie.ac.at