Generational thoughts: Teaching and learning foreign languages with book trailers

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Abstract

The paper presents a Media Education experience with teachers and students in one Italian upper-secondary school. The objective is the teaching and learning of foreign languages through the use of innovative languages and tools, such as audiovisual technologies. This experience is an example to facilitate the learning of disciplinary topics or meta-cognitive competences, such as comprehension, critical text analysis, writing and production of new and creative cultural products in audiovisual languages from traditional books.

1. Introduction

Some scholars of technologies from the Toronto School, such as Walter Ong, in *Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the world* (1982) and Derrick De Kerkhove in *Dall'alfabeto a Internet. L'homme "littéré: alfabetizzazione, cultura, tecnologia* (2008), after their predecessors such as Innis and McLuhan, have deepened how technological innovation has contributed to modify neurological processes, the ways of communication (especially language) and the ways of interpretation of real life for generations.

The digital revolution constructs a cultural world, connected to the development of a certain way of thinking, at the basis of thought and the perception of reality. Starting here, behaviours and new modalities of social interaction and communication are often structured. They represent new mechanisms of definition and construction of the identity.

The cultural and linguistic change, fortified by continuous technological development, has progressively weakened the semantic value of the "world" before and the "writing" after, losing ties with cultural tradition. The language of " writing", in fact, has structured for a long time the educational pedagogical model that has been, even now, at the basis of traditional process of socialization. So the linguistic transformation, connected to media change, has not always determined the change of strategies and tools of educational system (family and school).

 According to this interpretation, the diaspora between new and past educational models has increased and also the need to construct new educational paradigms has increased: these are nearer to the socializing needs of new generations. According to De Kerkhove and Ong, the book is the symbol of the writing era and the chirographic era (in other words it is possible using the expression: *phonological age*).

The use of the book emphasizes an abstract way of thinking, which is hypotactic, connected to visual sense (in this case, Ong talks about the attribution of a visual space to the typical sound of the primary orality). The thought is analytical and oriented to the objectification.

Through writing, thought is organized in rules and principles that facilitate the internalization, the reflection and the interior discovery. The written language can be considered as an evident demonstration of people to order the complexity and the unpredictability of the reality in a linear and sequential model. In this sense, the written language can be interpreted in the sociological point of view as a process of individual emancipation or of human control of the heterogeneity in a ordinated and rational way (Cortoni, 2011). However, this process has progressively reduced an other dimension of human species, that is also important in the learning process: that is instinctual, natural and emotional.

According to De Kerkhove, the progressive evolution of media inaugurates the ideographic era that stimulates the emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995), the sensorial, instinctual and natural intelligence, and it finds in the image its ideal expression to activate new forms of recognition and identification of emotions and competences (Meyrowitz, 1985, Thompson, 1995).

The metamorphosis of code and the discovery of the emotional expressivity through visual technologies have transformed the ways of cognitive approaches, perceptions that are evident and visible in the way of thinking and in the interpretation of the reality of new generations.

According to Ong, the mental structure connected to this era is mainly paratactic, connected to

experience. It is aggregative which means it is constructed through symbolic and linguistic connections.

However, the development of the visual society (Featherstone, 1990) induced an excessive shift of attention to appearance, to technique, to perception and to what is visible. In this society, the attention of media code or media form are more important than the transmission of meaning and of semantic value in an educational perspective.

Regarding this topic some scholars, among others De Kerkhove and also Jenkins (2006), talk about the need to create an ecosystem where more media, with their language and their cognitive stimuli, facilitate multitasking learning, giving new and diverse opportunities of learning, communication and sharing of experiences.

According to Jenkins, the hypothesis of the ecosystem, that includes many devices, is at the basis of the so-called cultural convergence, defined as "a culture where old and new media clash, where media text generated from the bottom-up and the top cross, where the power of media production and that of usage interact in unpredictable ways (*produsage*)" [1]

This concept is certainly shared in the public debate and in scientific literature about Media education. According to this field, becoming a citizen in the Information Society and In the Knowledge Society, each individual has to master technical, expressive and cooperative skills, from both old and new technologies.

2. Educational Meanings of a Book trailer

The idea of a Media Education course about book trailers derives from an educational trial to find a didactical strategy to establish a link between writing language and visual or audio language. With this laboratory, we emphasize the educational properties of both languages that have influenced the construction of different models of learning. This condition often causes breaks and crises between adults and young generations.

The book trailer allows for the activation of a cross-breeding process among different technologies and languages, one that is typical of the book and one typical of the audio-visual trailer. This integration, with their different implications for cognitive and emotional processes, isn't opposite but convergent and they are at the basis of the success of the learning process.

Hence, the book trailer can be defined in technical terms as the trailer production of the book; it is a typical support of the audio-visual world and, in general, it is used to commercialize a new movie; in this path, the trailer is used to put forward an educational support: the book.

In this laboratory it is important to translate and to re-contextualize some syntactic and semantic rules of the trailer, usually used in an economical perspective and in the entertainment context, to achieve different educational goals. These goals are structured in many levels:

- Cognitive, oriented to improve the disciplinary or interdisciplinary learning;
- Emotional for an involvement of students in didactical activities at school;
- Behavioural to improve the communicative capability of students, the work in group to the *problem solving* and the collaboration.

The *sequential intelligence* is the expression chosen by Raffaele Simone (2012) to describe a linear thought, at slow rhythm, where the reader establishes the way of reading in connection of his rhythm of learning. Latter, *simultaneous intelligence* is mainly characterized by synoptic inputs, that are organized in a chaotic way, and by the de-structuration of syntactic rules of written text.

Through the book trailer, it is possible to activate the passage from the sequential intelligence to the simultaneous intelligence. In the first case, the isolated reflection is emphasized, such as the internalization of concepts, the individual interpretation using those encyclopaedic links of their own cultural background at the basis of thought. In the second case, it is possible to talk about creative, paratactic and participative thought, where the student uses concepts previously internalized to re-organize them in a personalized way in meaning and in language.

If in a book, the text is a cultural, authentic, localized and closed, or complete; the trailer on the contrary emphasizes the creation of a new text, where the same student lives the experience of

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[1] Cf. Jenkins H., *Convergence culture: where old and new media collide*, New York University press, New York, 2006, tr.it., *cultura convergente*, Apogeo, Milano, 2007, p.12.

passage from the receiver to the producer. In this way, the text becomes open, changeable or modifiable; it is constructed through the sharing and the exchange of more meanings among people that cooperate in its definition.

Hence, a participative process is constructed and the individual learns to collaborate and to communicate with different people in culture and in way of thinking, they learn to plan using common rules, that are shared and co-built in working groups.

In the first case, the student lives the experience of reflexive, internalized and individualized learning through the activation of abstracting processes and memorization processes of encyclopaedic knowledge, generally more tied to traditional textual rules and to the recognition of the conceptual property of the author. In the second case, it is possible to activate a de-structuring process of the same rules and a personalized semantic re-constructing through the combination of symbols and interpretations from different cultural contexts.

Students, therefore, work on the transposition of textual meanings of the book in a creatively audio-visual tool. We aren't talking about the passage of the same content from a medium to another in the cross-media perspective. We are talking about the *ex-novo* conceptual re-construction that starts from the synopsis and from the meanings hidden in the text. The main goal is the construction of a communicative text, where the objective is to stimulate the rationality and emotionality of other young people to read the same book.

Table 1

Synoptic framework		
BOOK TRAILER	**book**	**Audio-visual trailer**
Features of thought	vertically analytic	horizontally complete
	hypotactic	paratactic
	abstract	sensorial
	Mono-sensorial	Multi-sensorial convergent
	Critical thinking	Creative thinking
Learning perspectives	Introversion	Extroversion
	Personalized analysis	Participative analysis
	reflection	Co-building of meanings
	Major cognitive involvement	Major emotional involvement
	Activation of abstraction and of memorization processes	Activation of processes in synoptic and symbolic connections
Types of intelligence	sequential	simultaneous
	linear	chaotic
	Personalized and slowed rhythm	Synoptic Inputs
	Local narration	Narration without linear space and time
Text	Closed (complete)	open (interpolated)
	Authentic (recognition of the source)	Continuously modifiable (with many authors)

3. Learning and teaching objectives

The book trailer laboratory can be organized for teaching groups of foreign languages, but also of mother tongue groups, that want to achieve with their students not only disciplinary objectives,

connected to a better comprehension of the language, but also cognitive and emotional transversal competences.

In the first case, the explicit reference is the development of multi-level critical analysis of a text and awareness through the creation and the production of a cultural object with a specific communicative intention. In the second case, new ways of working can be experimented through the laboratory, such as *problem solving* and *learning to learn* through the exchange of competences and knowledge.

The main goal is associated with the educational orientation of teachers on how transversal competences of citizenship[2] can be emphasized as strategies and innovative methods in the Media education field.

The experimented path is structured in two main connected moments; they take in turn according to an educational strategy that we can define as "a mirror": everything that teachers practise during the laboratory, is replicated into classrooms during the experimentation.

Hence, the first path is oriented in media educational training for teachers; while the second is experimentation in classroom for students.

In the training of teachers, the attention focuses on the development of technological competences of visual literacy (comprehension of basic language and the basic structure of a production process). Even if the reduction of intergenerational gaps on media competences is a utopia because teachers can never achieve the same level of skills and practical attitudes of new generations, their literacy is essential to get teachers closer to values, languages and knowledge of youth. The laboratory represents a strategic tool to construct a communicative connection with new generations (Cortoni, 2011b).

There have been mainly 7 laboratory phases:

1. Reading;
2. Text analysis;
3. Preparation ;
4. Transposition;
5. Production;
6. Post-production;
7. Self-evaluation.

The starting point of the laboratory is the **individual reading** of a classic book in its original language. This kind of activity needs a good knowledge of the language, as vocabulary and grammar rules from students. This kind of path is certainly advisable for children over the age of 12. According to some scholars, in fact, it is this age where the thought develops to use technology to learn better, to problem solve or to develop high technological competence (Calvani, 1999). Through the reading, each individual activates a process of internalization and memorization of key concepts that are the basis to interpret its meaning.

The analysis of text is strongly connected to the transversal competence, "interpreting the information", and it has as its main objective the development of the analytical and ideological thought. The student has to find some keywords in the text, they have to be connected to the synopsis (denotative analysis) or to the hidden meanings (connotative meaning). They are the main personal interpretation of the book - the choice of keywords has to be shared and exchanged with other members of the same working group.

The preparation is another type of critical analysis to develop a flexible and transversal thought through which it is possible to build and to imagine meaning connections among different previously selected concepts, using informative sources and different multimedia material (images, audio, written documents…). This specific activity develops "learning to learn", that is the mental attitude to explore, to research, to select and to choose diverse informational sources, useful to construct a complex discourse.

The transposition of the book in book trailer develops a creative and organizational thought connected to planning competence. It means the capability to organize and to synthesize - in an effective way - a lot of knowledge and to establish the connection among didactic objectives.

The production represents the creative and participative phase where individuals have to construct the communicative structure; it is appropriate to transmit the effective message to their audience,

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[2] Learning to learn, planning, communicating, collaborating, acting autonomously, problem solving, interpreting information, establishing links and relationships (attached 1, DM 139/2007).

developing communicative skills. This phase provides the construction of affective thought, capable of contextualizing messages with objectives and needs of the target.

The post-production represents a collage, the construction of relationships of meanings among different multimedia materials. They can develop a multimedia thought.

From the transversal point of view, the path is characterized by a methodology of work that provides the composition of groups and the collaboration to define common decisions and to synthesize a lot of information. This activity is the basis for the development of a synthetic thought.

4. Conclusion

The educational intentions and the awareness of potentiality of some media educational paths represent the first step to integrate the technological potential to educational and didactic objectives of teachers. Therefore, they aren't always sufficient for the training success of the media education laboratory that is oriented to develop transversal competences in the metacognitive and relational point of views.

The emotional involvement, the interest and the motivation of the same teachers are the basis of the guarantee of laboratory success.

To this, the availability of appropriate resources in the context of reference is added; they are essential to a good outcome of the laboratory at school. In the end, each educational process has to use an effective system of product and process evaluation, able to monitor cognitive, emotional and behavioural effectiveness. In this regard, a particular and interesting example as food for thought could be the comparison between cultural products, made by teachers, and those made by students from the same content. In this way, they can discuss their semantic and syntactic choices.

Another evaluation exercise could include peer evaluation techniques, that enable groups of students strategies for analyzing the products made by their peers in order to emphasize their semantic and syntactic alternative choices, or the consistency of the result with the linguistic rules and expectations of the same target.

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Methods of foreign language teaching is closely related to other sciences such as pedagogics, psychology, physiology, linguistics and some others. Pedagogics is the science concerned with the teaching and education of the younger generation. To study F.L.teaching one must know pedagogics. One branch of pedagogics is called didactics. Methods, as compared to didactics, studies the specific ways of teaching a definite subject. F.eg. the so called `principle of visualization `was the first introduced in teaching for Lang-s. Teaching a foreign language means first and foremost the format