ForumSprache

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Voices of literacy, images of books
Sociocognitive approach to multimodality in learner beliefs

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Abstract

Socioculturally oriented views that are based on Vygotskyan thinking argue that embodiment and materiality are an essential aspect of human semiosis and thinking. Similar orientation can be found in the dialogical notion of language in the works of Voloshinov and Bakhtin. Their view, which opposes the Saussurean decontextualism and abstractivism, sees the focus of language studies to be on the concrete events of language use. Accordingly, the view necessitates that the multimodality of these utterances be taken into consideration. Starting from sociocultural and dialogical assumptions, but also drawing on other arguments that have been presented in other paradigms and frameworks (e.g. conversation analysis, systemic-functional approaches), increasing attention is given to multimodality that is present in human interaction. Are beliefs, then, different in verbally articulated and visually represented data? In this paper, we will present our findings, relate them to our theoretical approach and discuss the multimodality of semiotic resources as a source of beliefs from a sociocognitive perspective.

Soziokulturell orientierte Ansätze, die auf den Theorien Wygotskis basieren, gehen davon aus, dass Materialität und Medialität wesentliche Aspekte der Semiose und des Denkens sind. Ähnliche Herangehensweisen sind in Voloshinovs und Bakhtins dialogischen Auffassungen von Sprache zu finden. Ihre Ansicht, die den Dekontextualismus und die Abstraktion de Saussures ablehnt, sieht den Fokus von Sprachstudien in konkreten Sprachverwendungsereignissen. Konsequenterweise setzt diese Ansicht auch die Berücksichtigung der Multimodalität von Äußerungen voraus. Aus soziokulturellen und dialogischen Perspektiven, wie auch z.B. in Forschungsansätzen der Konversationsanalyse oder der systemisch-funktionalen Sprachforschung, steigt die Aufmerksamkeit für multimodale Aspekte menschlicher Interaktion. Manifestieren sich Anschauungen und Überzeugungen in verbal artikulierten und visuell dargestellten Daten auf unterschiedliche Weise? In diesem Artikel stellen wir Ergebnisse unserer Studie dar, beziehen sie auf unseren theoretischen Ansatz und diskutieren die Multimodalität semiotischer Ressourcen als Quelle von Anschauungen und Überzeugungen aus einer soziokognitiven Perspektive.

Sosiokulttuuristen, vygotskilaiseen ajatteluun perustuvien suuntausten mukaan ruumiillisuus ja materiaalisuus ovat erottamaton osa inhimillistä merkityksenantoa ja ajattelua. Samankaltaisia ajatuksia ovat esittäneet myös dialogistit Valentin N. Vološinov ja Mihail Bahtin pitäessään konkreettista, eri modaliteeteissa tapahtuvaa kielenkäyttöä tutkimuksen lähtökohtana. Dialogisista ja sosiokulttuurisista lähtökohdista tuntuisi seuraavan myös se mahdollisuus, että kieltä koskevilla käsityksillä on juurensa materiaalisissa, eri modaliteettien esitystavoissa ja perinteissä. Tarkastelemme artikkelissamme käsitysten multimodaalisuutta ja oletusta siitä, että verbaalinen ja visuaalinen esitystapa tuovat esiin osin erilaisia käsityksiä.

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Introduction

This paper describes language learners' beliefs about language, language learning and language teaching. We will discuss and summarise findings from our studies in which beliefs of second and foreign language learners have been examined and connect this to theoretical and methodological points concerning first, the relationship between social and cognitive approaches and second, the role of multimodality. We will approach multimodality by drawing on our own work on 'beliefs' (aka everyday knowledge, subjective theories or conceptualisations) that language learners have about language, language learning and language teaching. Looking at both verbal data coming from oral interviews and visual data – learners' self-portraits – we argue for multivoicedness, situatedness and dynamicity of beliefs. Our results speak for a sociocognitive stand where individual beliefs continuously intertwine with the social world of e.g. interactive events and institutional discourses.

Here, we use the term multimodality to refer to the human capacity to perceive semiotic resources through different sensory channels (most importantly visual and auditory) and to employ different means in their meaning-making, such as articulated speech, different types of gestures, different types of written representations, and also other types of visuality that are present in arts and also, in drawings that we will discuss in this paper. Thus multimodality refers here to the essentially multimodal nature of human semiosis. Multimodality of language use is an increasing focus in language studies and research is now emerging in different frameworks and research contexts. Multimodal approaches have been used in, e.g., discourse analysis, text analysis, conversation analysis, and interaction analysis (e.g. Goodwin 2000; Norris 2004). Within systemic-functional approaches Kress & van Leeuwen (2001) have developed systematic ways of analysis and have also discussed multimodality in (on-line) teaching and learning (e.g. Kress, Jewitt, Osborn & Tsatsarelis 2001). Ecological-semiotic approach has been discussed by Thibault (2004). The cognitively oriented approaches to multimodality include those of cognitive linguistics (e.g. Forceville 2006) and a sociocognitive, embodied approach to language use and second language acquisition has been discussed by Atkinson (2011) and Churchill, Okadam, Nishino & Atkinson (2010). Recently, different types of visual and multimodal data have also been used in the studies of language, language use, language learning, language learners and multilingualism, which has resulted in rich collections of data involving both visual and verbal representations. Learners' self-portraits have been analysed by Kalaja, Alanen & Dufva (2008) and Kalaja, Alanen, Palviainen & Dufva (2011). Photographs of teenagers' use of English have been explored by Nikula & Pitkänen-Huhta (2008) and Sami-Finnish bilingual children's experiences have been explored by means of photographs and drawings by Pietikäinen, Alanen, Dufva, Kalaja, Leppänen & Pitkänen-Huhta (2008). Menezes' (2008) study uses language learners' multimedia language learning histories as its data. The findings of these studies speak for the power of visualisation in eliciting the subjective experiences and views, but they also suggest that visualisation adds something extra to the findings gained in studies employing verbal data.

Beliefs: social or cognitive?

Until fairly recently, the study of beliefs has been committed to theoretical and methodological assumptions typical of the cognitivist paradigm of SLA (second language acquisition). Duly, beliefs were defined as static mental schemata possessed by the individual and were mostly examined using experimental methods and quantitative measures such as questionnaires. While these cognitivist approaches have now been justly criticised, one answer has been to turn to exclusively socially oriented – and/ or constructionist – paradigms, in which the value of the subjective expressions and personal accounts as research data has been questioned. Thus people have been treated as users of socially and culturally available resources only, and what is being said (in interaction, in interview talk etc.) is considered as socially/discursively constructed only. For example, the ethnomethodologically oriented conversation analysts have

often quoted Sacks (1992) saying that in analysing interaction, it is important to "just try to come to terms with how it is that the thing comes off", at the same time regarding beliefs, intentions, and thoughts of the participants as less important or non-important. Further, the radical social constructionist views, such as expressed within discursive psychology, for example, often suggest that 'mental' phenomena (attitudes, memory, intentions) are essentially, or perhaps exclusively, discursively constructed (e.g. Edwards & Potter 1992). Thus one finds arguments that it is possible to analyse the observable discourse "without assuming any particular version of cognition, or *even that cognition…is taking place at all*" (Potter 2006:138, italics the present authors'). However, these positions have also been criticised (see, e.g., Hammersley 2003, Dufva 2010). The highly polarised opposition between radical individualist cognitivism and radical social constructionism seems to lead only into a cul-de-sac where certain essential questions, such as the theorising of learning, are ultimately left unanswered. Just as many recent studies have given us important and highly useful descriptions of the social events and interactions that involve language learning (Suni 2008), many scholars of second/foreign language development and multilingualism have increasingly pointed out the importance of the experienced views of learners for understanding the process of language learning and development (see, e.g., Breen 2001) and for further developing teaching practices (see e.g., Dufva & Salo 2009).

The approach we introduce here aims at transcending the representation of the relationship between social and cognitive as a dichotomy between internal and external. It draws both on dialogical philosophy of Bakhtin and Voloshinov and sociocultural arguments by Vygotsky, being also tangential with non-Cartesian approaches to cognition – or rather, cognising (see, e.g., Järvilehto 1998; Cowley 2009). We start with the argument that beliefs (about something) are not entities such as schema or propositions: once learned/acquired and since imprinted in the memory, as was envisaged in the cognitivist argument. Rather, beliefs are refractions of the presence of many voices at the social arenas – that is, social heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1981). Thus, we argue that they are dynamic and multivoiced (see Dufva 2003, Aro 2009). Metaphorically, words (and their ideological contents) are being recycled from the events of the social arena to the events on one's own psychological arena and back again to the diverse events of social activity. Bearing in mind the social origin and nature of beliefs, it is natural that some beliefs may be more readily available, "at the surface" as it were, being, e.g. more frequent or more powerful in the particular language community, while others are "deeper", weaker and perhaps less conscious in nature and less verbalisable. Here, Bakhtin's concept of chronotope is relevant: neither time nor space is privileged by Bakhtin, they are interdependent and should be studied as such. Specific chronotopes are said to correspond to particular genres, or relatively stable ways of speaking, which themselves represent particular ideologies. Holquist and Emerson have defined chronotope as "an optic for reading texts as x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring" (in Bakhtin 1986: 426): while the speaker or writer is a unique individual in a unique situation, they necessarily use and recycle certain ways of expression. A chronotope is thus both related to cognising and a narrative feature of language. The sociocognitive approach aims at a new understanding of the interrelationship between a person and the social activity she is involved in. Rejecting the cognitivist view of the early research on language learning and psycholinguistics (for criticism of cognitivism, see Still & Costall 1991, Dufva 1998), but finding also the exclusively social view inadequate, we discuss the dialogical epistemology as a position that sees social and individual aspects of activity as not only interrelated but parallel and intertwining. Personal beliefs do have a social origin – they are appropriated through participation in social practices, or, more broadly, are socially and culturally mediated (cf. Vygotsky 1986). However, as Voloshinov (1973: 39) argues, the social and psychological are in a constant, reciprocal relationship where one intrudes in the realm of the other – and becomes the other. Thus, to understand beliefs – or any personal views, such as attitudes or memories – as emerging in discursive practices

is correct, but they are not exclusively so. They are also 'personal' or 'individual', expressed by an individual with a unique set of life experiences. Beliefs – what people know or believe about something – have continuity in two senses. It is precisely the continuity that makes it impossible to pin down their ontology in either of these two realms exclusively and also makes it insufficient to regard them only in terms of the language (e.g. discourses, texts, interaction) they emerge in. First, continuity is created by the fact that there are socially and culturally available ways of speaking that get repeated across time and/or space in communities, from one person to another. It is also clear that at the level of external language use, certain ways of speaking emerge more often and thus gain authority or popularity. But, on the other hand, the ways of speaking are (by necessity) encountered by individuals who have a choice of appropriating or rejecting them and who, in manner of speaking, have an ownership of them: the words of the others become words of one's own (Bakhtin 1981). This does not mean that views expressed in the words of others would be accepted and repeated as such (although this may as well happen): language users are (generally) at liberty to express their own points of view either as direct echoes of the societal discourses, as counter-arguments of the same, or as various modifications that arise in a situated fashion. However, it has to be pointed out that there is clearly continuity in the way *individuals* express their beliefs in different situations and along the continuum of their own life span. While there are many situated effects in what one expresses, speakers are also operating on a continuum. Thus in emphasizing the interplay between continuity and situatedness in the expression of beliefs, we also wish to argue that it would be nihilistic to see a person's beliefs as random or as ad hoc productions of the current situation. Further, we also wish to point out that the subjective views or personal accounts are valuable as research data.

Effects of modality

In this paper, we add an important dimension to our sociocognitive arguments by claiming that not only words of the others, but also socially and culturally available **images** are being recycled in people's beliefs and conceptualisations. The data we discuss consist of interviews (Aro 2009) and visual data (Kalaja et al. 2008; Kalaja et al. 2011), that is, language learners' drawings. We also refer to findings of other studies on written narratives (see, e.g. Kalaja & Dufva 1996). Below, we will examine how different methods of data collection may elicit different *aspects* of beliefs, or, simply, *different* beliefs. The characteristics of the task, for example, its modality, are a strong influence in the beliefs that are expressed. People may express different beliefs in interviews where they are asked to put their views into words than in tasks where they are invited to present their views by visual means. Here, we draw on the Vygotskian arguments of sociocultural thinking in particular. We will argue that beliefs may involve not only *voices* (in the sense of verbally articulated beliefs, evoked by language use at the social arena), but also *images*, influenced by visual memories, or, of visual representations the persons have been exposed to. Thus both voices and images travel from the social sphere to people's minds and return there in the form of verbally or visually articulated/performed activity. To summarise our theoretical and methodological points of departure, the focus of our analysis is not to analyse the data as 'language', 'texts', 'narratives' , 'interview interaction' or 'images' alone but aim exploring the sociocognitive activity in which the inner, psychological world of the participants is related to the particular situation (here: the tasks by which the data was collected) and to the particular expressions (verbal or visual) that result in externally observable language use (such as the interview talk or written narrative).

We make some observations on the relationship between verbal and visual data drawing on the sociocultural argument that speaks for the important role of mediation and that also observes the potential difference brought about by different mediational means, an argument that derives from Vygotsky's (e.g. 1986) work. In sociocultural thinking, human knowledge is seen to result from mediated action that employs various

social and cultural tools/artefacts. Here, we will argue that what we here refer to as 'beliefs' also are influenced by the process of mediation, both when they first emerge (are appropriated from different sources) and when they are expressed in, e.g. in different types of tasks that are used as research data. To specify, the situated and mediated nature of knowing argues that the materiality of the resources used leaves its trace in the ways people conceptualise something: "what we hear" is thus (to a degree) different from "what we read" and "what we see" and remembering and conceptualising something when, e.g., writing a story or drawing a picture, people draw on these particular sources. In short, we will argue that also beliefs are mediated not only through language use but also through other semiotic resources, and, the modality of expression moulds what is expressed (see also Voloshinov 1973, Kress et al. 2001:15).

From the point of view of methodology, talking, writing and drawing about something draw on (partly) different cultural conventions and rules, such as, for example, how to write a life story, how to make a self-portrait or how to talk with an interviewer, and the data is also influenced by the particular modality and materiality of the task. Looking at that from the point of view of collecting and analysing data for research, we must conclude that what emerges as data is basically influenced by the task and situation both in the social sense but also in the material sense. The nature of the particular task, seen at the social level as an interplay between various participants, the roles designated for them, and such factors as the time limits have of course been known to influence results. Talking in an interview differs from filling up a questionnaire and responses given in a laboratory task might be different from those gathered by field-work.

Obviously, we see the great value in analysing interaction or language use at large. However, we do not wish to limit our analysis to that and argue that subjective views – such as beliefs – are important in two senses. First, we see it as important to listen to the research participants' voices in order to gain important information on the aspects of, e.g., learning process they, experientially, see as important. As Riley (1997: 128) argues: "the issue is not one of finding the objective reality, *the* truth, but subjective reality, *their* truth. What [the learners] believe will influence their learning much, much more than what we believe, because it is their beliefs that hold sway over their motivations, attitudes and learning procedures". In a sense, we need to take the research participants as epistemic authorities of their personal knowledge – as the dialogical epistemology argues, any knowledge results in an encounter between I and you, or, between two consciousnesses (Bakhtin 1984: 81, 88). We also wish to point out that an analysis of language use – e.g. recorded and transcribed interaction – does not capture reality in any true sense either; because it is never a neutral description of "what really happens", but reflects both the researcher's chosen perspective and his/her use of conventional methods and tools of analysis. Thus our focus of analysis is not located in the "external" product alone, but it does not aim at giving a direct view to a certain personal belief either. In fact, as we argue, there is no such thing, and this is our second important point: we consider the study of personal beliefs as an important means to speculate about the world of cognising and see it as important to relate our findings to those theories that emphasise the dynamic and distributed nature of cognition (e.g. Cowley 2009). While the subjective reality cannot be directly accessed, it can be tapped on – fragmentarily – for example by asking people to express and articulate their views. In analysing these, we cannot regard the manifest expressions as "identical" or "same as" of the experience or conceptualising itself. Rather, what appears as a **voice** in an interview or written narrative or as an **image** in our visual data may be described as an **aspect** of the person's beliefs. Beliefs are not singular entities, but, rather, dynamic clusters of multivoiced (Aro 2009) and multimodal conceptualisations.

To summarise, when studying the individual's beliefs from a sociocognitive point of view, we should consider the affordances and constraints by the research task and situation, the modality being one of the aspects important to consider. The surrounding research environment is not an "external" scene in which or against which individuals operate, but rather, a context for activity within which the individual agents act with mediational means to achieve the goals they set for themselves (cf. Engeström 2005,

Wertsch 1998). When context is thought of in the latter way, it cannot be reduced to an external environment; instead, there is an ambiguous and dynamic relationship between an object and its context: "the combination of goals, tools, setting […] constitutes simultaneously the context of behaviour and ways in which cognition can be said to be related to that context." (Cole 1996: 137).

Two cases and two modalities

The focus of our research is beliefs about language(s), language learning and language teaching. Since the 1980s, learner beliefs have mainly been looked at from two very different perspectives. Beliefs have either been conceptualised from a cognitive psychological viewpoint, where they are seen as characteristics of the individual, something learners have inside their head and which they can put into words, and that are relatively stable – often studied using questionnaires. On the other hand, learner beliefs have been seen from a more discourse analytical point of view, where they are considered to be functions of social interaction, and ever changing depending on the context of the interaction and in these cases. Kalaja & Barcelos (2003), in their collection, introduced many new approaches in the study of language learners' beliefs, such as metaphor analysis (e.g. Ellis 2001), diary research (e.g. Nunan 2000) and ethnographic methodologies (e.g. Allen 1996). All in all, belief research has focused on verbal data.

In the present paper, we draw particularly on the dialogical approach to beliefs which is more fully discussed in Dufva (2003) and Aro (2004, 2009). We will summarise research from two contexts: one case studying Finnish children's beliefs about English (using interviews as data) and the other case focussing on Finnish university students' beliefs about language learning (using visual drawings and their verbal explanations as data). Below, we will discuss those elements which seem to be repeated in both sets of data and in both modalities the role of books and literacy being our most important observation here. We will also point out differences between different sets of data that may be important. Here, we discuss the role of modality in particular. We will show that certain beliefs and conceptualisations seem to be similar – and that they may be typical of our culture at large – but we will also show how differences may appear as a result of the task and modality. In both sets of data English occupies an important position, but, in the children's data, it is a school subject that is studied by everybody while at the university, it is a major chosen by the research participants themselves.

Children: verbal descriptions of language learning

The first case explores longitudinal interview data on how 15 Finnish L1 children talk about the learning of English as a foreign language. It draws on Aro's (2009) dissertation study, where a group of elementary school pupils were followed over a course of several years. The data were collected in the research project "Situated Metalinguistic Awareness and Foreign Language Learning" (for other results, see, e.g., Dufva & Alanen 2005). The children were interviewed on three occasions: in Year 1 (aged 7), Year 3 (aged 9) and Year 5 (aged 11) about their views and experiences of learning English. English was introduced as a school subject in Year 3. The data were analysed both for content and using Bakhtin's (1981) notion of polyphony, or multi-voicedness. Bakhtin's concept of *voice* is a metaphor for the intention and worldview embedded in the speaker's utterance. Polyphony is an inherent quality of each utterance, because all our words and knowledge have been learnt in interaction with other people and thus reflect the voices of others in addition to our own. These others' words can be for example "internally persuasive" (Bakhtin 1981); open, dynamic and flexible: words that we can easily take over and use for our own intentions. Others' words can also be "authoritative", which means that the speaker must take them as they are and merely repeat them – examples of authoritative words include e.g. religious dogmas or recognised scientific facts. Exploring the polyphony in learner beliefs thus gives us a glimpse of what kinds of voices (and consequently the ideological contents these voices

stand for) the learners have come into contact with, and which voices are privileged in their beliefs, that is, whose words the learners find worth repeating.

In the following, we shall take a look at what the learners said about learning English: what, in their opinion, were the best ways to learn the language. Within this topic, the authoritative voices of school and society turned out to be particularly important. In the first year, the learners did not have many experiences of purposely studying English. However, many of them did know a word or two of English that they had usually learnt from a parent, older sibling, or a friend. There were also a few other kinds of sources for English mentioned:

MP: Mistä sä oot oppinu [englannin sanoja]?
Eeva: Äiti on sanonu ja sitte meillä on semmonen kirja.
MP: Yhym, minkälainen kirja?
Eeva: Jossa on kaikkia sanoja englanniks.
MP: Joo-o, ootsä ite sieltä opetellu?
Eeva: En ku mun äiti on lukenu sieltä.
MP: Where have you learnt [English words]?
Eeva: Mom has said and then we have this book.
MP: Mm hm, what kind of book?
Eeva: With all these words in English.
MP: Uh huh, have you studied it yourself?
Eeva: No my mom's read from it.

Eeva knew English words because her mother had told her some, and she also added that they had *this book, with all these words in English*. Eeva could not yet read herself, so she could not make use of the book, but she had seen her mother read from it. The book was clearly something that contained knowledge of English in the form of *words in English*, and the fact that her mother used it possibly meant that is was a source to be trusted – a parent was also certainly an authority.

In the third year, at the time of the interview, the learners had studied English for a few months. The practices of the school world were evident in their answers: the English teacher was a fairly prominent figure in the learners' answers, and they talked a lot about homework, exercises and tests, and particularly about their English text book.

MA: Osaaksää jo paljo puhua ja kirjottaa englantia, mitäs te ootte täs oppinu?
Valtteri: No, ollaan me niinku hirveesti niitä sivujaki menny eteenpäin ja kaikkee tällasta.
MA: Do you already know how to speak and write English, what kinds of things have you learnt?
Valtteri: Well, we've like gone through a whole lot of pages too and all that kind of stuff.

When asked to talk about what he had learnt over the past months, Valtteri said that they had *gone through a whole lot of pages* – in the text book. Not only did the text book appear to be the most important source of learning for the learners, but it also made learning countable: the English language became pages of the book, chapters studied, or the number of tests taken, rather than content. It also made English learning very school-centric: English in the learners' answers was often learnt through memorising words from vocabulary lists in the book in order to remember them in a test. The voice of the school world began to be very pronounced in the learners' answers and appeared to define their views of learning to a great extent.

In the fifth year, the learners talked in more detail about how English was learnt. Many felt that the best place to learn would be the school or a course and that having a good teacher would help. But even their descriptions of studying with the help of a teacher focused around written material: reading, vocabulary lists and chapters. When

asked to describe the business of language learning, the focus on written language remained a constant:

> MA: No, mitenkäs englantia opiskellaan jos joku haluaa oikei hyvin oppia englantia nii mitä sen kannattaa tehdä?
> Emma: Lukee niitä sanoja ja harjotella kirjottamaan niitä.
> *MA: So how does one learn English, if one wants to learn English really well what should they do?*
> *Emma: Read the words and practice how to write them.*

Over time, the model of learning focusing on the book – sometimes introduced by parents before school began and later reinforced by school practices – had become ever more prevalent. The learners' answers to how English was learnt indicated that they predominantly viewed it as a literary pursuit: many said that the best way to learn would be to read an English textbook. The first example may shed light on how these beliefs come to be: they are rooted in the learner's experiences and become recycled over and over again.

 Over the years, the learners began to find their own voice as language learners and bring their own experiences to the fore. They began to talk more and more about how they used English outside of the school context and about the various language resources they came into contact with. However, as these viewpoints of how to go about language learning emerged, it appeared that the authoritative voice, testifying to the power of the written word, seemed to have a great effect on them. Authoritative ideas were not only authoritative in the sense that the learners needed to repeat them as they are: it seems they also began to function as a filter through which the learners' viewed English learning in general. Consequently, when asked which outside-of-school activities could be useful in learning English, written material such as books, comics and computer games were considered useful – English-language television programmes, movies or music were not. Their assessment of what was useful for the learning of English was thus affected by the authoritative idea, and not only within the confines of the classroom, but also in their free time where they all, in fact, actively used and consumed English.

The authoritative idea of learning through books was a constant in the learners' interview answers over the years. Even though the learners began to bring up their own, more personal opinions about and experiences with the English language over time, the question is raised whether these voices, too, were spoken through the authoritative viewpoint – whether these authoritative beliefs prevented the participants from perceiving learning opportunities, language affordances and resources outside of school and, more importantly, outside of books, and consequently affected their learning paths. While different questions, of course, solicited different answers and there was plenty of idiosyncrasy in the learners' answers, they all very consistently echoed the authoritative idea that English is learnt from books.

Young adults: Visual and verbal representations of learning

The research project called "From Novice to Expert" is a five-year research project on the development of university students' professional knowledge of language, language learning and language teaching (see e.g., Kalaja et al. 2008). Its participants are Finnish university students majoring in English. The data that was collected during the students' 1st study year consists of their life stories, "language learning histories", their questionnaire answers and their drawings (N=110). Here we will discuss the drawings and their short "captions". First, the students were asked to draw their self-portrait as a learner of English on a sheet of paper ("My self-portrait: this is what I look like as a learner of English"). Then they were asked to give a short explanation of what they had drawn on the reverse side of the task sheet ("Give your own interpretation of the drawing in a few sentences.").

Although the two sets of data – from children and from young adults – discussed in this paper do not come from the same project, we were interested in examining whether

the tendencies were similar or different. Is there, continuity to be observed between children's beliefs and those of university students' beliefs and, what kind of role does the situatedness play? Particularly, can we find the influence of literacy and books also in this type of data?

Two most important findings in the analysis of the students' portraits suggest that first, the students portrayed themselves most often alone and second, although there are various mediational means represented in the drawings (such as other people, television, music, computer) books were the most important (for a closer discussion, see Kalaja et al. 2008). The first finding seems to be closely related to the individualist notion of learning: the underlying discourses, representations and/or metaphors that seem to be at work here are those that rely on notions such as 'knowledge is individual', 'learning means transferring information' or 'mind is a container'. These are metaphors typical of rationalist philosophy, cognitive psychology, psycholinguistics and also, traditional SLA and thus powerful and are recycled in pedagogical practices by textbooks, teachers, etc. The second finding – the strong presence of books – seems to suggest a particular view of 'language', but also seems to be a portrayal of classroom practices. It has been repeatedly argued that the notion of language in linguistics is literacy-based (see Voloshinov 1973: 71), and that one can observe a written language bias in linguistics (Linell 2005). The literate world view is also seen in language education: both ideals and practices frequently lean on written standards and literacy skills (for textbook-oriented and literacy-centred classroom practices, see, e.g. Pitkänen-Huhta 2003). Thus, it is no wonder that also in learner portraits 'learning involves books and reading'.

When comparing the drawings with short verbal descriptions the students wrote about their self-portrait, similar trends emerged: students did not mention other people, but named books as important sources of learning, although slightly more infrequently than in the drawings (Kalaja et al. 2008). However, when considering these findings in the light of the results of another project – consisting of written narratives (life-stories) – we find some interesting similarities, but also differences. One striking difference is that in drawings, the teachers were almost completely missing, while in life stories, the importance of the teacher for the learning process was frequently mentioned (Kalaja et al. 2008). The life stories also included more references to social interaction, other people, out-of-the-school experiences and travel.

Voices and images

We argue that the beliefs and conceptualisations expressed in the different sets of data we discussed above suggest both *continuity* and *situatedness* that intertwine. First, certain conceptualisations of learning seem to be more salient – as they appear both in children and young adults and both in verbal and visual data. An example of this is the strong presence of literacy in all sets of data (children and young adults; verbal and visual). We propose that this suggests a commonly held and influential view of learning, "a shared belief" (cf. 'language ideologies', e.g., Woolard 1998), that language learning is a literacy-based project. However, we are *not* saying that what is common and influential is necessarily explicit and consciously recognised. Although the common, culturally influential beliefs may often be mediated by explicit wordings in educational discourse, media, parental talk, classroom interaction, textbooks, there are also hidden agendas. Considering the role of literacy, we might in fact speculate that it is more of a hidden agenda, not necessarily articulated **as such** (for the hidden agenda of written language bias, see e.g. Linell 2005), but that is possibly mediated mostly through **practices** that are literacy-based, means of assessing language proficiency that focus on academic and literacy-based skills and values that are attached to literacy. There is a somewhat curious dissonance to be found in the fact that while, for example, oral, communicative and interactional skills are much highlighted in both national curricula and European language education policy documents, as well as in teachers' expressed views (see e.g. Kalaja & Dufva 1996), the data we have collected seems to tell another story. Also the young learners who were interviewed said that the point of learning English was to be

able to *speak* it with other people – yet they said the best way to learn English was to *read* it. Second, it is clear that somewhat different conceptualisations are elicited by different tasks. Although the literacy-influenced conceptualisations of learning seem to be present both in verbal and visual data and thus speak for the continuity of this powerful idea, there were also differences. For example, drawings elicited more images of "lonely" learner with an emphasis on receptive learning whereas in verbal captions and frequently in life story data, other people – e.g. teacher or various native speaker contacts – and activity through other mediational means – e.g. media – were more important. Similarly, in the interview data, the learners usually spoke from a position of "we learners" (*in the classroom, we read, we do exercises, we study words...*) rather than presented themselves as "lonely" agents.

Thus the modality modifies of what is being expressed, first, purely materially and then also by setting certain conventions as models for expression. In the words of Kress et al. 2001: 15): "Each meaning making system – mode – provides different communicative potentials. In other words, each mode is culturally shaped around the constraints and affordances of its medium – its materiality". Thus one reason for the fact that they draw themselves alone is just in the fact that this is a highly conventional way of portraiture while this is clearly not so with written biographies. We suggest that here continuity and situatedness intertwine in an interesting manner. Thus the research participants draw on particular genres and models typical of that particular task and modality, echoing particular conventions and traditions that are involved. When they are interviewed, they answer the questions the researcher asks them – even if they feel other topics might have been more important and relevant – because that is what you do in an interview. When people are asked to write their personal learning history, they choose a genre and a model for this: to take an example, written life stories may be modelled as an autobiography, a fairytale, an essay, a letter, a CV or a drama. Similarly, when the research participants are asked to draw a portrait, that is what they do. Thus a methodological point for the researchers looking for beliefs is that different beliefs may emerge, depending not only on the situation as such, but also on the affordances and constraints of expression. Experimental research and questionnaires yield different results than methods that allow the subjects to speak in their own words. Verbal language affords certain ways for self-expression while other semiotic resources (e.g. visual, pictorial) provide different means. Any research design calls for a particular kind of interaction that elicits particular events and responses. Here, we have discussed how using multimodal research methods may highlight certain particularities and may provide multiple angles to analysis – and shown that learners *can* and *do* express their beliefs regarding language learning.

Summing up: Beliefs about language learning

An important theoretical suggestion we wish to make is that 'beliefs' are not only multivoiced – they can also been pictured as multimodal. Our everyday knowledge of various things, such as marriage, health, cat food, and how to operate a cellular phone, are mediated to us through language but also through various types of images. Thus the origin of believing something, or knowing something, about something is to be found in the concrete events that are multimodal in nature. We listen to other people's talk, read instructions and newspapers, study textbooks, see movies and images in the magazines and go to the art galleries to have a look at the portraits hanging on the wall. In this sense, individuals are not only 'language users' (in the sense of verbal language) but users of semiotic resources that are afforded to them. Thus the knowledge we rely on and operate with in our everyday life is mostly, if not entirely, mediated through different semiotic resources and their interpretation. As Voloshinov (1973: 90) said: "Outside objectification, outside embodiment in some particular material (the material of gesture, inner word, outcry) consciousness is a fiction".

The socio-cognitive view of beliefs suggests that we look at the past and present social events not only as the origin of beliefs but also as a force that both provides affordances

and sets constraints to their rearticulations. Beliefs about something are – as also the social constructionist views suggest – varying and situated. But at the same time, they have continuity, both in the way the society recycles its ways of speaking and powerful discourses and in the way particular individuals appropriate and rearticulate them. Thus our dialogical and sociocultural approach argues against views saying that what people say or do in everyday interaction, or as research participants, is exclusively socially or discursively constructed. At the same time, we aim at finding new ways for studying how, precisely, the cognitive nature of beliefs should be understood. Answers may be provided by non-Cartesian – systemic, ecological and distributed – views of cognition that take the connection between the individuals and their environment as their starting point (see, e.g. Gibson 1979, Järvilehto 1998; van Lier 2004; Cowley 2009). In these frameworks, human cognising is regarded in terms of a human-environment system. Individuals are born to an environment that is not only a language community but also a cultural, semiotic community where various kinds of meaning-making signs are used. In these views, a fundamental reciprocity is assumed between the affordances (what is available in the environment) and what is noticed, taken heed of and appropriated by those human agents populating this community. Put simply, individuals build their own knowledge – whether that be formal, factual knowledge or more intuitive 'beliefs' gathered in various contexts of one's everyday life – in a multimodal semiosphere.

In articulating their beliefs about languages and language learning, people draw on, first, their own personal experiences (their unique "language learning history"), second, socially and culturally available (verbal and visual) representations, and, third, various situational factors that are present in the situation at hand (including the task and the modality of the expression). Thus beliefs are not *direct* reflections of the societal ideologies; but rather, in Voloshinov's (1973) terms, **refractions** of the social scene. Also, as dialogical approach indicates (Dufva 2003, Aro 2004, 2009), beliefs are not singular but rather, plural and multivoiced. Beliefs are thus not 'ready-made' schemata, but emergent from a dynamic and continuously changing data-base, a "mishmash" of various memories, recollections, images and views, a view that also coincides with dynamic notions of memory (see, e.g., Edelman 1992). Another way of putting this is that remembering is both situated (Sutton 2006) and autobiographical (Fink 2003). Thus the products, i.e. the beliefs and conceptualisations that we are able to examine in various verbal, visual or multimodal articulations, are expressions of knowledge potential rather than knowledge as a static schemata (cf. the concept of meaning as 'meaning potential', Rommetveit 1992, Lähteenmäki 2004). As we have shown, some beliefs may be less readily available while others are fairly consistently repeated, as seen in the role of the book. Voices of literacy and images of books are a strong cultural stereotype, and, as we see this, an example of authoritative voices.

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