

JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE
AND CULTURE PEDAGOGY

Issue 59 · October 2014

Learning Materials Without Borders

“Foreign language teaching can
offer a unique opportunity to get
into a dialogue with *the Other*”

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SPROGforum

JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE PEDAGOGY

Issue 58 · May 2014

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*All articles are published in full text in Danish
(except for Eide's, which is in Norwegian)*

SPRØGFORUM

Foreword

The boundaries for learning materials are wide-open at present. Firstly, we are now seeing the culmination of a semiotic wave that has influenced materials for several decades. The traditional textbook with texts, grammatical overviews and examples, (written) examples of language use and conversations, literary texts and non-fiction texts about culture and society, has been supplemented both by auditive material (first on cassette, then DVD and after that online) and by visual material (first in the form of drawings and other graphic illustrations as well as black & white and colour photographs, later by slides, feature films and video/DVD), where the visual element interacts with speech and real sound and (possibly) text. Today, material objects and material practice are being included. As the writer of the feature article, Lone Svarstad, wrote in the previous number of *Sprogforum*, an earlier language start can mean the language teacher going off to IKEA to buy children's kitchens as a learning material for foreign-language teaching.

Secondly, we find ourselves in the middle of a comprehensive digitalisation of everyday life, culture and society, and this particularly affects the school. Printed textbooks still exist, but they are being supplemented or replaced by an ever greater range of e-books (electronic books) and i-books (interactive books), controlled and produced by publishing firms and media concerns. At the same time, there are – in principle – plenty of possibilities for students, course participants and teachers to be able to communicate actively across national boundaries and make their own independent productions via the Internet, social media, etc., using various platforms such as: computer, smartphone, tablet, etc. As far as language subjects are concerned, this convergence of media, which is also moving towards integrating the senses in simultaneous sequences – sight and hearing, and maybe touch, smell and taste (?) – will be particularly interesting for the further enlivening of language use and linguistic interaction in all possible genres and situations, both the more realistic and the more fictive or imaginative.

Thirdly, these tendencies mean that in our repertoire of learning materials we not only have 'didacticised materials', i.e. materials

designed and organised with teaching and learning in mind, but also a wide range of materials that have perhaps been fetched from the Internet and are not didacticised in advance. Such materials are sometimes referred to as ‘authentic texts’, but it is important to underline that all materials that are included in teaching become didacticised in one way or other in the process – by the teacher, or by the teacher and students in collaboration. The materials are used for particular teaching aims and activities, as a supplement to or contrast with other materials, etc.

But no matter if the learning material contains verbal language, images or sound, or if it is in electronic or printed form, or if it has been created with a didactic purpose in view or not, it can be viewed from a common point of view: it is a text that has a number of functions in social practice. One can, as does the British-Australian sociolinguist Michael Halliday, distinguish between three functions: the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual (Halliday 1978):

The ideational function is linked to the content that is being mediated. It is also demonstrated in Karen Risager’s article in this number that there is good reason to scrutinise what messages are being mediated via the content, including perhaps hidden messages of an ideological nature. When foreigners learn Danish, they also have to learn what to call the phenomenon one sits on. Is it called in Danish, e.g. *stol*, *taburet*, *sofa*, or whatever else one has at one’s disposal to call it. If a learning material for Danish for foreign adults visualises the chair by reproducing design chairs by such well-known Danish designers as Børge Mogensen, Hans Wegner and Kaare Klint, one can ask why the author and publisher make such a choice. Can it be connected with the fact that the course participant is not only to learn that what one sits on is called *stol* in Danish, but at the same time become acquainted with Danish middle-class values, which among other things can be symbolised by design furniture?

The interpersonal function has to do with relations that are expressed between persons and groups in the text or the context. This perspective is represented in Liv Eide’s article. When the textbook author chooses that the person who is to represent a Chinese is to be called Quang, the Arab Mohammad and the Dane Jens, it can justify asking why the Dane is not to be called Quang or Mohammad rather than Jens. The interpersonal function also has to do with the relations the learning material offers its users, students and teachers. What roles is the student placed in – as someone who solves fixed assignments, or someone who explores the material on his or

her own? What didactic possibilities for action does the material open up for the teacher – and which ones are blocked?

The textual function comprises the actual interweaving of the text out of a range of effects of a linguistic, visual, etc. nature. How is the text constructed? What makes it cohere (argumentation, narrative, cross-reference, comparison, contrast, use of colour, rhythm, etc.)? Tools for analysis vary, depending on if it is a linguistic, visual or audio text, or a material object, e.g. a children's kitchen. And it is also absolutely certain that the IKEA children's kitchen as a learning material requires new analytical approaches. Irrespective of the nature of the aid, however, it is linked to being turned into language in social practice.

The broad definition of learning materials challenges the earlier requirement that a learning material by definition is material edited by a publisher. This is emphasised by Mette Hermann in her article, where she writes that the traditional textbook is characterised by having been legitimised by an author, and that there is a publisher who has approved it for publication. It is different with materials that language teachers fetch from the Internet. One does not necessarily know who has placed them there, for what reason and under what circumstances. When such material is downloaded, it calls for a critical appraisal of who the sender is of materials that lie openly accessible on the Internet. Why are they produced? What ideologies are promoted in the given material? To what extent does the content fit the curriculum? Websites that are used as learning materials were, among other things, in focus among representatives of publishing firms at the annual international book fair in Frankfurt in autumn 2013 (see reference list).

In connection with the focus on learning materials, the user perspective is extremely relevant. This applies both to the teacher who is going to teach language with the aid as medium, and the child, the young person or the adult who is to learn language. It is also important to include the parents (see reference list). The advanced start of foreign-language teaching can also well give rise to questions as to how parents can be guided to converse about language and in other ways help their children to learn languages, also on the basis of the used learning materials. Learning materials without borders – as we have called this number – places a greater responsibility on the teacher as regards quality in a field where many different interests are involved within production and use of learning materials: politicians, researchers, opinion-formers, leaders and market participants.

The articles in this number show both the many possibilities on offer of a linguistic, cultural and pedagogical nature as well as suggest various analytical and critical approaches to an evaluation and use of learning materials in teaching.

Have an enjoyable read!
The editors

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Language and culture in the new Folkeskole reform

[Sprog og kultur i den nye folkeskolereform. Kronik]

Abstract

A new *Folkeskole* reform came into force at the beginning of the school year in August 2014. The feature article deals with the status of language teaching pursuant to the reform. The position of foreign languages has been strengthened. Teaching English starts as early as Class 1, and teaching in the two foreign languages German and French can start earlier than before. The conditions for teaching Danish as a second language have been weakened. Unlike formerly, the subject is no longer described in the same breadth as foreign languages, among other things the cultural dimension is no longer a special area of competence. The structural inequality in relation to access to teaching in minority mother tongues continues after the reform. Still only a limited group of linguistic minority pupils have the right to free teaching in their native language, and there are even new restrictive regulations for the group that is entitled to such teaching. The languages Faroese and Greenlandic are still not given any special privileges by virtue of the Danish Kingdom (*Rigsfællesskabet*). The new school reform remains completely silent about the linguistic rights of deaf children. While the linguistic majority pupils are taken account of in the form of strengthened foreign-language teaching, this is not the case for teaching in Danish as a second language and in the minority mother tongues.

In the middle of a new learning materials culture

[Midt i en ny læremiddelkultur]

Abstract

This article gives an overview of changes in the use of learning materials that have taken place in the last decade due to an increased use of the computer and the Internet in today's teaching in Denmark. An overview of the traditional and new learning materials is given, and it is furthermore argued that web 2.0 tools should also be seen as learning materials. It is emphasised that teaching today requires highly skilled teachers when it comes to selecting, evaluating and planning learning materials, since modern teaching makes use of a variety of such materials, including many different materials on the Internet. Additionally it is discussed which skills are practiced when the Internet is used in a learning environment, and a model is introduced showing which elements should be considered when planning teaching that incorporates learning materials on the Internet.

Between the bazaar and the cathedral

[Mellem børsen og katedralen]

Abstract

What criteria do publishers use to accept a book manuscript on Danish as a Second Language for publication? This is the question we were asked by Sprogforum. Our article is a hands-on response to this question. We begin by arguing that the first step is to make sure a business plan is in place, before we proceed to examine a range of more content-related issues. We then present a list of 8 points that we, as publishers, consider important and take into account prior to accepting a manuscript. One of these points relates to the author's own perspectives on language acquisition and literacy development – a point that reflects our own ambition to constantly keep up with new knowledge production in this research field; not in order to apply every new finding but in order to make sure that both parties, author and publisher, are aware of what we are publishing and why. In conclusion, we argue for the importance of engaging more directly with relevant academic research for the benefit of all stakeholders involved – publishers and practitioners alike.

Voilà. The necessary grammar

[Voilà. Den nødvendige grammatik]

Abstract

In the article the underlying didactics behind a grammar book in French at upper secondary level is described. We are dealing with both overall language-didactic principles and practical measures. The didactics is based on both theoretical knowledge about language learning and 'best practice', i.e. what we know from experience actually works. There is also a description of how one can work with the Textbook and the Exercise Book of the publication.

The overall principle is the inductive method. The students start ideally with the Exercise Book. The grammatical subject is introduced with a number of small texts that contain many examples of the subject that is to help them to actively arrive at the rule. In the following exercises the rule is to be applied. The Textbook is only used as a last resort. In certain cases where particularly complex grammatical subject are involved, such as past tenses of the verb, a deductive approach is used, i.e. the Textbook is consulted before one embarks on the exercises.

To facilitate the learning, the exercises have been couched in relatively simple language, and the subject matter is related to the students' lives and everyday experiences, or to (eternally) topical subjects. Furthermore, various didactic measures are employed to motivate the students, e.g. appeals to their creative abilities and their eagerness to solve assignments. Mnemotechnical 'tricks' are inserted and care is taken to vary the material.

Mafia and terror in second language learning

[Mafia og terror i sprogundervisning]

Abstract

The article describes a model for working with political subjects in second language learning, in this case Italian language and culture. It focuses on an untraditional way of using a mixture of mother tongue and target language. It describes a way to use such a combination so that the information the students need to know is supplied in the mother tongue, and the very complicated parts of the target language texts are adapted/processed in a drastic way, or combined with input in the mother tongue. In addition, the article focuses on how to use newspapers in a unorthodox way. It attempts to give some ideas of how to manage complicated material by combining this with the information and experiences the students already possess. The article concludes that when studying a language it is vital for students to be able to use cultural as well as political information in oral communication.

Language teaching with the iPad close at hand

[Sprogundervisning med iPads lige ved hånden]

Abstract

This paper draws on empirical examples from a recent research project in which language learning was studied ethnographically through observations and interviews in a Danish lower secondary school where students used tablets (iPads) as a personal device for learning. Classroom observations identified ways in which the iPads supported students in learning in individualised ways by providing new and emergent ways of enhancing for instance reading and writing processes through video and sound. In addition to this, the iPad as a personal device helped pupils organise their learning in ways that were centred on their personal preferences and interests – and in this way provided additional engagement for language learning activities. Finally, as iPads were readily available for pupils, the tablets became part of an ecology of learning where shifts between modalities and materials helped students to learn languages such as English and German using both paper-based and digitalised materials.

Everyone has a story to build, share, tell and write. LEGO as a learning tool

[Alle har en historie at bygge, fortælle, gengive og skrive.
LEGO som læringsværktøj]

Abstract

For school systems throughout the world LEGO Education has introduced a new learning tool, StoryStarter, which with the aid of constructionism aims at developing the pupils' speaking, reading, writing, presentation and linguistic skills. Using StoryStarter, pupils are challenged in the infant classes and in mother-tongue instruction to create and communicate stories with the aid of LEGO bricks. The system is based on the professional insight that playing with LEGO bricks stimulates children's imagination, creativity and ability to solve problems and collaborate. The StoryStarter system has already been awarded a school prize in USA, and Danish school teachers have experienced that StoryStarter activities activate and motivate pupils at all levels. Pupils weak at a subject seem to acquire new roles and have strengths in creative aspects of the process and in collaborating with others on creating a story and communicating it – also via electronic presentations. Furthermore, teachers find that boys in particular gain more active roles via the creative process with bricks in collaborating with others in the narrating and development of stories.

Assignment didactics and scaffolding

[Opgavedidaktik og stilladsring]

Abstract

Assignment didactics is a field that deals with the question of how to develop student assignments in relation to a certain subject, its contents and objectives. The article has its point of departure in didactic research and suggests that scaffolding in student assignments focuses on the use of concepts, multimodality and student involvement. My study shows that the students' use of assignments is not sufficient in the subject Danish. I demonstrate that the assignments are not scaffolded in a sufficient way when it comes to the use of concepts, professional multimodality and involvement processes.

Latin America in textbooks for Spanish as a foreign language. Content and voices

[*Latin-Amerika* i lærebøker i spansk. Hva formidles og hvilke stemmer kommer til orde?]

Abstract

This article studies the representation of Latin America in Scandinavian textbooks for Spanish as a foreign language: what topics are treated, and what voices are present? The point of departure of the article is that Latin America can be seen as an ideal arena for the exploration of cultural and linguistic diversity, democracy, and questions dealing with the division between the North and the South. Spanish as a foreign language, thus, has the potential to develop the learners' consciousness and understanding of other ways of living than their own, and also their reflections on different power relations. The article claims, however, that these perspectives are essentially absent in textbooks for Spanish as a foreign language. As for content, the books often focus on facts about the different nations of the continent. When it comes to voices, Latin America is frequently presented through the voice of European adolescents. The result, I argue, is a superficial, touristic and even Eurocentric representation of Latin America, leaving very few opportunities for dialogue between the learner and *the Other*.

Analysing Culture in Learning Materials

[At analysere kultur i læremidler]

Abstract

In this article three approaches to the analysis of culture in language learning materials are presented: First: thematic analysis, where culture is typically seen as a large number of themes or topics, and intercultural learning is seen as the accumulation of factual knowledge about target-language countries. Second: intercultural analysis, where culture is typically seen as a multitude of identities and perspectives, and intercultural learning is seen as the development of the learner's awareness of sociocultural perspectives and their implications for communication, collaboration and conflict resolution. Third: analysis of power and empowerment, where culture is seen as a scene of conflicts and ideologies, and intercultural learning is seen as the development of the learner as a critically aware citizen. The article emphasises that all kinds of materials may be subject to cultural analysis, including linguistically oriented tasks such as exercises on negations.

Discovering pupils' linguistic repertoires. On the way towards a heteroglossic foreign language teaching?

[På opdagelse i elevernes sproglige repertoier
– på vej mod en heteroglossisk fremmedsprog-
undervisning?]

Abstract

This article draws on the experience of studying pupils' linguistic repertoires when they start learning German as a second foreign language in the Danish 'Folkeskole'. By using the methodological biographical approach of the language portrait, the article discusses its value in revealing pupils' actual linguistic repertoires. The article concludes that the language portrait should be considered as a useful tool for pupils and all language teachers, because it visualises linguistic repertoires. Furthermore, by analysing these repertoires the language portrait emphasises pupils' entire, creative heteroglossic practices in a variety of multiple situations and different social - real or virtual spaces. Finally, this article contributes to ways and advantages of exploring pupils' multilingual repertoires by questioning monolingual practices in the classroom and positing them as a key challenge when developing the curriculum.

ISABEL OLESEN

The schoolbook collection at Aarhus University Library, Campus Emdrup, Copenhagen (DPB)

[Skolebogssamlingen på AU Library, Campus Emdrup (DPB)]

Abstract

This short text describes the present collection of learning materials at the university library on educational studies in Copenhagen. The collection covers materials from the 19th century until the present day, and contains textbook materials and IT materials for all school subjects in primary and secondary education in Denmark. The description focuses particularly on learning materials for foreign languages and for Danish as a second language.