

# What is a Gospel? Reflections on Developing an Integrated Literacy Lesson Cycle in a First Year Tertiary Module Using Legitimation Code Theory

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## Abstract

Basil Bernstein dedicated his work to finding solutions to problems in education, applying a series of concepts and toolkits to open up the structures of meaning and knowledge building (Moore 2013). In this same spirit, this paper is focussed on a key problem in South African tertiary education: how to develop an integrated, self-reflexive literacy pedagogy within an introductory first year module at a South African university. In the module *Introduction to The New Testament*, my aim was to simultaneously develop accurate reading of and writing about a relevant academic text alongside beginning to provide access to the language and terminology of the tertiary level discipline of Biblical Studies. The paper reports on one lesson cycle in this module which follows the pedagogic methodology of Reading to Learn (Rose 2007; 2011). The toolkits for analysis include Legitimation Code Theory (Maton 2014), particularly epistemic semantic density and epistemological condensation (Maton & Doran 2017a; 2017b) side by side with the Power Trilogy (Martin 2103) developed by the Sydney School of Systemic Functional Linguistics. I hope that my use of a ‘grammar’ of theoretical categories from a community of practice such as Legitimation Code Theory will have the further advantage that my self-reflection is not expressed in isolation, or in terms that cannot be replicated.

**Keywords:** Social Realist theories, Maton, Legitimation Code Theory (Semantics), Systemic Functional Linguistics, Bernstein, David Rose, Reading to Learn, integrated literacy, epistemological access

## **Introduction and Context**

Twenty years of education reform in South Africa has only been partially successful (cf. Draper & Spaul 2015) in addressing the needs of young South Africans to read academic texts with understanding and then to translate this understanding into clear, relevant academic writing, especially in English, and particularly at a tertiary level. I have worked in the tertiary sector for the same 20 years, first as an academic literacy lecturer and more latterly in my discipline of Biblical Studies. In this paper I am presenting my initial thinking from an ongoing Masters Research project, in which I am trying to build on the cumulated knowledge of these professional experiences. My aim in writing the paper is to try and give a theoretical and reflective account of how, as a discipline specialist and an academic literacy specialist, I am trying to follow the suggestions of work such as Boughey and McKenna (2016) and attempt to lay both the foundations of the discipline of Biblical Studies and of academic literacy within the same module.

This paper will set out my methodology for preparing a text and analyse the pedagogic activities within and the work products arising from one lesson cycle in the module *Introduction to The New Testament*. The framework section of the paper explains the pedagogic methodology of Reading to Learn (Rose 2007; 2011), as well as introducing toolkits for analysis from Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) (Maton 2014). The methodology section explains my innovation of using the pedagogic moves from Reading to Learn side by side with toolkits from LCT (Semantics), specifically epistemic semantic density and epistemological condensation (Maton & Doran 2017a; 2017b). These toolkits enable me to unpack wordings, grammatical structures and sequencing of ideas within the text for the students, so that they can understand it more accurately before paraphrasing it in their assignments. In the last sections of the paper, LCT (Semantics) is used to analyse my pedagogic activities for unpacking information from Ancient History, as well as ancient and modern methods of studying the Bible, to help students understand the reading and then produce an assignment which answers the question ‘What is a Gospel?’

## **Conceptual Framework**

The theoretical framework which undergirds my approach to this study is a social realist sociology of education, which foregrounds knowledge and knowledge practices. This is an approach to knowledge which acknowledges

the constructed nature of what we know but also that there are structures beyond mere interpretation and perception underlying ways of knowing that also affect knowledge in powerful ways (Moore & Muller 2002; Maton & Moore 2010; Moore 2012). The approach in this paper originates in the Code Theory of Basil Bernstein (1971) and arguably the most successful contemporary extension of Bernstein's work, which is Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) (cf. Maton 2005; 2014). Maton's claim is that LCT brings Bernstein together with the field theory of Bourdieu into a powerful new tool for the analysis of the structures and sociology of knowledge (Maton 2014). As a result Maton has developed LCT as an explanatory framework for analysing the organising principles of knowledge and knowledge practices along several dimensions (Maton 2014), two of which, Specialisation and Semantics, have now been extensively researched (Maton & Doran 2017a:50). In this paper I will focus on the dimension of Semantics. Semantics construes two codes, namely semantic density (SD) and semantic gravity (SG).

*Semantic gravity* makes visible the degree of context-dependence or abstraction of meaning and *semantic density* makes visible the degree of condensation and complexity of meaning (Maton 2014:129).

I also place particular focus on a further development of semantic density, which is epistemic semantic density (ESD) and epistemological condensation (EC) (Maton & Doran 2017a; 2017b). ESD and EC attempt to analyse how meaning in English is condensed, *firstly* into technical words; *secondly* through grammar which brings these words together into definitions, taxonomies and other complex relationships; and *thirdly* through organizing, connecting and compressing meaning between sentences and paragraphs. This condensation of meaning is one of the issues which makes reading and writing academic texts so difficult for novice readers in schools and universities.

In recognition of this fact, there have been a number of research projects based at the University of Sydney using LCT and Sydney School Systemic Functional Linguistics as complementary frameworks in the study of classroom discourses (Martin & Maton 2017:37-39). Key to these studies is the frequent mismatch between the recognition rules required to see what academic discourses structures entail and the realization rules which are the pedagogic practices which may be used to make these discourses visible and usable for students (Bernstein 1990). This mismatch results in segmental learning and the lack of transfer of 'academic skills' between disciplines in the school system. Maton puts this down to a,

mismatch between [teachers'] aims of enabling students to acquire a cultivated gaze and their means of minimal guidance and modelling that leaves many students unable to recognize or enact what is required for achievement and reliant on common sense (Maton 2014:107).

In other words, we teachers are better at teaching rules for how to see the world academically than at showing students how to follow them. As a result, there is a need for explicit and visible instruction. *Firstly*, on how to recognize the structures and rules of a piece of academic discourse, by unpacking the key technical concepts, showing how the text is put together grammatically, and how it is composed into a recognised structure. But also *secondly* students must be taught how to repackage and display this kind of academic knowledge in different wordings. Instead most often teachings or instructions about plagiarism for instance, are misidentified by the misleading label of 'writing in your own words' and this vagueness often leads to a partial grasp of academic buzz words which students parrot uncomprehendingly in their academic writing.

The impulse for explicit instruction in the recognition and realisation rules of reading and writing has led the Sydney School of Systemic Functional Linguistics to develop genre pedagogy (cf. Martin & Rose 2012; Rose 2015a; 2015b). This paper will focus on Reading to Learn, one of the developments of this pedagogic movement which began to develop methodologies by which teachers can explicitly instruct learners in reading and writing behaviours that realise the structures of the different genres commonly used in schools and universities in order for them to produce their own appropriately written academic texts.

In this article I will reflect on how this kind of explicit pedagogy can lead to what Maton (2013:12) calls a 'semantic wave', which is the alternation between complexity and simplicity or abstraction and concreteness in order to build deep knowledge. A 'wave' in semantic gravity can capture the movement of meaning between abstraction and concreteness coded by arrows 'tending' up or down (SG  $\uparrow \downarrow$ ). So, the unpacking of abstract, context-independent theoretical language from a discipline such as Biblical Studies into everyday, context-dependent language in the classroom is explained as a strengthening of semantic gravity (SG  $\uparrow$ ). The opposite trend to instruct learners how to repackage meaning as abstract or generalized language is explained as a weakening of semantic gravity (SG  $\downarrow$ ) (Maton 2014: 110-111). Both of these

moves (as part of the ‘wave’) are equally important for building the deep knowledge necessary for successfully understanding and rewriting academic texts.

Whereas semantic gravity (SG) provides one continuum of the topology for describing and explaining meaning in social symbolic fields, semantic density (SD) provides the other. Here, a ‘wave’ describes the unpacking and repacking of the ‘internal relations among ideas and external relations to referents (Maton 2014:128)’. So the move to condense knowledge into a dense network of concepts or symbols, in the manner of technical scientific discourse, is explained as strengthening semantic density (SD ↓), while the opposite move of unpacking or defining key terms into a simpler, limited range of more everyday meanings that stand alone from the larger semantic network is explained as weakening the semantic density (SG ↑) (Maton 2014:129-130). Maton (2013:14 -15) particularly highlights how the well-executed use of semantic waves in the classroom bridges the gap between the high stakes reading of academic texts from a discipline and high stakes writing of legitimate texts that students must reproduce for their assessments. In addition, Maton’s research shows how high achieving student writing carefully deploys semantic waves to move between exemplification and theorizing, expansion, elaboration and condensation (Maton 2013:18-19).

The development of the dimension of Semantics in LCT has in turn prompted refinements by Jim Martin (2013) in his SFL genre pedagogy. In the context of training secondary school teachers in the implications of the higher semantic density (Mcnaught, Maton, Martin & Matruglio 2013), Martin and his team looked for relatively simple, and user friendly names, for expressing condensation of meaning. Therefore, technical terms, for example the cultural and historical meaning condensed into the term Greco-Roman, were branded ‘power words’ (2013:25). In addition, the semantic density of the language resources that SFL terms grammatical metaphor, are highlighted for the teachers as ‘power grammar’ (Martin 2013:28). For example, this could include nominalization, in which verbs are repackaged as condensed noun groups. Finally, by combining knowledge of the stages of relevant genres with how texts highlight thematic material and introduce new information, these teachers are trained to model ‘power composition’ (Martin 2013:31-33). This Trilogy of new pedagogic tools, inspired by the interaction with LCT, is then combined with the earlier strategy of genre pedagogy, ‘deconstruction, joint construction, and independent construction’ into a powerful knowledge

building and literacy intervention for teachers in discipline classrooms. Here, texts are elaborated, and similar texts are workshopped in class time before a further version of the information in the text is set as an assignment (Mcnaught, Maton, Martin & Matruglio 2013: 54, 62).

With beginner academic writers in a South African university, I concluded that this Power Trilogy would be an accessible way to begin to unpack semantic density. This is especially true since I was struck by the possibility of a relationship between Martin's formulations and the development of epistemic semantic density (ESD), which explores the epistemological condensation (EC) of meaning in definitions and technical language. This aspect of LCT Semantics, which enacts semantic density for the specific use of analyzing meaning in English discourse (Maton & Doran 2017a: 58f.) analyzes the strength of power wordings from the common wordings in everyday language, through to specialist wordings from everyday speech, and culminating in the compact wordings in technical language. In addition, Maton and Doran (2017b: 82-88) analyze the strength of power grammar through their clausening tool. This has the potential to distinguish epistemological condensation (EC) through study of how words are related into powerful clusters of meanings. Finally, the sequencing tool has the potential to uncover power composition by analyzing how the sequence of ideas bring together, summarize and repeat meanings between and within paragraphs. Beginning on 'Wordings', and following through 'Clausening' and 'Sequencing', below, I will show how this theory could begin to work in practice with the data from the lesson cycle. These are in the form of tables, also called Translation Devices, which set out the different levels of power words, grammar and composition in terms of their epistemic semantic density and give examples of these different levels from the text which I am unpacking.

Finally, in this framework section of the paper, I will further elaborate the integrated literacy pedagogy called Reading to Learn. Although it has no formal links to LCT, Maton (2013:17; cf. also Yi 2011:10-11) has identified it as one of the successful pedagogies that sets out deliberately to trace semantic waves through a set of pedagogic moves in the classroom. Like other pedagogies under the Sydney School banner, Reading to Learn is focused on teaching learners to read and write common school genres successfully (Martin & Rose 2012:1; Rose 2015a:4, 2015b:3) and as such is concerned with the gap between high stakes reading and high stakes writing (Maton 2013:18-19). This pedagogy was developed in the context of the education of indigenous and

other marginalized students in Australia which, like the majority of peri-urban and rural schools in South Africa, fails learners in two crucial areas:

- First, schools fail to teach reading skills explicitly, disadvantaging those students who come from less literate homes. Both upper primary and secondary stages focus on curriculum content rather than explicit literacy teaching. So, students who have been well prepared in their homes are more likely to succeed from such teaching practices.
- Second, the current pattern of classroom interaction helps to maintain the inequalities among learners. In other words, more successful students are rewarded for their good answers to teachers' questions while the least successful students are left frustrated after their responses are repeatedly ignored, negated or even criticized (Yi 2011:1-2).

In response to this invisible and socially unjust pedagogy, David Rose developed scaffolded methodologies, or classroom genres, linked with the Teaching and Learning Cycle (Rothery 1994). In order 'to enable all students to continually succeed at learning tasks no matter their class, language or cultural backgrounds' (Rose 2015b:15-16). Reading to Learn,

.... Consists of three stages with each divided into two phases. It begins with the deconstruction phase of Preparing before Reading and Detailed Reading. Then at the Joint Construction stage, the teacher and students proceed to Sentence or Note Making and Joint Rewriting. The last stage is Independent Construction which covers the phases of Individual Rewriting and Independent Writing (Yi 2011:1-2).

Below I set out how I prepared to teach the module *Introduction to the New Testament* (BIST110) showing how I bring the above framework into a methodology for use in the classroom.

### **Methodology: Reading to Learn Enhanced by LCT Semantics**

The lesson cycles and my classroom practice use a modification of the Reading to Learn teaching method, which focuses on extracting information from an

academic text and rewriting the information using a high stakes written mode of expression. The first phase of the cycle is deconstruction, or unpacking a relevant text with appropriate content for first level students. The aim is to look at how the meanings in the text are packaged through the author's choice of wording, grammar and composition using Martin's 'Power Trilogy' (2013) to highlight,

the semantic power of technical terms as 'power words', the knowledge construing power of grammatical metaphor as 'power grammar', and the crafting and organization of whole texts as 'power composition' (Macnaught, Maton, Martin and Matruglio 2013 : 51).

In my adaptation I conceived *power words* as identifying condensed technical words I needed to elaborate; *power grammar* as identifying means to talk about the kinds of condensed academic expression used in academic texts and modelling how to use it in writing in their own writing; and *power composition* as identifying the tools by which the texts were put together and modelling how students could also use the tools for coherent writing. This responds to what Macnaught *et al.* call,

The ongoing challenge of making educational knowledge accessible to students while retaining the complex meanings encoded in specialised pedagogic discourses (Macnaught, Maton, Martin & Matruglio 2013:51).

In particular, for South African students working in English as an additional or second language, I was also aware that I needed to explicitly define and concretize the status of certain words and wordings as technical and intrinsic to the discipline of Biblical Studies. This would assist students to become conscious of which vocabulary could be paraphrased or replaced with general synonyms and which words needed to be used with their technical meaning in order to maintain an acceptable degree of accuracy. Figures 1-3 below set out my initial translation devices in which is a way of showing how I tried to fit Maton and Doran's schema and Martin's Power Trilogy together and then set out as tables which I reproduced for the students as a reference guide.

**Wordings**

| <i><b>Most condensed</b></i>  | <i><b>Power Words</b></i> | <i><b>Definition</b></i>                                                                      | <i><b>Examples</b></i>                                 |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Conglomerate                  | PW+++                     | Terms consisting of two or more parts each with a separate technical meaning                  | GRECO ROMAN<br>ANCIENT LIVES<br>RABBINIC<br>LITERATURE |
| Compact                       | PW++                      | Terms consisting of one part with technical meaning                                           | Evangelist, the Law, Torah                             |
| Specialist                    | PW+                       | Happenings or qualities or processes expressed as things in the context of technical language | THE ETHICAL<br>SIGNIFICANCE                            |
| Generalist                    | PW+                       | Happenings or qualities expressed as things in an everyday language context                   | Ethical teaching<br>Moral teaching                     |
| Nuanced                       | PW                        | Terms from the everyday within the technical language context                                 | Biographical, rabbi.<br>Mark, Peter                    |
| Plain                         | PW-                       | Everyday wording well within an everyday language context                                     | stories, sayings                                       |
| <i><b>Most elaborated</b></i> |                           |                                                                                               |                                                        |

**Figure 1: Translation device for Power Words**

The above table gives examples from the text for this lesson cycle which is reproduced below. In the method I am using, these would be identified by me in the text and labelled by the students on their own copies of the reading.

### ***Clausing***

| <b><i>Most condensed relationships of meaning</i></b> | <b><i>Power Grammar</i></b> | <b><i>Definition</i></b>                                                        | <b><i>Examples</i></b>                                                              |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Taxonomizing                                          | PG+++                       | Adds ideas together into a clearly ordered structure                            | <u>The Gospels are a form of GRAECO-ROMAN BIOGRAPHY</u>                             |
| Coordinating                                          | PG++                        | Adds ideas together mainly by showing how one causes or is related to the other | <u>The HISTORICAL CRITICAL METHOD gave rise to all sorts of theories</u>            |
| Characterizing                                        | PG+                         | Adds a particular set of properties to a word                                   | We should therefore expect their authors to include some of Jesus' ethical teaching |
| Establishing                                          | PG                          | Adds a set of meanings to a word                                                |                                                                                     |
| <b><i>Most simple relationships of meaning</i></b>    |                             |                                                                                 |                                                                                     |

**Figure 2: Translation device for Power Grammar**

The table above sets out how I was trying to begin to illustrate ways meaning is condensed grammatically by setting up relationships between terms or word

groupings so that they show among other things the definitions of terms.

**Sequencing**

| <i><b>Most condensed relationships of meaning</b></i> | <i><b>Power Composition</b></i> | <i><b>Definition</b></i>                                                                                                        | <i><b>Examples</b></i>                                                        |
|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Integrative                                           | PC+++                           | Composition that summarizes ideas from more than one sentence or paragraph                                                      | Most importantly this is a NARRATIVE GENRE                                    |
| Subsumptive                                           | PC++                            | Composition that summarizes ideas from one sentence or paragraph to another                                                     | Signify = The significance<br>Save = This salvation                           |
| Consequential                                         | PC+                             | Composition that adds meanings or ideas together to show how one causes the other, or is opposite or unexpected from the other. | Therefore, so, as a result<br>However, nevertheless, by contrast, even though |
| Sequential                                            | PC+                             | Composition that adds ideas together into an order or sequence                                                                  | Firstly, then,<br>In addition,<br>In ancient times, recently,                 |
| Sedimental                                            | PC                              | Composition that repeats key ideas                                                                                              | In other words                                                                |
| <i><b>Most simple relationships of meaning</b></i>    |                                 |                                                                                                                                 |                                                                               |

**Figure 3: Translation device for Power Composition**

The above table highlights how the composition of the text begins to set up and draw attention to how meanings are condensed between sentences and paragraphs by among other things summarizing and repeating earlier knowledge.

## **Methodology for Preparing to Teach the Module**

Illustrated by the extract from the course reading below I try to capture how I marked and analysed the text to highlight the power words (marked by bold font or small caps), the power grammar (marked by underlining) and the power composition (marked by brackets and indentations) in order to begin thinking about how to unpack these features for my classroom.

We have argued before, and elsewhere<sup>1</sup>,  
that the Gospels are a form of **graeco-roman biography**  
{{{and therefore} need to be interpreted in the light of other **ancient**  
**lives.}}**

We should therefore expect their authors  
to include some of Jesus' ethical teaching as part of their account of his life  
and ministry,

{{{and also} that their own views about morality might be evident in  
their writings}}  
{{{as} they paint their particular portrait of Jesus for their audiences.}}  
<<{Most importantly} this is a **narrative genre** – >>  
{{{and} stories about people were a major method of imparting moral  
teaching in **the ancient world....}**

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I inherited this text from the previous teacher of the module, who marked had marked certain passages within a longer excerpt from a book by Richard Burridge. I retained these extracts in the module since they represented what I believed was a relatively simple, short introduction to some of the ideas about the genre of a Gospel. However, in 2018 I shortened the excerpts and typed them up into a single course reading for the students to study. The epistemic

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<sup>1</sup> Extract from Richard A. Burridge. *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (2007).

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semantic density analysis then was a preliminary step to producing a script for presenting the Deconstruction Phase in the classroom. An example of how this could be done for the first sentence of the source text is set out below at Figure 4. The words in italics which follow, are a guide to the different sections of the script, which work together as I deconstruct this sentence. The *preparing for reading* section strengthens semantic gravity and weakens semantic density (SG ↑ SD ↓) by attempting to concretize and unpack the context of the text and the author's purpose, as well as stating the internal relations of meaning in the sentence in more everyday language. The *cues* and *highlighting* both primarily work with the epistemic semantic density of the sentence. This is to unpack the meaning of the different parts of the sentence and the relations between them and then to highlight the power words.

This unpacking of the power words as well as the power grammar of the sentence is further developed in the *elaboration* which highlights the way biography fits into the social and cultural context of the ancient world, attempting to weaken semantic Gravity and strengthen semantic density (SG ↓ SD ↑) by connecting the students to content that will help their understanding of this sentence and linking it to ideas that will come up later in the text.

**Preparing for Reading:**

We are beginning here with Burrige linking us back to a whole lot of work he has done in the past and especially in the first three chapters of the book from which this passage is an extract. Most of the words in the sentence really just mean 'I have said this before'. What he is saying is that the Gospels are in some ways very like all the other life stories written in ancient times by Greek and Roman writers so we need to study them in the same way.

We have argued before, and elsewhere, that the Gospels are a form of Graeco-Roman biography and therefore need to be interpreted in the light of other ancient Lives.

**Cues:**

- At the beginning of the sentence, WHAT words mean 'I have said this before?'
- Next, WHAT is being talked about in this sentence?

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● In the next part, WHAT are the Gospels described as?</li><li>● Just after that, WHAT are the connecting words for the second half of the sentence?</li><li>● In this second half, WHAT is he saying about how we should look at the Gospels?</li><li>● Lastly, WHAT is a synonym he gives for Graeco-Roman biography?</li></ul> |
| <b>Highlighting:</b><br><b>The Gospels, GRAECO ROMAN BIOGRAPHY, interpreted, in the light of, ANCIENT LIVES</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Power Trilogy:</b><br>Power Grammar: sentence setting up <i>taxonomizing</i> (PG+++) relations. Power words highlighted above.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Elaboration:</b><br>Greek and Roman culture of the elite put a lot of emphasis on the education of boys especially reading, learning and copying good literature, ancient poems taught them religion, examples of speeches taught them public speaking and life stories of teachers and great leaders taught them how to live a good life.                           |

**Figure 4: An example of a possible teaching script**

This section has set out the methodology for preparing to teach the module. Below is a more detailed analysis of how this preparation translates into pedagogic moves through the lesson cycle.

### **Analysis: Semantic Waves and epistemic semantic density**

In this section I will attempt to show how my script above and the Reading to Learn pedagogic moves through a lesson cycle begin to enact something like a semantic wave of epistemic semantic density. I will try to give an account of how the unpacking and repacking the power words, power grammar and power composition through the deconstruction and Joint Construction Phases of the Reading to Learn cycle resulted in the examples of student writing presented as evidence of the Independent Construction Phase.

### ***Deconstruction Phase***

What became clear in preparing this text, using the epistemic semantic density tools, is that the course reading created is far more complex than initially thought. In terms of the power words, the passage exhibits a number of clusters of *technical* wordings (Maton & Doran 2017a:58) clustered around the historical cultural terms Graeco-Roman and Rabbinic as well as Narrative, Genre and Christianity. Because this is a humanities text it does not display clearly multi-part or *conglomerate* wording (Maton & Doran 2017a:60) in the manner of scientific texts. However, a number of the wordings, for example **GRAECO-ROMAN BIOGRAPHY**, **GRAECO-ROMAN GENRE**, **RABBINIC LITERATURE** and **RABBINIC TRADITION**, can be considered *conglomerate* wordings which considerably strengthen the epistemic semantic density and epistemological condensation. They also begin to build students' field in the study of the New Testament by explaining crucial ideas for the study of the cultural context of Jesus and the production of the Gospels. This epistemic semantic density is then further strengthened by related *compact* technical wordings (Maton & Doran 2017a:60), for example, **evangelist**, **Law** and **Torah**, which cluster around the *conglomerate* wordings to supplement the building of field.

The strength of epistemic semantic density is supported by the way the power grammar and power composition in the text contribute to strengthening the epistemological condensation of this text. This is achieved by the manner in which the two clauses define the Graeco-Roman cultural background of the writing of the Gospels. I have analysed these as *taxonomizing* (underlined) clauses (Maton & Doran 2017b: 83-85), *classifying* the Gospels as a sub-type of Graeco-Roman biography.

The Gospels are a form of **GRAECO-ROMAN BIOGRAPHY** and therefore need to be interpreted in the light of other **ANCIENT LIVES**.

Here the power grammar is providing a complex set of ideas about historical and cultural genres condensed into two clauses which I needed to unpack. I also needed to ensure that the students understood the relationships between the power words.

Moreover, I analysed many of the clauses as enacting *coordinating* relations between ideas, implying *causing* or *correlating* relationships (Maton & Doran 2017b:85) between the ideas in the two halves of the clause.

THE DEVELOPMENT of the **HISTORICAL CRITICAL METHOD** gave rise to all sorts of theories about THE AUTHORSHIP AND PROVENANCE of the four gospels,

Here again are the power grammar and the power words, including three complex grammatical metaphors (Martin 2013:30) about how a particular academic movement viewed the gospels.

Finally, the power composition of many clauses expresses *cumulative* relations (Maton & Doran 2017b:89). Mostly these construe *consequential* and *sequential* relationships (Maton & Doran 2017b:90). Here bracketed with {} double brackets for the clause and single brackets for the conjunctions. For example, the clauses that follow the quote above:

...{{{While} **REDACTION CRITICISM** brought back the author as theologian,}}  
{{which {also} led to hypotheses about **the communities** which preserved the texts ;}}  
{{{More latterly,} such community theories have come under serious scrutiny.}}

This power composition compounds the epistemological condensation of the text by moving swiftly through three clauses summarizing a number of complex developments in the field of Biblical Studies over almost half a century. The strength of the epistemological condensation is developed through clauses expressing *vertical* relations (Maton & Doran 2017b: 92) through *subsumptive* or *integrative* connections between ideas. The brackets << show the clauses which summarize or bring together meanings from more than one preceding clause. For example:

<<Their reasonable coherence within their diversity>>  
{{{both} allows the search for the **HISTORICAL JESUS}}**  
{{{and yet also reveals} how}}  
<<their **REDACTION** of Jesus' teaching and ministry applied it to their own situations. >>

These power composition moves provide an experienced reader with connections back and forth to the different points about the gospels being made

in the text which need to be carefully unpacked for the first years in my classroom.

This analysis of the strength of epistemic semantic density and epistemological condensation through the power words, power grammar and power composition of the text means that what at a superficial glance appears, to the academic, trained in the discipline, to provide a nice introduction to the question, ‘What is a Gospel?’, turns out to present considerable difficulty for university students encountering these ideas for the first time.

Therefore, the teaching script set out above and the Deconstruction Phase (1) in general aims to set up a semantic wave alternating concreteness with abstraction as well as unpacking the complex meaning relations but then also building up new constellations of meaning so the students can read this difficult but relevant academic text with understanding. This building up or repacking of knowledge and meaning will take place to some extent in the Deconstruction Phase but will be more fully enacted through the Joint Construction Phase which I turn to next.

### ***Joint Construction Phase***

The Joint Construction Phase of the lesson cycle included activities with students working individually or in groups. They then worked on sentences in plenary and then try to construct paragraphs that accurately paraphrased an understanding of the source. The aim of these classes was also to translate the material from the larger purpose of the author into an academic assignment which set out key information about the cultural background, authorship and reception of the four Gospels. The comment below from my field diary captures some of the initial frustration I felt in trying to facilitate these further steps in academic writing.

*The class was only partially successful. I am becoming more and more conscious of how much skill and translation it takes to extract relevant information from a source that has a slightly different purpose to the assignment.*

However, through the stages of the Joint Construction I did begin to move the students towards high stakes academic writing, particularly by focussing on building *horizontal* sequencing through conjunctions and focussing on

using the author's name as the thematic material at the beginning of their sentences (Butt *et al.* 2000: 142-143).

### **Activity 1: Working on Sentences**

In this first activity the students were divided into groups to work on paraphrasing different sentences from the first paragraph of the source. We brainstormed some 'saying verbs' – *suggests, explains, implies, claims*- that would be useful for their joint constructions and I also instructed the students to foreground the author's name. The results of this exercise were as follows.

1.

Burridge explains that  
**the gospels are a form of GRECO ROMAN BIOGRAPHY.**

2.

Burridge suggests that  
**the Gospel** writers think of Jesus' ethical teaching as part of their good news about Jesus.

3.

Burridge implies that  
the authors' understandings of morality are seen in their account about Jesus.

4.

He explains that  
**this is a form of GRECO ROMAN GENRE**  
**that tells a story of an important teacher.**

5.

Burridge claims that  
stories about people imparted **moral teaching** in **ancient times**.

The immediate outstanding result of setting out these sentences and analysing the way they attempt to set out semantic relations in terms of the epistemic semantic density tools is to notice that the students followed the instructions to each begin with a clause attributing the knowledge in the sentence to the author. Other than this important move towards academic writing, these first jointly constructed sentences reproduced the power words, word groupings and power grammar from the original source text. The interesting exception to this

is Group 4 who added information from my elaboration in the Deconstruction Phase that Greco Roman biographies told stories of important teachers in order to illustrate how to live a good life.

## Activity 2: Paraphrasing Paragraphs

Unfortunately, the classes during this phase of the lesson cycle were disrupted by a student strike. As a result, I was working with only the three students who attended. The texts below are the result of a process of drafting the paragraphs individually, and editing in plenary.

1. Burridge claims that  
there are similarities between **the gospels** and **Jewish Literature**.  
    {{{However,} none of the material was used}}  
to write about the life of a **Rabbi**.  
He adds that  
**the Rabbis** preserved the accounts and teachings of other Rabbi's  
about **the law**.  
<<This means that>>  
**the law** was the main focus of **rabbinic stories**.  
    {{{In **the gospels**, {however}, **the evangelists** shifted the focus  
from **the law** to **Jesus** in the **gospels**.}}
2. The **Historical critical method** had theories about  
who wrote the gospels.  
//As an example **redaction criticism** had theories about **the Gospel  
writers** as **theologians**//  
    {{{as well as}} theories about their **communities**.}}  
    {{{More recently}}, these **community theories** have been  
    carefully checked.}}  
It was quickly accepted that there should be **four gospels** within **the  
early church**.  
    {{{Therefore} **Tatian's** experiment to make just one gospel  
was not accepted.}}

In these joint constructions we are clearly working towards the epistemological condensation and explicitness of high stakes academic writing. In particular, as well as reproducing wording and power grammar from the original, each paragraph is attempting to add *sequential* and *consequential* sequencing (see figure 3 above) which is not present in the source. The other notable feature in Example 1 is the creation of two plausible synonyms for what I had identified as *conglomerate* wording; ‘Jewish’ substituting for ‘Rabbinic’ in ‘Rabbinic Literature’ and ‘stories’ replacing ‘tradition’ in ‘Rabbinic Tradition.’

With these joint constructions the students are beginning to experience a modelling of high stakes academic writing which enacts an appropriate level of semantic density in the form of epistemological condensation. At the same time, they are rehearsing and revising the content of the source text. Most importantly from my point of view as a teacher of academic writing, they are clarifying issues that are opaque in the source text, especially being more explicit about the relationships between ideas. From my point of view as a discipline teacher, they are learning crucial background to the Bible and also beginning to attribute these to an author, instead of writing as if these were self-evident truths.

### ***Student Independent Writing***

Following the Joint Construction Phase, the lesson cycle moved on to the Independent Rewriting Phase. Below is the prompt I set, which was designed to discourage the students from simply restating the ordering of the information in the source material.

Write a factual account about the four gospels. Begin with this sentence. ‘Since ancient times, Christians have accepted that there are four genuine Gospels’.

This is an important new development because it moves students away from ‘plagiarism’ towards the elusive ideal of ‘using your own words’. The examples of extracts from two students’ essays below show that they are beginning to make some progress towards accurately restating ideas but also writing independently.

## Student 1

{{{Firstly,} Burrige explains that}}  
{{{since **ancient times**,} Christians have accepted that there are **four** genuine **gospels**.}}}  
{{{Hence} **Tatian's** idea of the formation of a single **gospel** was rejected.}}  
{{{Nevertheless,}} the importance of the canonical acceptance of **four gospels** has been frequently questioned.}}

The absence of information about the creation and development of **the gospels** has led to presumptions.

//For example, the authoring of the **gospels** was done by specific **authors** in specific locations [according to **ancient Christian traditions**.//

{{{Additionally,}} **Papias** claims that}}  
**Mark** was **Peter's** interpreter  
{{{and} that **Matthew** collected **Jesus'** sayings.}}}  
{{{Another example,}} **Irenaeus'** connection of **Luke** with **Paul**  
{and} **John** as **the beloved disciple**.}}

Recently developed, **the historical critical method** introduced theories about the authorship and origin of **the gospels**.

**Redaction criticism** suggested that **the authors were theologians**.

leading to descriptive **theories** pertaining to their locations.

<<These theories were subject to thorough examination.>>

This assignment shows creativity towards realising the rules of high stakes writing. Beginning with technical wording he is able not only to reproduce *conglomerate* and *compact* wording, from the source and the joint constructions, but also create accurate synonyms such as ‘Ancient Christian Tradition.’ In addition, he creates interesting examples of *specialist* wording, for example ‘canonical acceptance’ and ‘rabbinic practice’. He also combines *specialist* wordings into embedded word groupings (Maton & Doran 2017a:66) such as ‘the absence of information about the creation and development.’ The net effect of this use of power words is to strengthen the epistemic semantic density of his assignment.

This ESD is supported by reproducing the epistemological condensation of the *taxonomizing* and *coordinating* clausings from the source, by following the joint construction in adding *sequential* and *consequential*

sequencing as well as ending two of his paragraphs with *subsumptive* sequencing, one of which he has created.

It is also necessary to draw attention to the fact that his efforts towards epistemic semantic density and condensation do result in a high semantic flatline (Maton 2014: 142) without much leavening of examples but this does capture the source that he is trying to rewrite.

## Student 2

{{{Firstly,} Burridge explains that}}

{{{since **ancient times**} Christians have accepted that there are four genuine **Gospels**. }}

Burridge implies that there were many questions referring to why were there just **four gospels in the canon**.

{{{Furthermore} he says

<<the background of these **gospels** were unknown,>>

{{{but} the **early church traditions** made suggestions that the **gospels** were written by specific people in specific places.}}

Papias implies that **Mark** was associated with **Peter** as his interpreter

{{{and} **Matthew** was the collector of [Jesus' sayings.]}}

**Irenaeus'** association between **Luke** and **Paul**,

{{{as **John** as the beloved disciple is {another good example}}}.}

{{{In addition} the **historical critical method** formulated theories about who wrote the **gospels**.}}

{{{Secondly,} Burridge explains that there are similarities between **Gospel and Jewish literature**.}}

{{{Although,} not even one piece of material was used to write about a **Rabbi's** life.}}

{{{Furthermore} the accounts and teachings of the other **Rabbis** about the **law** were protected by the **tradition**.}}

He claims that the **law** was the main focus of the **Rabbinic stories**.

This assignment follows the pattern set by his classmates, shifting his writing towards building epistemological condensation. He reproduces power words and word groups that build epistemic semantic density and power grammar that alternates between *taxonomizing* and *coordinating*. In addition, he follows their explicit use of *sequential* and *consequential* sequencing. However, where his work stands out from the others, is by using a constant theme pattern to build coherent sequencing.

Analysing these assignments using the ESD and EC toolkit, begins to show that the process of the Joint Construction Phase had already begun to have a marked effect on the academic writing of these four students for this module. In particular, they have adopted theme and power composition patterns that had featured strongly in my Joint Construction pedagogy. This group of assignments all have at least coherent sequencing (Maton & Doran 2017b:95) building knowledge between clauses. Also they are all using the sequencing that was strongly modelled in the Joint Constructions. They have also shown a relatively strong facility with rearranging and reordering the discipline knowledge without the composition between clauses becoming incoherent.

## **Conclusion: Reflections on my Practice**

This paper is the first fruits of a larger research project I have undertaken in the form of a Masters in Education. It is my first attempt to show an example of how I, the self-reflexive practitioner can work theoretically with sociological toolkits rather than feelings and hunches. I have tried to show how I used LCT Semantics to enhance and analyse an integrated Reading to Learn literacy pedagogy in a disciplinary classroom at a tertiary institution.

Firstly this work suggests that first year tertiary teachers should not follow my earlier example and assume that a reading that they prescribe is simple self-evident and will give the students the information that is intended. At the very least we should carefully read our prescribed texts and try to become be aware of how they may be misunderstood by students. My experience in this lesson cycle and indeed the module as a whole suggests that the effort of integrated literacy pedagogy bears fruit in clearer and better organized academic writing. My particular use of Reading to Learn and the epistemic semantic density and epistemic condensation tools are perhaps not essential, but I would argue that individual teachers could develop some form

of the deconstruction, joint construction and independent construction lesson cycle as one of their toolkits of pedagogic genres for delivering introductory content from foundational authors in their discipline.

My experience in this module also suggests that, in moving from deconstructing a text and unpacking its content into writing and paraphrasing in assignments, the concepts of power words, power grammar and power composition could be further powerful tools for the first year teacher. This is because power words will help to draw attention to technical wordings in the discipline as they occur in assigned reading and particularly point to their correct use and the acceptable range of synonyms which can be used to paraphrase them in assignments. Power grammar and power composition, in my experience and the Reading to Learn philosophy of scaffolding reading and writing of academic genres, point to a useful way of unpacking how texts are structured. Thus a teacher can use power grammar to highlight important language patterns in the discipline such as how to structure definitions, to express how one phenomenon causes another and to illustrate how to express ideas clearly in the target academic language, whether English or indigenous African languages.

In the writing of assignments the lecturer or tutors could continue to model the most powerful and appropriate ways to use these language patterns and thus begin to ensure more students produce assignments which approach high stakes academic writing. Power composition, on the other hand, is a tool for laying bear the structuring of academic language particularly where highly theorised academic writing makes this opaque. Lecturers or tutors could then also model explicitly how to structure assignments in a real world context of an actual assignment rather than in decontextualized tutorial on essay writing.

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