Critical Multiliteracies in a Foreign Language Classroom: Becoming an Intercultural and Interlanguage Mediator

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Critical Multiliteracies

Critical Literacy

Multiliteracies
Critical literacy
(e.g. Freire, 1987; Luke, 1995; Janks, 2003; Pennycook, 2001; Wallace, 2003)

- Uses *a linguistic analysis of texts* to encourage students uncover underlying messages

- Analysis entails not only examining micro features of specific texts but attending to wider implications which relate to the circulation of dominant discourse
  → help students develop an awareness of how language works in relations of power
What does “multi” (i.e., multiplicity) in multiliteracies refer to?

- cultural and linguistic diversity (**multicultural/multilingual**),
- a variety of medium (technologies) used for communication (**multimedia**)
- a variety of modes used in communication (**multimodal**)

Multiliteracies
Multimodal nature of meaning-making
Current Pedagogical Approach to FL Teaching

- “Communication” is understood as face-to-face, referential and transactional oral language use (i.e., an exchange of information) (Blyth, 2003)
- Written texts = a supporting technology to help develop oral “communication” skills (Homstad & Thorson, 2000; Kern, 2000)
- Texts as “language sample” for language exercises (Alderson, 1984; Devitt, 1997)
- Texts as providing ‘convenient’ topics for speaking exercises (Wallace, 2003)
Current Pedagogical Approach to FL Teaching

- Goal of reading instruction = literal comprehension
  - One-meaning approach: “read-respond-check response for correctness” (Alderson & Urquhart, 1984)
  - There is one correct interpretation of a text
Issues and Concerns

1. Puts emphasis on developing oral communication
   - Does literacy develop naturally?

2. Undervalues the richness of both content and textual features of the authentic texts (Kramsch, 1993)

3. Ill-prepares students for upper-level, text-based courses (Byrnes & Maxim, 2004; Kern, 2000; Maxim, 2006)

4. Language classes as simply transmitting knowledge and developing skills (Kubota, 2004; Wallace, 2003)
   - Perpetuates/maintains a hierarchical power between “language” and “content” teachers
Traditional reading:
Types of question posed while reading

- Does the text represent the truth?
- Is it fact or opinion?
- Is it biased or neutral?
- Is it well written and clear?
- Who is the author and what level of authority/legitimacy does s/he represent?
- What does the author say?
Critical multiliteracies: Types of question posed while reading

**Micro-Level**

- What is the context?
- Who is the (ideal) audience?
- What is the intention?
- What is the author trying to say and how is s/he saying?
- What claims are not substantiated?
- Why is the text written in this way?

**Macro-Level**

- What could be the assumptions behind the statement?
- How do you think the author understands reality?
- What could be shaping his/her understanding?
- Who decides (what is real, needs to be done) in whose name and for whose benefit?
- How could these statements be interpreted differently in a different context?
Concrete goals of critical multiliteracies in FL education (e.g., Pennycook, 2000; Janks, 2010; Wallace, 2003)

1. To unpack **assumptions and implicit meanings** by analyzing various aspects of text (both linguistic as well as visual information);

2. To appreciate **multiple interpretations** of text depending on the context and the purpose of reading and the discursive background of readers;

3. To recognize the co-constructive relations between language and ideology (worldview);

4. To question the authoritative knowledge and taken-for-granted concepts by becoming aware that they are often politically and socio-historically constructed;
Concrete goals of critical multiliteracies in FL education (Cont’d)

5. To question essentialized representations of language, culture, and people (i.e., stereotypes);

6. To use language creatively for one’s own purpose and interest; and

7. To actively and agentively participate in the society by engaging in sociocultural practice of literacy.
Critiques to Critical Approach to FL Teaching

- Goes beyond the scope of ‘language’ classroom
- Cannot be done at lower level as students do not have enough linguistic knowledge
Examples: Lower-level
There are three kinds of characters in Japanese: *hiragana*, *katakana*, and *kanji*. All three characters can be seen in a single sentence.

テレビを見ます。

*katakana*  kanji  *hiragana*

*I watch television.*

*Hiragana* and *katakana*, like the alphabet, represent sounds. As you can see in the above example, *hiragana* has a roundish shape and is used for conjugation endings, function words, and native Japanese words not covered by *kanji*. *Katakana*, which has rather straight lines, is normally used for writing loanwords and foreign names. For example, the Japanese word for “television” is written in *katakana* as テレビ (*terebi*). *Kanji*, or Chinese characters, represent not just sounds but also meanings. Mostly, *kanji* are used for nouns and the stems of verbs and adjectives.

(*Grenki I, p.18*)
Japanese Writing System

The Japanese writing system consists of three types of characters: hiragana, katakana, and kanji. All three are used together in a single sentence.

Katakana

Katakana is a phonetic alphabet, representing sounds. As you can see in the above example, it has a squareish shape and is used for conjugation endings, function words not covered by kanji. Katakana, which has a rather angular shape, is also used for writing loanwords and foreign names. For example, the Japanese word for “television” is written in katakana as テレビ (terebi). Kanji, or Chinese characters, represent not just sounds but also meanings. Mostly, kanji are used for nouns and the stems of verbs and adjectives.

(Genki I, P.18)
the Japanese word for “tell” Chinese characters, represent for nouns and the stems of verbs and adjectives.

(Genki I, P.18)
お宅も侵略されていませんか？
（Grenki I, P.18）
これが「オノマトペ」です。擬音語/擬声語のことです。
東日本巨大地震

爆発物 高い 殺傷力

暮らしに見る

風呂計

人生案内

天然ガス 佐渡沖で試掘

越川 禮子
Spot the Refugee

There he is. Fourth row, second from the left. The one with the moustache. Obvious really.

Maybe not. The unsavoury-looking character you’re looking at is more likely to be your average neighbourhood slob with a grubby vest and a weekend’s stubble on his chin.

And the real refugee could just as easily be the clean-cut fellow on his left.

You see, refugees are just like you and me.
POLITICS

Senate Blocks Drive for Gun Control
By JONATHAN WEISMAN  APRIL 17, 2013

Gun-control overhaul is defeated in Senate
By Ed O’Keefe and Philip Rucker, Updated: Wednesday, April 17, 9:25 PM
So easy a caveman can do it.
Classroom-based Research

- Used two on-line newspaper articles about the same incident from Asahi (Japanese) and the NY Times (English)

- Goals:
  - Encouraging students to use their knowledge (both Japanese and English) to analyze the texts
  - Fostering students’ awareness/confidence in their ability to play the role of cultural/linguistic mediators
Setting

- Course: 3rd year Japanese
  - Spring 2010 (7 students)
  - Spring 2011 (11 students)

- Semester (13 weeks) divided into 3 units
  - Unit 1: Non-fiction
  - Unit 2: Fiction
  - Unit 3: Newspaper articles
Data

- Classroom interactions (transcribed) (2010)
- Students’ writings (2010 & 2011)
- Responses in semi-structured retrospective interviews in English (transcribed) (2010)
Procedures

- 3 class meetings (70 min. each) were spent

  Day 1:
  - Situating the article in its respective societies
    - Different newspapers in the US and in Japan and their audience
  - Reading the NY Times article
  - Summarizing the article (oral) in Japanese

  Day 2:
  - Reading the Asahi article
  - Working on the comprehension questions
Procedures (Cont’d)

Day 3:

- Discussing the textual features of Asahi article
- Discussing the differences between the NY Times and Asahi articles
In-Class Activities: 3 foci

1) Textual analyses of the Japanese article
   - Headline
   - Organization of text (e.g., picture)
   - Event: Participants & Predicates (e.g., the use of causative)
   - Quotes (whose speech is quoted and how)

2) Comparison of information differently selected in Asahi and the NY Times articles

3) Effects of language choices and information selected
4 American Teenagers Arrested in Japan

By Hiroko Tabuchi
Published in World Asia Pacific section on Dec. 6, 2009
4 children of US Military personnel arrested on the charge of attempted murder: Female motorbike rider’s overturn incident

Published in “Society” section on December 5, 2009
Event:

- Four teenagers from an American military base in Japan were arrested on charges of attempted murder on Saturday for allegedly toppling a woman riding her motorbike, causing her to suffer a serious head injury.

Participants: Four teenagers from American military base in Japan

Predicates:
- were arrested
- allegedly toppling a woman
- causing her to suffer a serious head injury
Event:
What happened  (Asahi)

- 東京武蔵村山市で8月、道路に張られたロープでバイクの会社員の女性（23）が転倒し重傷を負った事件で、警視庁は5日、在日米軍横田基地所属の米兵の子の少年少女4人を殺人未遂の疑いで逮捕した。捜査関係者によると、同庁の引き渡し要請に対し、米軍側は難色を示したものので、最終的に応じたという。

Participants: (1) Metropolitan Police Department
(2) US military

Predicates:
(1) Arrested 4 teenagers who are children of US military...
(2) Were reluctant to comply with the MPD’s request first but eventually complied.
In the August episode, which has received national coverage in Japan, a 23-year-old motorbike rider suffered a fractured skull when she hit rope that the authorities say had been strung across a road by the four teenagers near the Yokota Air Base in Tokyo.

Participants: Motorbike rider

Predicates:
- hit the rope,
- suffered a fractured skull
Event:
What had happened (Asahi)

Participants: the suspected crime (of 4 teenagers)

Predicates:

put up a rope,

made her bicycle overturn, (use of causative)

caused her a serious injury of skull fracture  (use of causative)
**New York Times**

- One of the teenagers sought help from a passer-by for the injured women, according to the news report.
- Base-related crime is a delicate issue in Japan, where about 47,000 American troops are stationed under a mutual security pact.
- The United States and Japan are still negotiating the relocation of another United States military base, the Marine Corps Air Station Futenma in Okinawa, in the aftermath of a public outcry over the rape of a local schoolgirl by three American servicemen in 1995.

**Asahi**

- Including a pictorial description of how the accident occurred
- Including the info. that the US Military base officials were initially reluctant to cooperate with MPD
- Giving detailed information about the teenagers e.g.)
  - two teenagers’ quotes were contradicting to each other
  - they suspiciously gave false names at the beginning
**Classroom interaction:**

Y: *Was there information about the quote also in the NYTimes?*

    Wendy: No. There wasn’t.

Y: *Why do you think there wasn’t?*

    Sophie: I think it’s because they have different purposes. Asahi has more detailed information. But the NY Times article does not have that much interest (in the event).

Y: *Right. There is not as much details in NYTimes. What do you think, Helen?*

    Helen: I don’t know.

    Tami: It gives a bad image to readers.

Y: *Bad image if there is a quote?*

    Tami: About Americans.

Y: *You think quotes are there to give readers a bad image of Americans?*

    Tami: Yeah, *I feel like... the NY Times does not regard the crime as a crime.*

    Betty: Yes.

Y: *Then, what is it like?*

    Tami: *Like teenager, like children or something. Make it look like it's just kids that are messed up.*

    Pat: The titles of the articles also give that impression.

    Betty: Yeah.

    Pat: In the NY Times, ‘4 American Teenagers arrested’, but in Asahi, *4 Teenagers charged with attempted murder.*
Use of Causative
(Question on the worksheet)

次のaとbの文を比べて読者の印象がどう違うと思いますか。
(By comparing sentence a and b, what different impressions do you think the readers might get?)

a. 「4人がロープを張り通りかかった女性を転倒させ、重傷を負わせた」(causative structure; the original sentence from the text)
(The four put up a rope, made a woman overturn and caused her a serious injury.)

b. 「4人の張ったロープで通りかかった女性が転倒し、重傷を負った」(non-causative structure)
(By the role that the four put up, a woman overturned and seriously injured.)
Classroom interaction: use of causatives

Y: (comparing the causative sentence ‘A’ in the text with a sentence without causative ‘B’). What do you think?

Tami: in A, the woman became a victim, and...

Y: What? Can you say that again?

Tami: Like victim, victimized.

Y: Why do you think so?

Cathy: Because it uses causative. Um.. it shows the woman’s tragedy situation.

Y: What do you think, Wendy?

Wendy: In A, by putting up the rope... they intended.

Y: Right, intentionally.

Wendy: They intentionally made the woman overturn. In B..um. innocent. it's more like an accident. In A, they are guilty, but not in B. In A, because of the causative, the woman seems not to know.

Y: In B she seems to know?

Betty: In A, something is done to her. She has no control over what happened to her.

...
If your Japanese acquaintance is working with an American colleague who regularly reads NY Times, she may encounter misunderstanding due to different reporting on newspaper articles. Write an email message to her to inform how differently the event is reported so that she can better understand a view that her (American) colleague might have.
Hi,

I’ve heard that you read the newspaper article titled “4 children of US Military personnel arrested on charges of attempted murder.” It was interesting, wasn’t it? I read that too. Actually, there is also an article about this incident in the NY Times, in the US. The title is “4 American teenagers arrested in Japan.” The article has a lot of the same information, but the details are a little different. You might be able to see it if you compare the titles.

For example in the Japanese newspaper, they used quotes by the teenagers. Their responses were suspicious so that gives a bad impression. But according to the NY times, one of the kids tried to find someone to help the woman who was toppled. This is not a quote, but it implies that the suspect is a good person. Further, the Japanese article said that the US military was initially resisting to cooperate, but in the NY Times, it only reported that ‘US military is cooperating.’ It did not give much detail about this information.

Why is the information different? I think it is because they are writing for different readers and so there is a bias. So if you have a chance to meet and talk with Americans about this article, please tell them about what you know. And I think it’s good too if you listen to what they know about it. If you learn different opinions and perspectives, you will understand the incident better.
Interview: thoughts about the task “Differences in cultural perspectives”

Y: What do you think about the purpose of this activity?

Wendy: Um, I think, I think it was good because usually if I think about newspapers, I think about my hometown newspaper and the New York Times. Um, and I’m not really comparing them to, I guess, other perspectives? ...I never seriously thought about, um, how the perspectives can be different if it’s not just along with political parties. If it’s cultural difference, like based on histories and experiences, it’s good to think about who is writing, and who they are targeting...
Interview: thoughts about the task
“No clear-cut between ‘facts’ and ‘opinions’”

Y: So... what kind of perspective do you have now?

Sophia: Perspective.. (laugh) Um...well, frankly, I have this scary perspective of...

Y: Scary perspective? OK.

Sophia: You have to read all the accounts in order to get anywhere, you know, hear the truth.

Y: All right? Explain to me more. What?

Sophia: Well, you know, even in account that seems to be dry and without any kind of opinion in there, are actually opinionated by grammatical structures and what facts are being reported. So in order to keep the best perspective, you have to read more and more, like all the time, which isn’t really possible but, um... that's sort of what this is teaching me.
Interview:
What social role to play?

Y: As a person who can read both articles, what kind of role would you like to play?

Pat: I think, kind of a mediator between the two viewpoints, [I guess.] Since I know a lot of people who read one thing and they are like “this is how it is, I read an article about this.” And it’s like, well, there’s always this other take on it, there’s always the more intense or less intense, more detailed or less detailed things. So I think just keeping people aware that there are different details… Just keep people’s minds open to the cultural differences. I think it’s really important.
Interview:
What social role to play?

Y: As a person who can read both articles, what kind of role would you like to play?

Sophia: Well, just by making them aware that another perspective exists... a lot of my friends already sort of have this awareness, studying other cultures, but my family, for example, I think, would be really surprised to hear something like this [difference in news reports]. And you obviously can’t force them to go and read another language or anything but just making them aware that like, you know, Japan look at this in a totally different way and it really seems like they did a pretty horrible thing...
Conclusion

Having students compare a FL text with that of their ‘strong’ language helped to:

- Create reciprocity in the interpretative community in the classroom
- Shift the roles/power relationship between the teacher (a native speaker) and the students
- Position students as a core member in the classroom community
Critical multiliteracies practices in FL classes develop students’ deeper understanding of the power of language.

Students in FL classes are not monolingual language users; they are multilingual language users with rich knowledge and resources of various languages.

FL teachers need to:
- Take advantage such resources
- Help students become not just ‘text decoders’ but also ‘critical text interpreters’ and ‘informed text creators’
Thank you!