Chapter 14

Postmodern Literacy: Multimodal, Hypertextual, Intertextual Reading

Isabella Monika Leibrandt
Universidad de Navarra, Spain

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the author reflects on the importance of today’s literality in terms of multimodal reading and literary competence. This competence should include a multidimensional ability and contribute significantly to enrich life. An adequate multimodality is also presented as a co-constructive creation of meanings, so that didactic preconditions for the reception of multimodal texts are irreplaceable. As an example of dealing with multimodal texts in the classroom, conceptual foundations of postmodern texts are presented, which also include hypertextual and intertextual reading as part of a new learning experience. This is why practical suggestions and didactic aspects of literary communication are illustrated as a prerequisite for a successful classroom conversation, which should enable the reader to become an intellectual accomplice of the author.

INTRODUCTION

Literality as Multiliterality: The State of the Subject

Knowing how to read, it is always said, is a central element of today’s information and knowledge society. This is true for the individual and all his living facets at all ages. Reading serves us as a “gateway to the world”, as well as for building democratic participation in an increasingly fragmented society, in which reading is the basis of skills of critique and a self-determined life. This is how the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development defines reading literacy (OECD, 2013, pp. 9-10):

Reading literacy is understanding, using, reflecting on and engaging with written texts, in order to achieve one’s goals, to develop one’s knowledge and potential, and to participate in society.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-5796-8.ch014
To this claim to literary competence, the author would like to contemplate postmodern literature as an expression of an open, networked, but also often opaque world, in which only those who have the appropriate reading literacy can exert their potential, develop new things and in addition create meaningful links. Accordingly, literality in a broad sense can be understood as the totality of attitudes and abilities, social roles, and institutions that are needed for the survival of a written culture. Feilke (2011) differentiates the concept according to three concrete aspects: literality and literary competence are discussed from the point of view of the cultural prerequisites of their acquisition, from the aspect of writing and reading as a problem-solving action and from the aspect of the particular linguisticity, which also produces literality.

In a narrower sense and in terms of multimodal reading, ‘reading literacy’ is understood in the sense when people can understand, use, reflect on, and deal with written texts in a multimodal and multime- dial context. The term thus unites the understanding of the language and the meaning, the linguistic ability to express abstraction, the joy of reading and storytelling, the familiarity with books, writing, the skills of written expression and media competency, and, above all, multimodality. According to Bucher (2011), the fundamental change is that new and novel mixed forms of communication have emerged in various communication modes and channels, which can be generally described as multimodal forms of communication. These contain both cultural aspects as learning from and with texts and the aspect of action of problem solving as an interaction. In this respect, he quite correctly concludes that all communication analysis must be multimodally aligned and should show how the meaning and significance of a communication contribution is composed of in different modes.

Therefore literacy is a basic prerequisite for participating actively in the constantly changing world. Frequently, this competence is perceived as being an ability that need not to be acquired beyond the first years of school. However, this is a mistaken perception as this competence of multimodality involves the lifelong acquiring of knowledge and strategies in different contexts that evolve through interaction with peers, the generation and reading of texts and the use of information or knowledge (Böck & Kress, 2010). Reading is thus a multidimensional ability, which includes the reading of electronic texts.

On the other hand, there is still found a purely instrumental reading competence as a pure decoding of texts and a literal interpretation of the text. A multimodal literacy, which includes literary-aesthetic reading, involves understanding, using, reflecting and dealing with literary texts. At the same time, literary competencies are also evident in the recognition of connections and in the ability to criticize and contradict. Under this extension of perspective, Bucher (2011) presents the problem of coherence, compositionality, understanding, or communicative competence in a new light. In addition to these literary competencies, the author would also like to include the social, emotional, cognitive and linguistic abilities needed to communicate with texts. In this sense, language learning is increasingly becoming the focus of multimodality in teaching, because multimodality offers a variety of expressive possibilities as well as a potential, for interesting instruction, the possibility for involvement and for peer-to-peer learning (Wiesner, 2016).

This view is based on a literacy, which enables a lifelong active participation in social life. The idea here is that literacy is a major contributor to enrichment of life. Therefore, it is not enough to simply read a small number of text types, which is the standard in most schools. Rather, reading in the classroom should be a dynamic process in which each reader tries in different ways to understand the content of the text. This process is influenced by various factors which include, among other things, the reading situation, the text structure, and the characteristics of the questions that are posed in a text. Therefore, we often hear about the necessity for creating a ‘turning point’, which entails the construction of ad-