



Literamovie – creativity in multilingual and multimedia e-editions of classic texts

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Abstract

This article aims to enrich the conversation about the colonization of students' horizontal discourse by the vertical discourse in school, according to the Bernstein's distinction, researching the creative work of students in the context of a project, as a significant factor to this colonization. LiteraMovie Cartoon story© is a hybrid creation combining literature, movie and visualization based on cartoons. The reformation of the classic texts in a post-typography educational environment should be considered as a recreation of the text, based on new, as well as on old literacies. So, during two successive projects in the last two years, students of different grades were led to edit classic texts, creating a multilingual and multimedia e-edition with a cross-cultural perception. Finally, it is proposed that this creativity in producing e-learning objects could be the meeting point of formal and non-formal education, of the claim for knowledge acquired after a planned educational procedure and for learning in-action.

Keywords

Literamovie, hybrid multilingual e-edition, horizontal and vertical discourse, classic texts, creative learning

Introduction

Language teaching in traditional educational systems was mainly book-centred, based on the age-long classic tradition and the large scale typography, using a teacher-centred method as well. Nowadays, a great variety of textual genres are used in language teaching and student-centred methods are adopted, claiming the authentic creation of learning objects. Classic texts are present in contemporary education, although they are supposed to be left back as teaching material of the typography age. In other words, the essential issue of the tension between local and global in contemporary education seems to arouse (Χριστίδης, 2009), as locality is examined under the light of the use of ICTs in education, the new literacies and the globalization.

Furthermore, the review of teaching old-literacy-texts in the post-typography educational environment of new literacies (Reinking et al., 1998) should be neither self-limited to a discussion about the writer's skills or the on-going needs of the reader, nor should new literacies be considered as an external goal that the student has to achieve. For, according to Leu, there is a classified scale of out-of-context skills and knowledge of new, as well as of old literacies (word recognition, knowledge recoding, dictionary skills, understanding, inductive logic, writing procedure, orthography, response to literacy), as a concordance of neutral skills, producing new skills' gateway (Leu et al., 2004). On the contrary, for the New Literacy Studies researchers (Gee, 1990; Street, 1995), reading and writing are considered as formative factors of a conducive social activity through in-context practices, connecting people, language resources, means and



strategies and aiming to produce meaning in context. This concept supports the study of the above concordance as a nationally-oriented social practice.

As research focuses on learning methods and practices, it seems to underestimate creativity as a crucial factor in language teaching. In modern post-typography environment, students have the opportunity to deconstruct, reform and recreate texts in a multimodal e-edition using ICTs and to communicate with other communities in order to co-create e-learning objects. This activity may be considered not only as learning by practicing, but also as learning by creating with the claim of a final reading of the text by an educational community and of producing a piece of art and literature to be published.

Textual genres and learning objects

Teaching texts of a specific genre leads to the problem of the strict correlation between the text's structure and the defined opinion (or a sum of opinions) that it proposes about life. Teaching literature sets a different series of issues than teaching sciences, and it sets them differently. As Martha Nussbaum put it, we must take into consideration the genre of the text, as well as to view texts as an extension (or redefinition or refutation) of a genre: novels, for example, in contrast to the complex, as well as formalistic examples by moral philosophers, make the reader participant in and friend of, using punctiliousness, emotional fascination, exciting stories, variety and the uncertainty of good myth-making (Nussbaum, 1990). Additionally, the reformation of a classic text as an e-learning object by an educational community involves students to an alternative learning method, rendering them, apart from learners, co-creators of the learning material. But, should teaching classic literature using ICTs and editing e-learning objects based on it be considered a relative other of the same family or an opposite other? For the more we look into the procedure of the transformation of a classic text in a new communication environment, the more we focus on its deterministic progress to a new genre, obfuscating possible asymmetries between them. Of course, this discussion focuses on the educational use of classic texts, not only on their philological research in general.

The main claim in this correlation is to highlight possible asymmetries between the two, because a presupposition for the activity theory is that the nature of an activity is partly constructed by the tools used in it (Cope & Kalantzis 2004; Engestrom et al. 1999). Two long term projects in teaching language for first-grade-high-school students were planned on this claim: the former, a comparative analysis of the ancient Greek historian Xenophon (Hellenica, 2.1.16-32, The battle in Aigospotamoi) with the ancient Chinese general Sun Tzu's The Art of War, and the latter, The civil war in ancient Corfu by Thucydides: holocaust or Nash's balance (Τζουμέρκας & Πετροπούλου, 2011 [English version in http://en.tzoumerkass.gr/?page_id=26] ; Τζουμέρκας, 2011). Both of them aimed at a Literamovie Cartoon Story production, based on the classic texts with a cross-cultural point of view, as a multilingual and multimedia e-edition (in a tetra lingual e-edition in Ancient and Modern Greek language, English and Latin). A Literamovie e-edition claims not only to represent a text using authentic multimedia, but also to synchronize the multilingual edition of the text in order to facilitate language teaching. This way, when studying a text of the common heritage in a multilingual edition, authenticity, interaction and cultural equity are more feasible. Hybrid e-editions like these set again the issue of the meaning of multimedia in a multilingual environment as an internal factor in the phase of creation, not as an external criterion when assessing the results of the implementation or the suitability of the means used in it.



Hybrid textual genres and Literamovie Cartoon Stories

Additionally, the role of artistic performance in reforming a typewritten text in its meta-typewritten e-edition, not only as pictures on the margins of the text, but as hybrid e-edition should be evaluated. According to Appadurai, the multi-dimensional people flows in the age of the globalization provoke linguistic and cultural *hybridation*, so that hybrid textual genres have risen in contemporary communication field: infotainment, docudrama, dramedy, edutainment etc (Appadurai, 1990). Literamovie Cartoon Stories constitute such a hybrid, constructed using literature and cartoon stories inspired by and transformed in a dramatic performance of the text. According to the principles of the so-called *Learning by Design* the educational community of action must create e-editions, based on the results of the research in the context of a project, with the students in the role of creators and the teacher in the role of the editor. Doing so, students become producers of knowledge in an authentic learning environment, not just users of it.

Both the above projects were planned on three claims: *Exploration activities* with multilingual analysis, synchronization and representation of the text, researching the poetic function of language, as it is expressed by the intonation and the word order in a free-word-order language, like Greek language (see, http://en.tzoumerkas.gr/?page_id=164); *Comprehension activities*, claiming factual analysis of the text, structured in assembling knowledge resources, and especially the construction of a *Hotlist* with an interest for the knowledge resources of the specific case, as for the time, the field and the facts of the battle, the nautical technology in use (triremes, food supplies etc); and finally, the construction of a *Scrapbook* and a *Multimedia Collection* including all the information found and aiming at the *critical understanding of the text*, as well as a *cross literary and cross cultural approach*. But, all these are just materials for the publication of the final version of the text by the students. The third and most important claim was the *Creative activities* requested:

- *Story inside story* – students inspired from the comparative analysis of the texts, wrote an authentic scenario, based on a fictional conversation of the historical persons in future time
- *War diaries* written by students, based on *what if* scenarios, as students played ancient Athenian and Spartan sailors on their way to the battle
- *Authentic music and songs* composed by students, inspired by the historical facts
- *Radio Athenians*, digital radio show in a twelve-hour-show, based on fictional stories of the sailors, narrated by students
- *Authentic cartoons* by students and cartoon stories inspired by the text, and photo stories edited as cartoon stories
- *Authentic choreography* inspired by the text and performed by students
- *Dramatic representation of ancient Greek pottery painting*
- Production and publication of a *tetra lingual and multimedia e-edition*, in ancient and modern Greek language, English, Latin, as an e-learning object

As a Literamovie Cartoon Story includes story timing, designing and creation of authentic pictures and drawings, decoupage and acting, point of view and narration, it is an authentic piece of art. Somebody, though, could raise a plausible objection: is the principle of the uniqueness of a piece of art required in the case of an educational e-edition, as a procedure and as a final product, since it is to be reformed from time to time, and from this point of view it constitutes a continually coming-into-being piece of art? A dramatic historical narration isn't just a narration of unique facts, but also their hermeneutical conception. But, this conception isn't yet an artistic creation. If it is to be poetically reformed, it should be based not only on its uniqueness, as



historical narration, but moreover on its claim for ‘general truth’, as Aristotle put it (1451b:29-33). This is the meeting point of creating and learning.

In the above projects, the final reading of the text and its e-edition has the benefits analyzed by Kalantzis & Cope (2009:56-58). Moreover, this analysis could launch a new tradition in editing classic texts, based on the work of educational communities. Going back to the ancient Greek philosophical controversy about the value of oral and written speech, between Plato and Aristotle, it is the latter that, although Plato was deriding him as *reader*, collecting, scrutinizing and annotating books of his age launched the book-centered tradition, not Gutenberg. Even though the arguments in the modern controversy about the value of new and old literacies reproduce more or less this old discussion, it is the educational communities that will launch a post-typography classic tradition creating multimodal e-editions. Without this activity, the new discussion hasn’t got much sense.

Post-typography reformation of a text also refers to its audiovisual and multimodal reconstruction. The necessary skills in the audiovisual and media literacy, as well as in the grammar of the visualization (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996), that students have to improve in order to produce authentic visual materials, are the one issue of this reformation. The other issue is that, as writing skills give an opportunity for creative writing, but they do not demand it, in the same way, the skills in audiovisual and media literacy are one presupposition for planning and materializing authentic e-learning objects, but not the only one. The *authenticity in classroom* (Stevens, 1992:15) is connected with the opportunities offered to students in order to express authentic thoughts and speech, to co-create an authentically reformed digital edition of teaching and learning sources.

Conclusions

The above projects could be a proposal aiming to cure the disability of school to exploit new literacies in classroom, according to the *hypothesis of the disproportion between home and school* (Marsh, 2006). According to Bernstein’s distinction between *vertical and horizontal discourse*, they are activities of the former, having a direction towards the future, to the knowledge that is to be acquired at the end of a planned educational procedure. Therefore the discussion about the colonization of children’s horizontal discourse by the vertical discourse (Fairclough 2005; Κουτσογιάννης, 2009) could be enriched with this question: which is the role of students’ creative work in the context of a project, as a significant factor to the colonization of their horizontal discourse? For colonization, as well as pedagogy of immersion partly underestimate a significant parameter in horizontal discourse, the unasked initiative and inclination of students to be creative. The compliance to a discourse in context, according to *globalization from below* (Fairclough, 2006) may include *creativity in a local context* as well, because real world is something more than a field of adaptation.

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