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PLOTTING PEDAGOGY IN A RURAL SOUTH AFRICAN ENGLISH CLASSROOM: A LEGITIMATION CODE THEORY ANALYSIS

Poetry instruction in South African English Additional Language (EAL) classrooms is in sharp decline, while little empirical research exists to shed light on this situation. This paper describes what happened to poetry pedagogy in a Grade 10 EAL classroom in rural KwaZulu-Natal when teacher and learners were forced to engage with a poem inappropriate to the context, learner level and teacher content knowledge. This paper applies a sociology of knowledge lens, Legitimation Code Theory, to the task of describing EAL poetry pedagogy in a resource scarce context of high difficulty. The analysis shows how the difficulty level of the poem obstructed epistemic access to the poem's global meanings, generating pedagogic incoherence. Implications and recommendations for further research are presented.

INTRODUCTION

Poetry has become a ritual of mass learning, teaching and most importantly, opening wounds so that they may heal, in the presence of art (Nova Masango, 2013).

Unfortunately, for most learners in South Africa's schools, there is a vast gulf between the dynamic performed poetry community in which many young South Africans, such as Nova Masango (2013), actively participate, and their experience of poetry in English Additional Language (EAL) classrooms. While performed poetry is widely created and eagerly listened to locally and internationally (D'Abdon, 2014, 2016), the study of English literature, particularly poetry, within EAL curricula is declining due to perceptions of difficulty, elitism and mechanistic pedagogies, generating negative attitudes in learners (Fialho, Zyngier & Miall, 2011; Newfield & Maungedzo, 2006). Consequently, many educators minimise poetry in EAL classrooms, despite strong earlier motivations for its inclusion, and with little empirical knowledge of the nature and effects of poetry instruction within school classrooms. This paper aims to explore the insights to be gained from applying Legitimation Code Theory (LCT), a sociology of knowledge lens, to the empirical description of poetry pedagogy in an EAL classroom.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON EAL LITERATURE TEACHING

Enthusiastic rationales promulgated since the 1970s have hailed literature study for English language learners. Advocates argue that literary texts provide meaningful, purposive, authentic language contexts that produce language development benefits such as expanded vocabulary and increased grammatical range and target language thinking capacity (Brumfit & Carter, 1987; Davies & Widdowson, 1974; Nada, 1993; Sanoto, 2017.) Formal poetic features may demand more conscious attention than everyday language, providing input to be negotiated and synthesised (Hanauer, 1997). More affectively-oriented claims include the fostering of cross-cultural awareness and personal engagement with universal themes and issues, along with the evocation of powerful emotional responses. Studying poetry can also stimulate learners' own creative writing (Heath, 1996; Lazar, 1993; Kirkgöz, 2008).

However, despite these positive motivations, many local and international teachers and learners see studying poetry as the most challenging and least popular aspect of the syllabus. In many EAL classrooms, it is simply avoided (Benton, 2000; Dymoke, 2012; Epperly, 2009; Kumah, 2009; Newfield & Maungedzo, 2006). Yet, in addition to arguments for the intrinsic aesthetic value of studying poetry, engaging with poems' complex, condensed, figurative ecosystems can contribute to developing high-level reading competencies in learners (Barry, 1999; Lockett, 2010).

Much sensible pedagogic advice has been disseminated alongside these motivations, encompassing issues of text selection and diverse pedagogic approaches, from the more cognitively formalist to the more affective. Supporters of the New Critical tradition advocate close reading of texts, focusing on formal poetic features such as word choice, language patterning and part/whole relations (Hanauer, 1997). Texts need to be carefully selected for appropriate linguistic and cultural level, length, genre representation and relevance to learners (Brumfit, 1981; Scott & Huntington, 2007). Robertson (2017) emphasises moving from learners' extant knowledge of poetry in the home language, using poetry for reading instruction, and harnessing multisensory, interactive approaches, including much oral poetry reading and having learners illustrate poems. Hughes (2007) advises stressing the orality of poetry, along with facilitating learners in collaborative searches for multiple meanings. However, many such proposals continue to rest upon slim empirical foundations. Edmonson (1997) deplors the lack of well-designed studies of the use of literature in additional language classrooms. Carter (2007) reiterates the need to fill the gap of empirical, classroom-based studies and 'generate enhanced paradigms' for this task. Yet Hall (2015: 96) concludes, again, that 'we know little or nothing about the actual teaching of literature in second language situations'.

Of this 'little or nothing', more is known about additional language learners as readers of target language literature than about how additional/foreign language teachers teach literature. Most reader studies focus on college students, particularly in the USA (Akyel, 1995; Ahmed, 2014; Hanauer, 2001; Hall, 2015). Overall, poetry reading by additional language learners comprises processes of close reading in the service of global meaning construction via excavation of latent textual meanings (Hanauer, 2001). However, different people read different genres varyingly, and experienced and educated readers read differently from novice and uneducated readers (Peskin, 2010). Readers with low levels of linguistic ability read with literal understandings that subvert high-level comprehension responses, partly because accurate comprehending needs reading from behind the eyes; that is, prior experience and knowledge schemata help in linking new information to extant knowledge. Use of poetry can boost learners' intrinsic motivation to study and use the target language (Khatib & Daftarifard, 2010). Overall, novice readers are more text-bound and more dependent on bottom-up linguistic processing, lacking experienced readers' more flexible repertoire of reading strategies. Readers of poetry expect complexity and challenge and the reading strategies deployed usually comprise learned and taught behaviours (Hall, 2015). The strategies of poetry readers identified by Culler (1975), such as assuming the significance and metaphorical coherence of texts, the use of binary oppositions as means of fostering coherence, and the suspension of disbelief, comprise top-down means of processing cultivated gazes through the typically institutionalised conventions of schooled literary meaning-making (Fish, 1981).

Studies of literature teaching in additional/foreign language classrooms tend to be small-scale and qualitative, with earlier studies focusing on teacher evaluation and assessment strategies.

These earlier studies highlighted the predominant use of testing, rather than teaching questions, with teachers mostly asking many closed-ended questions (Nystrand, 1991). Assessment questions clustered around three types: evaluate and criticise, describe and discuss, and paraphrase and contextualise (Carter & Long, 1990).

Good literature teacher traits include high use of authentic, open-ended questions, encouraging learners in the exploration of texts via their own experience, and the incorporation of prior learner responses into subsequent teacher questions (Nystrand, 1991). Teacher intervention has been identified as crucial in maximising the potential in poetry study in terms of purposeful, dynamic thought and interaction (Boyd & Maloof, 2000). Naidoo's (1992) case study focused on the effects of studying anti-racist literature on the development of learner cultural knowledge. A few case studies have been suggestive of the benefits for learners of interactive teaching approaches such as collaborative tasks, including learner dyads, small group work and individual learner journals with teacher marginalia and high-level teacher evaluation (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991; Scott & Huntington, 2007). South African studies are even more elusive. Reid (1982) and Paton and Janks (1985) investigated literary text selections for the secondary school EAL curriculum, concluding that it was dominated by canonical Western texts. Newfield and Maungedzo (2006) documented Maungedzo's action research study, tracking the positive effects of his implementation of a multi-modal, learner-centred, project-based approach to teaching the poetry curriculum to his deeply alienated Sowetan high school students.

The research knowledge base with respect to the teaching and learning of poetry in EAL classrooms remains sparse. In particular, there is very little systematic, pedagogically theorised knowledge about how teachers teach poetry in these contexts, the nature of their interaction with the learners in their classrooms, and how these practices relate to issues of the knowledge building of literary competence. Building knowledge of EAL poetry pedagogy is an important component of understanding the relationship between the overall pedagogy of subject English teachers and the development of advanced literacy competencies in learners, hence the present paper's focus on this lesson.

This paper explores the insights to be gained by applying LCT (Maton, 2014b), a multi-dimensional, flexible sociology of knowledge and knowing practices, to the task of describing EAL poetry pedagogy. The goal is to demonstrate the nature of the insights to be garnered through the application of this lens, not to effect definitive judgements about the teacher and her pedagogy.

METHODOLOGY

Rural South African schools serving black communities generally comprise multiple dimensions of marginalisation: geographic, economic, educational and linguistic (Moletsane, 2012). This was true of the KwaZulu-Natal school in which this 2008 lesson occurred. It was situated 60 km from the city of Pietermaritzburg and 20 km from the nearest town, in an economically depressed area. The school was purposively selected as a functional rural state school. In 2004 (personal communication), the principal stated that most of the 820 learners lived with their grandparents and most parents/guardians struggled to pay the minimal annual school fees of R150. The 88% Grade 12 pass rate was thus a considerable achievement, but needs contextualisation against the almost 50% dropout of learners by Grade 11.

Eleven Grade 10 lessons taught by the same teacher were observed and video and/or audio recorded: five in 2005, four in 2006 and two in 2008. Nine were transcribed and closely

analysed, initially inductively and qualitatively. The recordings of the other two were inaudible due to noise interference from adjoining classrooms. The lesson selected here is representative of earlier analysis of the broader data which revealed two dominant patterns. The first was a strongly teacher-centred pedagogy, with a prevalence of whole-class instruction. The second was oral group work, for brief periods, with group presentation of a short product arising from the group work. Strong teacher control of pacing and sparse evaluation were common to both modes. The lesson analysed here was selected for further LCT analysis due to the substantial challenges presented by the choice of poem for both teacher and learners.¹

Focusing on a single lesson allows for in-depth exploration of the knowledge practices enacted, utilising two LCT dimensions. I proceed with contextualisation of this lesson. Thereafter, I introduce LCT and the two dimensions, specialisation and semantics, used in this analysis. I then present the analysis of the materials used and the lesson, exploring how LCT illuminates aspects of the nature of the teacher's poetry pedagogy, and the implications for improving this aspect of subject English pedagogy in South Africa.

LESSON CONTEXTUALISATION

The teacher, Mrs Dlamini (a pseudonym), an isiZulu home language speaker, was qualified with a teacher training college diploma and was completing a degree majoring in English and mathematics through distance education. She had taught at the school for 12 years, with nine years' experience in teaching English. Her goal was to motivate her learners to gain knowledge of English and an understanding of its importance to the wider world. She expressed more interest in the language aspect of the syllabus than the literature and saw the extensive use of code-switching into isiZulu by content subject teachers and logistical problems presented by aspects of the recently introduced Outcomes Based Education curriculum as creating challenges for her work. For example, she said it was difficult to control classes with up to 65 learners in group work and assessing all the oral pairs created time problems. In this class of almost 50 Grade 10 isiZulu home language learners, she was teaching a sonnet by the eighteenth century British poet William Wordsworth.

LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson focused on understanding Wordsworth's sonnet *The World Is Too Much With Us*. Comprising five phases as tabulated below, the lesson was strongly teacher-led, apart from phase four.

Phase	Focus	Time (end of phase)
1	Settling in, distributing handout	1:12
2	Teacher-led decoding of biographical paragraph	14:09
3	Teacher-led explication of poem	42:14
4	Group work: answering worksheet questions	46:30
5	Teacher-led sharing of answers to some worksheet questions	51:08

The lesson was organised around a photocopied handout comprising a biographical paragraph on Wordsworth (see Appendix 1), the poem, a glossary of 12 words, a six-line paraphrasing of the poem's meaning and two sets of questions headed 'Understand the poem' and 'Explore poetic devices'. The paragraph briefly referenced Wordsworth's time in France, return to Britain and views on the French Revolution, and nature. There was no reference to

Wordsworth's response to industrialisation or explication of 'Romanticism' as reaction to this.

Overall, this strongly teacher-controlled lesson comprised mostly teacher-led exposition of the paragraph and the poem, with extended 'question and answer' sequences exhibiting the initiation and response pattern first identified by Mehan (1979), with few evaluation moves. The selection of content, its sequencing and the pacing was controlled by Mrs Dlamini, moving the lesson consistently along, with only slight lessening of pace in the brief group discussion of handout questions. Decoding both texts was the sole focus, without integration with other aspects of the syllabus. Interdisciplinary relations (boundaries between different subjects) were weaker, due to the teacher referencing links to the Life Science syllabus in relation to the image of 'sleeping flowers'. Interdiscursive relations (boundaries between schooled and everyday knowledge) were also relatively weak through the teacher's drawing on isiZulu cultural frames to explain aspects of both texts.

Mrs Dlamini's warm, relaxed manner permitted intermittent noisiness and laughter, while maintaining task focus. Seldom naming learners, she selected readers and responders from those who self-nominated. Only one learner-initiated question occurred, during a discussion of what it means to be pagan.

The above overview broadly outlined the relational and procedural structures of the lesson. However, it provided no insight into how the knowledge/knower and semantic practices underpinning the lesson were enacted. It is to these aspects that an LCT analysis was directed.

LEGITIMATION CODE THEORY

LCT comprises a sociological framework seeking to uncover the deep generative principles of social practices which offers a rich multi-dimensional set of conceptual resources for this task. Drawing from Bernstein's code theory, LCT sees social practices as enacting competing claims to legitimacy via more or less explicit or tacit languages of legitimation deployed within a wide arena of social fields. Informed by Bourdieu's field theory, social actors are conceived as working collaboratively and competitively in shifting struggles over status and resources. Such actors' goals are to achieve maximum relational gain, to have power to shape what counts as most important within fields and to secure the most advantageous positions within them. Field theory helps illuminate the way the organisation and relations of social fields structure knowledge practices, while code theory draws attention to the shaping importance of knowledge structures for fields (Maton, 2014b).

Specialisation: epistemic relations and social relations

The specialisation dimension of LCT focuses on the underlying organisational principles of knowledge practices with respect to what they are oriented towards and by whom they are enacted. That is, all practices simultaneously comprise relations both to objects and to subjects (Maton, 2014b: 29). For analytical purposes, one can then differentiate between epistemic relations (focused upon practices and what they spotlight) and social relations (oriented towards who is the agent of the practices). With respect to knowledge claims, epistemic relations are expressed in terms of the relations between knowledge and its items of study, and social relations in terms of knowledge and its originators. Epistemic relations and social relations can vary in degree of strength for different knowledge practices. For example, physics draws strong boundaries between itself and other knowledge practices in terms of

what may be studied and what constitutes legitimated procedures of study. However, in principle, anyone who masters these practices may study that which physics focuses upon. Physics thus reveals strong epistemic relations and weak social relations.

By contrast, what is studied in school English can be highly varied (Maton, 2014b: 32), ranging from the linguistic structure of the language, through literary to popular and academic texts, and oral processes of communication. Epistemic relations here are relatively weaker. Who may be seen as legitimate knowers is variable. In terms of the literary aspect of subject English, it is those who have taken on particular literary identities and ways of being, producing relatively stronger social relations. The organising principles of practices can then be conceived in terms of specialisation codes, varying independently in strengths of epistemic relations and social relations. Visualising these relations as intersecting continua generates a matrix, along which countless variations in the strengths of each aspect can be plotted, within and across four specialisation codes: knowledge, elite, knower and relativist. These are represented in Figure 1 below:

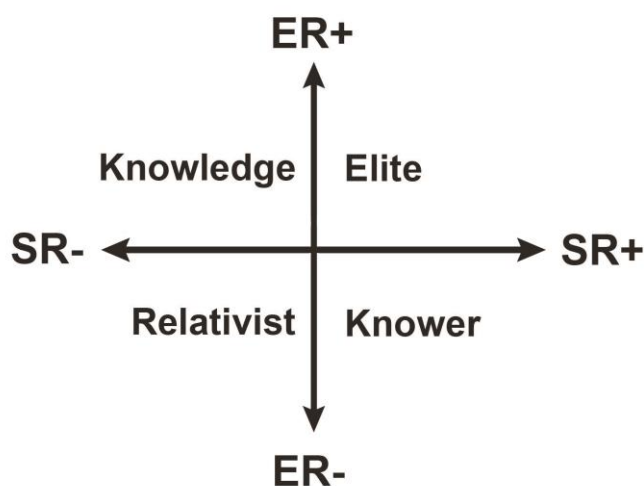


Figure 1: Specialisation plane (adapted from Maton, 2014b)

A knower code thus comprises relatively weaker epistemic relations and stronger social relations (ER-/SR+). The legitimacy of claims derives from the legitimacy of knowers and their attributes, rather than the specific nature of the object of study or the forms of knowledge-building. Maton (2014b: 32) argues that the ‘procedures and principles of knowledge are thus relatively tacit’. The legitimating traits of knowers may derive from biological or social features, and ‘socialized or cultivated dispositions’ (Maton, 2014b: 32).

In the field of the school subject EAL, varied codings are possible. The study of English may be approached linguistically, with emphasis upon structural knowledge and analysis of language forms. This could fall within a knowledge code. On the other hand, study which sets fluent, communicative competence as the goal, emphasising learner language use in real-life contexts, may fall within the knower code. A range of coding placements is also possible for the roles given to literature study within EAL courses. In advanced classes with goals of high-level literary analysis, similar to those set in home-language courses, a cultivated knower code may apply, often utilising ‘a powerful invisible pedagogy’ (Christie & Macken-Horarik, 2007: 157) with tacit criteria for success. Such knowers are likely fostered via immersion in established literary canons, internalisation of cultural heritage values of aesthetic refinement and sensibility, and analytic competence in close reading of literary texts

(Hennessy et al., 2010; Lockett, 2010). Other possible forms of knower code in EAL literary studies will derive from how much emphasis is placed on aspects of the text itself, the author’s context and intentions, the reader’s personal experiences and responses to texts, and/or the reader’s context. The specialisation plane offers the means for nuanced tracing of variations in relative strengths of epistemic relations and social relations, within as well as between quadrants, as illustrated in Figure 2 below. These can be explored within individual units such as single lessons, multiple units within individual case studies and cross-case comparisons.

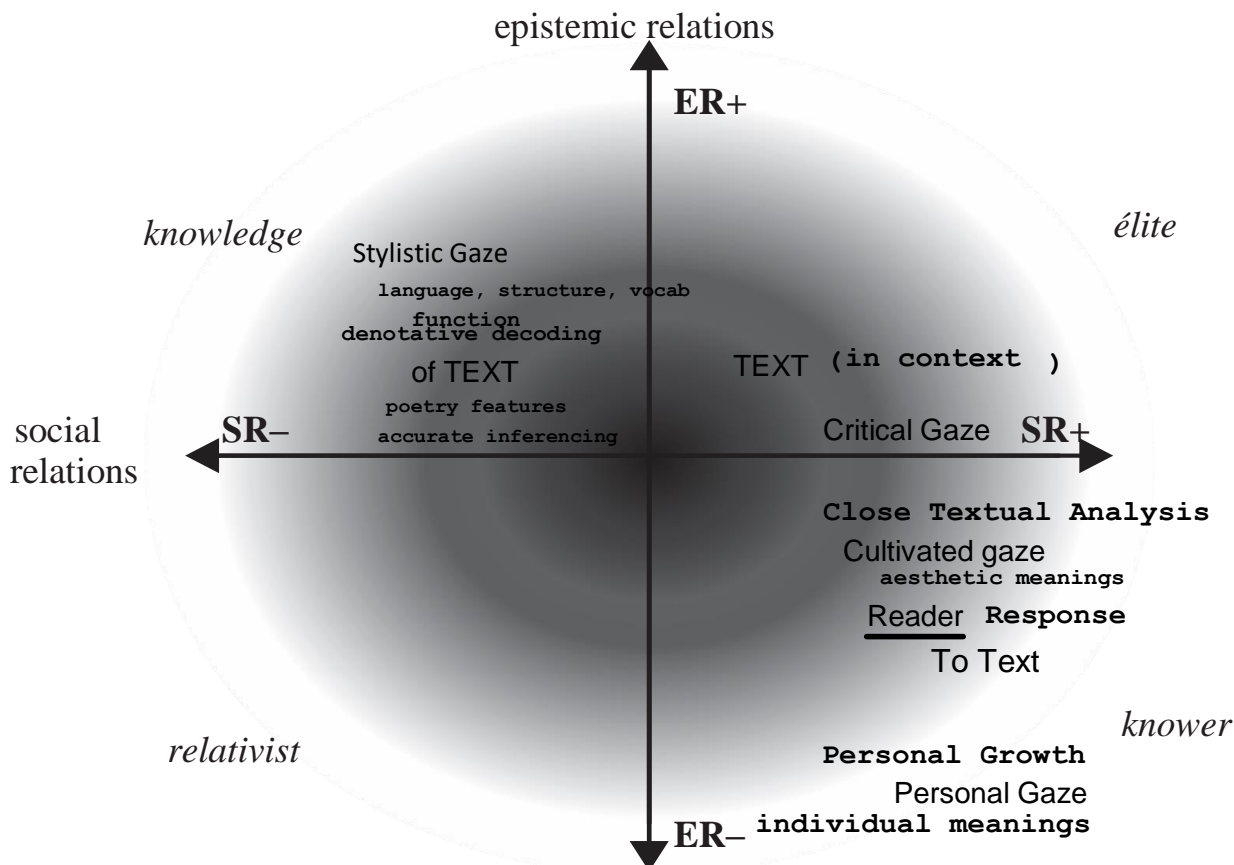


Figure 2: Specialisation plane: EAL poetry pedagogies (ibid)

These variations in approaches to EAL literature instruction can be organised upon a continuum of relative strengths of specialisation relations moving from ER+/SR- to ER-/SR+, to inform analysis of pedagogy and materials utilised. This serves as an external language of description (Ensor & Hoadley, 2004; Maton & Chen, 2016) that translates the salient LCT concepts into an analytical framework for tracking specialisation relations in EAL poetry lessons. This framework can be presented as follows:

▲ **Teacher/pedagogic material focuses upon:**

ER++/SR--

Knowledge of language in poem, e.g.:

structure (grammar), vocabulary (denotation), functions.

Knowledge of poet, e.g.:

biography, interests, genres.

ER+/SR-

Knowledge of poetry, e.g.:

formal features – structures, language patterns, poetic techniques;

poem as contained semantico-logical puzzle:

seeing and making plausible links between parts and whole;

how to read between the lines and effect accurate inferencing; and

cultural conventions/meanings with interpretive salience for poem.

ER-/SR+

Seeking core, aesthetic meaning of poem via:

modelling + performing close textual analysis, including:

adopting subjective stance within ‘high’ cultural criteria (more ‘objective’);

activating salient cultural schemas + analogies;

identifying symbolic connotations of poetic elements; and

extrapolating from text.

Fostering learners’ interpretive abilities with respect to the above.

Fostering learners’ target language thinking abilities via engagement with poem.

Fostering learners’ responsive capacities + ranges via:

choosing a poem which the teacher likes and which is aligned with learner cultural frames, interests, motivations and needs;

building bridges between learners’ world and the world of the poet and poem;

growing learners’ empathic capacities via responses to poem;

growing learners’ creativity and creative writing capacities; and

activating and harnessing learner enjoyment of poem.

ER --/SR ++

Fostering learners’ personal growth through engagement with poem.

Eliciting learners’ personal responses to poem.

Managing classroom relations: encouraging/validating learners, defusing difficulty/tension, deflecting face threatening issues.

▼ **Semantics: semantic gravity and semantic density**

The semantics dimension focuses on the nature of meaning in relation to sustained knowledge building. This dimension understands social fields of practice as ‘semantic structures’ whose controlling principles are conceptualised as semantic codes made up of semantic gravity and semantic density (Maton, 2014a: 36). The concept of semantic gravity articulates the organising principle beneath different types of educational knowledge relating to the extent of the context-dependence of meaning (Maton, 2014b). The relative strength of semantic gravity can vary along a continuum of strengths where, the more contingent meaning is on its location, the stronger the semantic gravity (SG+) and, the less contingent, the weaker the semantic gravity (SG-). So attending to the denotative meaning of a word in a poem encapsulates stronger semantic gravity than attending to the theme expressed through the word in the poem. Furthermore, by:

dynamising this continuum to analyse change over time, one can also describe processes of: *weakening* semantic gravity (\downarrow), such as moving from the concrete particulars of a specific case towards generalisations and abstractions; and *strengthening* semantic gravity (\uparrow), such as moving from abstract or generalised ideas towards concrete and delimited cases (Maton, 2014a: 37).

Semantic density captures the extent to which meaning is concentrated within social practices such as clothing and teaching. It may also vary along a continuum of strengths. When semantic density is stronger (SD+), greater amounts of meaning are concentrated within practices; with weaker semantic density (SD-), fewer meanings are concentrated (Maton, 2014a). So the term ‘foot’ as used in everyday discourse to refer to a body part would carry fewer meanings than its use as a technical poetry term, where it would invoke networks of related concepts such as stressed and unstressed syllables, and iambic meter. Semantic density can also be dynamised to capture processes of weakening and strengthening. The relative strengths of both concepts can alter independently, producing a spectrum of semantic codes (SG+/-, SD+/-). Changes in semantic gravity and semantic density over time can be represented as visual semantic profiles. Figure 3 below provides a simplified illustration of idealised profiles mapping changes in both semantic gravity and semantic density moving in inverse relationship to each other (they can alter independently). The semantic profiles also indicate differences in the range of movements between SG-, SD+ and SG+, SD-. Profile A1 shows a high semantic flatline, representing knowledge far less tied to its immediate context than that shown in the low semantic flatline of profile A2. Profile B shows a semantic wave, revealing movements between more and less contextually tied knowledge (Maton, 2014a: 38).

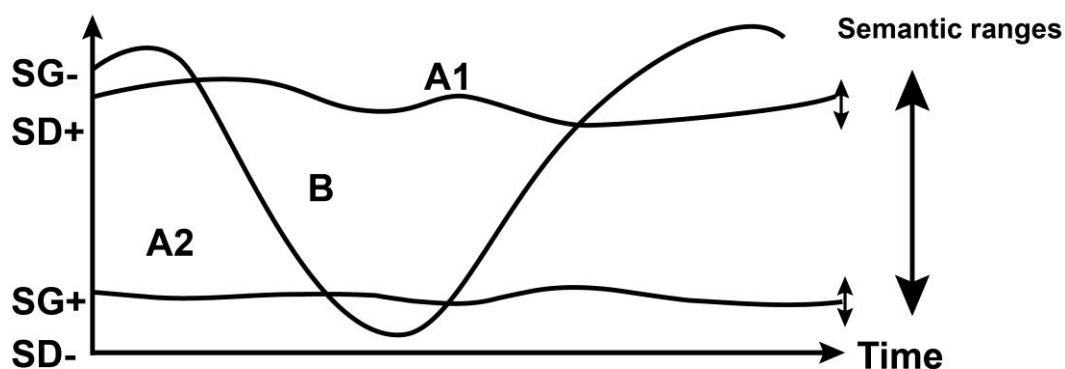


Figure 3: Semantic profiles (adapted from Maton, 2014b: 143)

Specialisation analysis: text difficulty obstructing epistemic access

The objects of study in this lesson were the biographical text and the poem, *The World Is Too Much With Us*, while the knowers were Mrs Dlamini and the learners. Tracing the shifts in epistemic and social relations here highlights the profound consequences of mis-selection of the poem for study in this context, compounded by insufficiently scaffolded teaching materials.

Specialisation relations in the lesson materials

The photocopied materials (from an unnamed textbook) comprised a paragraph of biographical information on Wordsworth, the poem, a glossary, a paraphrase of the poem’s meaning and two sets of post-reading questions. The biographical paragraph moved between

relatively stronger social relations and relatively stronger epistemic relations. It opened with the assertion of the poet's inspiration by the ideals of the French Revolution: 'liberty, equality and fraternity (brotherhood)'. Epistemic relations were strengthened through the provision of biographical details about the poet's tertiary education, his French relations and his return to the English countryside. Slight strengthening of social relations was evident through the inclusion of information alluding to his beliefs and values – abhorrence of violence in the late French Revolution and the British war against France, and seeing nature as a key source of inspiration. Epistemic relations were foregrounded in the list of glossed words placed to the right of the poem. They remained foregrounded in the six-line paraphrase of the poem provided on the next page, and five of the six questions listed under the heading 'Understand the poem'. These, as well as the other two ER+ questions, focused on the basic meanings of words, phrases and poetic devices. The majority of questions expressing stronger social relations focused upon how certain poetic devices contributed to the aesthetic effects of the poem. One question elicited learner opinion on the salience of ideas in the poem for today. This was expressed in general, rather than personal terms. Overall, the questions highlighted building knowledge of the poem, primarily in terms of denotative meaning, and knowledge of poetry as expressed through the poet's deployment of poetic devices. This suggests placement just within the knowledge quadrant due to the focus on denotative decoding of the meaning of the poem, with a little shift into the knower quadrant via the few questions orienting slightly towards a close textual analysis approach.

Specialisation analysis of the lesson

Overall, the lesson showed a dominance of epistemic relations. Phase 2 displayed relatively stronger epistemic relations, with Phases 2 and 3 expressing slightly less strong epistemic relations. Episode 2 had some sections with stronger social relations. Episode 3 had some sections moving into relatively stronger social relations.

Mrs Dlamini's main focus was on decoding both texts, mostly linearly, with epistemic relations predominating. She asked many display questions focused on establishing the denotative meanings of words. For example, immediately after her initial oral reading of the paragraph, she asked: '*So the kind of poem that he loved to write was what?*' She and the learners co-chorused '*Romantic*' as a response. Further examples of definition-seeking included: '*Fraternity means what?*' and '*Something that is sordid is something that is how?*' Most of the vocabulary she asked about simply required learners to recite the definition provided on the handout, invoking resonances with the collusive 'safe-talk' between teachers and learners identified within apartheid-era 'Bantu' education (Chick, 1996). Safe-talk comprises patterns of non-threatening, routinised exchange that avoided exposure of either teacher or learners' lack of specialised knowledge.

For unglossed words, Mrs Dlamini directed learners to dictionaries. This was reasonably helpful for 'devote', providing 'give completely'. However, the dictionary definitions of 'world' provided 'the earth with all its countries and peoples', which could not help learners to access the implied meaning of 'worldliness' in the poem, a crucial 'keystone' concept for understanding the entire poem. The very next entry in the school dictionary is 'worldly', defined as '1. of life on earth, not spiritual, 2. interested only in money, pleasure etc. **worldliness**' (South African Oxford School Dictionary, 2004: 523). Inferring that this is the poet's meaning relies on advanced poetic comprehension competencies drawing on holistic meanings beyond literal, linear decoding. This was clearly beyond the learners' capacities and seemed beyond those of the teacher as well. The absence of gloss for 'the world' in the support materials had significant, negative consequences for teacher and learners.

Without this knowledge, both teacher and learners struggled to interpret the opening line ‘The world is too much with us’. Learners initially failed to respond when asked the meaning of ‘world’. After teacher encouragement: ‘Your own opinion; just come and say,’ learners valiantly provided a range of literal and occasionally more metaphorical possibilities: ‘environment’, ‘population’, ‘the world is so obsessed with us’, and ‘the world is bigger than us’. In a follow-up move to ‘so obsessed with us’, the teacher validated the answer and asked for explanation of ‘obsessed’. Another learner offered: ‘interest’. Mrs Dlamini demurred: ‘To be interested – is the world interested in us?’ Learners chorused: ‘No.’ Mrs Dlamini repeated the line of poetry, adding: ‘Is something not somewhere, ja?’ She then repeated the learner’s utterance, and ended this sequence with: ‘Let us find out, maybe we get the right answer. This all our opinion (sic).’ Her initial foregrounding of epistemic relations thus concluded without clearly establishing the knowledge needed to unlock the metaphorical senses of the opening line. However, there was also no emphasis on social relations in terms of learners’ personal associations for this line. While the teacher acknowledged opinions, she did not provide guidance on how these could be meaningfully utilised in relation to schooled literary practices. This is again suggestive of safe-talk (Chick, 1996), and situations identified by Jacklin (2004), Hoadley (2006) and Hugo and Wedekind (2013), comprising routinised practices with formal semblances of pedagogic discourse but lacking processes generative of specialised insight. Hoadley (2006: 28) concludes that these represent ‘collapse’/‘rupture’ in pedagogic discourse, or the lack of a specific aspect of pedagogy within a lesson. The classroom activity here comprises a comparable absence of specialised pedagogic code, best plotted as ER°/SR°, located at the intersection of the axes of the specialisation plane.

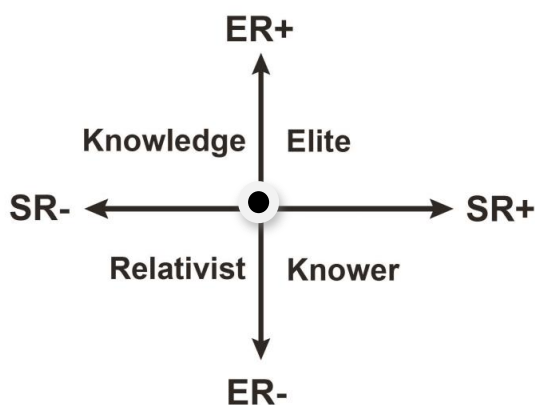


Figure 4: Specialisation plane: zero coding

This represents the occurrence of a ‘shell’ of pedagogic activity without offering learners access to a specialised literary (or language) voice in the face of a textual choice acutely misaligned with learners’ language level and frames of reference and the teacher’s content knowledge.

Within this superordinate ER°/SR° position, the interludes of relatively stronger social relations serve an important localised role in helping both teacher and learners stay a demanding course. Social relations became relatively stronger when Mrs Dlamini worked to:

- Reduce the distance between the 200 year old British poem and the learners’ world: ‘Okay, getting and spending ... we, you girls, we receive some of the things, we spend some of the things When you go and buy; then my husband will come – he spend a lot of money buying rubbish sometimes.’

- Encourage learners that they could understand the poem:
'Okay, as I got to read the poem once more, try to understand, be in William's shoes, take as if it's you who's writing this poem ... then I think it's ... you're going to have the understanding.'
- Diffuse difficulty levels (often with humour):
'Hau, there's nothing that we own. Can you listen to that Fiona? They don't own anything' (learner laughter).

Learners struggled to explain why Wordsworth wrote Romantic poetry. Mrs Dlamini's response was to construct an intricate local analogy to aspects of the biographic paragraph:

'Let's say if you are a boy, get married to Xhosa girl You do what they want Then you get married, until you have a baby with that particular somebody. All of a sudden, when you think that's the best place for me to go and stay, if that's your in-laws say, "you going to come and stay with us this side", or you think that the better place for me are to stay next to my in-laws You get the point? ... But in that particular place, all of a sudden they start fighting ... they declare what you call war. What would you, what would come into your mind? [Ls: Leave that place] You'd be stressed, right? What else would come to your mind? Would you continue staying? [Ls: No] Stressed as you are, depressed as you are – what would you do? ... [L: I would flee that particular (place)].'

This analogy re-constructed the socio-political complexities of Wordsworth's circumstances, values and subsequent actions in individually psychologised terms, with misleading implications, such as Wordsworth and Vallon being married. Dis-analogous relations, such as nation-state versus ethno-linguistic conflicts, were not clarified (Bertram, 2015). The appeal to learner experience and responses was largely rhetorical, de facto excluding opportunities for learners to explore counter-opinions or how this information shed light on the poem. The extensive amount of time and energy expended by the teacher here provided little return in increasing meaningful access to the poem.

Here, and when dealing with the poem, the teacher gave more attention to the less specialised dimensions of both texts, avoiding the unpacking of notions such as liberty, equality and fraternity. While the learners remained engaged, the analogy above did not offer salient schemata for interpretation of the poem. The biographical material was unhelpful in this regard, omitting potentially more useful information such as Wordsworth's views on industrialisation. In the short term, deployment of unspecialised strategies offers face-saving benefits to both teachers and learners. However, these, in combination with the selection of a poetry text inappropriate to both the teacher's and learners' competencies and needs, mitigate strongly against learners' acquisition of advanced English literacies and likelihood of seeing engagement with English, beyond the communicatively utilitarian, as offering much personal meaning and value.

Insights from semantic analysis

Focusing upon semantic gravity and semantic density draws attention to formations of abstraction, particularity conceptual networks and connections. Mapping these formations within pedagogic practice can:

1. highlight issues of conceptual complexity contributing to challenges in decoding the object of study; and

2. illuminate areas where deliberate developmental attention may provide teachers with knowledge of valued semantic profiles within their discipline.

Such insight may assist teachers in strategically deploying a wider repertoire of semantic ranges to facilitate the growth of their learners' literacy and literary competencies.

The semantic gravity analysis revealed two broad patterns. The first, dominant pattern involved a series of incomplete downward 'escalators', where the teacher aimed to unpack word meanings. The second pattern exhibited a slight downwards drift, but comprised more 'semantic scatter' than a defined descending escalator, due to the absence of significant connections and semantic flow.

Maton (2013) and his researchers found frequent occurrences of descending semantic gravity escalators in the Australian school lessons they observed. These formed when teachers unpacked more abstract, specialist knowledge into more concrete, everyday forms, without overt modelling of subsequent ways to ascend to more decontextualised formulations. An example of incomplete downward shift occurred when the teacher asked: *'Have you ever seen the flowers sleeping?'*

Ls: *[Noisy generalised 'No.']*

T: *Hau!*

Ls: *I'm talking to the Grade 10, to the Science class. [Laughter] Do you good at Science?*

Ls: *Yes.*

T: *But you don't know about flowers? Hau!*

Ls: *We don't know that flowers sleep.*

T: *The flowers sleep.*

Ls: *Yes*

T: *Who is your, who is your science, your, your, your life science teacher?*

Ls: *[Noisily name teacher.]*

T: *I ask him to take you out to Botanic Gardens.*

Ls: *Yes.*

T: *I'll ask him to take you out to Botanic Gardens. Maybe you going to see different kinds of flowers. The flowers sleep, but not all the flowers – different kinds of flowers. You have to know them by their names. I'll ask him to take there in town. It's nearby you, Botanic Gardens. [Noisy response from learners] Okay, they up-gathered now sleeping flowers.*

Given its metaphorical nature, 'sleeping flowers' displays relatively weak semantic gravity and strong semantic density. The phrase attributes animate behaviour to plants and invokes an image of flowers with closed petals. Further networked complexity operates through the phrase serving as a simile for the state of the winds referred to in the previous line. The

teacher strengthened semantic gravity by asking the learners if they have had direct experience of ‘sleeping flowers’, pointing potentially to concrete particularities. She moved on to the particularity of the students being Science students and invoked the potential of being able to achieve empirical understanding via direct sensory experience. She added a small additional layer of particularity through asserting that only some flowers ‘sleep’. So her unpacking comprised her declaration that certain flowers do ‘sleep’ and are potentially available for scrutiny by learners in a local botanical garden. At this point, she moved on to the next line in the poem, leaving learners with no detail on how flowers can be said to sleep. Thus, this sequence comprised an incomplete descending semantic gravity escalator. There was also no unpacking of the metaphor of winds being ‘up-gathered ... like sleeping flowers’. The resulting incomplete escalator can be plotted as in Figure 4 below. A dotted line is used to indicate that, although all the elements were topically related to each other, coherent unpacking of the meaning was not achieved, concluding in a semantically ‘disconnected’ reversion to the original phrase, as represented in the separate line (7).

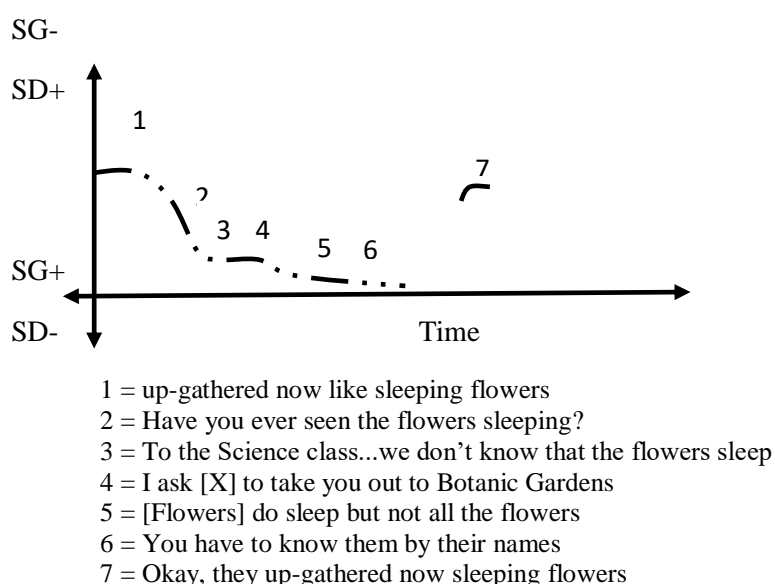


Figure 5: ‘Sleeping flowers’ semantic gravity profile

A similar profile was evident when Mrs Dlamini, after establishing that pagans are people who worship gods, asked: ‘*What are gods? You know the small “g”?*’ A learner responded: ‘*A person who worships statues.*’ The teacher implicitly evaluated this: ‘*Statues. Is it statues?*’ Another learner offered ‘*And snakes.*’ The teacher repeated this, amid learner laughter, and then moved on: ‘*Okay, let’s go on.*’ Here, learners descended abruptly to very concrete particulars that were not fundamentally wrong, but would have benefited from mediation at intervening levels of semantic gravity, such as that some communities believe in multiple gods, who may embody concepts, such as wisdom, or an aspect of the natural world, such as the sea, or snakes, and these may be venerated through representations such as statues.

The second pattern of semantic scatter represented an extreme variation of truncated escalators, with very little or no unpacking of concepts with weak semantic gravity and even fewer semantic connections within the sequence. The first such sequence occurred when the class worked to establish the meaning of ‘the world’ and the first line. The teacher deferred endorsement of most of the interpretations offered, including ‘*good things and bad things happen to us and nature*’, and ‘*the world is so obsessed with us*’. While she occasionally

obliquely rejected a few, as in: *'To be interested – is the world interested in us?'*, she offered no overt unpacking of the line using movement from more to less decontextualised forms of knowledge. The sequence thus concluded, unresolved, without any pedagogically useful semantic waving.

The other key episode of semantic scatter occurred at the end of the lesson, in addressing the worksheet question: *'Are there any modern movements with similar attitudes?'* Here, the teacher did not unpack the meaning of 'modern movements'. The first learner answer was *'the war'*, which linked back to the biographical paragraph, not the poem itself. The teacher obliquely deflected the answer by asking for further responses: *'The war, say this group, say the war, the attitude, the modern movement. Somebody want to try.'* A learner then offered: *'They still praise a pagan'* which the teacher expanded with: *'So, in other words, there are still people believe in gods? [Ls: Yes]. Is that a modern movement? ... that's your own opinion. What would other groups say?'* This implied absence of teacher validation. A learner then offered: *'Howling of wind.'* Mrs Dlamini endorsed this: *'... that is still valid. It happened long time ago, it still happens – the wind blows. Whenever it feels like, it blows.'* This was suggestive that the teacher was working with a literal understanding of 'movements'. Very shortly thereafter, she ended the lesson: *'Okay, time is over. Okay, work it out there in your own, in your room.'*

These two patterns accounted for the bulk of the lesson. One instance of a reasonably complete wave occurred near the end of the lesson, when the teacher elaborated on the last line. She invoked her learners' experiences of visiting the sea and hearing the waves. She said:

'So the author ... says here we seem to be focusing on things that seems not to be so important. It's like we are dishonouring things that are not useful to us; not noticing everything that is around us. We focus on ... other things that are how? The very first way – materialistic.'

Her invocation of personal experiences strengthened semantic gravity, but was not an immediate unpacking of the actual clause. She then weakened semantic gravity slightly by bringing in the concept of 'dishonouring', then strengthened it fractionally by using more concrete, everyday terms such as 'not useful' and 'not noticing'. 'Things that are not useful' obliquely connected to the image of Triton and her personal recounting of hearing sea waves. She concluded with a little weakening of semantic gravity with: *'We focus on other things that are ... materialistic.'*

Maton (2013, 2014a) argues the importance of semantic waves within classroom practice as one key means whereby teachers can mediate between high-stakes reading (such as a complex poem) and high-stakes writing (where learners have to demonstrate their learning in assessment tasks.) The dominant semantic formations of this lesson clearly showed the negative pedagogic consequences of the intense pressures created when EAL teachers and learners have to engage with content acutely inappropriate to their context, content knowledge and cultural frames. Working with such a difficult poem, distanced from them in time, culture and language, contributed to pedagogic immobility on the part of the teacher, rendering mediation of the poem's tacit, densely-structured, allusive networks incoherent at key points. That is, the semantic threshold was too high for the teacher to render the poem meaningful as a whole to her learners. Such pedagogy construes reading of poetry as impenetrable mystification, a ritualistic performance comprising a shell of pedagogic-like

acts, but without increased access to poetic knowledge, or responsive meaning making, at its centre.

Yet it is also suggestive (beyond better selection of poems) of possible entry points for creative interventions. Mapping semantic formations can illuminate areas where developmental attention may provide teachers with conscious knowledge of valued disciplinary semantic profiles and a wider repertoire of semantic ranges that they can purposively deploy to facilitate the growth of their learners' literacy and literary competencies.

CONCLUSION

Applying the LCT specialisation and semantics lenses to the pedagogy of this conscientious rural teacher highlighted the difficulties in building coherent meaning in response to such a challenging poem. This analysis has illuminated the extensive obstacles to developing cumulative poetic understanding within a frustrating scenario. Given these insights, it is not surprising that many teachers choose to avoid teaching poetry altogether. This points to the ongoing importance of attending to the power relations and contextual circumstances shaping the selection of such a poem for EAL learners studying in a resource-scarce school. That this poem was taught in a rural Grade 10 EAL classroom in 2008 suggests that the findings of Reid (1982) and Paton and Janks (1985) regarding the persistence of canonical Western texts in local EAL curricula retain pertinence. While Grade 10 EAL teachers in South Africa currently have three approved anthologies of poetry from which to choose poems for study, suggesting slightly more control on their part, the 10 poems selected for formal examination in the Grade 12 EAL literature paper show a disturbingly masculinist, Eurocentric bias. Not one female poet is included, but nine white male poets are. Only four South African poets are included, with only one being black. There is need for further research into the multiple layers influencing poetry selection criteria, along with what forms of intervention will generate sustainable means of growing teacher capacities for creative EAL poetry pedagogies producing meaningful engagement for learners. Inspiring case studies of innovative teaching, such as those of Camangian (2008), Newfield and Maungedzo (2006) and Kajee (2011), along with Newfield and D'Abdon's eloquent case for reconceiving poetry as inherently multi-modal, provide vital visions of what is possible when poetry is embraced and taught as a dynamic genre expressing contemporary concerns. The remaining challenge is to establish sufficient detailed knowledge of existing poetry pedagogies in EAL classrooms. We need understanding of the contextual features that generate and sustain them, and knowledge of the kinds of conditions and supporting materials that would enable the myriad 'ordinary' EAL teachers, working in extraordinarily tough circumstances, to provide their learners with richly engaging access to poetic literacies. Without these, it will be very difficult to bridge the gulf between too-often ossified schooled poetry instruction and the compelling world of South African performed poetry.

The dominant ER°/SR° coding finding of the specialisation analysis suggests that, while these learners may have gained some new vocabulary and some ideas on humanity's materialism and alienation from nature, studying this poem did not further coherently induct them into poetry literacy. If poetry is to be more widely and effectively harnessed in local EAL classrooms, further research is needed on numerous fronts. Depth ethnographic case studies utilising LCT lenses could contribute to carefully contextualised tracking of full ranges of EAL teachers' literature pedagogies, building nuanced understanding of the relationships between teachers' content and pedagogic knowledge, subject department and school 'ecologies', syllabi and curriculum frames and the knowledge practices enacted within

subject EAL classrooms. Use of LCT concepts would facilitate cross-case comparisons. Analysis of learner responses to national assessments, such as Grade 12 exit examinations, would establish what forms of specialisation and semantic formations are most valued by examiners. Such knowledge could form a baseline for research into what forms of pedagogic knowledge practices most effectively facilitate learner progress in mastering valued knowledge practices in their written assessments.

Given this teacher's clear dependence on insufficiently supportive textbook material, research exploring what knowledge formations in support materials (print and audio-visual) provide optimal purchase for EAL teachers and learners is indicated. Insights from the semantics dimension of LCT could provide models for how to work deliberately with varying strengths of semantic gravity and semantic density, and how to relate salient aspects of indigenous knowledge productively to other cultural knowledges (see Appendix 2 for one very provisional initial example). Application of these insights as a tool for creative pre- and in-service training is also suggested. Macnaught et al. (2013) documented a promising initial project with Australian school teachers. For subject EAL, particularly in South Africa, the challenge is to build systematic understanding of the diversity and instability of the knowledge practices of subject EAL, and creatively channel these insights to increase teachers' repertoires of apt, confidently mobile pedagogies, locally fitted to the particular needs of their learners.

ⁱ Informed consent was secured in writing from the Department of Education, the school principal and the teacher. The full transcript of this lesson is available at <https://ukzn.academia.edu/FionaJackson>.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Biographical paragraph from worksheet

William Wordsworth (1770 – 1850)

When he was young, William Wordsworth was inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution: liberty, equality and fraternity (brotherhood). He moved to France after graduating from Cambridge University and had a daughter with his French lover. He was horrified when England declared war on France, but became increasingly alarmed by the violence of the French Revolution. He became deeply depressed and moved to the English countryside where he had grown up. Here he wrote some of the earliest Romantic poetry. Romantic poetry celebrates nature as a source of comfort and moral guidance (see the glossary at the back of the book for more about Romantic poetry.) Wordsworth lived with his sister Dorothy. Dorothy was herself a poet and writer who neglected her own work in order to devote her life to her brother's creativity.

Appendix 2: Example of a pragmatic semantic gravity inspired network for pedagogic practice

