Veranstaltungsform und Titel

Fach	English Literature and Culture (B.A.) & American Studies (B.A.)
Veranstaltung	Linguistic Approaches to Children's Literature (seminar)
Dozierende	Mirjam Haas
Zielgruppe	third year B.A. students
Dauer	2 hours a week, 14 weeks, one semester

Lernziele
- hone students' **close reading** skills via the introduction, discussion, and application of various linguistic phenomena
- introduce students to **children's literature**, particularly its **ludic use of language**
- **fine-tune term paper writing skills** as well as (introduce) **peer feedback skills**

Kurzbeschreibung

Here's the **official seminar text** as it was published on Jogustine (as students worked alone rather than in groups on their semester project, I crossed this section out):

In this seminar, we will consider different linguistic approaches and the way they invite us to think and write about children's literature in an academic context. There will be three major topics: Making (Non)Sense, Language as Matter and Language that Does. The texts we will read cover a broad range of periods and text forms, from Lewis Carroll's novel *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) to Kate DiCamillo's picture book *La La La: A Story of Hope* (2017). Our focus will always be on language, so be prepared to read secondary literature on linguistic topics – which is generally very readable. Please note that you will work with one text (in the widest sense, from video game to poetry) as well as a literary linguistics approach/focus of your own choice throughout the semester, so start thinking about a text that you would like to work with.

We will read most texts in excerpts that I will provide for you – nevertheless, please be aware that this is a reading-intensive course, there will be weekly assignments and all students will work on a short-written work over the semester.

What's the concept behind this class?

<u>General Context</u>

Students take this seminar as either part of a module called "The Language of Literature" or – if they study American Studies in their minor and English Literature and Culture in their major – as part of the module "English Literature: 1500 to 1800." The latter combines the language with a historical focus and the students who take this module have to work with historical literary texts for their term papers. The group is usually about 25 students strong and students are supposed to attend the seminar during the fourth semester of their B.A. studies. The American Studies minors – usually only a handful of people – attend it during their third year. In fact, and this is true for both groups, it is often one of the very final seminars students take as they generally have little contact with – and hence are weary of – straightforwardly language-orientated topics. (This is not really true, of course, as all literature is language.)

<u>Content</u>

The main goal of the course is to familiarise students with stylistic concepts, i.e. linguistic approaches to literary texts, and to practice their close reading skills. In order to achieve this, students need to be introduced to these concepts on a basic level (e.g. what is a word and how does it mean? How does turn-taking work in conversation? etc.) as well as enabled to (at least in a general way) understand, talk about and apply them. As children's literature provides many examples of playful as well as multimodal language use (in picture books, for example, language and images mean together), these texts ideally lend themselves to explore many aspects of literary language. The course is split into three sections, framed by an introductory session (see Session 1 in the Reihenplanung below) and a reflection on the questions discussed in that session towards the end of the seminar (see Session 11).

The first section is entitled "Making (Non)Sense": in these opening sessions, which are meant to be an introduction to language as well as an invitation to think about language phenomena and the role they play in literature, we deal with words and their semantic meaning-making, words and their sound form and very basic ideas of conversation analysis on nonsense examples. In this way, students are meant to distance themselves from their object of study as they are forced to rethink their own automized language use and processing (the picture book *Du Iz Tak?*, for example, makes use of a nonsense language very similar to English which playfully invites readers to think about sentence structures, the role pictures/objects/contexts play in deciding the meanings of specific words as well as the importance of conversational contexts, e.g. we recognise greetings – whether we understand the exact words and phrases or not – as conventionally exchanged upon meeting).

The second section, "Language as Matter," begins with a session to which students bring their own examples of unusual uses of formal literary language in children's literature and are introduced to stylistic theory proper. The focus in these sessions is on thinking about text as something material with a specific shape and form, the text as it is set on a page. We look at poetic form, visual form – both of text, images and paratexts – and typographical form (on the example of dialects and languages other than English that are integrated into our literary texts).

"Language that Does," the third section, deals with pragmatic approaches to language, i.e. the way language means in in the world as opposed to in isolated examples (usually) below the sentence structure. Students are introduced to Speech Act Theory, Literary Names, Ambiguity and, finally, we discuss Intertextuality (texts quoting one another) as a form of literary language use. This section is the closest to more conventional literary language analysis, it is meant as offering a connection to students' usual reading practices and students often choose topics related to this section for their term papers.

<u>Academic Writing</u>

The second (self-chosen) focus of this class lies on improving students' academic writing as well as their feedback skills. Students are usually already quite skilled at term-paper writing as they usually take this seminar towards the end of their B.A. studies, so the focus is more on fine-tuning than on introducing the basics. Each student pursues a semester project which culminates in an essay plan that forms the foundation for their final term paper. During the first half of the semester, students are occasionally given writing and reflection tasks (see appendix) to help them find a relevant literary text to work on (a list of titles is provided to help with this, too), an appropriate linguistic approach to apply to that text and an initial research question. Towards the end of the semester, students are divided into three smaller groups (7-9 students strong) and hand in essay plans (a template is provided; see appendix). They then get written double blind peer feedback by a student from their group as well as my feedback. The peer feedback is introduced via a feedback task (see appendix) and a feedback guide that is the result of said task. These smaller groups then meet in the Student Session relevant to their group (there are three such sessions altogether) at the very end of the semester in which they briefly introduce their group to their project, get additional oral feedback and reflect on and discuss both.

Reihenplanung der Veranstaltung

Phase und Dauer/Sitzung je 90 Minuten	Inhalt		Methode/Dozierenden- und Studierendenaktivität	Sozialform	Materialien und Medien	Ziele
Session 1	Introduction: Language, Children's Literature and the Ludic		introduction by way of discussion of meta questions (e.g. "Why should we, as literary scholars, concern ourselves with language?") teacher-led presentation (admin)	pair & share, class discussion	PowerPoint, board (to collect ideas) PowerPoint	introduce the class to the general topic and its relevance, get to know each other explain the format of the class
Session 2	Making (Non) Sense	Words in *Through the Looking-Glass*	**Prior to the sessions:** Students read introductory **linguistic or stylistics text(s)** (e.g. on morphology/ pragmatics/foregrounding etc.) and provide an **example** for the linguistic phenomenon of the week (e.g. nonsense words) in the relevant **moodle** forum one day ahead of class (these examples are taken up during the session). Students also read the (usually brief) **excerpts from the children's literature text(s)** of the week in which the linguistic phenomenon of the week appears/is played with. During the sessions: **Opening**: example(s) relevant to the phenomenon of the week (sometimes taken from among the examples the students provide on moodle, sometimes provided by me – these can range from	**independent work** (reading and finding examples) & **online fora** (some students very actively engaged with each other here – I only occasionally encouraged this explicitly) **teacher-led discussion** and **presentation** (all sessions were either held in-person (at the	research literature examples provided by students (moodle) primary literary text(s), excerpts PowerPoint	**Main goal:** get students to engage with and grasp the linguistic phenomenon of the week and to apply this (for most students entirely) new knowledge to analyse literary texts more efficiently, i.e. **hone their close reading skills** (this is applicable to all text work, not exclusively children's literature or even literature; however, children's literature is an especially fruitful example as it often uses language playfully) **Sub goals:** make sure they **read the texts** (control function of examples, work with excerpts (keep it brief) and introductory texts
Session 3		Pragmatic Thinking with *Pooh*				
Session 4		Words Sans Sense? (*Du is Tak?*, *La La La* & *Oink*)				
Session 5	Language as Matter	Literary Matter: Form and Meaning (examples are provided by the students)				
Session 6		Linguistic Otherness: Functions of Foreign Language (*The Book Thief*)				

Session						
		and Dialect (*The Secret Garden*)	interviews (to e.g. demonstrate dialect) to word collections (e.g. magical words)) **Admin** (if any)	beginning of the term) or held synchronously via Teams)		(keep it as easy as possible to follow))
Session 7		Visual "Language": *The Arrival* – A Story Told in Pictures	**Theory**: review of the linguistic/stylistic literature and their examples, establishment of guiding questions: a) What is x [= the linguistic phenomenon of the week]?			make sure they **grasp the concepts** (transfer function of examples; application of their examples as well as further examples during the session)
Session 8	Language that Does	Spellbound: Magical Language as Speech Act ("Ali Baba," "The Wizard" & *Harry Potter*)	b) How does x operate/mean? c) What are the functions of x? (Ideally, we're now halfway through the session) **Task** (group work): students are now asked to apply what they've learned to the children's literature text(s) of the week (ca. 20-35 minutes, elaborate	group and/or partner work	work sheets; texts are available via moodle	make sure they can **apply the concepts** (analysis and discussion of primary literary text excerpt(s) we discuss that week – also: their own essay plans, see Student Sessions below)
Session 9		How to Do Things with Words: Names & Naming (*Anne of Green Gables* & "What's in a Name?")	guiding questions, work sheets) **Final Discussion**: gathering the strands, often different groups work on different texts, so they also present their results to each other After the sessions: **Work sheets** are scanned and made	class discussion	screensha-ring of work sheets (during on-line teach-ing)	create a **positive and motivating but also challenging learning environment**
Session 10		Ambiguity in Context: Approaching Literary texts from a Linguistic Perspective (Guest talk by	available to all/online: work sheets are shared documents in Teams. After each bigger thematic unit (e.g. Making (Non)Sense,) a **general overview** is given/discussed. Occasionally, students are given extra **tasks to prepare** them for **the essay plan** (e.g. to help them find a text that has	individual work		

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		Dr. Wiltrud Wagner)	interesting linguistic features; see page 13)			
Session 11		Using Someone Else's Words: "And Wolfie said, 'May I come in?'" ("Little Red Riding Hood" and *Alice in Wonderland*	[Session 10 was an exception, here theory and examples were provided in the session by the guest lecturer and discussed with the entire group throughout. For Session 11, we began by readdressing the opening meta questions from Session 1. Students were given five minutes to pick one question and type their answer into the chat. Afterwards, their answers as well as whether they changed throughout the semester were discussed in the group. We also addressed the question of whether they now felt confident to proficiently talk and write about as well as apply linguistic concepts to literary language. This acquired knowledge and ability was then to be tested during the final Student Sessions as described below.]	individual work and group discussion	think and share (chat)	
Session 12	Essay Plan Presentations & Feedback	**Student Session 1**	For the final three sessions, the students were divided into three smaller groups (à 7-9 students)			Main goal: enable students to write a **relevant and successful term paper** in a relatively new field to most of them (students are
Session 13		**Student Session 2**				
Session 14		**Student Session 3**	Prior to the sessions: All students are asked to consider a) feedback they've been given in the past that they found helpful, b) feedback they	individual work & sharing/dis-	moodle forum	usually in their third year when they take this course, so as they are already quite

			did not find useful and c) to try and **develop guidelines for good feedback practice** based on their experience plus research they do on the topic online, they are then asked to post the ideas they gathered for task c) on moodle, I generate a **feedback guide** based on this.	cussion via moodle	feedback guide (document)	familiar with the basics of term paper writing, the focus is on fine-tuning their skills) Sub goals: include students in the **feedback** cycle, introduce them to the benefits of (well-introduced) **peer feedback** – not only concerning feedback-giving but also -receiving
			Two weeks before their relevant session, students hand in an **essay plan draft** (see appendix for the template) on a **literary text of their own choice** (these "texts" can also be films etc.; exception: they can only use the texts we use in class if they work with a different linguistic approach and do not analyse the excerpts we discussed in class), these plans are then anonymised and swapped by me and send back to the students to give **peer review** based on our feedback guide. **One week** before their session, students receive anonymous peer feedback as well as **my feedback** and revise their plans on this basis.	(anonymised) partner work, one-on-one teacher feedback "A Living List of Children's Literature" (provides further resources & an overview over CL texts)	essay plans (document, a template is provided, see below) document	give students the chance to **see and discuss other students' work in a safe (enough) environment** introduce and establish **writing as a process** (feedback cycle: time management, revision process (which ends with the final term paper), importance of processing time to achieve distance) **strengthen, explore and add to the feedback that was given in written form**, enable students to ask questions
			During the sessions: **Opening**: explanation of procedure & reminder of (rough) feedback guidelines (What was good? What could be improved? How can it be improved?), students are asked to take notes	teacher-led introduction	chat (Teams)	

			Presentations and Discussions: students briefly **present their plans** to the group: they give a text example, name their linguistic approach(es), research question, thesis, (rough) outline and open questions/plans to proceed; **the group discusses the plan** (I lead the discussion); the final word is given to the **presenting student.**	individual presentation group discussion & teacher feedback	screen-sharing of essay plans (document)
			After the sessions: students use their revised plans as the **basis for their term papers** (relevance)	independent work	

Hinweise zur praktischen Umsetzung und Übertragbarkeit

- this class is the result of a series of classes I've given that share a focus on **language and literature** and while I'm quite happy with the class as it is now (from the positive learning environment to the visible progress most students make over the course), it is very different from the class I originally started out with. Over time, I changed both text corpora and focus: I began with drama texts (both early modern and contemporary) and a narrow focus on sound and/in performative texts (this is also my PhD topic), then moved on exclusively to early modern drama texts and sound (which proved difficult both in language and conceptual terms), finally, I widened the focus to communication in early modern drama (which worked better but still was difficult due to the language barrier these 400-year-old texts automatically bring with them). By coincidence, I had to spontaneously create a session for the latter class and chose to work with a Charles Dickens text (19th century) as well as a Roald Dahl text (20th century) – for the first time, the students of that class seemed to truly engage with the language and were able to grasp the stylistic concepts much more easily. This experience as well as the invaluable information by colleagues that this particular class is mostly meant to hone students' close reading skills made me rethink the class entirely. The result is the class described here.

- though students always had to hand in short **written assignments** during my classes and I had tried to implicate **peer review** (to little success), the writing elements and especially the introductory task to the peer feedback are heavily influenced by the training I received when taking part in the "Fortbildung: Vermittlung Wissenschaftlicher Arbeitstechniken."
- I need to **further fine-tune the Student Sessions**: as the class size is around 25 students, timing is of the essence and students need to present their plans as concisely as possible (I will reconsider whether screensharing the entire plan is truly helpful), the peer feedback within the sessions (especially concerning the plans that are unknown to them) could be improved as well. One student suggested to share the plans (perhaps in a shortened version) amongst the students of the specific group beforehand. Another student suggested that the essay plan could be included even more within the earlier parts of the seminar.
- I want to implement **"think, pair and share"** as opposed to "pair and share." "Pair and share" – i.e. asking students to talk to their (virtual) neighbour before discussing a topic with the entire class – is a method I was frequently taught with myself both in school and at university. As it activates and engages students, I applied it in my own classes without thinking about it too much. Recently, however, I learned in Barbara Oakley, Beth Rogowsky and Terrence J. Sejnowski's *Uncommon Sense Teaching: Practical Insights in Brain Science to Help Students Learn* (2021) that the method developed by Frank Lyman in the 1980ies is originally called "think-pair-share." This really important initial step (ideally coupled with notetaking) allows students to first individually think about the issues discussed in class and hence strengthens their confidence (even in the small group) and ability to more easily express their thoughts which leads to a broader diversity of observations and ideas and, as a bonus, discourages "free riding."
- as students are rather advanced in this course, I'm considering letting them take over the sessions at the beginning of the class (also to further class engagement). The idea would be to still provide the material for them (and to encourage them to do their own research) – i.e. the literature, the primary text excerpts and the moodle fora with the examples – as well as to keep the structure (linguistic phenomenon of the week, discussion of examples, group work: analysis of literary text excerpts, general discussion) but to let groups of **students be in charge**. This would need to be carefully prepared, e.g. via discussions in the office hour prior to the sessions.
- I am thinking of **reapplying the format to other topics** (perhaps I can have another try at sound with a better concept behind it all).

Anhang

name   date
seminar
teacher

Title
[try to point out your research focus in it]

[you do not need to fill this in according to order; you will hand in your essay plan to me as well as receive written feedback from a fellow student during the course of the semester; you'll then review your essay plan accordingly and present it within a small group in one of the three final sessions and get some more oral feedback from the group.]

My text(s) [note: you **cannot** use any of the text passages we've used in class; e.g. you *cannot* write about the *Winnie-the-Pooh* chapters we've looked at, you *can*, however, look at other chapters – if you choose a different linguistic approach that is, see below]:

My linguistic approach/method [note: you **cannot** use the approaches we've used on the same texts; e.g. you *cannot* write about magic/spells and *Harry Potter*, but you *can* write about names in HP]:

Questions I have/topics that interest me [list, mind map, or similar – make a choice which questions/topics you want to pursue further; we'll also occasionally work on this and other bits of the essay plan together]:

Passages in my text(s) that are important for my chosen focus:

Research Question [**what do you want to find out?** Your research question is your motivation to work on this topic, it is the issue you want to understand, and it is your goal to answer it (as far as possible). Usually, research questions generate further questions: for example, you might have noticed that picture books often use typography in interesting ways, so you may ask yourself – why do they do that? To what purpose? This will generate more questions on the history of the book, reading aloud, prosody, child-parent relationships, double address, multimodality etc. and in order to answer your initially simple-looking questions, you must decide on a **focus** (which part of the question will I answer?), a **method** (which theory and approach will I use to answer the question? You'll encounter many methods in this class that you can use) and a **line of argumentation** (see thesis)]:

Thesis [a thesis statement is the claim you make with your essay/term paper, it is the (provisional) answer to your research question (which shouldn't necessarily appear in question form in your text itself) and it can always be argued for and against(!), it is what you are to prove with your essay or term paper and it is also your **framework** (see Research Question explanations: focus, method, line of argumentation) – remember to also mention what the outcome will be (academic writing ≠ subtle); this is a very **important** part of your essay plan and its directly connected to your Research Question]:

What resources do I need to answer my research question(s)/what have I started to read/look into [make sure you use academically sound resources]:

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name   date
seminar
teacher

Plan Proper
[remember it's a plan, so things can – and should – still change, and it doesn't have to be perfect!]

Introduction ideas [important keywords and maybe a quotation]:

Rough outline of argumentation [keywords; try to connect things]:

One sample paragraph [the other **very important** part of your essay plan: write one sample paragraph (about 350 words) on a quotation/moment from your text and analyse it (close reading), use **at least one secondary source** to back up your claims and cite your **primary text** as well; it needs no introduction, just write it as if it were a part of your final term paper (the important feedback for you will be on your **close reading and argumentation skills** – so make sure both are there!!!) & point out in which part of your general outline it occurs]:

Conclusion ideas [keywords; can you connect it to the introduction?]:

Works Cited [MLA please & don't forget your primary text!]:

Task 1 (Session 3)

(Take-Home) Research & More Task 1 (20 mins)

Pick a piece of literature (children's book or YA) that you think might be interesting to use as your semester project for this class (doesn't have to be your final pick). Set yourself a timer for five minutes and write down all associations you have with the work you have chosen.

i)   Once you have created your list, circle all associations that you can connect to language/communication. (If there aren't any, maybe you should reconsider your choice.)

ii) Try to create a topic out of one of the associations that connect to language and formulate a research question. (Try not to take longer than 10 minutes for this step)

iii) Please **post** your research question (indicate the text you've been thinking about) in the **moodle forum called "Research & More Task 1" for Session 4** by **Tuesday night (Nov 09)** and give **feedback** to someone else's post (best someone who hasn't gotten any feedback yet)!

Task 2 (Session 6)

==Take-Home Research & More Task== (25 mins; you don't have to upload your texts, you can **also do this later on! I'd recommend to do it before Christmas, though, so it can help you with your essay plan ideas and progress.**)

Writing Task:

i)   You should ideally do this task on your semester project but if you are not sure about it yet (or haven't one as of now), you can also do the task on any of the sessions we've had so far.

ii) You'll need a piece of paper, a pen and a timer.

iii) Now set your timer to 15 minutes and write a draft for an email to someone you know who knows nothing whatsoever of English Literature and/or Linguistics in which you describe either what you want to do in your semester project or what we have done in one of our sessions of your own choice.

iv) Reflect the task & your result – are there open questions? Does everything connect? Are there things that need to be further researched? As a bonus (not a must), find somebody (maybe the person you thought of when writing the text or somebody from your group) to show your text to and ask them to explain back to you what they think your project (or one of the sessions) is about.

Tasks 3 & 4 (Session 8, due after Christmas)

Two end-of-the-year Tasks (I'll create extra fora on moodle for the Christmas slot)

Research Task & More (20 mins)

Post a quotation from the literary text you're planning to use for your essay and post it in the forum on moodle till **Friday, Dec 31**. Then look at the others' quotations, pick one (ideally one that hasn't been commented on yet) and make a guess at which topic the person is trying to pursue based on the quotation and its linguistic/stylistic features. The deadline is also **Dec 31**. Feel free to discuss guesses & original ideas in more depth with each other in the forum in your own time.

Feedback Task

i) Think of feedback you've been given on your writing in the past that you found truly helpful (maybe you can still access it & have a look?!). Try to pin down what it it was exactly about the feedback that you found helpful. Can you find some general categories for good feedback?

ii) Now think of feedback you've been given on your writing that you found not helpful at all (again, maybe you still have access to it?). What was it that made this feedback so unhelpful to you?

iii) Do some online (or offline) research on feedback-giving & try connect it to your own experience – are there general trends/guidelines for constructive feedback?

Please post these final results (i.e. task iii)) in the forum on moodle till **Tuesday, Jan 4** – you don't need to go into your personal experiences, but can refer to them if you want to and please remember to give your sources, thank you!

(I'll collect your results and create a best-practice handout which you'll receive together with the essay plan you are supposed to feedback.)