

## Section 2: The discipline of LS

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### THE CONCEPTS OF «LANGUAGE» AND «DISCIPLINE» ON THE MOVE. A STUDY OF SHIFTS IN CURRICULAR GOALS FOR «NORWEGIAN» (1940-2006)

#### Introduction

This article claims that the concept of ‘language’ is invalid for conceptualizing the whole curricular discipline for French in France, Norwegian in Norway and the like. The very disciplinarity of what has been called Mother Tongue Education (MTE), Standard Language Education (SLE) or Language of School Education (LE), is at risk. It outlines how simplistic perceptions of language have been challenged by broader understandings of culture and communication (de Beaugrande 1998). This theoretical part serves as a platform for a critical study of the curricular goals of all five main curricula for the school subject Norwegian between 1940 and 2006. A special scope is the relationship between language and communication. One conclusion is that the notion ‘Norwegian’ that has served as a term both for the national language and the school subject is inadequate. The article implicitly suggests, that if the European and the Norwegian situation is fairly similar (Ongstad 2003), international discussions of competences, national implementations and final local outcomes and evaluations of competences will need a paradigmatic theoretical reconsideration.

## 1. Language versus communication or text versus lifeworld

Generally the relation between language and communication is often seen as form/content + use = communication. This implies firstly that language is a rather closed whole which is used as a tool in different contexts. Secondly this is mainly a category based view ('categorical'). For research it thirdly means that linguistics is basically seen as 'applied'. Syntax and semantics are twins (focusing respectively structure and reference) and pragmatics (focusing use or action) is added.

An *integrative* view, often found in systemics and pragmatics, opposes this perception: form/content/use = communication (Bühler 1934). One important consequence of this systemic and triadic view is the emersion of what seemingly is a contradiction or a paradox that has to do with parts and wholes (for a discussion of this version of the hermeneutic circle see Ongstad 2006a.). Another is that language will become part of communication rather than being a unique and separate phenomenon.

If an utterance or a text is seen as a category or a closed phenomenon, it needs to be cut off from the contexts that contributed to it its meaning in the first place. Robert de Beaugrande argues that theory-driven scenarios on language as a phenomenon...

...attempt to establish the status of language as a chiefly theoretical entity abstracted away from its connections to practice and from the many 'non-scientific' or 'pre-scientific' discourses about language. Here, a language is regarded not as a general theory of human knowledge and experience but as a theory about itself: a uniform, abstract system constituted by exclusively linguistic principles. A noteworthy early example was de Saussure's (1974 [orig. 1916]: 232, 14) pronouncement that 'the true and unique object of linguistics is language studied in and for itself' – 'langue' as opposed to 'parole' (language in practice) – and that this 'language is a well-defined object in the heterogeneous mass of speech facts' (cf. § 69).

(Beaugrande 1998: §21)

He further claims that the descriptive and generative variations of language are mostly theory-driven and lead to a problematic formalism that will obstruct a more functional approach (Beaugrande 1994, 1997b; Beaugrande 1998: §45). Formalism disconnects and divides things, and creates workable oppositions. Through this epistemological grip

‘mainstream linguistics’ can secure its legitimation and autonomy as a scientific discipline (Beaugrande 1998: §31 and §45).

Such a purely linguistic view then will favour particular elements, categories and clarity, and give priority to the specific, the concrete, the logic and the well defined. Searching towards functionalism and triadic views would be fundamentally different, focusing relations, paradoxes, coherence and simultaneity and give priority to the open-ended, general and systemic (Ongstad 2004; Herrlitz *et al.*, forthcoming).

## 2. Cognitive-social-linguistic – a three-fold dialectic

However, if we follow a broader perception related to the concept of ‘lifeworlds’, utterances and texts should rather be seen as dialogical to systemic contexts (that is, communicational disposition influence by registers, genres and discourses) (Habermas 1984; Bakhtin 1986; Halliday 1994; Ongstad 2002 and 2006a). This general view is, more implicitly though, taken by a row of other theorists, as different as for instance Dewey, Baumann and Gardiner (for an overview, see Ongstad 2002 and 2006a). De Beaugrande, although not using the concept of lifeworlds, formulates the principal connections this way:

(...) Our theorising might start from the principle that all human issues or activities have three basic aspects: the cognitive relates to knowledge, the social relates to actions and interactions, and the linguistic relates to language (Beaugrande, 1996a). (...) Cognition is socially and linguistically determined; social actions are cognitively and linguistically determined; and language is socially and cognitively determined (...)

(Beaugrande 1998: §21, SO’s underlining).

Consequently a truly rational reform in an educational system would require education to be explicitly defined as a *three-fold dialectic among cognitive, social, and linguistic progress* towards a wider inclusion in theory and practice (Beaugrande 1998) (the fact that the ancient rhetoric, Kant, Pestalozzi, Dewey and Steiner all have implicitly built on these aspects, is another story. See Ongstad 2006a).

### 3. Corresponding textual meta-functions and context aspects

De Beaugrande further argues that Michael Halliday's theory of meta-functions takes account of the three-way dialectic among linguistic, cognitive, and social aspects of language. However he admits that these terms have not been widely used, presumably because functionalism tends to foreground the social as a counter-move against the formalist withdrawal into a cognitive idealisation (Beaugrande 1998: §63).

Yet systemic functional linguistics does make a parallel distinction among its three **meta-functions**: the **textual** is what language gets used and why, the **ideational** is what gets talked about and how, and the **interpersonal** is who talks to whom and why (cf. Halliday 1967-68, 1985a, 1985b, 1994a). Just as linguistic, cognitive, and social determine each other while they evolve (§ 21f), the three meta-functions continually interact and presuppose each other: the textual is *in principle* also ideational and interpersonal (Beaugrande 1998: §63). Dialectical interactions also determine the triad developed for analysing the Firthian 'context of situation': '**mode**' as 'symbolic organisation' ('what part language is playing in the situation') '**field**' as 'social action' ('who is taking part'), and '**tenor**' as 'role structure' ('what is happening'), (Halliday 1985b: 12; Halliday & Martin 1993: 32f).

Halliday and his followers accordingly argue that there is a parallelity between textual and contextual aspects. Thus the 'interpersonal', for instance, concerns social relations that are both interactional and personal, and characterises social groups that are integrated (Halliday 1973: 107 and de Beaugrande 1998: §112).

According to de Beaugrande language education (or programmes) in general would benefit from a reorientation of education around inclusive, creative, and self-reliant communication. This would avoid among others seeing content as a list of facts (cf. Beaugrande 1996a, Chapter VII, and references there) (Beaugrande 1998: §133).

In Ongstad (2002, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, and 2006a) a somewhat similar view is developed, however not directly related to Hallidayian systemics. In these works knowledge fields such as MTE/SLE/LE, mathematics education and 'Fachdidaktik' are analysed more in detail. The reason for not using notions directly related to textual grammar is to allow for concepts that reach further than 'text' and embrace multimodal, semiotic communication.

#### 4. Linguistics and/as disciplines in (new) contexts and different «disciplinarity»

In the following I will present three forms or aspects of ‘disciplinarity’ related to different perceptions of language and communication. Firstly «language» as a disciplinary *university study* was, through the 1960s and the 1970s, in Europe and in the English speaking world, dominated by a combination of grammar and language history, a construction ideologically based on a nationalistic philology (Doyle 1989; Elbow 1991; Scholes 1998). Although the formal name for the study of Norwegian language and literature at the University of Oslo actually for a long time was «Nordic» (Norw.: ‘nordisk’), its content focus nevertheless was the *Norwegianness* of language aspects and a study of Norwegian literature as such.

The kind of disciplinarity reflected in the teaching and research was mostly scientific and *academic*, strictly giving priority to epistemological aspects. However in the 1970s many new subfields emerged, such as sociolinguistics, pragmatics and semantics, which slowly contributed to a focus on aspects of language more in general and not primarily its Norwegianness (symptomatically the 1970s became the brake-through-time of Chomsky’s generative approach, which represented a universal, ‘non-national’ view on/of language).

Secondly, and as a contrast, «Norwegian» *at the teacher colleges* could rather be seen as a school subject. Generally all disciplines (Norw.: «fag») had historically and for a long time been blamed for being «seminaristic», which is a pejorative for lack of academic vigour (in the 19<sup>th</sup> century teacher colleges were called «seminars», a loan from Danish terminology; in Denmark institutions for teacher education are still called ‘seminarer’). Yet the knowledge elements of «Norwegian» in teacher education were more or less blue-prints of university disciplines. Methodology and pedagogy, and later «fagdidaktikk» were separate disciplines.

From the 1970s onwards a growing *didactisation* can be traced, and at the end of 1990s college curricula for «Norwegian» changed and became clearly school oriented (Ongstad 1999). Terms such as «Norskdidaktikk» and «Fagdidaktikk» had become commonplace. This does not mean that the discipline as such now easily could be called «Norskdidaktikk» (Ongstad 2006b). Still the local attitude in the different departments of Norwegian is that methods, practice, ‘fagdidaktikk’ and pedagogy rather should be *added*. A genuine didactic

character of Norwegian as teacher college study should appear as practice, that is, stressing how it is taught and *used* in schools and colleges (Ongstad 2006b).

Thirdly, inspecting the disciplinarity of «Norwegian» relative to a *school context*, it very much gets its configuration from practice. Interestingly, in Denmark a new concept has emerged which can be seen as a symptom of a changed perception of disciplinarity: the concept, «elevfaglighed» (Danish) is hard to translate directly, but it could loosely be understood as the kind of disciplinary quality that the pupils/students should achieve or have achieved. Actually it may in some sense come close to ‘competence’. Accordingly disciplinarity in this sense is something related to a mind and a body, rather than just being something in itself. The kind of disciplinarity behind this concept is *qualitatively* different from an academic understanding of disciplinarity (Ongstad 2006b). While teacher educators in many English speaking countries balance and blur the disciplinary and the educational (didactic) elements more easily, Norwegian teacher educators to a large extent seem to keep them separate (Kvalbein 2006). The above three forms of disciplinarity then, *academic*, *didactic* and *practical*, do not have clear borders, and bringing them tight together or keeping them strictly separate will create particular problems. The institutional related perceptions of these disciplinarity are not just results of epistemological gatekeeping but are deeply rooted in (often tacit) perceptions of language and communication on at least two levels: as scientific ‘objects’ and as tools for thinking (the discursive basis for these disciplines’ own general theory of science).

## 5. Text theories, langue and parole (a missing link?)

Text theory as a sub-discipline has had strong influence on theories of both language and literature, changing the philological amalgamation and slowly bridging the gap between language and literary studies as separate fields. On the surface it lifted the focus of language studies ‘up’ above the limited horizon to “what is between two full stops”. Further, in literary studies, the intimate relationship between text and genre became crucial when ‘text-specificity’ and literarity became research objects. As a consequence there was even a drift from «given» to «open» genres. In a deeper sense though the nationalistic enterprise

had been fundamentally and paradigmatically challenged. It implied a move from describing the national *langue*, towards understanding the use of any and any one's *parole*. In other words, in educational contexts a move from discipline to student, from language to communication.

Hence, in a sense, other sub-subjects, such as media studies, applied linguistics, Norwegian as a second language, ICT as part of the discipline, rhetoric, pragmatic studies, 'norskdidaktikk', educational text studies, etc., could all be seen as new disciplinarity *caused by* a deeper search for *la parole* rather than as *causing* the new paradigm in the first place. And most European MTE/SLE/LE curricula/subjects are deeply affected. In 2006 this extension has even moved beyond text, towards *culture*, already visible in some national curricula (Ongstad 2005a and 2005b). Although culture is an aspect in Norwegian as a discipline and as a school subject (see L97), it is only recently that one has seen a professionalisation of this field more closely related to 'Norwegian'. One example is a new Master's study at Hedmark University College.

*Semiotics* is still not yet a separate field of study in Norway, although quite a few recent doctoral theses in the field of education have claimed to be «semiotic». In the new national curriculum for the school subject «Norwegian», R06 (for the levels 1-13, aged 6-19) a new core concept is multi-modal texts (Norw. «sammensatte tekster»). Hence, what is at stake is firstly what kind of *disciplinarity* these new ambitions represents and secondly how teacher education will try to «cover» that, not the least given the uncertain and 'undertheorized' mixture of *academic* and *didactic* oriented disciplinary background most teacher educators have, both in language and in literature (Ongstad 2006b).

## 6. Discipline/Fach/fag/school subject as a goal and or a means?

Coming from an academic tradition, where many disciplines at a first glance appear as given, it is often provocative to meet views that argue in the following way:

The structuring of schooling into subjects represents at once a fragmentation and an internalisation of the struggles over state schooling. Fragmentation because conflicts take place through a range

of compartmentalised subjects; internalisation because now conflicts take place not only within the school but also within subject boundaries (Goodson and Marsh 1996: 152).

Goodson and Marsh (1996) further argue that a hundred-year-long unbroken tradition throughout the 20th century for seeing the school subject English as inevitable in the educational system has strengthened a certain disciplinary stability. Yet at the same time the traditional gap between grammar and comprehensive schooling at least in the UK (respectively: ‘Cambridge’ versus ‘London’ based English) has become less, they argue, leaning on Medway (1990).

On the one hand we find an established tradition stressing literature, elite, cultural heritage and transmission. On the other hand there is a new approach stressing discursive language, masses, cultural relevance for and participation in subcultures. This ‘encounter’ represents an uneven amalgamation of polarities and this dilemma brings us back to how language and communication are related and to the further question of how *disciplinarity* in curricula are connected to language and communication. I will briefly review the two options.

Thinking: language plus use: We have seen how language can be perceived as an *instrument* for *doing* something. The dyad semantics/syntax that constitutes language is a functional *tool* that can be *used* (cf. Austin’s *How to do things with words*). Pragmatics is accepted and important, but placed *outside* language. Students (on all levels in the educational system) should learn what language *is* and then how to *use* it. This simple and often implicit adding to a Saussurean ‘worldview’ is still influential and perhaps even dominant.

Thinking: structure, reference, action, utterance (text) and genre (context) as simultaneities (communication): This view does not give priority to language as such, but see ‘it’ (sic!) as a focused, systemic, dynamic *aspect* of larger cultural, communicational wholes, from which other different linguistic and discursive aspects are never separated, unless focused. A split between text and context is refuted. Writing, reading, talking and listening are *simultaneously* structuring, referring and acting of texts/utterances. These processes are intimately and systemically related to specific discursive contexts or genres. No aspects can be defined as separate. This view would help students to continue to learn (as we are bound) to *communicate*, and where verbal language is seen as *integrated*. This position still seems only randomly accepted.

Not only do these two perceptions tend to be antagonistic in research and higher education. The symptoms of this tug of war are even visible in the structuring of most national curricula in (post-)modern societies of today. I will try to show how this situation may have come about by briefly contrasting goals set by five main national curricula for the school subject Norwegian over the last 60-70 years. I present all goals first before commenting.

## 7. Ideological shifts in curricular goals

### 7.1. Norwegian (1940): The goal is to teach the children:

1. to **speak** their mother tongue naturally, straightforwardly and clearly – without major phonetic or grammatical mistakes;
2. to **read** both *bokmål* and *nynorsk* [the two Norwegian written languages or language forms], with distinct pronunciation and fairly correct accent, to understand and **retell** what they read, and to be able to obtain knowledge by reading;
3. to **write** straightforwardly, naturally and fairly correct (and with fairly correct punctuation marks) about topics adequate for the field of experience and knowledge for this year level (KU 1940:48, SO's translation and comments added in [...]).

### 7.2. Goals set by the 1974 curriculum for Norwegian

Teaching in Norwegian shall aim at:

- developing students' ability to **use** their mother tongue in speech and in script;
- developing students' knowledge of Norwegian language, *bokmål* and *nynorsk* and teach students to love their mother tongue;
- conserving and strengthening students' love of reading and developing their ability to apprehend and experience the aesthetic and ethical values conveyed in poetry, so that they even later on will love literature;

- training students in understanding spoken and written Danish and Swedish.

### 7.3. Goals set for «Norwegian» in the 1987 curriculum (M87)

The teaching of Norwegian shall aim at:

- developing students' ability to listen, talk, read and write, so that they are able to understand others and be able to express themselves confidently and diversely;
- giving students the possibility for active and creative verbal cooperation, to communicate in different contexts and for different purposes;
- giving students a good knowledge of and skills in the main language, knowledge of the side language ['sidemål' – the 'other' Norwegian language in addition to the one which is their dominant language] and dialects, and developing tolerant attitudes to language and language use;
- helping students to master rules and norms for language and to master linguistically practical and factual matters in work life, social life and cultural life;
- creating engagement, making a joy of reading and aesthetic experiences and to stimulate students' love of reading through reading and work with literary texts;
- developing students' ability to perceive, experience and judge content and language in literature, other texts and media;
- letting students work with literature in ways that strengthen the feeling of identity and open their minds for historical, social and cultural connections;
- giving students a feeling of being part of the Nordic culture and language community.

(KUF 1988:129-130), SO's translation and comments added in [...])

### 7.4. Norwegian in the 1997 curriculum, L97

General aims for the subject are:

- to increase pupils' abilities in their mother tongue and teach them to avail themselves of the opportunities for interaction, which their

first language provides both in speech and writing, so that they can acquire the knowledge and skills that will serve as a platform for further learning in and outside school, and also make them active participants in society;

- to strengthen pupils' sense of cultural belonging by mediating experience in and knowledge of Norwegian language and literature, insight into other cultures, and understanding the significance of other cultures on the development of our own;
- to strengthen pupils' sense of personal identity, their openness to experience, their creativity, and their belief in their own creative abilities;
- to make pupils conscious participants in their own learning processes, provide them with insight into their own linguistic development, and enable them to use language as an instrument for increasing their insight and knowledge.

([www.odin.dep.no/odinarkiv/norsk/dep/nedlagt/kuf/1999/eng/014005-990128/dok-bn.html](http://www.odin.dep.no/odinarkiv/norsk/dep/nedlagt/kuf/1999/eng/014005-990128/dok-bn.html), accessed 22.3.2007)

The fifth, **the 2006 curriculum**, in contrast, does not give overall goals in bullet points, as do all the former ones. It rather uses particular, mostly active verbs that tell what this school subject is supposed to *do*: *Norwegian...is a central subject...*, *...establishes itself between...*, *...relates to a broad spectrum of texts...*, *...shall help students to orient...*, *...shall cater for...*etc. In other words: Norwegian in this curricular context is seen, not so much as a defined content (nouns), but rather as an action (verbs) which is consistent with the title for the chapter, *Goals for the subject* [Norw.: formål med faget] (UFD 2005:37). This means that even the description of the school subject has moved from categorisation to action, from semantic 'linguaging' to functional communicating.

The impression one gets of the curricula from 1940 is that language is clearly seen as a closed and thus, in a Saussurean sense, formal entity. Even if the wording of the 1974 goals is slightly different, they seemingly build on the same ideological conceptualisation of language. With the 1987 and 1997 plans we are moving more towards communicational ideologies. The 1987 curriculum actually gives an explicit view on the function of language; pragmatics is important, but still mostly separate: Language is a means to orient oneself in the world, to make contact with others and for personal development (KUF 1988:129, my underlining). The implicit model is: language + use = communication. Nevertheless,

it also implicitly relates ‘Habermasian’ lifeworlds (self, world and society) systemically to language and its functions. This curriculum further comments upon Norwegian as a school subject: *Norwegian is a communicational subject, an aesthetic subject and a central subject for maintaining culture and tradition. It is further a basic tool subject in school [and] (...) an attitudinal subject* (KUF 1988:129). This new pattern of disciplinary self-awareness is followed up in the 1997 plan. Over the first pages six significant aspects are outlined, each ending with a conclusion:

(...) The subject Norwegian is about identity. [Norsk er eit identitetsfag.]

(...) The subject Norwegian is about experience. [Norsk er eit opplevingsfag]

(...) The subject Norwegian is about becoming educated. [Norsk er eit danningsfag.]

(...) The subject Norwegian is about culture. [Norsk er eit kulturfag.]

(...) The subject Norwegian is about skills. [Norsk er eit dugleiksfag.]

(...) The subject Norwegian is about communication [Norsk er eit kommunikasjonsfag.]

(TRMERCA 1999:121-123)

In the 2006 plan (R06) these aspects have been subtracted, shortened, concentrated, or reduced: *Norwegian is a central subject for cultural understanding, communication, ‘Bildung’ and development of identity* (UFD 2005: 37, my translation).

## Summing up comparatively

The curriculum of 1940 focuses on language and its form (mainly **nationalistic?**). The curricular goals are few and specific. In the 1974 curriculum *both* language and literature are important (now more **literary?**). The curricular goals are still few and specific. There is still no visible break with former views of the relationship between language and communication.

In 1987 «communication» as a perception has become a competitor to language (**functionalistic?**). The curricular goals are now, from a didactic point of view more manifold and ambitious. There is a focal shift from language to student, and it is new that Norwegian is described

or defined as a school subject. With the 1997 curriculum language as a phenomenon seems to be secondary to developing student's discursive abilities (**constructivistic?**); Norwegian is a discipline where teaching is secondary to learning. Furthermore, language has become a learning instrument (**meta-cognitive?**). Descriptions of the 'nature' of the school subject Norwegian in six parts reflect a conscious (explicit) self-understanding of what «Norwegian» has become – or more normatively – should strive to become. Its disciplinarity has shifted (Elbow 1990).

In 2006 no *overall* goals are given. There is a shift though to 'competence goals' expected to be reached (and evaluated?) after year 2, 4, 7 and 10. 'Text' is now a dominant part of the school subject (**textual?**), diminishing the concepts and the former disciplinary constituents «language» and «literature». The school subject is given particular purposes, rather than being described as content elements. The curriculum *communicates*.

For a future European framework for 'competencies' in MTE/SLE/LE and in the next steps of development in national school subjects, these paradigmatic tendencies will be crucial and inevitable (de Beaugrande 1998), since it seems likely that the main curricular aspects in some sense will be part of the overall disciplinary web (Ongstad 2005a/b).

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## MOTHER TONGUE EDUCATION (MTE)<sup>1</sup> IN AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

### Introduction: some lessons in writing

Suppose we meet a European pupil, 11 years of age, who tells us he/she is able to write e.g. a nice fictional text. What do we know then about his/her writing competences? Of course these competences depend to a large extent on his/her education in writing, and that in turn depends to a large extent on the national 'definition' of those competences. I have studied writing lessons in different European countries (Van de Ven 1994). I described each lesson based on observation and audio recording. I also interviewed the teachers about their objectives with these lessons.

In a series of lessons Hungarian pupils (11 years of age) read a very long poem. In one of the lessons the teacher analysed the way the landscape is pictured in the poem. The pupils were given the assignment of writing a short text, dealing with one of the episodes in the poem (the

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<sup>1</sup> With 'Mother tongue education' I refer to the school subject Dutch in The Netherlands and Flanders, German in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Swedish in Sweden, etc. This is a traditionally used concept. I am aware that it does not cover exactly what we mean while discussing those school subjects. But there simply does not exist an international concept for this phenomenon, covering 'reality' (cfr. Herrlitz & Van de Ven, forthcoming, and presenting a rather extended version of this paper).

hero saving a princess). The teacher told the pupils that she would evaluate their texts with special attention to the way they pictured the landscape. I characterised this lesson (and the other lessons by the same teacher) as representing a product-oriented and modelling approach to writing, showing a monologic educational ‘archetype’: the teacher transmitting her knowledge and standards to the pupils (cfr. Nystrand *et al.* 1997).

In a series of lessons the pupils in Sweden (11 years of age) read a children’s book about space adventures. The teacher started a role play, in which the children were supposed to be colonists trying to reach a new planet. They were given the assignment of writing a text about life on board their space shuttle. The teacher stimulated their writing with some concrete topical questions (What do you think about? Who is your friend? What are the rules? What interaction is there?, etc.). The texts were then read aloud in the classroom. The teacher gave positive feedback, praising creativity. I characterised this lesson (and other lessons as well) as a form of creative writing, stimulated by brainstorming and a writing context. This lesson represented a dialogic educational archetype, in which the teacher stimulates the pupils to use their own understanding of the situation, their own knowledge to fulfil the assignment (cfr. Nystrand *et al.* 1997). I observed some other lessons in other countries, perceiving similar differences. In short: pupils of 11 years of age all get writing lessons, but the conceptions of writing, of writing standards, of educational methods sometimes differ to a large extent. What do we know when a pupil tells that he/she is able to write a text?

I observed lessons in the Netherlands and in Norway as part of an international comparative research study (Smidt & Van de Ven 1994). I interviewed a 17 year-old Dutch girl called Alice, who enjoyed learning how to write narrative and personal texts, but hardly got the opportunity to do so in the Dutch context of final examinations, while her Norwegian counterpart Siri profits from the opportunity to practise writing such texts. What do we know when both girls tell us they are able to write a personal text, thanks to or even despite their education? (cf. Smidt 2002, Van de Ven 2001)

It is important to consider the lessons I observed and the teachers and students I interviewed as representing national conceptions of writing education. They are not representative in a statistical sense, but in a cultural sense. The teachers, accounting for their lessons, referred to schoolbooks, curricula, examinations and educational traditions, so these lessons can be seen as representing national traditions of mother tongue education.

# 1. The International Mother Tongue Education Network

My research was carried out as part of the research program of the International Mother Tongue Education Network (IMEN; cf. Herrlitz, Ongstad & Van de Ven, forthcoming)<sup>2</sup>. IMEN started from a rather personal experience. Moving from Germany to the Netherlands Herrlitz discovered that the meaning of the word “grammar” (German “Grammatik”, Dutch “grammatica”) turned out to be rather different; whereas in German mother tongue education, the teaching of grammar may include reflections on language structure and use, in Dutch mother tongue teaching there is a sharp opposition between grammar and reflection on language. According to Herrlitz, this difference proved to be only the tip of an iceberg. Patterns, position and meaning of familiar concepts like the teaching of language and literature, language proficiency, the school’s canon of literary texts etc., which on the surface seemed to be identical or at least similar, appeared to be different in the longer run. Teaching Dutch (“Nederlands”) in the Netherlands, and German (“Deutsch”) in Germany is not at all the “same” process related to two different languages: it belongs to two different cultures of education. To Herrlitz’s surprise, the same seemed to be true of the teaching of the subject “German” in Austria, Germany and Switzerland, or the subject “Dutch” in Belgium (Flanders) and the Netherlands (Herrlitz & Peterse 1984).

Herrlitz, together with Dutch scholars, took the initiative of developing IMEN. They discovered that there was no comparative research tradition IMEN could join. Comparative research hardly dealt with school subject content. And the existing research on mother tongue education appeared deeply rooted in the different traditions of national education systems and language communities. A new, international, research group was needed, and a new methodology for international comparison. The interest in comparative analyses of the content level of MTE and the reconstruction of differences in meaning construction in different cultures of MTE implied a certain preference for a qualitative research methodology belonging to an interpretive research tradition in which the researcher tries to understand the world of human experience from the perspective of those involved and the social and historical interests being served by those experiences.

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<sup>2</sup> See also: [www.lu.hio.no/imen/](http://www.lu.hio.no/imen/).

In this contribution I will present some global results of IMEN research, illustrated by some examples, like those presented in the sections above. In the IMEN research, differences as well as similarities were discovered.

## 2. Differences

Although in different European countries mother tongue education emanates from the tradition of Latin and Greek education, at first sight there are important national differences. In the section above I referred to differences in teaching grammar and writing. Other examples concern the teaching of literature, conceptual dimensions, and the structure of the field or discipline of mother tongue education.

### 2.1. Literature

With a Hungarian colleague (see Angyal & Van de Ven 1991) I explored respectively Hungarian and Dutch perspectives on literature teaching. In Hungarian literature education the transmission of cultural heritage appeared to be a leading argument for teaching literature and literary history – which was similar to the Dutch situation. But it became very confusing for me to perceive that attention was paid in Hungarian literature education to Homer and Shakespeare, to Greek myths, to the Finnish Kalevala, to authors like La Fontaine, Andersen, Puskin, Rimbaud. In the Dutch tradition the cultural heritage had been restricted to the national cultural heritage, while in Hungary this cultural heritage showed a more European perspective. There are other IMEN reports illustrating that there are different national cultures of literature education in England, France, Italy, Sweden, Flanders,...<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> I cannot deal with all IMEN research in detail, in order to give evidence for all my statements. In Herrlitz, Ongstad & Van de Ven (forthcoming) an overview of IMEN publications is presented. See also: [www.lu.hio.no/imen/](http://www.lu.hio.no/imen/) (accessed 22.3.2007).

## 2.2. Concepts

This cultural heritage perspective was labelled by my Hungarian colleague as a ‘functional’ approach to mother tongue education. She emphasised the difference between this conception of ‘functional’ and the more emancipatory conception of functional she perceived in publications from the UK (Angyal & Van de Ven 1991). In the Netherlands a functional approach on mother tongue and literature existed too, but had been operationalised along the lines of vocational training, while a Swedish colleague explained ‘functional’ in terms of authentic learning (Malmgren & Van de Ven 1994).

International research provokes a lot of such conceptual problems. ‘Cultural heritage’ and ‘functional’ are not alone in being given different meanings by researchers from different countries. We also discovered problems in international interaction using concepts like didactics, whose meaning in English is not similar to didaktiek (Dutch), Didaktik (German, Scandinavian) or la didactique (French). There are also concepts that appear to be hardly translatable, like ‘Bildung’ (German), or a similar Norwegian/Danish concept like ‘dannelse’ (cf. Hardcastle 1999).

## 2.3. Field structures

Documents on education – teachers’ handbooks, curriculum materials, students’ exercise books, syllabi, ethnographic studies, etc. – have one feature in common: they generally reflect the subject structure of schooling. This is because institutionalised education in secondary education in Europe is not primarily the *general* formation of pupils’ minds and personalities but *specific* training in particular *disciplines*; *schooling* is a *disciplined* process – in the double meaning of «bound to school (and very often also university) subjects» and «highly controlled by rules of behaviour and interaction». Bernstein (1971) considers discipline as the centre of schooling; from that consideration he draws the conclusion that *classification* – a term that „refers to the degree of boundary maintenance between contents” (Bernstein 1971: 49) – can be used to identify and compare different types of curricula, implying different structures of educational knowledge. According to the strength of boundaries between contents, educational documents can be classified

on the dimension of classification strength – getting a relative position between the extreme values of maximal versus minimal boundary strength (= strength of classification). In Bernstein’s concept, classification is related to the first meaning of the term discipline: the content structure of school subjects.

In the IMEN context, the meaning of classification has to be extended: this term refers not only to the «external» borders between contents of different school subjects but also to the «internal» boundaries between (sub)fields of one subject – mother tongue instruction.

The examples on writing in the introductory section of my text construct a relation between literature and writing, thus connecting sub-contents or topics of mother tongue education. From IMEN research (Delnoy, Haueis & Kroon 1992) we may draw the conclusion that the boundaries between (sub)fields of mother tongue education differ in size and strength. Constituents like literature, writing, oral communication, grammar, new media, reading, are differently mutually connected (or not). There are differences in the patterns of dominance between these constituents, literature being dominant in Germany, language abilities in the Netherlands. Not all countries have the same constituents, although literature, grammar, reading and writing appear to be the ‘hard core’ of the subject.

### 3. ‘Similarities’

There are nevertheless also similarities between different European countries. In many European countries there is a paradigmatic debate on mother tongue education. International comparison elucidates that these paradigms are more or less similar in the different countries. Each country also shows a difference between rhetoric and practice.

#### 3.1. A paradigmatic debate

In reports on the history of mother tongue education the school subject has been characterised at a poly-paradigmatic arena. From its start as a school subject in institutionalised secondary education (in many

countries end of 18<sup>th</sup>, beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century) different paradigms of mother tongue arose in more or less the same period, in more or less similar social-economic circumstances. A ‘paradigm’ can be loosely described as a community of scholars (and of teachers) sharing agreement on topics, activities and legitimating mother tongue education, thus creating a certain ‘meaning creating context’ (Englund 1996). In such paradigmatic meaning creating context, terms like ‘communication’ or ‘literature’ get different meanings. In the 1970s, for example, ‘communication’ as a core concept of mother tongue education included conceptualisation, and aimed at emancipation. In the 1990s a more utilitarian paradigm defined ‘communication’ mainly as training vocational skills. Similar differences concern the notion of literature: it might be understood as ‘high literature’ or ‘fiction’, including youth and mass literature as well.

Van de Ven (2005) distinguishes between four main paradigms in at least six different European countries, characterised not only by differences in topics and their ‘meanings’ but also in related beliefs on teaching and learning. It is important to be aware that paradigms compete for dominance, but older ones do not disappear when a new one wins the battle; they remain in the paradigmatic debate as a strong alternative. Because mother tongue education is a poly-paradigmatic field, core concepts of the subject (communication, writing, literature) are poly-interpretable concepts. This causes misunderstandings and often un-understood disagreements.

Reports on the recent history of mother tongue education (Herrlitz *et al.* 1984; Delnoy, Herrlitz & Kroon 1995) show a paradigmatic change round 1965 in all 17 countries involved in this research enterprise, with the possible exception of Turkey. In these countries teaching practices in all schools and at all levels were modelled on or oriented to mother tongue teaching in the highest grades of the classical gymnasium. Mother tongue education was primarily literary education; central to it was the literary canon which was traditionally accepted as the cultural heritage in the respective speech communities. Complementary to the teaching of literature, a form of grammar was being taught which was modelled on classical grammar. In all systems of mother tongue education a basic form of written composition was being taught, the precise form and nature of which differed from one country to another (e.g. in England the «composition», in Germany the «Besinnungsaufsatz», in Denmark the «essay», in Norway ‘stil’, etc.) and which, typically, was unrelated to the forms of written communication normally employed in society.

Around 1970 this canonical model of mother tongue teaching came under attack from progressive educationalists throughout Europe, although the precise moment when it had its greatest effect varied from one country to another. The attack on traditional teaching concepts and methods, which went on more or less unhampered by cultural contexts or socio-political counter-forces, created a need for reform everywhere.

Though the traditional situation was to some extent being broken up, it was not replaced by a new «canonical situation». It would be nearer the truth to speak of a number of «streams of innovation» or «streams of reform» which engendered political and educational debates and controversies and which finally led to more or less far-reaching reforms, but not to a new homogeneous standard situation.

### 3.2. Rhetorics and practices

One must be aware that this paradigmatic change was very clearly formulated on the rhetorical level. On the pragmatic level the discontinuity of the paradigmatic change has been less visible. IMEN research illuminated another similarity of mother tongue education (and in fact of education) in different countries: the gaps between rhetoric and practice, the gaps between ideological and formal curricula on the one hand and observable practice – the operational curriculum – on the other (cf. Goodlad 1979). The debates on mother tongue education are very often debates on a rhetorical level, not based upon empirical research or at least descriptions of what is going on in schools and classrooms.

## 4. Opposing trends

My paper is written in the context of the possible elaboration of a Common European Framework for ‘mother tongue education’. Such a common framework fits into a trend of (international) homogenisation, of globalisation. This trend of homogenisation however is challenged by other tendencies. First of all there is the problem of English as lingua franca, which causes problems of conceptual translation as referred above. One simply cannot express some important national concepts in

the English language. Secondly, the trend of homogenisation is also reflected in the development of national curricula. In most West-European countries, as a consequence of prolonging compulsory education and international migration movements the ethnic, socio-cultural and linguistic diversity in classrooms has considerably increased. This process of heterogenisation strongly contrasts with the trend of homogenisation reflected in the development of national curricula. These national curricula are thus to be understood in the context of the dilemma's of diversity and homogeneity, and also by the existing diversity in local and regional language variety.

The same holds true for homogenising tendencies as expressed in education in the national literature by establishing a national canon. But there also is a competing homogeneity in the perspective of teaching European literature, where national or European standards (the canon) and worldwide globalisation of (media) culture is competing with diversity caused by the attention for youth culture, youth literature, new genres and (new) media.

According to Kroon & Sturm (2003) the phenomenon of opposing tendencies is not new. Language education started in Europe mainly as education in Greek and especially in Latin (as *lingua franca*), which can be interpreted as a homogenising tendency. Afterwards, in the 15-17th centuries there was a movement into vernacular language education (mainly in elite education). This movement – at least in the Netherlands – clearly led to homogenisation: it standardised the vernacular language by means of a (prescriptive) grammar. This homogenising tendency on the national level is in the same time a heterogenising tendency seen from a European perspective. In the 19th century the national homogenisation increases by the emphasis on national language as characteristic of national identity, taught by prescriptive grammar, in forms of compulsory education.

The social tendency to homogenisation is grounded in the Enlightenment and its idea of human equality: equal rights and duties for everybody. In the same time, this tendency is grounded too in the idea of one nation with a homogeneous language and culture and the educational concept of one national culture and one national identity in which everybody participates.

On the other hand, there is – also grounded in the Enlightenment principle of human equality – the idea of the equality of all languages and cultures which leads to particularism instead of homogenisation of nations and to an educational concept of a culture which houses multiple

subcultures, resulting in regional or even local identities in which everybody participates in his manner and style.

It seems that the same Enlightened ideal results in opposite tendencies of homogenisation and differentiation, respectively.

## Conclusion

Mother tongue education is ‘a social construct’. There are different conceptions of language, grammar, literature, etc. based upon paradigmatic choices (mainly in rhetoric) and national-cultural traditions as well. The field structure of the school subject differs too. In the discourse of mother tongue education a fundamental distinction should be made between the level of *rhetoric* (the formal and ideological curriculum) and the level of *practice* (classroom activities). There is a considerable gap between these two levels. What do we know then when a student writes in his/her portfolio that he/she is able to write a text?

The construction of a Common European Framework for mother tongue education is nevertheless an interesting enterprise. Although IMEN succeeded in starting some international discourse on mother tongue education, although there are interesting developments like the activities of the International Association for the Improvement of Mother Tongue Education (IAIMTE)<sup>4</sup> and its periodical *L1 – educational studies in language and literature*, still the international discourse on mother tongue education is not a very strong one. The construction of a Common Framework could be an issue provoking new discussions and co-operation. I see such a framework as a starting point for dialogue, in which differences are explored, accepted, valued, with the objective of reaching more and deeper mutual understanding of these differences. Perhaps such a framework could lead to a broader agreement on mother tongue education, on joint standards. But in those standards also possibilities for differentiation should be present – in the light of the Enlightenment.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.ilo.uva.nl/development/iaimte/default.html](http://www.ilo.uva.nl/development/iaimte/default.html) (accessed 22.3.2007).

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# THE COMPLEXITIES OF “WRITING”: CONCEPTIONS OF WRITING AND THE TEACHING OF WRITING IN NORWAY AND OTHER COUNTRIES

## Introduction

In a European setting, and indeed in most of the world today, writing is considered a basic skill, important in most walks of life and used in nearly all school subjects. Thus, in the new Norwegian national curriculum for ages 6 to 19, all school subjects are responsible for developing writing skills (*Kunnskapsløftet* 2005). However, as the IEA study of writing competence showed (Purves ed. 1992), there is no universal consensus about *which writing skills* should be developed in schools, which *criteria* should be used to *assess* writing competence, and, indeed, exactly what is *meant* when we speak about “writing competence”. Writing in the natural sciences is usually a very different thing from writing narratives or argumentative texts in subjects like “Norwegian” or “English”. It is today accepted that literacy is best understood as “literacies”, connected to different social and cultural functions and spheres (Barton 1994, Fairclough 1992).

Obviously, then there is a need for the content of “a common European framework of reference for languages of school education” to address the case of school writing. In this paper I will make the point that in order to do so, it is important first to understand what is actually implied by terms like *writing*, *writing competence*, and *the teaching of writing* in different

countries. I suggest that international comparative case studies may be helpful to build such an understanding. I shall give, first, a summary of a comparative case study of school writing in Norway and the Netherlands, conducted some years ago within the IMEN network, and then, as an invitation to new comparative studies of school writing, I offer a glimpse of what writing may mean today in a Norwegian elementary school.

## **1. Writing and the teaching of writing in Norway and the Netherlands – the NONE project**

In the NONE (Norway/the Netherlands) project two research projects were combined. Piet-Hein van de Ven sampled data from four writing lessons by one teacher in the last two forms of upper general secondary education in the Netherlands. I carried out a longitudinal research project on students' writing during three years of Norwegian upper secondary school. In 1992 we decided to make a comparative analysis of some "incidents" taken from our lesson protocols. Building on IMEN methodology, the Dialogue-Testing-Dialogue procedure for international comparison of mother tongue education (Herrlitz & Sturm 1991), we exchanged and analysed the "incidents", systematically comparing and discussing our interpretations of the data as we went along. In a joint presentation (Smidt & Van de Ven 1994) we analysed lessons in which Norwegian teacher Gunnar in his Norwegian class, and Dutch teacher Henri in his Dutch class, give their students writing instructions and guide them in writing the sort of pieces that they are expected to produce in the final national tests of writing competence in the two countries.

We were of course acutely aware that these two "incidents" could not in any simple sense be seen as representative of writing instruction in the Netherlands and Norway. Nor are they directly comparable in every respect. But, as we say in our joint paper:

We do, nevertheless, base our comparative study on the assumption that it is possible, through the windows of such incidents, to identify at least some of the characteristics of the school systems and cultures that teachers and pupils in the two classes have to take into account in what they say and do. It may for instance be possible to see what sort of writing is taken for granted or considered possible within these different school cultures.

(Smidt & Van de Ven 1994: 96)

Through our cooperative and comparative close analysis and interpretation of the way the two teachers talked about and organized writing in their classes, we were able to identify some of the key concepts in what might be called the “hidden curriculum” of writing in upper secondary education in the Netherlands and Norway. A very brief example might give you an idea of this. First, let us hear Gunnar introducing his list of six optional topics or assignments (“*oppgaver*”) for his students:

/.../ These assignments we will go through in *full* class. One is a – (writes “*tolkning*” on the blackboard) – and the first one is an “*interpretation*” [*tolkning*], and it is based on the text – „Perleporten” – which we will start with on Tuesday. In the course of Tuesday that text will be *thoroughly* discussed. That means – that means that you will have material [*stoff*]. This time our emphasis will be on *the writing*. The material will have been thoroughly gone through. You will come home with a lot that you got in the two hours of interpretation. Then the thing is to *work it out* to be an “interpretation”. The second one (writes on the blackboard) will be an analysis [literally: a “going through”] of a text you will get handed out, which will be a “*pragmatic analysis*” [*språkbruksanalyse*], a – an assignment that – of the type we have been through earlier, a typical exam assignment. /.../

(Smidt & Van de Ven 1994: 84, some corrections made here)

And here is Henri in his Dutch class, referring to a previous brainstorming in class about “issues you dislike very much”, telling his students how to get started with an “enraged text”:

/.../ Well, with that stuff you are going to choose one of the three issues, does not even have to be one of those three, but probably there is one issue present, one issue of the three of which you say, well, I am going to use it, and you are now going to, in that style that is nicely individual, and rather biting, you are going to search for some extension and you are going to transform that in a nice piece of language. Is to be subdivided into paragraphs, and then just powerfully noted down why you dislike that very issue so terribly. /.../ What I want to agree with you now, or rather what I want to discuss with you now, are some stylistic means, which can be very useful. /.../

(Smidt & Van de Ven 1994: 91f, a few corrections made)

Even these very brief quotations indicate a difference in the culture of secondary school writing in the two countries. For instance, in the Norwegian example a key concept is "*oppgaver*". "*Oppgaver*" are formulated topics or assignments for writing, instructing not only the subject matter of the text to be written, but also very much the way it should be handled: the exam genre (Ongstad 1993, 1999). In his Norwegian lesson Gunnar therefore promises his students to "go through" (another key concept in the teaching of writing in Norway) what the different exam genres demand. In the Netherlands, the focus seems to be more on the issues and stylistics. On the institutional or system level this difference can be explained by the different exam or testing systems in the two countries. The exam systems in their turn are connected to the traditions of school writing in the two countries, in which certain key concepts in one country may not even have a perfect equivalent in another country and another language. Indeed, the Norwegian "*oppgaver*" is not easily translated into Dutch or English (Smidt 2002).

Cultural differences lead to different teaching practices: In Norway students are supposed to read texts and in some cases analyse texts before writing, in the Netherlands there may be brainstorming instead. Gunnar in his pre-writing phase explains the demands of the exam genre, Henri moves on to stylistics, relying on a classical rhetorical tradition. In all of this we get a glimpse of the hidden curricula of school writing. Norwegian upper secondary school writing aims at the mastering of various genres, some of them based on analysis of texts, literary or nonfiction, while in the Dutch case Henri seems to represent a European humanistic tradition of what is seen as sign of a mature writer: to be able to express an opinion effectively, combining the specific and the general (Smidt & Van de Ven 1994: 98).

Returning to our present day situation, we see that the NONE project demonstrates, first, the need to describe and understand the differences in what "writing" and "teaching writing" means in different cultural settings, and, secondly, the usefulness of international comparison in achieving this goal.

## 2. Writing in Norwegian schools today

Let us now take a look at what writing and teaching writing might imply in contemporary Norwegian elementary education. It is worth

noting that in Norway, as in many other European countries, international tests (PISA, PIRLS) have brought about a stronger political interest for what is called basic competences. In the new national curriculum for schools 1-13 in Norway (*Kunnskapsløftet* 2005), writing is defined as one of five basic competences, to be developed in all school subjects, across the curriculum. This means that writing in school subjects like biology, mathematics, physics, history and religion gets more attention than before. At the same time there is a growing interest today in other aspects of written texts than the purely linguistic side of them. Most of the texts that surround us in our daily life, including the ones produced by children at school and elsewhere, depend on other sign systems besides the verbal. Indeed, as Kress & Van Leeuwen (1996) would say, all texts are in some respect *multimodal*<sup>1</sup>.

In a recently started qualitative study of writing across the curriculum in Norwegian elementary and secondary schools we want to describe and discuss the characteristics of writing in different school subjects, and the implicit or explicit norms of writing that we find in Norwegian schools from kindergarten to upper secondary school. 14 schools and kindergartens are involved in this two-year project, and 17 researchers covering the school subjects Norwegian, social sciences (including history), natural science, mathematics, and religion. We want to find out how writing is developed as a “basic competence” in different school subjects, and how students develop specific subject competence and knowledge through writing. In a first exploratory phase we want to get an understanding of the cultures and norms of writing that are in force at different age levels and in different subjects, and so we ask questions like these: What is writing used for in different school subjects and at different age levels? What sort of writing is encouraged? What are the writing tasks and genres used? Are there specific “cultures of writing” connected to different subjects? In this initial phase our methods are largely ethnographic, involving observation of writing practices in the classroom, interviews with teachers, and the collection of written material: teachers’ plans etc. and (most importantly) students’ written texts.

In the following I want to share the preliminary results of a pilot study for this writing project. In this study I observed, at intervals through the school year 2005-2006, the writing and the teaching of writing across the curriculum, on the fourth-year level in a city elementary school. My

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<sup>1</sup> See also Frydensbjerg Elf, this volume.

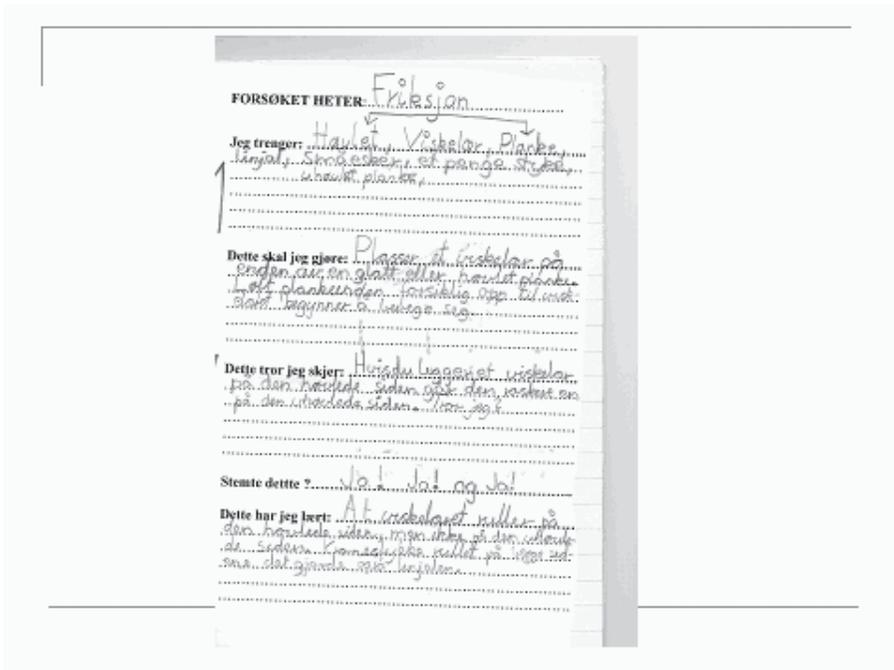
focus here will be on the scope of genres and purposes and the patterns and norms of writing that I found in the writing activities in this class.

### 3. Writing in a fourth year class in Norway

In Norway the fourth year at school means that the children are between 9 and 10 years old. These children write every day at school, and I am struck by the great variety of genres and purposes of writing. Let me give an impression of this variety.

The school year in this class is organised in periods or sections, each with a main theme or topic. For instance, in the autumn term three of the main topics were “*Long ago*”, about the ice age and stone age, involving school subjects like history (but also natural science, religion etc), “*Out in the world*”, about great personalities like Albert Schweitzer and Mother Theresa, involving subjects like geography, history and religion, and “*Technology and design*”, involving science (e.g. physics) and mathematics etc. The spring term of 2006 started with a topic called “*Space*”, involving science (astronomy, physics) and religion (mythology). (In addition to the above-mentioned subjects, teachers would always consider Norwegian as being involved, since all topics implied reading and writing.)

In the period about “technology and design” the children made their own technical constructions and conducted various physical experiments. One particular experiment was intended to give the children an understanding of the phenomenon of friction, with various objects sliding on changing surfaces. Here is Marina on her way into one of the genres of science, the report of an experiment:



The text is generically prestructured by the teacher with guiding headlines for the different sections:

**FORSØKET HETER [THE EXPERIMENT IS CALLED]:.....**

(Here Marina fills in “Friksjon” [friction])

**Jeg trenger [I need]:.....** (Here Marina, somewhat unsystematically, lists a plank, rough on one side and planed on the other, a rubber eraser, a ruler, and a coin that the children were given)

**Dette skal jeg gjøre [This is what I am going to do]:.....**

**Dette tror jeg skjer [This I think will happen]:.....**

**Stemte dette? [Was this confirmed?]:.....**

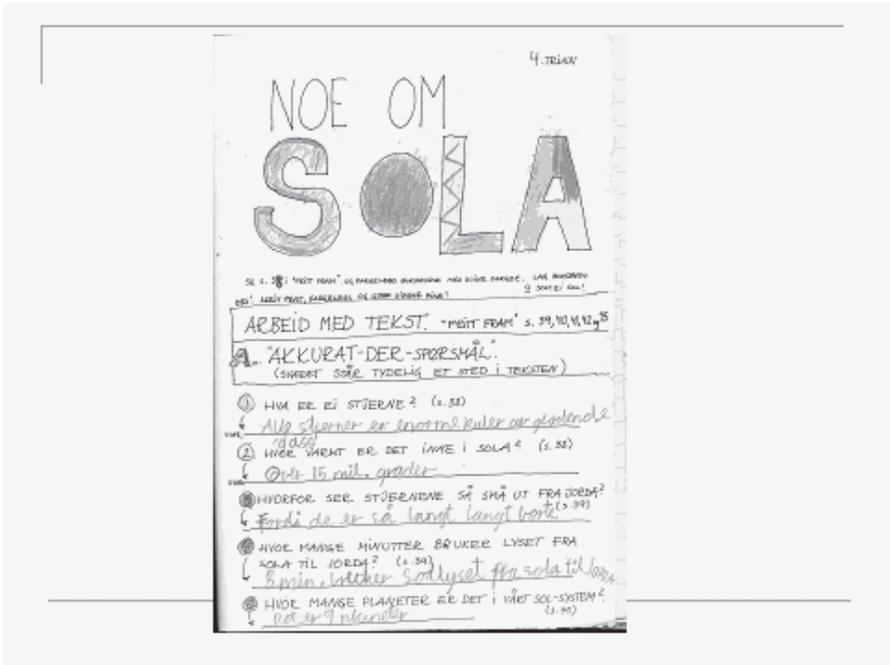
**Dette lærte jeg [This is what I learned]:.....**

As we can see here, the children are helped not only to explore and experience the phenomenon of friction, but are also guided into a way of working and thinking and expressing themselves: the testing of hypotheses in science experiments and the corresponding written genre. At this point in her literacy development, there are of course certain conflicts between the scientific structuring of the text and Marina’s way of writing, as when she, answering the question “Stemte dette?” (“Was this confirmed?”), enthusiastically writes “Ja! Ja! og Ja!” (“Yes! Yes! and Yes!”). Nevertheless, Marina is certainly on her way to learn the

ways of the science report. For instance, in science texts the graphic figures and illustrations are often important, making the text multimodal, and here, accompanying her written account of the experiment, is Marina's visualisation of it:



This example, then, shows novices on their way into “communities of practice” (Wenger 1998) or “discourses” (Fairclough 1992). As we all know, school as an institution is in itself a community of practice with “schoolish” genres that are used in many subjects. For instance, a well-known written genre at school is the genre of questions and short answers, where the right answers may often be found in a text the children have read or have at hand, as in the following example. Marina’s classmate Thomas answers teacher’s questions about the sun on a work sheet:



This is traditional factual writing, as we might expect in a period devoted to learning about “space”. However, in the same period, while working with the solar system, the children also got a chance to write stories and poems about the moon. In Thomas’ case this resulted in a very imaginative and humorous story about the full moon going to the moon doctor (the “man in the moon”) because of his drinking problems! The humorous point is based on the double meaning of the word “fuld” in Norwegian: “full” and “intoxicated”.

This example, then, shows that in Norwegian elementary schools today writing in connection with science topics like space is not necessarily limited to the traditional genres of factual knowledge and science. Thus, there is a great deal of writing in connection with the main topics through the school year. It is often used as a tool for learning, establishing not only factual knowledge but also the terminology and genres of other school subjects than Norwegian (natural sciences in my examples). Language and genres, far from being unimportant in this sort of writing, are usually taken for granted and not foregrounded. However, writing in connection with science topics like space and technology is not limited to standard ways of constructing knowledge in the genres of the natural sciences, as we could see from Thomas’ story about the “full moon”.

Running parallel to and in between work with the main topics there is a great deal of other writing in this fourth year class. As the teachers explicitly point out in their plans for the year, the basic subjects Norwegian, mathematics and English are integrated in the main topics whenever possible, but also “stand on their own” (Teachers’ *Temaplan 2005-2006*). In this “other” writing, *topics* can be more incidental or general, often connected to daily life, for instance hobbies, or activities at home or at school: holidays, school excursions etc. To give you an example, the girls in the class had an excursion with their teacher – a “Girls’ Trip” (*Jentetur*), and made a mind map – a genre often used in this class – the day afterwards. Then, supposedly based on their mind maps, they all wrote “books” telling about their experiences from the trip.

This “other” writing, which is not connected to the main topics, appears to be seen by the teachers as writing in the school subject “Norwegian”. In my preliminary study this seems to imply less focus on topics and more on language, textual structure and the organization of texts. Working with informative, expository texts and stories the teachers teach their children the use of mind maps and to organize texts in *introduction, main section* etc.. The genres too are foregrounded in writing in “Norwegian”: The teachers want their children to learn to write “*fantasy stories*”, *songs, poems, personal letters* and *informative texts*, for instance.

#### 4. Results of pilot study

The results of my preliminary study of what writing means in this class can be summarised in three points:

- 1) The study suggests that writing in a Norwegian fourth-year class spans a great many genres and purposes: organising knowledge in mind maps, imaginative writing, trying out ideas, communicating with others, constructing knowledge, etc.
- 2) In teachers’ planning of their writing instruction there seem to be two different framings:
  - a) with a focus on *content and topic* – often connected to school subjects other than “Norwegian”. Here language and genre and purpose tend to be taken for granted and are not so much foregrounded.

- b) with a focus on *form and purpose*: language, style, text structure and genre, often based on the systematic organisation of text books for the subject “Norwegian”, focusing on language and genres. Here the topic, although never unimportant, is not foregrounded.
- 3) Learning to write is an integrated part of learning the various ways of constructing and organising knowledge in different school subjects. In other words: learning at school about the world also means learning how to write (and speak) about it in various genres, as in the science report and the school test. This is consistent with what has been pointed out in many earlier studies (e.g. Miller 1984).

These preliminary findings will of course have to be explored more fully in the larger writing project of which this was a pilot study, and compared with the findings of other studies nationally and internationally.

## **5. The need for further studies and an invitation to international comparison**

This takes me to my concluding remarks. As I see it, if we want to develop “a common European framework of reference for languages of school education”, we will need further studies of what writing and the teaching of writing means, at different age levels, in different school subjects, and in different countries. What, for instance, is writing used for in different school subjects in European countries? Which are the genres that children meet and are supposed to learn? Are they the same in, say, England, Italy, Poland as in Norway? And what exactly is the relationship in the educational systems of various countries between writing in the L1 school subject and in other subjects? Do we see patterns like the one I observed in the Norwegian fourth-year class in other countries? In our newly started writing project we have established links to similar projects in Norway, Sweden and Denmark to answer questions like these, and we are also hoping to cooperate with the Netherlands. As my initial example from the NONE project indicated, international comparative studies may give us the opportunity to see more clearly what the cultural norms of writing are in our own country as well as in other countries.

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## LITERACY AND SEMIOCY: LEARNING FROM NEW MODES AND MEDIA OF LITERARY CLASSICS

### Introduction

For almost two centuries we have talked of language and literature as the main object of language as subject (LS). Reflecting cultural change, however, this paper argues that we should rethink this object. In general, the language curriculum should rephrase its terminology, moving from ‘language’ to ‘making meaning’, and rethink its rationale moving from literacy to semiocy. Semiocy is defined as a person’s mediated multimodal meaning-making competence to reflect and act, on the basis of understanding, upon a situated demand in purposeful ways. It is something we *do*, in private and professional domains, on an everyday basis. It is a core communicative competence for a successful life and well-being in future society. But it is not *a* rationale that is incorporated, systematically, in existing frameworks of reference for languages of school education. In order to clarify this problem, and suggest its relevance for the upcoming Council of Europe project on Languages of Education, this article approaches the semiocy concept from three angles: 1) theory, 2) case analysis, and 3) critical-constructive final remarks.

## 1. Theory

Since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, educational thinking in Europe has developed a strong tradition for identifying LS with the general framework of teaching language and literature. Language-and-literature is the structural formula within which we reflect on the actual and potential practice of LS. We may term this formula the *dominating* theory (T1) of LS. Although this theory has proved very successful, researchers working in local or comparative contexts also point at problematic aspects of T1. One fundamental problem is that it has served the function of nation building. This is a problem if one acknowledges – contrary to Herder in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and many contemporary politicians – that we construct our identities in an increasingly globalised and media-saturated world. But what’s the alternative, then?

On the homepage of the International Mother Tongue Education Network (IMEN)<sup>1</sup>, the discursive existence and dominance of the language-literature theory is termed a dyadic split. IMEN calls for research that “caters for other aspects of MTE that do not fit this dyadic split, such as media, semiotics, text, ICT, drama, StLE as L2 education”. These keywords reflect a cultural shift from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, suggesting that we as researchers, teachers, and policy-makers should move beyond, scrutinizing and testing T1 by drawing on new disciplinary optics that seem to grasp, albeit in rough ways, the complexity of contemporary, global, semiotic culture – while at the same time acknowledging local nation bound history and identity, including language.

One way of doing so, I will argue in the following, is to focus on the three notions *mode*, *media* and *semiocy*. These three notions could function as a functional, adequate and robust terminological alternative for LS agents dialoguing with each other on micro, meso and macro levels: In classroom practice, teacher education, curriculum frameworks, even across national borders, such as in a European framework of reference for a language curriculum. We may term this the vernacular Theory 2 (T2) of LS. T2 is developed from a cross-disciplinary theory-building informed by social semiotics (Kress & Hodge 1988, among others), multimodality (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001), media pedagogy (Buckingham 2003), and socio-cognitive educational theory focusing

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<sup>1</sup> [www.lu.hio.no/imen/](http://www.lu.hio.no/imen/) (accessed 22.3.2007).

on competence-oriented knowledge production (Ryschen & Salganik 2003). This is not the time and place to be detailed about these theories and how we might be able to synthesize them. But, at least, let us be clear about the distinction modes and media. Kress offers a definition:

I use the term “mode” for the culturally and socially produced resources for representation and “medium” as the term for the culturally produced means for distribution of these representations-as-meanings, that is, as messages. These technologies – those of representation, the modes and those of dissemination, the media – are always both independent of and interdependent of each other. (Kress 2004: 6f)

Applying this definition, we realise that language is no longer simply language. Rather, language is understood as two different modes, speech and writing. Equally, literature could be understood as something more than a mode of writing. Culturally and socially we are trained to teach literature in classrooms as writing, hence focusing on this single, independent mode using historically developed analytical methods, predominantly biographically, existentially and textually oriented. But what about picture books combining words and images; and what about Apollinaire? The point is that a monomodal approach is not enough; rather, it is inadequate for describing any textual reality. Alternatively, we may propose, as a safe hypothesis, that if people are to be able to handle, in productive and creative ways, the full semiotic complexity of contemporary society, they need to be able to understand writing *independently*, but also *interdependently* in relation to the co-producing meaning-making of the *medium* it is marked on and the way *constellations of modes and medium* are distributed and actualised in different communicative contexts – in time and space – by local meaning-making agents, including students and teachers working in classroom communities. As shall be demonstrated in the case analysis, teaching Danish literary classic Hans Christian Andersen from this expanded perspective is both possible and relevant.

## 2. Case analysis

Moving from abstract theorisation to models of didactic design and analysis of communicative practices at school, Kress and Van Leeuwen suggest we move from questions like “‘what *is* a mode’ to questions like ‘how do people use the variety of semiotic resources to make signs in concrete social contexts’” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 2001: Preface). This alternative theoretical point of departure would have crucial implications for any kind of intervention in LS – and more broadly, languages of school education (LE) – we might consider, be it research or political interventions. It opens up for a framework that allows teachers to orchestrate what we might term a holistic, competence-oriented kind of teaching in which students meet and are demanded to act upon semiotic resources in purposeful ways – that is, developing their *semiocy*. As literacy researcher Gee has argued, being inspired by Dewey’s pragmatism, *semiotic* domains should move into and form the *academic* domains of schools enabling active *knowing* instead of transmitting passive *knowledge*. Along these lines, we may propose a LS-related didactic model, which reflects the vital aspects and practices of this kind of teaching.

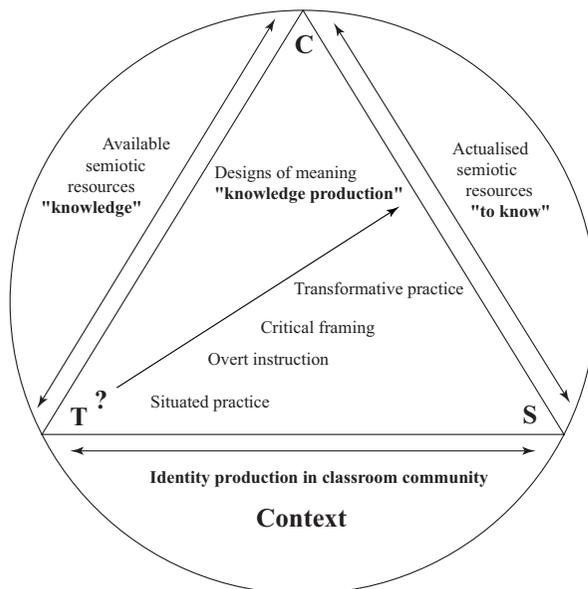


Fig 1. LS-related didactic model. Sign-codes: “C” stands for content, “T” for teacher, “S” for student, “?” for subject related question or problem presented to students.

The case analysis presented here is based on ongoing research and seeks to adapt the model outlined above to naturalistic settings; and vice versa, to let naturalistic settings help revise the model. The proper methodological etiquette is design-based intervention research (Barab & Squire 2004), which is a kind of qualitative research that engineers theory-informed empirical data of classroom practice that we may use for studying the potentials, constraints, and politics of knowledge production within LS.

The study was partly funded by the *H.C. Andersen 2005 Foundation*<sup>2</sup>. The foundation sought to promote, among other things, research that might broaden our use and understanding of the fairytale writer Andersen in educational contexts. My specific, and controversial, task was to apply a media pedagogic approach to Andersen. Controversy comes from the fact that Andersen is seen, in general, by Danes, as the most prominent, literary, nation-building writer that has ever existed. For Danish politicians, he was the name that came up first when they argued, recently, for the implementation of a canon in Danish that would help “new Danes”, in particular, understand what Danish culture is about. It follows from this that we should expect that the idea of applying a media pedagogic approach bringing old and new media and modes of Andersen into concrete, local classroom practice, was bound to become an intervention that would contest the knowledge regime of the subject, and the teachers participating in the study.

The data referred to is a *convenience sample* compounded by four cases. Four Danish teachers teaching Danish in upper-secondary education in four different locations in Denmark agreed to participate. Initially, the teachers expressed positive interest in both Andersen and media, arguing that the project would help them meet new demands in the Danish curriculum that emphasize that teachers should teach *with* and *about* media and ICT integrating this with the teaching of traditional topics (but with no advice or training of how to do so). The teachers chose one class each which they considered to be most motivated for the project. Students were 16+ when it began. Classes spanned from containing 21 to 28 students.

Preparing the teaching experiments, I found that it would be rather easy to move beyond the traditional monomodal teaching of Andersen that would take his writings in books as the (sole) point of departure. Other semiotic resources exist (see figure 2), more or less as an open

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<sup>2</sup> [www.hca2005.com](http://www.hca2005.com) (accessed 22.3.2007)

source (although copyright restriction is indeed an important constraint of media pedagogy). In Experiment 1, students would work with computer-remediated fairytales and 19<sup>th</sup> century newspaper reviews available on the Internet addressing the competence often referred to as *critical media literacy* (Lemke 2005). In Experiment 2, oral readings of Andersen fairytales and audiovisual and written material about how to make read outs were made available for work in the classroom community.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL [http://www.adl.dk/adl\\_pub/forfatter/je\\_forfatter/je\\_forfatter.vad?ff\\_id=22&noc](http://www.adl.dk/adl_pub/forfatter/je_forfatter/je_forfatter.vad?ff_id=22&noc). The page title is "H. C. Andersen" and it is part of the "Arkiv for Dansk Litteratur".

**Forfatter**  
**Periode**  
**Titel**  
**H. C. Andersen** Arkiv for Dansk Litteratur

**Forside** 1805 - 1875

**Titelliste**  
[Anvendt udgave](#)  
[Manuskriptliste](#)

**Forfatterportræt & bibliografi**

**Søg**  
**ADL forsider**

**//** Jeg finder, at Eventyr-Digtingen er Poesiens meest udstrakte Rige, det naaer fra Oldtids blodrygende Grave til den fromme barnlige Legendes Billedbog, optager i sig Folke-Digtingen og Kunst-Digtingen, det er mig Repræsentanten for al Poesie, og den, som mægter det, maa heni kunne lægge ind det Tragiske, det Komiske, det Naive, Ironien og Humoret, og har her baade den lyriske Strenghed, det Barnligtfortællende og Naturbeskriverens Sprog til sin Tjeneste

af "At være eller ikke være" 1857, Esthers replik i Tredie Deel, kap. VI.

**Andre ressourcer:**

[H.C. Andersen Online](#) (breve, dagbøger og eventyr, papirklip og portrætter, sangtekster fra Det Kongelige Bibliotek)

[Noder til tekster af H.C. Andersen](#)

**1805** Født i Odense

**1822** Udg. *Ungdoms-Forsøg af William Christen Walter*

**1828** Studentereksamen (kbh.)

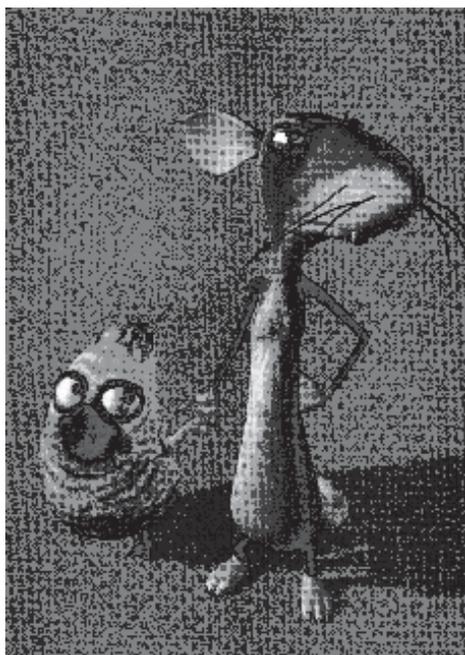
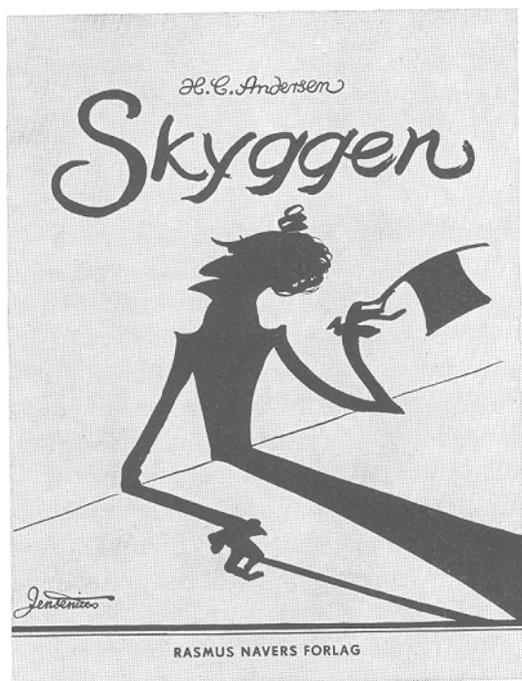
**1829** Examen philologium et philosophium

**1829** Egentlig debut (på eget forlag) med *Podreise fra Holstens Canal til Østbynten af Amager*.

**1829** Debut som dramatikker på Det kgl. Teater med *Kjærlighed paa Nicolai Taarn eller Hvad siger Parterret*

**1830** Første trykte prosaeventyr





In Experiment 3, Andersen picture books and other visual representations of his fairytales, produced from mid-19<sup>th</sup> century up till now, were made available. And in Experiment 4, 20<sup>th</sup> century animated Andersen fairytales and material about these and other animations were made available. Each experiment would last around 10 teaching lessons and include semiotic resources, tools and guidelines that would encourage teachers to demand certain kinds of competence-oriented or semiocyc-oriented knowledge production in class. The teachers were expected to *adapt* and *redesign* the available design from their professional, local perspective – not simply *implement* it.

Empirically speaking, one of the main findings was, clearly, that there are plenty of *potentials*, in terms of designing curriculum resources that include a variety of modes and media. And not only potentials: Many of the teacher and student actualisations of these resources, in specific contexts, show evidence of valuable, transformative, even surprising knowledge processes that prove the possibility, and importance, of moving from T1 to T2 in LS. This finding was most significant when observing so-called “media super users”; that is, students that were able to work with and reflect on a wide variety of modes, media, and technologies, while at the same time being able to encourage others in the classroom, including the teacher, to do the same, hence constructing a learning classroom community.

On the other hand, and related to this finding, the teaching and learning of Andersen from a multimodal media pedagogic view is *constrained*, not the least due to normative teacher and also student conceptions about what Danish is and is *not*. All four teachers were strongly rooted in the language-and-literature rationale of LS. As one of them – I call her Karen – sceptically put it at the initial meeting, “animated Andersen fairytales are often trivial; they remove the Mouton-Rothschild quality of the written stories”. She added though, after having taught Experiment 4 ten months later that “one can compensate for this by choosing the right analytical strategy, although the Disney animations are no match for the original!” It seems that during intervention Karen changed her conception of teaching new modes and media from clear scepticism to reluctant curiosity – her taste regime remaining the same.

Obviously, I cannot go into detail about the observations made of the intervention process and its four experiments. Only a snip of evidence will be offered of this play between potentials and constraints – from the third experiment that focused on Andersen picture books. As Ven has demonstrated (Ven 2005), picture books have been known to the LS

curriculum for at least a hundred years; they are part of a modern visual culture. Contemporary theorists of communication, including Kress, claim that children are extremely visually competent. In Danish primary school there is some tradition for teaching about and with Andersen picture books. So, we might expect that students in upper secondary education would be relatively competent to work with this kind of “double-modal” material. During the experiment, the class would run through several steps, working both collectively and individually with Andersen picture books, focusing, among other things, on how modes – in specific media – signify independently and interdependently with each other and with the medium in contexts. The end goal was that the student themselves should produce, individually, at home, an essay about an illustrated Andersen fairytale chosen by them. They were allowed, in their essay, to add creative illustrations produced by them. They were informed that a teacher evaluation would consider how they had responded to the demand of the experiment using its learning resources.

In my observations in all four classes, I found that teachers and students adapted, in engaging ways, the learning resources. Analysing the student essays, I found some sort of “personalisation” on the grounds that several students had searched for and found new illustrated fairytales, unknown to me, on the Internet that they seemed to be fascinated by. This was a productive, unexpected outcome. In their essays, however, I also found a significant counterproductive, or rather, enlightening, outcome. The dominating pattern in almost all essays, regardless of the teacher, was that pictures and illustrations were analysed as an *appendix*, completely detached from the analysis of the written fairytale. So, the student essays followed the well-known regime of that genre: The *written* fairytale was analysed thoroughly using the traditional methods; whereas the visual representation was analysed in quite formalistic ways; only few students seemed to connect modes and media. Only one student produced her own creative illustration in addition; the rest seemed to consider this option meaningless or silly.

Last summer, attending a videogames conference in the US, I met Jay Lemke and told him about this observation. His brief comment was: “We call this logo-centrism”. This hits the spot. What I found in classes was, precisely, that a dominant regime of representation – the mode of writing – rules the knowledge regime practised both by teachers and students.

Reflecting on the experiments while they were going on, and later, *all* teachers and *many* students found the four experiments eye-opening,

but also frustrating and disturbing, both in terms of content and method. Teachers argued that they lacked training in and knowledge about these kinds of semiotic resources: how they produce meaning, and how they might teach them. Karen (the teacher referred to earlier) explicitly acknowledged this point when she and the class evaluated Experiment 3. She said: “We have not done what we should have done”. She was not rejecting the multimodal media pedagogic approach; on the contrary, she was self-ironical about the habitual ways of teaching Danish that are so difficult to change. Similarly, a remark made by many students, not only in this experiment, could be rephrased like this: *‘This was really interesting, perhaps because it is something new, but we are not sure whether it is Danish’*. Some students would add that it should be; others, thinking about exams, that it was probably not.

These observations can be explained and understood from many perspectives. Generally, we might conclude that in the domain of LS as in the case of teaching Danish in Denmark, a large number of students do not seem to be competent to deal with the interlacing of modes and media. They are producing knowledge as a *novice*, not an *expert* (Bereiter & Scardamalia 1993). Being inspired by social semiotics, which stresses the importance of rules of social systems, I would argue that we cannot be certain whether this finding is related to the specific knowledge regime of Danish, or LS in general, and that students might be otherwise competent to deal with constellations of words, images and media in other domains, such as domains outside school. The point is, however, that the school system has an obligation, in my view, to address this semiotic competence, this semiocy, so that all students meet these kinds of demands and can handle them to a certain degree in life after school. Or to put it the other way around: Western societies need this analytical-creative competence in order to be able to survive in a knowledge society.

### **Critical-constructive final remarks**

This brings us to a few critical-constructive final remarks. Based on my theoretical and empirical research, I conclude that we should move towards a new, simple – but not simplistic – future-oriented theory of LS, which I term T2. With a foregrounded focus on modes and media, a new curriculum goal could be outlined, not only for LS, but also, in

general, for language(s) of (school) education (LE). We might call this goal semiocy, or semiotic competence – moving beyond the critical semiotics of the 1970s (which Buckingham has argued, convincingly, and repeatedly, implied of number of false assumptions on the relation between children, media, and education) and towards a post-critical pedagogy.

Adding some power to the semiocy concept, it should be noted that the concept was first developed in a recent research-led report from the Danish Ministry of Education about *Danish as a Future school subject*. Semiocy, it is argued, is the next step after literacy (in the line of Brian Street, David Barton, and others). It involves the competence to handle and further develop all potential semiotic resources available in contemporary society. It is a principle that acknowledges both the collective functional-utilitarian *and* the personal-formative need for citizens to be able to critically consume and contribute to a full range of semiotic domains and practices in a complex modern culture – addressed *en miniature* with different weight and emphasis in different school subjects, such as LS, on different levels.

Language and literature in the light of T2, do not vanish. Rather the shift from literacy to semiocy, particularly in LS, is a matter of progression. In primary school, the framework of LS should allow for the continuation of a strong emphasis on the teaching and learning of the mode of writing. Writing is a fundamental means for socio-cognitive development; and it is still the dominant mode of meaning-making in many domains in contemporary society, not least in other school subjects. Having said this, though, we should acknowledge the claim made by Kress and others that the dominance of writing is being replaced by the dominance of the image – and that multimodal meaning making in a rich variety of media is becoming the rule, not the exception, in many school domains and out-of-school domains.

T2 is indeed a theory; and like all theories, we should expect that it has both advantages and limitations that we should further scrutinize and test – using design-based intervention methodology, among others – before generalising it into a general policy-oriented framework. In general, the theory should be able to offer clear answers on fundamental subject-related didactical questions, like: What is the theoretical paradigm of semiocy? What topics would be taught? How would the teaching-learning process be conceptualised? What is the resultant knowledge regime? And who might be agents of this hypothetical process of change? In table 1 some tentative answers are offered. Obviously, all answers

need to be rephrased as research questions and explored as such if they are to form part, somewhere in the future, of the Council of Europe framework of reference for Language(s) of (School) Education.

Time / Century	Paradigm and tradition	Legitimacy: Why?	Topics: What?	Teaching-learning: How?	Knowledge regime	Agents
21st century	Semiotic paradigm; communicative and hermeneutic tradition.	Access and contribution to semiotic society functioning within and across national borders.	Semiotic resources and their meaning-making, with an emphasis on the mode of writing and speech and its mediated multimodal meaning-making	“Designs of meaning”, competence-oriented in holistic way.	Semiocy, Socio-cognitive constructivism	Didacticians, teachers, government(s), Students (particularly super users), market representatives

Table 1. The Rationale of LS – a Proposal.

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## HARMOS – LANGUAGE 1: „THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MODEL OF COMPETENCES FOR LANGUAGE 1 (LANGUAGE OF EDUCATION) AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF MINIMAL STANDARDS FOR GRADES 2, 6 AND 9 IN SWITZERLAND.”

### Introduction

HarmoS is a national project, started in 2002 by the EDK (Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education) to harmonise the educational systems of the 26 cantons of Switzerland. The aim of one of the sub-projects is to define minimal standards for grades 2, 6 and 9 in L1, L2, Mathematics and Sciences on the basis of a common competence model. This model forms the basis for the operationalisation of educational aims, which permit an evaluation of the output of the educational system through test-procedures. The project is inspired by similar projects in other countries (Germany, Canada, USA) and refers to the works of Weinert & al. (2001) and the expertise of Klieme & al. (2003). According to these works, competence is considered as a disposition or as an individual potential to be realised when a person successfully copes with problem-based tasks.

The following text presents some of the main aspects of a first draft of a competence model L1 as language of education. The text concludes with some remarks on the presented model and on the development of educational standards. They can be regarded as a contribution to and impulse for the development of a Common European Framework of

Reference for Languages of School Education. The competence model is defined as a pragmatic model of language activities.

## 1. HarmoS: a project of harmonisation of the compulsory education in Switzerland

With the aid of the EDK (Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education), the cantons have accelerated and increased their cooperation in the field of education in the past ten years. In particular, the cantons work on the binding harmonisation of the compulsory school system in entire Switzerland. Thus, they want to secure the quality of the educational system for the future and to reduce barriers to the mobility of the Swiss people.

The most important EDK-projects of harmonising the compulsory school system are the creation of a new inter-cantonal agreement (organising benchmark figures and goals of compulsory school) and in connection with this the development of national educational standards. The creation of a common curriculum in each language region completes these projects.

## 2. Contents of the new EDK agreement

The new inter-cantonal agreement on harmonising the compulsory school system shall be passed in autumn 2007 to be ratified by the cantons. This new agreement will include the following contents:

- **Structural benchmark figures:** the age at which children start school, an earlier and more flexible enrolment at school and the duration of obligatory school;
- **Binding standards:** as a new aspect, the concordat will set binding educational standards which must be met by the end of 2nd, 6th, and 9th grade. Educational standards will be determined in four subjects: first language, foreign languages (including a second national language), Mathematics and Natural Sciences. Educational standards are measurable and controllable descriptions

of competences, which are independent of the curriculum and based on a comprehensive competence model;

(The educational standards are developed by the HarmoS project. After public invitation to tender, the institutions for the scientific work were named in May 2005. For each subject a project leader<sup>1</sup> took over the „leading house” function. All “leading houses” cooperate with institutions from other language regions.)

- **Instruments of system-control:** Furthermore, the concordat will define the instruments of system-development and quality assurance for the entire Switzerland. The most important instrument for this is the Swiss educational monitoring.

### 3. Phases of the development of standards

The elaboration of the standards is developed in three distinct phases:

- 1) The development of models of competence for the four disciplines (first language (language of education), foreign languages (a second national language), Mathematics and Natural Sciences)<sup>2</sup> including the competence levels for grade 2, 6, and 9;
- 2) The validation of the competence model by testing a large sample of pupils in each language region;
- 3) Proposals for minimum standards in the four disciplines<sup>3</sup>.

Two other phases will follow: a phase of implementation of the standards in the cantons and a phase of evaluation of the effects on the school system.

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<sup>1</sup> Leading house for L1 is the University of Teacher Education, Zurich (Prof. Dr. Peter Sieber). The other project partners come from institutions of the German, French and Italian part of Switzerland.

<sup>2</sup> Our study will take place in this first phase of the HarmoS-project.

<sup>3</sup> The minimum standards do not substitute the curricula but are „tools” to help the ministers of education to define precisely what kind of competence can be expected from the pupils at three moments of the obligatory school at the end of 2nd, 6th, and 9th grade. With these minimum standards each canton will be able to regulate its own school system (special programs for pupils who do not reach the minimum standards, etc.).

## 4. A competence model for the first language

With regard to educational standards models of competence set themselves two targets:

- They describe the structure of the standards the student has to meet (model of competences);
- They offer a scientifically based concept of the gradation of a competence and of the levels, which can be ascribed to each student by assessments (model of competence levels).

The development of a competence model can be seen as a recursive process: development of a model, development of tasks, validation, adaptation of the competence model.

## 5. A definition of the terms *competence* and *L1*

A description of our competence model first needs a definition of the key terms *first language* and *competence*. Basically, the term *first language* or *L1* corresponds with the term *language of education*, which is used by the Council of Europe. The term refers to the language first used in the school in which the students learn to read and write. It is the language first acquired by the majority of pupils, the language of education and the local language as well. In the French-speaking part of Switzerland it is French, in the Italian part Italian, in the Romanic part Romanic and in the German part German. Using the term *L1* confronts us with at least three problems. Firstly, the *L1* is not the first acquired language for a remarkable number of children. Secondly, Swiss children in the German-speaking part of Switzerland grow up with a German dialect which can differ a lot from the version of standard German which is taught in schools. Moreover, the four national language regions of Switzerland reveal different school cultures and traditions with regard to the three aspects of the language of education – that is, languages as subjects taught in schools, languages used as media of teaching and learning in other subjects in schools, and languages as part of a holistic language curriculum which embraces all the languages a learner is confronted with. It can be regarded as a challenge to unite these four LE-cultures in one competence model.

The term *competence* refers to conceptions of Weinert (2001) und Klieme (2003) and is generally regarded as a cognitive ability and the motivational, volitional and social readiness to solve problems in various situations. In this sense, competence is a disposition or a potential which allows people to cope with language tasks and which can be activated if conditions are ‘ideal’. That means: if somebody is able to solve a problem, it can be concluded that this person has certain competences at her or his disposal. But the reverse conclusion is false: if somebody is not able to perform a task it cannot be concluded that the person has no competences. Competences or dispositions can only be defined precisely in a concrete situation and in carrying out a task.

## 6. A pragmatic approach

The competence model we use considers both qualities of language – language as a system and language in use – although the pragmatic dimension is emphasised. Starting point for the description of competences are language activities. Language activities take place in different modalities (productive and receptive) and in different realisations (oral or written, direct or indirect). Language activities comprise various necessary or at least useful aspects. We differentiate between the following aspects: *situate*, *plan*, *realise*, *repair* and *evaluate*. These five differentiations should enable us to structure the various aspects of language activities, but should not be misunderstood as a linear sequencing of a complex language activity. The following passage describes what is meant by these five aspects. Examples of competence descriptions of the language modality *listening* are set in brackets.

- To *situate* is the competence to identify the content of a speech act, the structure of a genre and the function of a communicative situation and to realise and attain one’s own communicative goal (e.g. identify who speaks with whom and where; recognise the function of a text).
- To *plan* means the competence to choose, weight and structure the content and to choose the register, style, genre and the communicative strategy (e.g. choose strategies of listening; determine formal peculiarities of the text).

- To *realise* mainly comprises the coding and decoding competences on the level of phonemes, graphemes, words, sentences, texts, iconographical and non- or paraverbal representations and the competence to use different kinds of knowledge (e.g. activate language skills; activate general knowledge; recognise aesthetic elements).
- To *repair* is the competence of revising language during the language production or reception process (e.g. check your understanding by asking questions).
- To *evaluate* means the competence to reflect the language process and the language product (e.g. summarise what has been understood; reflect on the content or the form).

It goes without saying that these five language activities do not follow each other in succession, but they are recursive. Language activities are realised in social and communicative situations, follow a certain genre and are influenced by motivational and emotional factors, which are highly affected by previous language experiences. As a habitual pattern motivation is therefore a major aspect of language competence.

In order to describe language competences, the differentiation of the abstract aspects of language activities have to be applied to the four language modalities (language skills) of our competence model. Although this structuring might at first sight be more adequate to describe the language production process (writing and speaking), the different activities in the reception process (listening and reading) can also be assigned to these five aspects, – with different emphasis. The common reference to the aspects of language activities ensures a coherent description of each language skill/modality. At the same time it accepts a different concretisation of each modality/skill.

Not only the aspects and modalities of language activities, but also additional factors, which influence the realisation of language activities play an important role in the concrete description of competences and in the development of language tasks as well. Some of these factors will be described in the following part of the text.

- *Product and process*: The description of language competences can refer to two different objects, the product and the process. Reference to the product focuses on the language ‘results’ (e.g. a written text), reference to the process focuses on the way, how language is produced (e.g. writing strategies).

- *Genres*: With regard to the development of language tasks the genres or text patterns, which are historically and socially formed, gain in importance.
- *Conceptual orality and literality*: Characterising the oral or literal conception is an important orientation guide when developing tasks (e.g. direct or indirect communication, public or private discourse).
- *Language reflection and awareness*: Language awareness, the analysis of language in all its facets plays an important role in modern language teaching. The reflection on language structures, language processes, rules of discourse and aesthetic effects in texts are closely linked to the aspects of language activities. (e.g. you can only revise your text when you are able to reflect about its structure or its content).
- *Language culture and aesthetics*: Language does not only exist as a medium of communication or an object of research. Language is also an expression of human creativity and an aesthetic product (e.g. the knowledge about the different literary forms and traditions).

## Concluding remarks and questions

The project HarmoS L1 is still a work in progress. We conclude with a few comments about the process:

*General remark*: The empirical basis for the development of a sustainable competence model with inheriting coherent standards and with tasks, which refer to it is still small. Although deep insight into reading competences has been gained – last but not least thanks to the PISA studies, similar insight into writing, listening and speaking competences is still missing. Conclusions, which are too general and devoid of any empirical basis are to be avoided. The project HarmoS will contribute to a significant increase of empirical data, once the competence model has been validated. We also hope that this increase may help us fill the still existing gaps in our knowledge of language competencies.

*Four language skills*: In contrast to the Common European Framework for Reference for Languages (CEFR) we define four main language skills or modalities, regarding interaction not as a separate skill

but as belonging to both language reception and production. That is why an oral dialogue is regarded as a combination of both listening and speaking skills. Is this an unacceptable simplification or an advantage of our model?

*Integration of multilingual aspects:* The presented model of competences is a monolingual model. How can bridges be built between L1, L2, L3...?

*Cultural diversity* Switzerland has four different language areas with different school traditions and backgrounds. How can our model take the cultural diversity of Switzerland's four language areas into account, how can cultural obliteration be avoided?

## References:

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