FOSTERING NEW LITERACIES IN TEACHING NORWEGIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT. *Fostering New Literacies in Teaching Norwegian as a Foreign Language.* It is of paramount importance to understand how language knowledge and literacy are evolving in accordance with the demands of the 21st century society. Digital media are changing reading and writing practices and are conducive to the development of a new set of literacies. Therefore, it is relevant to seize the educational opportunities that arise and understand their implications in the field of foreign language learning. This paper intends to focus on the relationship between language, culture and new technologies in order to highlight issues of multimodality and identity.

Keywords: foreign language learning, digital literacy, multimodal literacy, multicultural literacy, critical literacy, multimodality, Norwegian, Digital Age.

REZUMAT. *Promovarea unor noi modele de alfabetizare în contextul predării limbii norvegiene ca limbă străină.* Este important să înţelegem cum învăţarea unei limbi şi procesul de alfabetizare se adaptează cerinţelor societăţii secolului al XXI-lea. Mass-media digitală determină o schimbare în abilităţile de scriere şi de citire favorizând astfel dezvoltarea unui nou model de alfabetizare. De aceea, este necesară conştientizarea acestor oportunităţi educaţionale precum şi înţelegerea implicaţiilor pe care acestea le exercită în domeniul învăţării limbilor străine. Acest studiu intenţionează să se concentreze pe relaţia dintre limbă, cultură şi noile tehnologii pentru a evidenţia aspecte legate de multimodalitate şi identitate.

Cuvinte cheie: învăţarea limbii străine, alfabetizare digitală, alfabetizare multimodală, alfabetizare multiculturală, alfabetizare critică, multimodalitate, Norvegiană, era digitală.

Introduction

This paper intended to highlight the extent to which an intercultural perspective and the emergence of new technologies reshape and guide didactic

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practices in the context of teaching a foreign language in a formal educational setting. The paper articulates some questions that relate to the need to re-imagine pedagogy, the notions of literacy and the way one decodes and makes sense of the multimodal communicative environment.

Teaching Norwegian as a foreign language

Norwegian as a foreign language has been taught at the Department of Scandinavian Languages and Literature within Babeş-Bolyai University for almost 30 years. During this long tradition, Norwegian language and literature was offered both as a major (starting with 2008) and as a minor specialization (starting with 1991). The singularity of such a BA programme based on a niche specialization has gained awareness and recognition to such an extent that the total of students who attended in 2019 the BA programme in Norwegian language and literature amounted to 355 students (Tomescu Baciu et al., 2019). A variety of courses are offered in order to enhance students' linguistic and communicative competence, as well as their intercultural communicative cultural competence that tackles intercultural knowledge, intercultural skills and intercultural attitudes.

As face-to-face teaching has ceased on the 11th of March 20202 as a consequence of the rapid outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the courses pertaining to the spring semester had to be delivered fully online. This had direct implications on the teaching practices as both teachers and students had to get familiarized with online teaching platforms, to adapt teaching resources, to establish norms for interaction patterns and delivery of individualized feedback, to receive student's assignments and to establish some contingency plans in case various situations cause a breakdown in the online communication. This unprecedented situation has slowly but steadily requested students to make use of their digital skills and to use digital technologies as educational tools. Of particular importance in the context of teaching Norwegian online was the know-how of incorporating new literacies in didactic practice.

This paper does not intend to focus on issues of assessing the effectiveness of online teaching practices or on offering an extended view of various literacies found in the literature. In this respect, the current paper is centered on a guiding principle that targets the traid model - language, culture and new technologies – which is questioned from a didactic perspective.

Firstly, it is relevant in this context to draw attention on the particularities of learning a foreign language. These refer to: a limited amount of time available for language instruction, a lengthy, conscious process that implies effort, instruction is usually performed in a formal environment, cultural aspects are taught explicitly and language learning is highly dependent on learners' motivation.

The outcome of such an effort would be attaining communicative language competence comprised of linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences (CEFRL 2001, 13). Thus, language and culture are both present in the learning of a foreign language.

Secondly, the digitalization of the educational system and of the teaching practice (online courses, digital content, online evaluation etc.) has an impact on teachers' and students' expectations as well as on decoding and making-sense of these new resources. In view of this given context, this paper intended to refer to the intricate link between language, culture and the new technologies as a premise for language development.

Reconceptualizing pedagogy

Digital technologies have become an inseparable part of today's learning process. Rethinking pedagogy in the Digital Age is essential in order to fully grasp the idiosyncrasies of the "new learning environment" (Dreamson, 2020). Instead of having within the educational system separate dimensions that develop on their own (such as pedagogical practices, content development and ICT tools), Dreamson (2020) motivates the need to merge these and to consider the overlapping nature of them since together they reshape the educational practices. Thus, this "transformed learning environment" (Scott, 2005) needs to blend new tools for learning (Learning 2.0), with increased student collaboration and self-responsibility and with personalized content and differentiated teaching and assessment (Pedagogy 2.0).

This discussion raises issues of competence. Although the distinction between "digital natives" and "digital immigrants" (Prensky, 2001) is widely used, it cannot be entirely transferred and acknowledged in pedagogical practices. Dreamson (2000) regards every participant as 'digital immigrant' based on the fact that one needs to undertake a new learning identity in this learning environment in which updated pedagogical practices, new digital content and ever-changing technology tools are constantly incorporated. Thus, the learning experience is new to everyone and is unique for the particular multilingual and multicultural (virtual) classroom in which it takes place. In the same line, Bullen, Morgan and Qayyum (2011) conclude that there are "no meaningful generational differences in how learners say they use ICTs" even if individual differences and preferences can be identified. Therefore, one cannot openly state that students who pertain to the category of digital natives have a built-in digital competence. Still, they exhibit some characteristics that are commonly accepted: continuously connected, involved in experiential learning, able to perform multitasking, showing a need for immediacy in receiving information, preference for social activities, involved in the community (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005; Palfrey & Gasser, 2008).

From a didactic perspective, teaching conducted in this new learning environment would be guided by an acknowledgment of the different types of literacies that it incorporates, all at once, in the teaching sequence. In doing so, the main aim would be to offer learners various individualized pathways to reach *Bildung* understood as a comprehensive development of students into responsible human beings (Hillen, Sturm & Willbergh, 20011:11). Further one, teaching is about making deliberate decisions "over how to construct interpretations of teaching content" (Hillen, Sturm & Willbergh, 20011:11) in a Digital Age when learners are progressively requested to manage non-linear information structures such as digital storytelling, animations or videos. Thus, this discussion outlines the need of being able to manipulate various types of educational content in order to fulfil "technological, social and cultural expectations" (Chaka, 2019: 60).

Notions of literacy

Diverse concepts have been developed in literature as an outcome of exploring the flexible, adaptative and context-bound nature of literacy that resonates and adapts to current technological advancements. As the parameters of communication undergo changes, in light of an increased globalized and information-rich world, meaning-making needs to incorporate social and cultural spheres of understanding. The traditional definition of literacy based on the abilities to exhibit receptive (to read and to listen) and productive skills (to speak, to write) in a language has been extended and reconceptualized in order to incorporate new directions and realities grounded on the one hand in current technological advancements and the digitally mediated society and on the other in intercultural perspectives that have permeated the educational landscape in the past two decades.

At the moment, an array of experiences is connected to literacy that is no longer perceived in a narrow sense (i.e. exhibiting proficiency in productive or receptive skills). The demands of the 21st century society and education have implications for understanding the intricacies of literacy and the pedagogical aspects that derive out of it (i.e. reconsidering the role of teachers, the manner in which assessment is going to be performed, the way in which interaction patterns and collaboration undergo changes).

In the context of teaching a foreign language, it is relevant for a teacher to understand that "literacy development in one language supports literacy development in the second or subsequent languages learned" (ACTFL)[2]. Thus, knowledge from one's mother tongue (L1) can be explored and deepened in the foreign language (FL). Still, the context within FL is different as one considers the diversity of educational resources used, the different aims of tackling teaching materials or the particularities of the socio-cultural contexts existing within the classroom.

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[2] https://www.actfl.org/guiding-principles/literacy-language-learning

On the one hand, in this current paper, foreign language teaching and learning is viewed as being deeply connected with the concept of culture (Kramsch, 1993; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013) and intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997). Norwegian is taught by making connections to its literature and history, by contextualizing learning experiences and by understanding that every utterance is situated in a socio-cultural setting. This connection to culture, as a broader concept, with its explicit and implicit elements of cultural representation, constitutes the foundation for understanding that language cannot be taught out of its deeply rooted cultural context. Building on the perspective that language is social practice, students would need to develop a certain kind of literacy that would enable them to mediate between cultures and exhibit respect, curiosity and openness toward what is perceived as different. Consequently, literacy in the FL should not be limited only to linguistic abilities but also to cross-cultural understanding (Piera, 2011) of the FL society.

On the other hand, considering that digital technologies are an inseparable part of today's learning process, the teaching Norwegian would also incorporate digital media and resources and digital apps in order to facilitate learning. Implicitly, this uptake of digital usage would need to have in mind an appropriate didactic use of ICT tools.

As communication practices have been redefined as a consequence of the emergence of these new technologies and of an understanding that communication is always situated in a socio-cultural context, a taxonomy of new literacy skills and practices has been formulated in order to grasp the extent of these changes. Therefore, concepts such as digital literacy, new media literacies, Internet literacy, social media literacy and multimodal literacy have been coined.

Based on the triad framework indicated above, the grid below includes some of the new literacies that have already been incorporated, to some degree, into the teaching practices of students who study Norwegian:

Table 1. Literacies and foreign language learning

digital literacy	It refers to the ability to understand information items in the hypertext and multimedia formats (Gilster 1997; Bawden 2001). It is not a mere technical skill grounded in information retrieval, but a cultural tool for engaging in everyday experience mediated by a variety of digital sources (Buckingham 2010)
multimodal literacy	The ability to interact in a meaningful way with multimodal texts (icons, visual representations, sound, video) and to create multimodal and digital resources (Scolari, 2019)
critical literacy	The ability to interpret critically texts pertaining to different genres and discourses (Miller, 2015). Access and analyze information, evaluate messages from a wide variety of media, apply creativity to express and analyse messages (ACTFL)[3]
multicultural	Multicultural literacies involve complex literacies intertwined with and embedded in social and cultural practices, ability to relate to diverse people, in diverse communicative contexts (Chaka, 2019)

[3] https://www.actfl.org/guiding-principles/literacy-language-learning

These new literacies indicated above "are often more collaborative, more participatory" (Chaka 2019, 57), develop new mindsets and widen the angle of perceiving literacy. In order for students to become fully literate in today's world, the curriculum should incorporate new literacies as pathways for engaging in critical and culturally sensitive thinking, in collaboration practices and in using ICT tools responsibly (International Reading Association, 2009). Communication mediated by digital technology follows an online etiquette and the emergence of these new literacies "are central to full civic, economic, and personal participation in a global community" (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008: 1).

Fig. 1 below indicates, in my view, the elements that interrelate in shaping these literacies in the foreign language classroom:
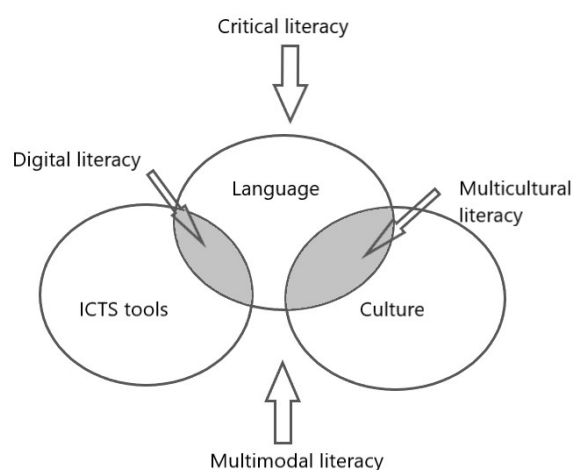

Fig. 1. The interplay of new literacies in the foreign language classroom

This framework points out that the connection between language learning and culture is facilitated by the development of multicultural literacy, while the relation between language learning and ICT tools is enabled by the development of digital technology. Critical thinking, as a nexus for developing critical literacy, represents a 21st century skill (Trilling & Fadel, 2009) that needs to become visible both when using the new technologies or when relating to culture (educational resources or people pertaining from different socio-cultural contexts). The demands posed by the digitally mediated society on teaching practices refer to the need of analysing, conceptualizing and understanding information from both traditional print-based sources and digital resources that envisage a multitude of genres. Therefore, multimodal literacy becomes essential when language and communication are rendered through a variety of channels.

Multimodality

Multimodality is rooted in diverse disciplinary fields, but as a concept, it refers to perceiving communication as taking place in multiple modes, linguistic and non-linguistic ones. According to Kress (2010), multimodality is a normal state of human communication as people use different modes of making meaning. Given this stance, different modes render distinct potentials for making meaning: an image can substitute a text that is too long to read, writing is used when something is too difficult to represent visually and colour can be used in order to highlight specific aspects (Kress, 2010:1). As a consequence, all these modes have the effect of maximizing understanding and offering a broader view of the message intended to be decoded. Slowly but steadily, multimodality has extended the narrow focus on language towards "an interest in language and its other relations to other means of making meaning" (Jewitt, Bezemer & O'Halloran, 2016:4). In this line of thought, the decoding process is grounded in the interplay between language and visual representations or language and sounds.

Stated like this, it implies that the principles of multimodality are relevant to consider in the domain of foreign language teaching and learning. Firstly, learners need to be able to make sense of complex communication repertoires that combine both text and information that is sent through different channels: video, audio, visual imagery etc. In the foreign language classroom, such multimodal resources are the norm because students seldom engage only with resources that are monomodal, i.e. they contain a single mode of interpretation. In this respect, coursebooks contain multimodal resources that combine information sent through different channels. Technological advancements and the emergence of new digital tools generate an increased focus on embracing simultaneously visual, auditory and textual stimuli. Thus, learners both engage in a complex process of decoding the message and expand the way in which they communicate their ideas.

Another salient aspect of multimodality in the context of foreign language teaching resides in the way learners perceive or understand the target culture. Culture is ubiquitous in language learning, is always in the background and challenges learners' "ability to make sense of the world around them" (Kramsch, 1993: 1). By acknowledging the fact that "language fulfils a range of social functions" (Jewitt, Bezemer & O'Halloran, 2016: 8), learners of a foreign language would better understand the different modes of communication and the complex issues of identity to be found in a multimodal communicational frame. Since language learners are required to become intercultural mediators across languages and cultures (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Kohler 2015;), it is necessary for them to have exposure to different multimodal resources that would facilitate

the understanding of the intertwined relation between cultural differences and communication. In addition, learners of a FL are "constantly building connections between a familiar and a new language and culture" (Kohler, 2015:194)

A fundamental premise resides in considering the differences between learning one's mother tongue and learning a foreign language. In the first case, the elements of culture are integrated implicitly, in an unconscious process and language and culture co-exist. On the other hand, in the case of foreign language learning, much more focus is placed on learning vocabulary and grammar structures out of context and the elements of culture are taught explicitly. Troncoso (90 in Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2010) advocates for making use of learning materials that act as a source of exposure to both language and culture. In this regard, multimodal resources would be able to provide that missing contextualization and the decoding of the message would have in view for making meaning linguistic, social and cultural resources. In trying to untangle the intertwined relation between cultural differences and communication, one needs to ascertain that "differences between cultures means differences in representation and meaning" (Kress, 2010:8). In this respect, language distance needs to be addressed, as more pronounced cultural differences generate greater differences in the resources of representation and in the practices of their use (Kress, 2010). These differences can be found in the area of politeness, proxemics, gestures, facial expressions or different symbols.

At the moment, teaching practices need to adapt to a new demand: the learning expectations of students from Y and Z generations differ from requirements of former generations (Baumöl & Bockshecker, 2017:1). References are made to collaboration and sharing, as driving forces and paradigms that change the manner of interaction and of making information available (Baumöl & Bockshecker, 2017). Moreover, the processes associated to electronic reading are different in comparison to those used in linear-printed forms (books, magazines etc.) (Zammit, 2014). Meaning is achieved through making connections to images, colours, sound, graphic organizers, videos in addition to language. In evaluating messages from a wide variety of media, students develop their digital literacy, multicultural literacy, critical literacy and multimodal literacy.

As indicated in the Framework for 21st Century Curriculum and Assessment issued by the National Council of Teachers of English (2013)[4], the 21st century literacies refer to the ability to critically analyse and interpret multimedia and information sent through different channels of communication, to create and share knowledge with the global community, to be able to engage in cross-cultural communication, to be able to master diverse ICT tools and the ethics required to engage in such complex environments.

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[4] https://secure.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Positions/Framework_21stCent_Curr_ Assessment.pdf

Conclusions

This paper intended to highlight that the ubiquity of ICT tools in the educational landscape has determined rapid and constant changes in didactic practices. Thus, the notions of literacies need to be constantly redefined. By acknowledging that digitization determines changes and leaves room for challenges in the teaching practice, attention must be directed towards using digital technology in order to make teaching and learning more flexible, purposeful, authentic and channelled towards autonomous and lifelong learning.

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