METAREFERENTIAL ASPECTS OF DIDACTIC COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

Glottodrama is a research-program regarding the didactic dimension of teaching foreign languages through linguistic and theatrical methods. This project encompasses interdisciplinary characteristics, being an indicative example of applying Lifelong Learning Program of the European Union in Romanian institutions. Being coordinated by the Linguistic Research Laboratory of Culturiana Publishing Company, the method aims at experimenting didactic strategies involving both language and drama-teacher. It covers diverse social and cultural contexts. The students learn the foreign language through acting diverse parts from different classical or original theatrical texts. Their performances are filmed and recorded. Watching the didactic materials, they can improve their verbal and non-verbal communication. Many aspects of disciplines analyzing non-verbal communication are implied allowing to the students to perceive life and culture of different civilizations in which they enter linguistically and theatrically. The present paper deals with the meta-referential aspects. The meta-referential approach involves a move from a first cognitive or communicative level to a superior one at which the referents become self-reflexively signs or even meta-signs. This human capacity to watch, see, act and, verbally and mentally, interpret itself is a defining one for the essence of a human being. Meta-reference may be read in two opposite ways: a hyperbole of creative teaching-methods and a

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staging of real life. A divided self is exposed in different milieux showing social, physical details which are different of its own. Diverse portraits and social or cultural contexts intermingle with the inner openings and the specific features of various civilizations via drama devices.

Keywords: learning, creative teaching, media, drama, culture, meta-reference

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Introduction

Teachers', researchers' and individuals' pedagogical experience has highlighted the difficulties and pendencies in teaching a foreign language in our time. The efforts are greater and more problems appear especially in the first stage of learning. New, interactive and efficient methods must be created in order to increase amenity, attention, communicative performance, bringing up social connections, relations and empathy. Glottodrama is one of these new methods. It was created in Italy within a European project. It has spread in many European countries and beyond. Taking into account the student's status in front of society, this method is based on drama or theatrical scenery. The primary inspiration appeared observing the status of the students as "characters" because they have to invest with new linguistic parts and different normative social models. Because of emotion, tension and embarrassment, those who learn a foreign language tend to play a part or to act in the respective foreign language. Glotto-drama offers a more natural way to express, real living linguistic contexts and the acquisition of the foreign language becomes a pleasant, useful and more authentic access to another linguistic and emotional Self. This method is also used in Romania and especially in one of the most important cultural and educational cities, Iasi, at EuroEd Foundation, "Gr. T. Popa" University of Medicine and Pharmacy and "George Enescu" University of Arts.

Any language establishes a linguistic game. The communication activity follows contextual rules. This special kind of game is also a "metalinguistic" one. The learning target language, as long as we use a direct method, is also a tool to learn the language and to speak that language. This statement entails a very important implication. Since the goal of the game is not to communicate, but rather to learn to communicate, most of the communication in the classroom is not directed to any goal other than speaking the language itself. This function often becomes predominant and gets hold of almost the whole communication within the group-class. Moreover, the teacher's protagonism increases when communication becomes meta-communication on grammar topics. This accounts for the phenomenon, highlighted by Mario Rinvolucri (Rinvolucri, 2008), according to whom the average European teacher covers almost 70% of class speaking whereas to students is left just a remaining 30%. The goals of glottodrama aim at diminishing the use of language in a metalinguistic function, and directing it towards the achievement of more genuine communicative purposes. It is also a very flexible method which may be appropriate for any age-level or learning-level or to any train of events.

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Any linguistic act enters in a certain situation context within one of the domains of social life (range of action or area of interest). Choosing the domains where learners have to be prepared to operate is a determinant for the choice of teaching and evaluation situations, goals, tasks, topics, materials, and activities. The reader should bear in mind how a choice of directly relevant domains effects motivation, and consider the advantages these could bear in the future. Children, for example, can be more motivated if they focus on their incidental interests, which however could result in little preparation for communicating in the future, in an adult environment. In adult instruction, the interests of the employers, who sponsor the courses and require focusing on the professional domain, could clash with the students' motivation, since they may be particularly interested in developing interpersonal relationships. The number of possible domains is undetermined, since every range of action and area of interest might build up a domain, to which a certain user or a certain teaching course refers. The Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR) identifies, for the general purposes of language learning and teaching, four vast domains:

• The personal domain, where the individual lives as a private subject, is focused on domestic life with family and friends, and is involved in individual practices, like reading for pleasure, keeping a personal diary, devoting himself to a particular interest or hobby, etc.

• The public domain, where the individual acts as a member of society or of some organization, and is involved in various kinds of transactions with different purposes.

• The professional or occupational domain, where the individual is involved in his job or profession.

• The educational domain, where the individual is involved in organized learning activities, mainly (but not exclusively) in an instructional institution. Linguistic competence, in time, becomes communicative competence as long as, following a circular process, the learner enlarges the range of the domains in which he uses the language, from the personal domain to the socially wider ones, improving his abilities of interaction with other individuals in the community, and engaging himself in achieving more specific purposes. Thus, communicative competence takes the shape of a progressive synthesis of both social and cultural experience which overcomes the conceptual borders of knowing the linguistic code.

The interest on situational usage of a language and the situational meaning makes obvious the preoccupation with pragmatic aspect. In this sense, Grice's

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distinctions and definitions must be recalled (Grice, 1957). Having as starting point Grice's contribution, Parisi has stated: "to understand the real purpose of a sentence, which can be different from what the words show, the listener relies mainly on the tone of voice (…) nevertheless, once again it is the context that helps to understand, in this and other cases (...). The context, that is the knowledge of the situation in which the sentence has been expressed, is used by the listener not only to find out the real purpose of a sentence (…) but also to find out further purposes that the sentence might have, in addition to the purpose communicated by the words (…) the comprehension of further purposes of sentences or super purposes is a fundamental aspect of the linguistic communication; understanding the immediate purposes of why the sentences are spoken, that is their literal meaning, is like staying at the surface of the exchange that actually takes place between two people talking" (Parisi, 1981). Of course, the teaching activity in glottodrama implies more nonverbal semantic markers. The classic teaching methods ignored all nonverbal aspects and focused on the rules, vocabulary and formal conversation. During the glottodrama courses, the drama teacher stages a real-life everyday situation while the second teacher briefly presents the words and explains the basic rules. This activity takes place in the grammar corner away from the life-scenes. All the bedevils and emotions of the beginners disappear when they see two teachers involving themselves in acting and wearing new linguistic costumes which are adequate for other cultural contexts. This is true both for children and for adults.

From 1971, Paivio developed a dual coding theory (Language and Mental Imagery) that bases the cognitive process analysis on two devices, Image System and Verbal System, which are independent but interconnected and that elaborate information in different ways (Paivio, 1971). The first one would put together the specific components of different sensory modality (visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory and kinaesthetic) into integrated units, the *imagens*, whereas the second would deal with the modality of the different linguistic information (phonetic and graphic), re-codifying them into auditory-motor form, the *logogens*, that is in the form into which, for example, we listen and perceive our inner dialogue when we talk to ourselves. Also the recording in the information memory would work in the same way therefore it would be based on a double track.

Individual with left emisphere dominance

- He is more inclined to communicate verbally
- He has a rich and varied lexical repertory
- He formally recognizes the phonetic discrimination

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• He has a limited control over prosodic elements of the language
• He hardly recognizes details in the incomplete figures
• He has more ability to decode a verbal input
• He has more ability to memorize abstract grammatical notions
• He prefers logic tasks

Individual with right hemisphere dominance

• He is less inclined to speak correctly and he is inclined to use bodily communication (gesture, facial expressions, etc.)
• He has a poor lexical repertory
• He find difficult to discriminate verbal sound
• He has a high control over prosodic elements
• He easily manages to complete a figure not completed in its details
• He has more ability to decode a visual input
• He has more ability to memorize concepts rather than grammatical structures
• He prefers intuitive tasks

The independence of the two systems implies that the two channels can work alternatively and simultaneously and in parallel as well, but not necessarily one neglecting what is happening to the other. In this way we can imagine a scene without necessarily describing it verbally, talk about something without experiencing any mental image, or we can do both, for example, when we verbally describe a familiar scene that we remember. These common experiences should represent the best evidence of the two systems' independence. But at the same time the fact that the information can easily move from one system to the other means that they anticipate also a connection form. This means that we can operate transformations or symbolic translations from one system to the other. The Image System is conceived by Paivio as an analogic system and of the same type would be the relationship between its representational units and the objects or the actual events perceived. On the other hand, the Verbal System works with discrete digital units that have an arbitrary relationship with the referred objects. Moreover, there would be a qualitative difference also in the way the information units are organized into complex units of higher level between the two systems. The Image System organizes them in a "synchronic" and "spatial" way, so that, for example, the different components of a scene are all available in the memory at the same time. An important implication of this organization is that it makes possible a high level of articulation and integration of multiple component based information. For example, the mnestic representation of any domestic space is familiar to us, and it

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includes a huge number of information that is available in the same way. In other words, if asked, we can equally answer correctly regarding the position of the objects. We cannot utter all this information at the same time because this is a limit of our utterance system for verbal messages but they are available all the same in a synchronic way.

On the other hand, the verbal information is sequentially organized into higher level structures. And this is a consequence of the characteristics of the auditory and phonatory systems used in the reception and production of the spoken language. The linguistic units sequentially unfold over time and the theory claims that even the system that deals more directly with the "word" is specialized in some way in the sequential elaboration. The theory also assumes that both systems can transform the symbolic information and when this happens the modifications follow the structural characteristics of the two systems. So the Image System, from the visual point of view, is capable of transformations in the spatial aspects as size, form and direction, color, movement and ability to manipulate objects with "the mind's eye". The Verbal System, on the other hand, enables us to operate transformations over a sequential axis. In this way both systems are dynamic, able to transform the information even if in different ways. Both the *logogens* and the *imagens* would be organized in associative chains and the knowledge would consist in the operations with which we elaborate complex "molecules" of higher level formed by the two systems.

Glottodrama wants to challenge first of all a psycholinguistic and intercultural critical point found in different methodological solutions at more advanced learning levels as well, that is to say the difficult psychological switch from the perception of the foreign language as *other's language*, peculiar feature of an extraneous community of native speakers, to the perception of the acquired language or foreign language as *my own language*, an element of my personal communicative resources to be employed even in strongly emotionally colored interactions, when it is necessary to free the linguistic creativity. This concept intends to put into practice a political-cultural principle established by the Common European Framework for Languages, according to which a real multilingualism can only be realized if the language learning process transfers the whole personality of the student into the new language and not only some aspects of it limited to particular domains of use. If this process is not completed, the possibility of a successful social interaction and personal autonomy are narrowed.

The goal is reached if the development of the linguistic competence is related to social context expansion of the use to such an extent to cover the whole

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range of the communicative domains in which the learner participates. Otherwise the learner's personality will always be mutilated when using the second language and his freedom of social interaction could suffer. It is obvious that the learner/student develops a greater pragmatic competence due to this method. Understanding, speaking, reading and writing in a foreign language are developed in a very harmonic and balanced way. The intercultural commitment is stronger and the clear usage of the second contextual meaning of the words is ensured by these theatrical fictitious settings. During the classes these theatrical side is provided by a drama-teacher or a student from the University of Art. It is also very interesting to mention the best results obtained due to choices of poetic texts not very difficult to understand, but with a powerful and commanding musical and metaphysical effect and impact upon the learners, teachers and audience. It also stimulates creativity, emotions, perceptivity for all the human actors involved.

Conclusions

The theatrical catharsis proves its benefic and efficient function even in pedagogy. The classical methodology has become a pleasant, revolutionary and ludic interface between a foreign language and culture and the native language. This modifying method changes the cultural perspective and the behavior of the learners, teachers and audience. Art relieves emotional tensions and cut loose the power of expression and linguistic creativity.

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