Chapter 9
Beyond Comparisons: Frameworks for Developing Digital L2 Literacies

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PREVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Think of your own experiences becoming “literate” in your first and other languages. How was this experience a process with a beginning and an end, and how was it (or is it) an ongoing process? How might you think of your literacy in the plural, as ‘literacies’?

2. How would you define literacy? What are some problems with traditional definitions of literacy with regard to second/foreign language (L2) learning and teaching? In what ways do you think traditional definitions of literacy are challenged by technology-mediated uses of language and other forms of meaning making?

3. In your experience learning an L2, how did you use comparison as a means to learn about the new language and culture? How was comparison used in learning activities that you did? As a teacher of L2, how have you incorporated comparison as a teaching and learning technique?

4. Examine the ACTFL Comparisons standard below. What aspects of this standard involve the development of literacy as you understand it? How does the notion of comparison and contrast develop critical awareness?

5. Although the standard mentions comparing one’s own language and culture with the language and culture being studied, many teachers believe that the learners’ first language (L1) should rarely, if ever, be used in the classroom. In the case of comparisons, when might it be pedagogically appropriate (if ever) to use or analyze the learners’ L1, or to explicitly contrast L1 and L2 languages and/or cultural practices?
ACTFL STANDARD 4: COMPARISONS
(National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996, p. 6)

4.1 Students demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own. This standard focuses on the impact that learning the linguistic elements in the new language has on students’ ability to examine English and to develop hypotheses about the structure and use of languages. From the earliest language learning experiences, students can compare and contrast the two languages as different elements are presented. Activities can be systematically integrated into instruction that will assist students in gaining understanding and in developing their abilities to think critically about how languages work.

4.2 Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own. As students expand their knowledge of cultures through language learning, they continually discover perspectives, practices, and products that are similar and different from their own culture, and they develop the ability to hypothesize about cultural systems in general. Some students may make these comparisons naturally, others may not. This standard helps focus this reflective process for all students by encouraging integration of this process into instruction from the earliest levels of learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

As articulated above, the ACTFL Comparisons standard states that “through comparisons and contrasts with the language being studied, students develop insight into the nature of language and the concept of culture and realize that there are multiple ways of viewing the world.” With this in mind, L2 learning activities should assist students to develop “their abilities to think critically about how languages work,” as well as “discover perspectives, practices, and products that are similar and different from their own culture.” In this way, the Comparisons standard encourages the development of L2 literacies through the raising of critical awareness of the intimate co-weaving of language and culture.

L2 literacy has been reconceptualized in the last few decades, especially with the rise of the Internet. Until the mid-1990s, L2 representations in instructed learning environments were limited to textbooks designed for learners, reália and cultural products such as magazines or movies meant for expert/native users, and the instructor her- or himself. Outside of class, learners at that time might have seen static representations of the L2 in popular media, or if they were lucky and had the means, they might have visited a place where they were exposed to people who spoke the L2. With the widespread growth of the Internet in the mid-1990s, however, L2 texts, practices, and expert/native speakers became accessible in new ways, both in and outside of the classroom. At the same time, the Internet began having profound impacts on language use more broadly, changing the nature of
the L2 texts and practices under study. To interpret and participate in these newly available representations requires powers of interpretation that extend beyond ‘reading,’ and of forms of participation that often extend beyond ‘writing’; in other words, traditional conceptualizations of literacy are no longer adequate. It is better conceptualized in the plural as ‘literacies’ because of the multiplicity of media and contexts. We can speak of ‘digital’ or ‘new media’ literacies when they involve the use of Internet and related computer technologies, especially Web 2.0 technologies such as social media, virtual environments, and multiplayer online gaming.

The theories behind conceptions of digital literacies are the focus of this chapter, along with discussion of comparisons-focused pedagogical frameworks that address their development in the L2 classroom. As explained in the introduction to this volume, chapters address one of the ‘5 Cs’ (i.e., communication, cultures, comparisons, communities, connections) as articulated in the Standards (National Standards, 1996). Of all the standards, development of literacies is most appropriately matched with the Comparisons standard. To explore how this standard can be applied to literacies development in technology-mediated L2 pedagogical contexts, this chapter will first examine the definitions of ‘literacy,’ ‘new literacies’ and various ‘literacies of the digital’ (Martin, 2008). Several pedagogical frameworks coherent with the Comparisons standard for the development of digital L2 literacies will then be presented. These include (1) functional approaches, such as frameworks for online reading comprehension (e.g., Leu et al., 2007) and media literacy education (Buckingham, 2003), (2) language awareness approaches (e.g. Bolitho et al., 2003), including genre awareness (Hyland, 2001) and corpus-informed L2 instruction (e.g. Flowerdew, 2009), and (3) sociocultural, or new literacies approaches, including multiliteracies (e.g. New London Group, 1996) and our own bridging activities framework (Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008). We will conclude with a list of key terms, questions for reflection and discussion, ideas for action research projects, case studies in research and teaching, and a list of useful online resources.

2. LITERACY

Literacy is traditionally understood as the set of decoding and encoding skills needed to read and write. In the 1970s and 1980s, education and social science researchers began questioning the text-based, autonomous definition of literacy, where literacy is seen as independent from the contexts in which it occurs (e.g. Street, 1984; see Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, and Barton, 2007, for histories). Instead, they began to present literacy as a social practice, where it is practiced by individuals as parts of larger groups. Barton (2007) explains that according to this new, sociocultural view, literacy is described in terms of user practices in particular domains and media, and is situated in broader social, institutional and historical relations. This socially informed re-definition of literacy acknowledges the cognitive dimensions of literacy use and development as psychologically situated in user awareness, intentions, and actions, and grounded in a symbolic system of
communication, namely language.

New sociocultural and situated definitions of literacy provide an alternative to views of literacy focused on the mechanics of decoding and generating graphical forms of language. Earlier work informed by sociocultural theory demonstrated that communities and individuals engage in multiple and divergent literacy practices that emerge within specific cultural, historical, and epistemological traditions (Scribner & Cole, 1981). In contemporary research, the New Literacy Studies movement (e.g., Bazerman, 1988; Gee, 1992, 1996; Street, 1995) has clear implications for current understandings of literacy and language learning as socially and culturally situated, shaped by context, and mediated by various tools and technologies. Thus, contemporary conceptions of literacy have expanded beyond the narrow, if also necessary, skill of decoding and producing graphical texts.

A term often used to describe literacy, as well as other cultural technologies, is that of social practice. Social theorists use the term practices to describe socially structured, and socially structuring, everyday life activity (Bourdieu, 1991; de Certeau, 1984). Given the critical importance of literacy in the modern era, some have argued that language and literacy practices are central to the cultural organization of all social life (Pennycook, 2010). As a social practice, literacy develops dynamically in a wide variety of interrelated semiotic and cultural modes, genres, and domains, and so can be understood in the plural, or as ‘literacies’. Seen this way, literacies involve more than just reading and writing, and encompass any semiotic activity practiced in ways recognized by particular groups, networks, or communities (Gee, 2004; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). In essence, becoming literate in a particular semiotic practice (or set of practices) requires the ability to interpret and generate signs that are meaningful to a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), while it also involves the development of an identity appropriate to that practice (Gee, 2004). Group participation involves taking on recognizable social roles (Gee, 1996), or ‘doing identity’ in ways that are recognizable to that group.

2.1 From literacies to digital literacies

With this new sociocultural conceptualization of literacy, New Literacy Studies has emerged as a diverse field, a “highly contested space” (Leu et al., 2007), where literacies are defined alternatively as social practices, dispositions, discourses, contexts, or various combinations thereof. In spite of divergences, Leu et al. note researchers agree that new literacies:

- are emerging from reconceptualizations of literacy afforded by new Internet and other communication technologies,
- are an essential aspect to individual and group participation in today’s increasingly globalized world, and so should be incorporated into modern educational curricula, and
- are indexical in nature, quickly emerging and shifting with new technologies; education should therefore not focus on specific literacies, but on how to adapt to these emergent qualities.
The term ‘digital literacies’ refers to Internet- and technology-mediated literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2008). When seen to encompass functional abilities, digital literacies may overlap with what is traditionally known as computer, information, and media literacy. In brief, computer literacy involves the competence to make functional use of technology on a physical and implementational level, information literacy includes the ability to find and evaluate information, and media literacy encompasses developing critical and rhetorical awareness of the ideological origins of media representations. Notably, the concept of multimodal literacy (e.g., Kress, 2003, 2009; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) has emerged with the World Wide Web and the integration of images, sounds, and music into textual representation, often in multi-dimensional and non-linear layouts. Semiotic practice has become multimodal, and any definition of literacy must now include awareness of how visual and aural semiotic modalities are intertwined with more traditional graphemic modes.

Bawden (2008) and others have noted that functional definitions are rather like competencies, reducible to lists of abilities that coordinate with curricular objectives, while digital literacies, when seen from a ‘new’ perspective, involve a certain disposition or critical awareness that extends considerably beyond mechanical competence. Lankshear and Knobel (2006) have created a clarifying framework that helps delineate what is meant by ‘new’ by differentiating between paradigmatic and ontological novelty. According to the authors, paradigmatic novelty refers to socioculturally informed conceptions of literacy that view language development and use as one dimension of gaining the capacity to participate in culturally organized systems of semiotic activity. Put another way, literacy is not just something you develop, but something you practice. In digital contexts, these paradigmatically new literacy practices involve the discursive construction of identity and community through various text-based interactions. For its part, ontological novelty refers to the historically new and continually emerging communicative genres and social practices associated with post-typographic forms of text and textually mediated social performances. In other words, there is not just a new way of thinking about literacy, but there are entirely new literacies. Lankshear and Knobel propose that ontologically new literacies reflect how “changes have occurred in the character and substance of literacies that are associated with larger changes in technology, institutions, media, and the economy, and with the rapid movement toward global scale in manufacture, finance, communications, and so on” (2006, p. 24; see also Gebhard, 2004; Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996; Thorne & Black, in press).

2.2 Digital literacies, identity, and L2 learning

Most second language acquisition (SLA) research has focused on learning in formal instructional settings (see, for example, Ellis, 2008; Thorne, 2008a, for a review of L2 learning in digital environments). However, from a new literacies perspective, there are many opportunities for language use and development that exist in online community and recreation contexts where the everyday practice of
‘doing identity’ is mediated by a range of modalities, genres of communication, and topics of interest (Hanna & de Nooy, 2009; Thorne, 2008b, 2009). In these contexts, and more generally in educational settings of any kind, learning involves developing new performative repertoires that entail gaining the capacity to enact, and evoke in the response of others, relevant identities. In this sense, ‘learning’ and ‘identity’ are aspects of dialectical transformation rooted in interactions with experienced or more established members of a community.

Numerous studies of interaction online have described contexts within which identities of significance are built and performed. This has been the case particularly for adolescents and young people (Merchant, 2005; Thurlow & McKay, 2003; Turkle, 1995). Investigating the role of globalized and plurilingual discourses on literacy and language development, Lam has carried out a number of qualitative research studies that focus on Asian English learners (2000, 2004, 2009). In her first study, Lam (2000) described a young male Chinese immigrant to the US, Almon, who struggled with English and performed poorly in school, but who developed an English-mediated identity through participation in an online Japanese popular music fan community. By constructing a textual identity through typed communication and a variety of modalities and discourses, Almon distances “the narrative and biographical selves...in constructing his social relations with a trans-border network of Asian youth” (p. 458). Lam followed her focal subject for over a year and used ethnographic and discourse analytic techniques to create a case study. By using post-structuralist conceptualizations of voice (Kramsch, 2000) and a dramaturgical view of interaction informed by the work of Goffman, Lam showed how Almon designed a successful English language textual identity in the form of a new, female-presenting voice.

In 2004, Lam investigated participation in online Cantonese chat rooms and focused particularly on two Chinese immigrant teenagers who exhibited neither English-speaking American or Cantonese-speaking Chinese identities. Rather, these teens indexed group affiliation through the regular mixing of languages, using English in combination with certain Cantonese language particles and address forms that indexed solidarity and deference. Lam identifies her approach as L2 socialization, which she combines with critical theory to ask how literacies are embedded in power structures and how they operate in relationship with ideologies and contexts of use. From this perspective, L2 teaching in institutional contexts is a powerful means by which society reproduces particular educational values and ideologies (e.g., Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Lam notes that the transnational realities of contemporary cultures and identities are often plurilingual and ‘glocal’ (i.e., both global and local). In this way, the local and experiential dynamics of L2 socialization are not only a site of identity development, but also of contestation and ideological struggle.

Digital literacies also play a role in Black’s research on learner identity development through participation in fan fiction communities (2007, 2008, 2009). Using a longitudinal qualitative approach, Black (2007) has described how independent learners were able to design, through peer group encouragement, authorization, and ratification (Gee, 2001, as cited in Black, 2007), identities as full participants
in English-medium communities. This is particularly noteworthy since the identity of ‘successful English language user’ was not ascribed to some of these individuals in formal school contexts. Through interaction and negotiation with other fan fiction enthusiasts and readers, the learners were able to use English and a mix of transcultural and translinguistic resources, including knowledge of Asian languages and Japanese manga and anime cultures, to “display expertise and build on their different forms of personal, cultural, and linguistic capital” (2007, p. 119). Black shows how the learners used various interactional techniques to negotiate their authority as English language experts and to perform identities as competent fan fiction authors. In this way, these fan fiction authors created relevant and affirmed online identities as they rearticulated the lives of the fictional characters in new transcultural narratives. These new, Internet-mediated identities stand in counterbalance to their “less successful attempts at using English in academic settings” (2009, p. 420) and the ESL learner identities ascribed to them there.

The research described above illustrates the developmental potential of “intercultural interaction in the wild” (Thorne, 2010, p. 144) that can involve processes of language socialization and feedback from significant peers, which in turn supports the acquisition of linguistic forms, communicative strategies, and resources for performing relevant social identities in a new language. The research shows us how L2 learning and socialization into new literacy practices may occur outside of formal educational environments, and may provide insights into, and implications for, how we develop digital L2 literacies in more structured learning environments.

3. PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR DEVELOPING DIGITAL L2 LITERACIES

For L2 instructors and researchers, applying the concept of digital literacies to technology-mediated contexts can be daunting because literacy and new literacies research is only sometimes presented in terms of pedagogical application, and rarely in terms of L2 pedagogy. In response, in this section we present several pedagogical frameworks, coherent with the concepts discussed above, that we have identified as having potential application to technology-mediated L2 teaching (see Table 1). We interpret them in terms of themes common to the ACTFL Comparisons standards, namely the development of critical language and cultural awareness through comparisons-focused instruction.

We present the frameworks below in a loosely organized fashion, although all are from highly complementary perspectives. We start with functional frameworks, which focus primarily on the functional processes involved in literacies development. Then we move to awareness-oriented frameworks, which center on critical awareness development. Finally we end with new literacies frameworks which are more sociocultural in nature. Leu et al.’s (2007) approach to online reading comprehension offers a basic, functional orientation towards the activity of reading online. Buckingham’s (2003) framework is also functionally oriented, but looks towards the development of media literacy more broadly defined.
Language awareness (e.g., Bolitho et al., 2003; McCarthy & Carter, 1994) is a broad framework that can be understood to encompass genre awareness (e.g., Hyland, 2001) and corpus-informed approaches (e.g., Bernardini, 2003; Johns, 1991). A multiliteracies approach (e.g., Kern, 2001; New London Group, 1996) is probably the most well known framework addressing literacies development from a sociocultural, new literacies perspective, and our own bridging activities approach, which draws from all the frameworks, is a sociocultural approach designed specifically for digital L2 literacies development. Each of the frameworks deserves more in-depth consideration than the brief treatments given here, and we encourage readers to explore, interpret and adapt them for their own technology-mediated L2 pedagogical purposes.

Table 1
Overview of Pedagogical Frameworks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach or framework</th>
<th>Perspective on literacy/-ies</th>
<th>Original design focus</th>
<th>Sample comparisons-focused activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online Reading Comprehension (Leu et al., 2007)</td>
<td>functional</td>
<td>sequential, L1, digital</td>
<td>using and comparing L1 and L2 portals and search engines to find information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Literacy Education (Buckingham, 2003)</td>
<td>functional</td>
<td>conceptual, L1, digital</td>
<td>analyzing multimodal structures of parallel L1 and L2 advertisements and questioning sources and motives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Awareness (Bolitho et al., 2003; McCarthy &amp; Carter, 1994)</td>
<td>awareness-oriented</td>
<td>conceptual, L1 &amp; L2, non-digital</td>
<td>comparing chat transcripts and transcripts of spoken conversations on the same topic and questioning speaker choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre Awareness (Hyland, 2001)</td>
<td>awareness-oriented</td>
<td>sequential, L2, non-digital</td>
<td>analyzing and comparing blogs as social text types, across languages and topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corpus-informed Approaches (O’Keeffe, McCarthy, &amp; Carter, 2007)</td>
<td>awareness-oriented</td>
<td>conceptual, L2, non-digital</td>
<td>comparing the frequencies of words and structures in parallel L1 and L2 corpora of news discussion board comments</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Multiliteracies</strong> (New London Group, 1996; Kern, 2001)</td>
<td>sociocultural</td>
<td>sequential, L1 &amp; L2, digital &amp; non-digital</td>
<td>transforming the biography of a well-known historical figure from the target culture into a social network page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bridging Activities</strong> (Thorne &amp; Reinhardt, 2008)</td>
<td>sociocultural, awareness-oriented</td>
<td>sequential, L2, digital</td>
<td>collecting online game chat transcripts in the L2, analyzing them, and comparing them with similar transcripts in the L1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not all the frameworks were originally designed to address L2 or digital literacies development in particular. For example, the online reading comprehension (Leu et al., 2007) framework, designed for general education contexts, can be tailored to teaching L2 online reading, especially if geared towards a critical orientation and comparisons with L1 texts and compositions. Similarly, the media literacy education framework (Buckingham, 2003) might be adapted by being applied to both L1 and L2 digital texts and practices in comparative activities. The multiliteracies framework (e.g., New London Group, 1996) has been applied to a variety of general literacy and L2 contexts (e.g., Kern, 2001), as have the language awareness paradigms (e.g., McCarthy & Carter, 1994). In contrast, the other frameworks presented here—the genre awareness (Hyland, 2001), corpus-informed, and the bridging activities frameworks (Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008)—were designed specifically with L2 teaching contexts in mind.

It should be noted that the frameworks also vary heuristically according to how they were meant to be applied. Several are better understood as general approaches for conceptualizing digital media and language use that can inform the design of pedagogical activities broadly. For example, the stages of the media literacy education framework are meant not to be sequential, but to inform task choice and curricular design. Similarly, language awareness and corpus-informed approaches are better understood as conceptual in nature, rather than as specific frameworks for designing sequences of activities. In contrast, the other frameworks—online reading comprehension, genre awareness, multiliteracies, and bridging activities—are meant to be implemented in a specific sequence, although conceptually they may inform curricular development more broadly.
3.1 Online reading comprehension

Leu et al. (2007) offer a framework for online reading that could be adapted to developing L2 literacies through comparisons. Their framework starts with identifying important questions, for example, around a critical issue or problem to be investigated. In an L2 learning context, students could be directed to choose a topic from the target culture currently being reported on and discussed. They could then generate questions about the story taking the vantage point of communities that might ask them—for example, local residents or interest groups affected by the event or issue, certain social classes or strata of society, citizens of a nation state, etc. Comparisons-focused discussion would investigate how cultural perspective would inform different questions. The next step is locating information, which would involve students using different search engines, websites, and news portals, in the L2 and their L1, to find the answers to their questions. A comparison dimension would then center on similarities and differences among the purposes and audiences of the various tools, including discussion of the language of web searching.

Leu and colleagues’ third step is analyzing and synthesizing information, which involves critical evaluation of the relevancy, accuracy, reliability, and bias of found information. For an L2 learning activity, learners could first locate answers to their questions in multiple sources, in both the L2 and their L1. Then, they would compare the various evaluative aspects in each reporting of the story, and discuss differences in language use and cultural perspective. The fourth and final step is communicating information, that is, re-presenting and sharing understandings to other audiences. In an L2 learning context, this could be done in new media, for example, in a blog or a video presentation. Learners could present their findings from the previous three activities, focusing on comparisons, that is, on similarities and differences among the language used, cultural perspectives, and portrayals of the cultural products and practices that they found.

3.2 Media literacy education

While Leu et al’s (2007) framework offers a sequential heuristic for activity design, Buckingham’s (2003) media literacy education model is a conceptual framework that could complement such activities, and be adapted to comparisons-focused L2 literacies instruction. His framework for analyzing digital media includes four aspects: production, language, representations, and audiences. The goal of production analysis is to become aware of the consciously manufactured aspect of media texts, for example by examining the regulation, distribution, and access to media products and the industries involved in production. In digital L2 literacies instruction, this would involve an additional emphasis, in activities focused on locating and analyzing information, on news sources, whether a multinational news conglomerate, a state-owned national organization, a local reporter, or a blogger. Comparisons would consider how and why, in both L2 and L1 sources, a multinational news conglomerate might use different language registers and offer different perspectives than a local report.
Focusing on *language* encourages learners to critically explore the meanings, conventions, codes, and choices that a media message conveys. When locating and reading information, learner attention can be drawn to how media composition is multimodal (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Kress, 2009), and that digital literacy involves awareness of multiple extra-linguistic semiotic modes like image, layout, and sound. Comparisons-focused literacities activities would examine how these differed among multiple L2 and L1 media, for example news sites and portals, online videos or advertisements, or blogs, and would ask learners to question why. *Representations* activities encourage looking at how media presents and re-presents issues such as realism, truth telling, bias, and stereotypes. In literacies instruction, this might involve comparing representations of the L2 and L1 across L2 media, with representations of the L2 and L1 across L1 media. Finally, analyzing *audiences* involves how media target, address and reach their audiences, and how that audience responds. In literacies instruction, this would include critical consideration and comparison of different media audiences within and between the L2 and L1. While American L2 learners, for example, might be aware that different American media organizations target diverse audiences according to political affiliations, most are likely unaware that the media organizations in the target culture may also have commercial and political interests, or that there even are various audiences within the target culture.

### 3.3 Language awareness

Language awareness (Bolitho et al., 2003; Carter & McCarthy, 1997; McCarthy & Carter, 1994; van Lier, 1995) is defined as both a disposition towards language and a pedagogical approach (Tomlinson, in Bolitho et al., 2003). In this view, language is a social semiotic (Halliday, 1978), a unified, coherent system inextricable from culture and social interaction. Translated into a pedagogical approach, building learner language awareness means raising learner consciousness of the role of choice in language use, as “different choices from within the grammatical system realize different meanings,” both textual and ideological (p. 29). To achieve this, learners explore the relationship between features of discourse and the social contexts in which they function. Language use is presented as an object of analysis, and lexico-grammar\(^1\) is shown as emergent from use and contextually dependent. A language awareness approach seeks to develop learner autonomy and a positive orientation towards active discovery and independent exploration of language. Providing a balance between *experiential* and *analytical* learning is key to developing language awareness, as explicit analysis of language “strengthens the vital role of implicit awareness arising from language experience” (Masuhara, in Bolitho et al., 2003, p. 254).

McCarthy & Carter (1994) offer several curricular principles to develop language awareness. The *contrastive* principle involves comparing the same or related content from different genres. The *continuum* principle exposes learners to a variety of texts in the same genre by different authors. The *inferencing* principle relies on teaching strategies or interpretative skills for cultural and literary
understanding. Applied to the development of digital L2 literacies, for example, students could contrast the structure of a blog in the L2 with that of a blog on similar issues in English, to understand the role of choice in language use and Internet participation. Students could compare an Internet advertisement with a print advertisement for the same product, or the contextual and structural features of an instant messaging session they have participated in with the transcript of a face-to-face conversation about the same topic. Changing one feature of two texts under comparison, for example the author, participants, content, genre, language, or medium, affords awareness of the role that particular feature plays in meaning making.

3.4 Genre awareness

Besides the general principles offered by McCarthy and Carter (1994), language awareness concepts have been used to inform the design of more concrete pedagogical frameworks. Hyland’s genre awareness model (2001), in particular, developed for L2 literacy development more generally, can be adapted to digital contexts. Hyland’s first phase focuses on developing context and directs learners to explore the social and situational features surrounding a text, including purpose, roles and relationships, audience, and the role of choice in authorship. In the second phase, modeling, teachers and learners explore the explicit grammatical and rhetorical structures that comprise the text, including stages and sequencing. The third phase, joint negotiation, encourages explicit construction of texts using the knowledge gained through model deconstruction, with support provided by the instructor as necessary. This leads to the fourth phase, independent construction, where individual learners construct texts “in which they combine a knowledge of content, process, language, context, and genre” (p. 136). In the fifth and final phase, comparing texts, learners juxtapose the texts they have constructed with other texts and reflect critically on similarities and differences. Central to this approach is critical comparison among texts and contexts, across and within languages and cultures, as this “encourages students to draw on their knowledge of genre and focuses them on reinterpreting how they use and experience genres” (p. 138).

Just as they would a print text, L2 learners can explore the context of an Internet text by considering its cultural, situational and structural features, with additional attention to the text’s hypertextual, multimodal, and dynamic qualities. For example, learners can examine the purpose of a particular blog in which they are interested, and consider when, how, why, and what is posted, and the function and structure of the blog comments (if the blog is interactive). The structure of a blog comment thread can be examined, and an appropriate comment to a blog post of the class’s choosing might be constructed as a collective class assignment. In this way, participation is supported and scaffolded through modeling and joint negotiation. Ultimately, students can post comments on their own and return to the class with samples of their own participation for re-analysis. This may involve comparison or contrast with similar texts and consideration of their own roles as
participants, which leads to language awareness and greater understanding of the role of choice in language use.

3.5 Corpus-informed approaches

Corpus-informed L2 pedagogy has recently grown in popularity as the necessary technology becomes more widespread (O’Keeffe et al., 2007; see Reinhardt, 2010, for a review). The objectives of corpus-informed approaches usually involve the development of language awareness through explicit focus on lexico-grammatical features, which complements a genre-oriented focus on social features of texts. Corpus analysis can be used either to inform the language and content the instructor presents to learners, or as an instructional activity in which the learners, usually advanced, actively use corpus analysis tools themselves (Bernardini, 2003). The first corpus-informed approaches were data-driven learning activities (Johns, 1991), which introduced students to concordance lines of corpus data, so that they could learn the meaning and use of a particular word by examining its collocations and semantic prosody (Hunston, 2002; Boulton, 2010). The most basic corpus-informed activities involve frequency lists, where learners analyze the frequency of particular words in a given corpus, which can be a single text, a collection of texts from a similar genre, or a large corpus balanced to represent a larger register of use. Comparing frequency lists from two different texts, genres, or corpora, either by hand or using a keyword analysis approach (Scott & Tribble, 2006) can raise learners’ language and genre awareness, especially if the texts are from the L2 and their own language. Because corpus results can be confusing and difficult to interpret, many researchers have called for pedagogical mediation and a balance of data-driven approaches, which are bottom-up, with top-down approaches, like genre-oriented approaches, that include discussion of context and user variables (Flowerdew, 2009).

One way to use corpus-informed approaches in technology-mediated L2 classrooms would be for an instructor or learners to develop small corpora based on Internet texts. The frequencies of words in a small corpus of discussion board posts in the L2 could be developed and used for a variety of activities, for example, frequency lists to notice common lexico-grammatical structures and collocations and to compare actual usage with dictionary definitions. Another activity might involve comparing the frequency of particular words in the discussion board corpus with a corpus of blog comments, or of conversation, general news reporting, or fiction registers. Any of these comparisons could be done using McCarthy and Carter’s (1994) contrastive or continuum principles, with the corpora from different texts in the L2, or in comparison to similar corpora in the L1.

3.6 Multiliteracies

The New London Group’s (1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kress, 2003) notion of ‘multiliteracies’ is grounded in sociocultural and situated theory-informed New Literacies Studies. Through access to what the New London Group calls Available Designs, students are seen to “gain substantively in metacognitive and
metalinguistic abilities and in their ability to reflect critically on complex systems and their interactions” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 15). Learners transform their own understandings by interacting with other designs and designers, through representation and recontextualization of meaning, or re-design. The act of creative, transformative design allows for the production of new resources, which then “become available for subsequent acts of meaning design” (Kern, 2001, p. 60). Design modes include linguistic, visual, gestural, spatial, and audio design, thus the notion of ‘multiliteracies’ (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 26). Available linguistic designs include the linguistic systems of orthography, vocabulary, syntax, and cohesion and coherence, as well as the schematic, or more text-based structural systems of rhetorical patterns, genre, style, and cultural models (Kern, 2001). Production and interpretation of meaning involves access to, choosing from, and interacting with these designs in sociocultural context.

An L2 pedagogy of multiliteracies centers around an integration of four phases or components (Kern, 2001). While they may be sequential, elements of one component may be integrated with another, so that while some are more salient at one time than others, “all of them are repeatedly revisited at different levels” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 32). The first, situated practice, entails meaningful and experiential use of Available Designs without critical reflection. For example, in digital L2 literacies instruction, situated practice might involve learners participating in a chat in the L2. The second, overt instruction, comprises explicit and scaffolded pedagogical intervention directed at the development of metalanguage and control of the designs; for example, presentation of online chat conventions in the L2, comparison with those in the L1, and discussion of when and where their use is appropriate or inappropriate. The third component, critical framing, encompasses activities that promote the reflective use of metalanguage to consciously notice relationships between systems and designs. In instruction, students might compare the differences in language use conventions among spoken registers, traditional written registers, and those in technology-mediated interactive, or chat, registers—in both the L2 and the learners’ L1s—by analyzing and comparing transcripts about the same topic in all three registers. The fourth and final component, transformed practice, involves juxtaposition and integration, or the re-design of Available Designs. In instruction, students would participate in a new chat and attempt use of the new conventions learned.

3.7 Bridging activities

Informed by awareness-oriented and multiliteracies approaches, we developed a bridging activities framework (Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008) with the goal of bringing learners’ everyday digital communicative practice into the L2 classroom. Bridging activities facilitate the experiential and analytic awareness of digitally-mediated student selected or created texts and literacy practices, for example, those generated through social use of Web 2.0 technologies like blogs, collaborative documents, threaded discussion boards, social networking and multiplayer online gaming. The key to bridging activities is learner involvement in selecting
the texts for treatment, which ensures relevance and builds motivation. In addition, this affords the development of skills that will enable continued participation in personally relevant Internet text genres and practices, and the understanding of connections between language activity inside and outside the classroom. In bridging activities, technology-mediated language use is both the means and the object of awareness. In other words, the approach exploits the everyday, experiential nature of multimodal, digital mediation as the means of instruction, and at the same time, it is the explicit object of analysis.

To implement bridging activities we proposed a three-phase cycle of *observation* and *collection*, *exploration* and *analysis*, and *creation* and *participation*, of Internet texts and practices. The first part of each phase, observation, exploration, and creation, is based in situated practice and experiential learning principles, and as such, is grounded implicitly in the Internet activities and literacy practices with which most learners are familiar from their own everyday lives, like exploring, reading, and posting. The second part of each phase is more analytical and critically oriented and requires guided learner activity and direct instructor intervention. Throughout, learner attention is drawn to similarities and differences among technology-mediated practices in their own language and culture and the language and culture being studied. Shifting from situated to critical practice, from experiential to analytical learning, and between different linguistic and cultural perspectives, is the means by which comparisons emerge and awareness develops.

*Observation* activities situate digital texts and literacy practices by having students take note of their own habits while beginning to observe texts and practices of interest in the L2. *Collection* activities entail selecting, capturing, and critically reflecting on the texts of interest. *Exploration* activities target reading and comprehending collected texts, while in *analysis* activities students examine the social and lexico-grammatical features of the texts (for example, through genre analytic and corpus-informed activities). *Creation* activities focus on production of comparable L2 texts, with peer review and instructor guidance, and in *participation* activities learners contribute their texts and reflect on the reaction. For example, learners could observe news discussion board posts on a topic of interest in the L2, collect a selection of posts, read them, analyze the genre qualities and corpus-informed text features of the posts, create posts to add to the board with peer assistance, post them to the board, and observe responses. Through scaffolded participation in actual digital L2 literacy practices, learners develop critical awareness of their roles as active participants in mediated L2 communities. Ideally, participation leads to new experiences observing, exploring, and creating texts in the language of study, and, eventually with less instructor guidance, internalization of the critical, analytical processes involved in collection, analysis, and participation.

4. CONCLUSION

In sum, there are a number of useful pedagogical frameworks, built upon func-
tional, awareness-oriented, and sociocultural perspectives, for addressing digital L2 literacies development that can incorporate comparisons-focused techniques. The Comparisons standard states that “through comparisons and contrasts with the language being studied, students develop insight into the nature of language and the concept of culture and realize that there are multiple ways of viewing the world.” (National Standards, 1996, p. 6). A surface reading of the standard is that learners should develop critical awareness about the language and culture of study through comparisons. Indeed, when determining learning objectives, ‘culture’ is often the object of ‘learn about,’ while ‘language’ is usually the object of ‘learn’—in other words, when we develop learning objectives, it is easiest to think of language as a practice, and culture as a set of products or texts. In communicative language teaching, we know that students should learn through language by using it meaningfully and participating in authentic practices. We less frequently make ‘learning about language’ a curricular goal, perhaps because of a fear that it will result in a meaningless focus on grammatical forms. Also less often is ‘learning through culture’ an objective, probably because in L2 learning contexts, authentic participatory learning environments are difficult to find or create.

However, new perspectives on literacies help us interpret the Comparisons standard as addressing not just the development of critical awareness about, but also awareness through both language and culture, since semiotic engagement involves not just texts but also social practices. To meet the ACTFL Comparisons standard and “develop insight into the nature of language and the concept of culture” (ACTFL, 1996), learners need not only to experience the language by using it, but also to develop awareness about language as a system of patterns and practices. At the same time, learners need to see that a culture is not just an object of analysis, but a set of meaningful social practices, and that some participation in and through those practices is necessary to truly learn about it as a system of meaning making. Comparisons are thus key to the development of digital L2 literacies.

NOTES

1 Lexico-grammar is used in corpus linguistics to refer to grammatical structure as expressed through the lexicon. In corpus-informed pedagogical approaches, the two are not analytically separable. See O’Keeffe et al. (2007) for more on this perspective.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How do literacies involve ‘dispositions’ that extend beyond finite competences or abilities? Do you agree that ‘new literacies’ are something new? Why or why not?
2. To what extent should L2 instructional objectives include the development of computer, information, and media literacy? How can comparisons-focused instruction address these objectives?
3. When literacy is understood as a level of textual competence, it is more easily measured and assessed than when it is conceptualized as involving social semiotic practices. How might literacies be assessed as both ‘texts’ and ‘practices’?

KEY TERMS

literacy
computer literacy
information literacy
media literacy
multimodal literacy
new literacies
digital literacies
experiential learning
analytical learning
language awareness
cultural awareness

CASE STUDIES

Research

An instructor of intermediate Spanish has been doing various intra-class chat activities with her classes for several years, with varying results. Most students do very well with brainstorming activities, although some don’t produce as much language as she would have liked during role play activities. All her students enjoy it when she teaches them some Spanish text acronyms like “tqm” for “te quiero mucho” (I like you a lot) or “pq” for “porque” (why or because), and many try to use them when she has them chat.

Recently, however, she was informed by the level coordinator that when students chat, she should make sure that they use proper grammar and spelling, and consider grading their chat transcripts for mistakes. When she tried to do this, she noticed that the students really had trouble, and did not enjoy the activity at all. Some took a long time to compose their chat turns, and they were unable to complete even a basic brainstorming activity. She would like to come up with an argument against the policy that she can bring to her coordinator based on research and classroom evidence.

Discussion Questions:

1. From a new literacies perspective, what would be the arguments for not forcing students to focus on grammatical accuracy when chatting? What other arguments from chat research are there? You might want to refer to Abrams’ chapter in this volume.

2. What genuine digital literacy practices or texts could the instructor present as support for her argument?
3. What sort of comparisons-informed learning activity could the instructor do that focuses on chat as a literacy practice? How could grammatical accuracy be incorporated as a secondary objective for the activity? How would the activity be assessed?

4. What other sorts of classroom-based evidence could the instructor use to contrast a literacies-informed approach with an accuracy-focused approach? Outline a classroom research project that would contrast these approaches, based on learning outcomes.

Teaching
An instructor has taught advanced French for several years and is often frustrated at his students’ trouble with grammatical aspect and the distinction between the passé composé and imparfait tenses (the former is used for past completed actions, while the latter is used for past habitual actions). He is worried because he just introduced the passé simple, which is the literary form of the passé composé, and if students don’t understand when to use the composé, they will really struggle with the simple. He knows that the textbooks the students have used offer lengthy explanations, but they still have trouble with it.

In the lab, he has the students visit several francophone blogs that he found beforehand, written for different purposes and different audiences—a gossip blog, a political action blog, a poetry blog, and a personal blog. He has them focus on a few pre-selected posts, all about three or four paragraphs long, for which he developed comprehension questions. After checking for comprehension and discussing the content, he has the students, in groups (one group per blog), go through the posts and identify the instances where the authors used the three target tenses. He draws a large chart on the whiteboard with the four blogs as columns, and the three tenses as rows. When they are done, he asks the groups to tell him how many of each tense they found in their post, and writes the number in the appropriate box. He then has the groups come up and write the verbs they found in the appropriate boxes.

He asks the class several questions about the chart, for example, which blog seemed to contain the most of each tense, and which the least. They found that the passé composé seemed to be distributed across the blogs, but that the passé simple was almost exclusively in the poetry blog, and in the political blog in the transcript of a political speech. There was some imparfait in all the posts, but more in the personal blog. As homework, he asked the students to try to figure out why the tenses were distributed like they were, to translate the instances they found, and to bring their reflections and translations to class the next day.

The instructor hoped that the students would figure out that the passé simple was in the poetry and political blog because it was used for literary and formal registers, while the imparfait was mostly in the personal blog because it was used for backgrounding habitual actions when telling stories, which is what people do in personal blogs. He wasn’t sure whether translation was appropriate, but he wanted the students to see that the English translations, if done correctly, would
distribute differently and overlap, since aspect and habituality is marked differently in English—passé composé doesn’t correspond exactly to present perfect, nor does the imparfait correspond exactly to past progressive, though it’s easy to assume that they do.

Discussion Questions:

1. What was the pedagogical objective for this task? What were the conditions of this activity (group constellation, specifics of the assignment)? What do you think would be the challenges of implementing such an activity?

2. How was this activity addressed towards the development of both analytic and experiential awareness? What sorts of activities could the instructor have done to situate the students’ understanding of aspect and tenses, and their experiences with blogs? What sorts of follow-up activities might the students do to apply what they’ve learned?

3. How does awareness ‘about’ an L2 grammar as a system of patterns and practices help one develop awareness of one’s L1 as a system? What are the benefits of ‘awareness about one’s L1’ and should it be a goal of L2 instruction? In other words, should comparisons between L2 and L1 systems be made explicit, or do you think L1 grammar should only be taught in the English (or other L1) classroom, if at all?

IDEAS FOR ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS

1. To develop awareness of Internet literacy practices, have your students create, conduct, and collate a survey of their literacy practices, both digital and non-digital. They can work in groups to brainstorm the various aspects to assess, for example, amount of time, language use, medium, and purpose for each practice. For a larger project, students could survey other classes, write summary reports comparing groups and practices, and/or present the findings as a course project.

As action research, reflect on the findings and what the implications are for L2 learning, L2 literacies instruction, and broader definitions of literacy. If possible, compare the students’ practices with your own practices, those of friends and colleagues, and those of expert/native speakers in the target L2.

2. A major concept related to the notion of literacy as social practice is Lave and Wenger’s (1991) ‘community of practice’ (CoP). Becoming a member of a community involves apprenticeship by core or expert community members and ‘legitimate peripheral participation’. In what ways do you think that the Internet affords the creation of, and participation in, new CoPs? How can L2 learners become involved in new and existing Internet CoPs in the L2?
As action research, reflect on your students and the various communities in which they participate. What is their status in these communities? What literacy practices, digital and non-digital, are important to these communities, and how do participants learn them? Consider equivalent communities and literacy practices in the L2. For a larger project, interview a few students and write profiles of them. In the profiles, include differentiated instructional implications and possible bridging activities to which the student might respond positively.

3. Create a blog-based portfolio of digital literacy practices in the L2 for your, your colleagues’, and your students’ use in comparisons-focused literacies activities. Try to update the blog approximately once a week, by searching the Web and finding news stories, websites, videos, interesting blogs, discussion boards, online games, and other online resources that demonstrate digital L2 literacy practices. While resources designed for learners are useful, focus primarily on genuine resources that expert/native speakers would use, and that could be used in a comparisons-focused learning activity. In each blog post, include a link to the resource, a description of it, a discussion on how it might be used in a learning activity or as a learning resource, and, if possible, a link to an L1 equivalent.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


**USEFUL RESOURCES**

While most of these organizations do not address L2 education explicitly, we believe they offer resources and ideas that can inform and inspire foreign language education innovators who are interested in learning more about the concepts and educational applications of literacies research.

1. The New Media Consortium
   http://www.nmc.org/
   According to their website, the NMC “is an international not-for-profit consortium of learning-focused organizations dedicated to the exploration and use of new media and new technologies.” Every year they publish the Horizon Report, a document that explores emergent technologies and their educational potentials.
2. The New Media Literacies Project
   http://newmedialiteracies.org/
   The New Media Literacies Project at the University of Southern California
   offers a collection of instructional and professional development resources
   devoted to new media literacies, including a blog, videos, and various pub-
   lications.

3. Everyday Literacies Blog
   http://everydayliteracies.blogspot.com/
   Colin Lankshear and Michele Knobel’s blog on digital literacies offers re-
   sources and commentary, in their words, “on everyday practices of produc-
   ing and consuming texts of whatever kind in meatspace and cyberspace”.

4. Association of College and Research Libraries Information Literacy Re-
   sources
   http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/issues/infolit/index.cfm
   The ACRL Information Literacy Committee hosts a website with various
   documents, standards, and instructional resources for developing informa-
   tion literacy.

5. U.S. National Foreign Language Resource Centers
   http://nflrc.msu.edu/index.php
   The fifteen U.S. NFLRCs offer foreign language educators free or low cost
   access to instructional and professional development resources, including
   classroom materials and workshops. The NFLRCs have different foci, for
   example, the University of Arizona’s Center for Educational Resources in
   Culture, Language, and Literacy (http://cercll.arizona.edu) sponsors proj-
   ects on literacies, while San Diego State University’s Language Acquisi-
   tion Resource Center (http://larc.sdsu.edu/) has a focus on technology.

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