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-structures & model 2
5. Explaining in oracy and literacy
6. Concluding remarks
BICS
Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills

CALP
Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency

(cf. Cummins 1991)
Discourse functions

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

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

Focus on classroom talk

- 40 CLIL secondary school lessons  
  (Dalton-Puffer 2007)
- 12 tertiary hotel management lessons  
  (Smit 2008)

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)
Explaination

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

S1
Explicator

O

S2
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 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 were put on the market she was er 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 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.
- type-token - 'some kind of'
- analogy 'parallel'
- elaboration
- exposition: A, that means ...
- rationale
- example
## Semantic Relations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relation Type</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
<th>Subtypes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Taxonomic Relations</strong></td>
<td>relationships btw. entities</td>
<td><strong>Token</strong>, <strong>Hyponym</strong>, <strong>Synonym</strong>, <strong>Antonym</strong>; <strong>Translation</strong>, <strong>Glossing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Logical Relations</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaboration</td>
<td>A, i.e. B - A, e.g. B – A, viz. B</td>
<td>exposition, exemplification, clarification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition</td>
<td>A and B - not A, nor B - A, but B”</td>
<td>conjunctive, negative, adversative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variation</td>
<td>not A, but B – A but not B – A or B</td>
<td>replacive, exceptive, alternative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>relations of the parts of various forms of argument</td>
<td>cause/consequence, evidence/conclusion, problem/solution, action/motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analogy</td>
<td>transfer from one particular to another particular</td>
<td>structure, surface, effect…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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, ja? the word would be ruhr
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
because you sai- ah I mean .. it is - do you know what diarrhea (/i:/) is?

ja (XXX)

tagebuch

no, this is a diary (picks up register). a diar-diarrhea this is ..

durchfall

if you if you empty the .. your bowels[ .. very rapidly ...

was?

durchfall?

you can throw up like that if you’re very thick-sick but it could also go the other way

durchfall, oder?

so it’s durchfall, and dyséntery [is an extreme case of durchfall, of diarrhea

wooos?

dünnschiss

it’s very extreme and many people die from that because they .. ja they become dehydrated. .. sind zu sehr entwässert

wasser-wasser (XX)
in the book you find a translation for that ah, ja? the word would be ruhr.

° da gibt’s ein Ruhrgebiet°
Explanation 1a

Explanandum

S1
Explicator

polilogic
monologic

S2 S3 S4…Sn
Addressee

(Gaulmyn 1986)
INTEX interactive explaining

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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exm</th>
<th></th>
<th>Explanandum</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Sanctioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>XEN</td>
<td>(4) we need a testimony, who is a testimony? who is testimony? (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Jenz</td>
<td>what? testimony?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>XEN</td>
<td>that’s what does a testimony do?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exp</td>
<td>ie</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Crek</td>
<td>attended the (. ) happening and has to say the truth in front of the court. (. ) 1&lt;1&gt; testimony /1&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exp</td>
<td>eg</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>XEN</td>
<td>no. (. ) testimony. testimony, you for example, you have been out there. (. ) while the other guy crashed his car into the other car. (1) and you where there just waiting for the bus and you say, &lt;QUOTOTATIVE squeaky voice&gt; oh terrible, terrible, &lt;/QUOTOTATIVE&gt; (1) and you saw the whole thing, with police came</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glos</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Jenz</td>
<td>witness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>XEN</td>
<td>=to witness it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exm</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Jenz</td>
<td>is called testimony,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exp</td>
<td>viz</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>XEN</td>
<td>you come and give your testimony. (. ) so you are (. ) erm asked to &lt;QUOTOTATIVE&gt; tell the truth, nothing but the truth &lt;/QUOTOTATIVE&gt; (. ) in front of your (god), (what) you’ve witnessed, (. ) and not (. ) tell a little better in another way to make it better for one of them. (1) so you’re,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Jenz</td>
<td>I do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>XEN</td>
<td>you d- you do it,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Jenz</td>
<td>mhm testimony</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>XEN</td>
<td>yeah testimony</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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

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