

Foreign language learning through moving image literacy

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Abstract

Moving image literacy is usually used in the students' mother tongue. This article presents, though, how moving image literacy was integrated in the teaching of English as a foreign language in a Greek state secondary school. It studies the teamwork of three 14-year-old students who were in a class that realized a moving image project, which included both analysis and video production in the form of a trailer, and shows how these students learned the film language and developed the equivalent metalanguage in English, and how their mother tongue mediation contributed to that. The research project was realized as a case study in a class where the English teacher was also the researcher. The research data consisted of the students' written classwork and homework, the researcher's observation journal, the pre-project questionnaires, the final focus group semi-structured interview, and the produced video; it was analyzed with the use of discourse analysis aiming to explore how moving image literacy can contribute to foreign language learning.

Keywords: foreign language learning, moving image literacy, mediation, film language, film metalanguage

JEL classifications: Z00 Other Special Topics: General

Introduction

According to the international research carried out so far (Bazalgette et al., 2000; Benyahia, 2007; Buckingham, 2003; Burn and Durran, 2006; 2007; Burn and Leach, 2004; Burn and Parker, 2003; Goodman, 2003; Potter, 2010; Reid et al., 2002), moving image literacy has been introduced and taught mainly in the students' mother tongue. In Greece, where this literacy and the production of digital video for educational purposes are still at an initial level, it has been both challenging and particularly interesting for me to realize moving image projects with secondary school students within the framework of teaching English as a foreign language, which served as the pilot and main research projects of my doctoral studies. The research was carried out after the written consent of the participating students and their parents, and the official written approval of the ex-Pedagogical Institute and the Ministry of Education of Greece. The part of the research presented here focused on the use and assimilation of the English film language for the creation of students' multimodal texts that addressed both their classmates and their other peers on YouTube, where they uploaded their trailers, and on the development of the English film metalanguage, as well as on the use of English as the language of communication throughout the project realization. Given that English is a global language and most of the media texts students are exposed to are English, the introduction of moving image literacy in the foreign language class can be considered

as a helpful tool for students for this language learning while they are exploiting their already acquired knowledge outside from school.

To begin with, we used Burn and Durran's (2007, p.8) cultural-semiotic 3-Cs model of media literacy, according to which literacy is cultural, critical and creative. These three social functions must be present in all media literacy projects so that this kind of literacy is effectively acquired. As the function related to my present research is the critical, we should mention that through this students can judge media texts and also express themselves. Moreover, the cultural theory of Bourdieu (1984) played an important role in the project design and in the approach of the research data. The concept of "cultural capital" refers to the knowledge and experience a person carries in him/her, as a result of family inheritance, academic acquisition or both. The consumption of cultural goods, not only products but also participation in activities and attendance of spectacles, depends on one's cultural capital and contributes to its extension. In addition, one's inherited cultural capital lets academic knowledge be understood and assimilated and when this cultural capital acquired outside from school is developed and systemized in the official educational environment, it is transformed into "academic capital" (Bourdieu, 1984, p.23). Furthermore, Askegaard and Kjeldgaard (2006, p.232) refer to the phenomenon of "glocalization", as a convergence of the global influences and practices in the market with the local ones, especially characterizing the youth culture and consumption habits. Therefore, young people who tend to consume "glocal" (Askegaard and Kjeldgaard, 2006, p.231) cultural products also contribute and participate in their production, which is the case in the moving image project below.

As far as the pedagogical theories are concerned, the ideas of the Russian psychologist Vygotsky were used. Vygotsky refers to the "spontaneous concepts" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.130) that children develop in an unofficial way, outside from school. These are the ones they come to school with and which are transformed into "scientific concepts" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.130) due to the interpolation of official education. He also stresses the importance of "play" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.92) as a good educational practice because children learn practically, through improvisation and the trial-and-error method. Last but not least, he develops the idea of the scaffolding of knowledge, which means that students come in class with their already acquired knowledge and teachers have to work within the "Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86) of each one of them, so that children take a step forward and make gradual progress that is appropriate for their competence and therefore, the new knowledge can be conceived and assimilated easily as it is the next step in a student's cognitive process. As for foreign language learning, Dendrinos' (2006, p.9) concept of "mediation" has been used as a technique of learning a foreign language by using information from authentic material in one's mother tongue and act as a mediator in order to transmit in the foreign language (L2) a message informed in one's first language (L1). This technique has been used in the Greek State Certificate of Language Competence designed and carried out to certify one's competence in a Foreign Language (FL) and it is gradually spreading out in the Foreign Language Learning (FLL) context.

Data analysis

Data collection and analysis methods

This is a case study realized over three months as an extra teaching activity within the framework of English as a foreign language, in the advanced level of the second grade of a State secondary school of Piraeus. The class consisted of twelve students, whose English language competence level was "B1 Independent User", according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2009) and the teacher was also the researcher. Given that these students worked on a moving image literacy, and more precisely on a cine-literacy, project for the first time, they were taught film vocabulary and grammar first, and after watching the popular Hollywood film "The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring" (Jackson, 2001), which they had chosen from an offered list, they analyzed it in groups of three, focusing on the film characters. More precisely, each group treated a character of their choice and presented it in class using a PowerPoint presentation. After the analysis stage, the groups worked on the production of a trailer presenting their chosen character. At the end of trailer-making, they had to justify their choices in writing.

The data collected consisted of the students-participants' written and audiovisual texts, the researcher's observation journal and the final focus group semi-structured interviews. The data used for analysis here is by a group of three students who dealt with the character of Aragorn, one of the film central heroes. These students' work throughout the project was representative of their class because they were a multi-faceted team, consisting of members of various knowledge and motivational levels, whose production was quite sophisticated even if this was their first moving image project. Through their character analysis and production work the three students revealed their "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1984, p.13) and their already acquired, both formally and informally, linguistic knowledge, while they were academically taught new concepts, and through "mediation" (Dendrinos, 2006, p.9) they discovered a new way of language learning.

As for data analysis, the discourse analysis applied was carried out according to Gee (1999, p.80) who suggests that the meanings both of the written and the oral speech are situated, i.e. they depend on the situation in which they are created and are followed by certain connotations in each case. So, the same words can be interpreted differently in different situations. Additionally, the conveyed meanings also depend on the cultural contexts and the relationships, values and principles that dominate them. "Institutions" (Fairclough, 1995, p.36; Gee, 1999, p.83) also play an important role in discourse analysis, as they usually set the framework in a society and it is within this framework that speech is produced in order to address the others and transmit a message.

The critical function

Film language and metalanguage

Since the beginning of the project, we observed that the participants already knew, even in the foreign language, a lot of film language terms, as a result of the informal knowledge acquired outside from school (Buckingham, 2003; Burn and Durran, 2007) through their contact with the global pop culture and peer learning. This knowledge, which

they could also categorize, constituted their "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1984, p.13). For example, even if they did not know the 'film genre' term, but its simpler and more informal synonym 'kind of film', they could name some film genres and illustrate them with examples of specific films. More precisely, in the pre-project questionnaire about their knowledge in media and the cinema, when they wrote about the kinds of films they watched, they could already state even in the foreign language film genres like "adventures", "comedies", "thrillers", "science fiction", "animation" and "historical films". In support of that, the teacher-researcher noted in her journal that when the 'film genre' was analytically discussed in class and the students were asked to categorize 'The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring' film, they all shouted out, "Action and adventure film!" but there was also a boy who mentioned, "A fantasy film because of its mythological elements." The justification of his answer and his reference to the 'mythological elements' of a fantasy film prove that the students were also aware of the features of each film category and as members of the audience, they had certain expectations from each one of them. They were conscious and active film viewers, who had their preferences and could judge the films according to their taste (Buckingham, 2003).

As we continued with film vocabulary and film grammar, students were analytically introduced with various concepts, many of which were already known to them through their contact with the global pop culture, mainly through the media and their peers; they were not the product of formal learning. Therefore, our aim was to introduce these concepts to the students in a more systematic way which included the definition of each concept, its illustration with popular films they had watched, and an exemplifying picture coming with it; in this way, the participants were facilitated in their assimilation of the presented concepts. According to Vygotsky (1978), the students that had acquired the so-called "spontaneous" concepts outside from school would acquire now the equivalent "academic" concepts thanks to the interpolation of official education. The role of the teacher was to offer her students a more organized and deeper understanding that was socially situated, the examples used to explain these concepts were driven from their own social environment and the local and global popular culture they were familiar with. As it was also found, some "scientific concepts" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.130) already known to the students from the Literature subject were more easily treated during this project. Another factor that contributed to the better understanding of the concepts introduced was the translation of the totally new or more complex concepts in the students' mother tongue, Greek. Once the participants made sure that they had understood these concepts in their first language, they could use them more easily in English.

As an illustration of this, we could say that in a table with the characteristics of the three above mentioned film genres (Tables 1, 2, 3) the students were asked to complete in pairs, the 'iconography' and 'typical characters' sections were appropriately completed, showing the students' clear understanding of these concepts, whereas the 'typical narratives' section proved to be difficult for them, since the students referred to specific events taking place but not to any courses of events. The concept of 'narrative' was completely new for the students and they needed time to assimilate it during the project. The approach of the 'theme' concept was also rather problematic. The students already knew it from the Literature subject but they found it

difficult to apply it to films, and when they were asked to refer to the themes that these specific film genres have, two out of the three students referred to plot features like "action, adventure" and not to the deeper meanings of these film genres. Nonetheless, the third student of the group, who worked in pair with a student from another group, referred to "war, pride and love" in the fantasy film genre. The different approaches of students of the same class show that the 'theme' concept is more complicated and demands a deeper critical ability by the students in order to understand and assimilate it.

Table 1: First student's answers to the film genres classwork handout

Film genres	Iconography	Typical characters	Typical narratives	Typical themes
Fantasy Films e.g. 'The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian'	castles, swords, natural sounds, natural colours	brave heroes, evil enemies, animals, good soldiers	many battles	action, adventure, fantasy, sci fi
Adventure Films e.g. 'Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End'	ships, naval battles, cannons, natural colours, sea, sound of the sea, shooting sounds	good and evil heroes	many battles	adventure, action, sci fi
Action Films e.g. 'The Matrix'	underground, pistols, shooting sounds	good and bad heroes, loyal soldiers	conflicts	fantasy, action, sci fi

Table 2: Second student's answers to the film genres classwork handout

Film genres	Iconography	Typical characters	Typical narratives	Typical themes
Fantasy Films e.g. 'The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian'	castles, swords, natural sounds, natural colours, a quest, valleys, forests	brave heroes, evil enemy, animal soldiers	many battles	action, adventure, fantasy, science fiction
Adventure Films e.g. 'Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End'	ships, naval battles, cannons, natural colours, sea, sound of the sea, shooting sounds	army of the good, a stranger enemy	many battles	adventure, action, science fiction
Action Films	underground,	good and bad	a conflict	fantasy,

e.g. 'The Matrix'	pistols, shooting sounds	heroes, loyal soldiers		action, science fiction
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Table 3: Third student's answers to the film genres classwork handout

Film genres	Iconography	Typical characters	Typical narratives	Typical themes
Fantasy Films e.g. 'The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian'	red, black, natural colours, evil and disaster, death	knights, kings, horses, fairies	the war of the pirates	about the war, pride and love
Adventure Films e.g. 'Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End'	pirate ships, black colour, sound of the sea	pirates, captains, sailors	the battles of the pirates	treasure hunting, adventure, action
Action Films e.g. 'The Matrix'	imaginary weapons, black colour, sound of disaster	the main hero and his team	an imaginary war	a future fight

The more analytical discussion of the film genres that followed in class contributed to the deeper understanding of the relevant film terms, fact proven by the paragraphs the students wrote for homework, one for each one of the film genres studied. In these paragraphs, they managed to talk about a film category as a whole, and not just about specific films, and managed to develop their film metalanguage. We could say, then, that they made a step forward in their "Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86) and managed to acquire the equivalent scientific concepts to a larger extent. More specifically, one of the students wrote about adventures and action films: "In adventure films, [...] the filmmakers want to create tension for the audience who is 'burning' from anxiety to see what is going to happen in the end. [...] In action films, there is a fight between the good and the evil and usually the fight takes place because there is an arrested man that the good wants to save. This happens because the creators want to put the good in defense as the audience likes it."

As we see, given that until that moment this student had only been a spectator, he analyzed the film genres from this point of view, emphasizing the effect of the narrative on the audience. In addition, as a conscious film viewer, he thought critically about the narrative of each film genre and connected the filmmakers' purpose to the audience's expectations and tastes. He also found that the filmmakers usually take into consideration what the spectators want and expect to see, focusing in this way on how the film creators address their audience, or according to Burn and Parker (2003, p.6), to the "orientational function" of a media text, and in this case of a film.

Later on, both the film narrative and the film language terms were presented and analyzed in class with the use of visual means. As a class discussion is a direct and participatory process, the interaction between the prompts given by the teacher and the students' responses was a kind of game, in which the students were involved more easily and got enthusiastic more quickly. Therefore, the idea of Vygotsky (1978) about the beneficial role of play in education proved useful during the realization of this project. In the film terms discussion, which proved to be a very lively one, the introduction to the various terms included their presentation by the teacher and their illustration by the students with the use of films known to them. This method was an interesting challenge for the participants that boosted their motivation as they were asked to interpret the taught film theory in their own way.

As observed, many of the terms were already known to the participants either from their out-of-school cinematic experience, like "box-office", "the Oscars", "blockbuster" and "flashback", or from the Literature subject, like "allegory", "motif" and "allusion". More specifically, when the concept of allusion was analyzed, a student referred to wizard Gandalf the White, who is an allusion to God that guides and protects the others, whereas when the "colour character coding" term was analyzed, another student referred to the white colour of the good wizard Gandalf's clothes, who came as a savior of the people, and to the black colour of the evil wizard Sauron, who wanted to destroy the world. In other cases, when the terms were new to the students, it was found that they tried to interpret them based on their etymology, as the French term "mise-en-scene", which, after being given the Greek translation for total understanding, a student interpreted it as "the placement of objects and actors onstage"; alternatively, they made associations with other terms they already knew. For example, when we analyzed the term "storyboard", two students mentioned that "creating a storyboard is like making a cartoon, as it has to do with a sequence of sketches", making a parallelism between a newly introduced term with a text type familiar to them, even though they confused two distinct kinds of texts that had different purposes. It was a matter of poor conceptual understanding even if this parallelism had a rationale behind it.

The abovementioned examples show the process of film grammar learning in class through the interaction between the teacher and the students. So, Vygotsky's (1978) "play" as a feature of the learning process and the elaboration of the terms that the students were asked to make helped them think critically, and connect the "scientific concepts" introduced to them in class to the "spontaneous" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.130) ones they already possessed and were part of the "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1984, p.13) they came in class with. In this way, they understood more deeply and systemized their film language knowledge and turned their "cultural" into "academic capital" (Bourdieu, 1984, p.23) through the interpolation of official education.

Lastly, regarding the students' critical ability development and the assimilation of film theory and of the way messages are constructed, these students declared in the final interview that the practical part of the project, which means the trailer-making, contributed to the deeper understanding of the film terms through their application in practice, and one of the students commented that he found the practical part "easier" because they worked practically on what they

had already been taught and if they forgot something, they could refer to their notes while playing, experimenting with the offered digital footage and creating. In this way, the students' hands-on experience facilitated the learning process, a conclusion also drawn by the researchers of a large scale research project of video-making in education realized in British schools (Reid et al., 2002).

Foreign language learning

As far as the learning of English as a foreign language is concerned, during the theoretical part of the project, all the terms, the explanations and the examples were discussed in English. Nevertheless, there was the Greek translation next to each term, to make sure that all the students understood its exact meaning so that they could participate in the examples discussion that followed, as already analyzed. In fact, the film vocabulary discussion was a combination of English and Greek, with the use of L1 (Greek) mainly when defining the terms to ensure their clear understanding, whereas the examples were mainly discussed in L2 (English) so that the students used and practiced it. It is interesting how the use of film metalanguage worked here in conceptual learning and how it related to the teaching and learning of the foreign language. The students could understand and learn the terms in Greek first, and then in English, before they provided examples in the latter. In this case, foreign language learning was boosted by the use of the mother tongue; the students understood the film language in Greek first and then in English and developed a film metalanguage directly in the foreign language. According to Dendrinos' article on the use of mediation in foreign language learning, it is

a form of everyday social practice which involves meaning-making agents (that is, event participants who create social meanings during the process), in acts of communication that require negotiation of meaning and relaying of information across the same or different languages. Such action becomes necessary when the help of the mediator is either requested or offered because it is assumed that the participants in a communicative event are experiencing some kind of information gap or because they cannot understand something said or written. (Dendrinos, 2006, pp.16-17)

According to mediation theory, we could say that in this project the teacher-researcher played the role of the mediator so that the students managed to acquire knowledge in L2 (English as a foreign language) with the help of L1 (mother tongue) by reaching a deeper conceptual understanding of the given terms in their first language and then directly develop a media metalanguage in the foreign language.

As it was expected, the first participation of students in a moving image literacy project that was even more realized in a foreign language could not totally cover all their learning needs and some weaknesses were observed in the assimilation of the film terms. So, in the following stage of the project, when the students were asked to use the film terms to analyze a scene of the film, some errors were detected that were due to the use of the film terms in the foreign language. For example, in their analysis they used the term "high-key lighting", instead of "highlighting", confusing therefore two terms close not only in meaning but also linguistically, in terms of spelling and

pronunciation. In addition, in the end of the project, during the interview, it was observed that the students had understood the film terms in Greek, but they still did not remember the names of some of them in English. So, as the interview took place in the foreign language, there were questions containing English film terms, for some of which the students asked their Greek translation before they answered. In fact, they asked for mediation, resorting to their mother tongue in order to completely understand some concepts before continuing with the production of a message in the foreign language, the answer to the question. A student even commented that the English terms needed to be studied more for someone to remember them. From all the above we conclude that terminology learning in a foreign language at this language competence level is a demanding but not impossible venture for the students.

We should mention, though, that for students who worked on a media project for the first time these were subtle notions and such mistakes were quite expectable and totally acceptable. Therefore, through this trial-and-error process, the newly taught concepts became clearer for the students and the whole process contributed both to their conceptual learning and to the acquisition of the terms in the foreign language. Then, it was up to the teacher to intervene, talk with the students about the points that were still unclear for them, offer them guidance and play in this way the role of facilitator (Buckingham, 2003). In the interview, the students also mentioned that the two separate 45-minute sessions per week for the English subject, according to the national curriculum, were not enough for the realization of a project that took place along with curriculum teaching and for the extended use of the foreign language with the aim to practice and enrich it. More specifically, a student said regarding the written justification of their choices in trailer-making, "we made more linguistic mistakes than usual because we didn't have enough time to write it with more attention". The rigidity of the Greek national curriculum that does not permit a teacher to teach in more sessions in order to complete a project or a series of lessons and the need for a more flexible school structure were seen as obstacles during the project realization and they are issues occurring in other countries, too, such as the U.S.A. (Tyack and Tobin, 1994).

Despite all difficulties, the students' insistence to use the English language during the interview was remarkable despite the fact that the teacher made clear to them that they could use Greek for their facilitation as the interview aim was the project assessment by the students and the teacher would not consider their performance in English for the term mark. Sometimes it was difficult for them to fluently express themselves in the foreign language and asked for the English translation of a Greek term or word in order to continue their statement. In this way, they applied Dendrinos' (2006) "mediation"; they understood the meaning of the question in English, processed the answer in Greek and then expressed it in the foreign language. Apart from the students' learning benefit from this process, using the global language of English was also more prestigious for them and gave them the sense of power (Crystal, 2003). Firstly, they knew that this interview would be used for research reasons and that the researcher worked for an Anglophone Institution, so they wanted to make a good

impression, as they mentioned. Secondly, after having made so much effort to carry out the project in L2, they felt that speaking English during the interview would be the appropriate ending for it. As a student stated, "We better speak English so that the English people don't think that we don't know anything. Besides that, we have made an effort throughout the project; we won't quit it now in the end."

In the final interview that served for the project assessment, the students mentioned that the realization of this project, the written and oral activities, and also the use of audiovisual means helped them improve their English. One of them stated that the character analysis process helped them improve their linguistic competence, talking in the first plural person ("we"), as if he represented the other members of his group too: "Now we have some experience in analysing characters and using the language for this purpose. Now this process is easier for sure." They also talked about aspects of the English culture that were discussed and analyzed as part of the teaching and learning process of the foreign language. In the interview they mentioned among others the classic literary figure of Tolkien, the author of the book the film had been based on, and elements of his mythology such as "monsters", "dwarves", "hobbits" and "imaginary landscapes", the name of which they remembered and easily used in the foreign language.

Conclusions

Concluding, we could say that during this moving image literacy project the students managed to assimilate the taught film language at a satisfactory degree and develop the equivalent metalanguage in favour of their English language competence. The use of their pre-existing cinematic knowledge along with the film language taught, analyzed and used in the school environment, contributed to the formation of their own capital, as a combination of its cultural and academic form, and the transformation of their spontaneous into scientific concepts, as a result of the official education role. Therefore, the students' popular culture, a combination of global and local elements, was what the students brought in class with them, and it was the official culture of their educational environment that helped its systematization and enrichment.

At the same time, this moving image literacy project was a different way of learning English as a foreign language since the study of new terms, their explanation, analysis, and the argumentation on the choices made constituted various ways of using and practicing the English language. As for the mediation method, it worked as a reference to the students' mother tongue and a means of facilitation for the better conceptual understanding of the foreign terminology. Another important factor which motivated the participants to work in English was its status as a global language and the prestige that its acquisition gave them. Consequently, despite the difficulties faced during the project, the final result was positive and beneficial for the students-participants and boosted their foreign language learning.

This case study could be used as a basis for a broader development of moving image-making projects within the framework of foreign

language learning in the future. These projects could also be of various degrees of difficulty both in terms of film language and media techniques, according to the language competence level they are designed for. In this way, the gradual progress in the students' learning would be ensured.

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