Mediating meaning in communication and in language(s) learning

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Setting the scene

- Changing realities of our world
  - globalisation $\rightarrow$ changed the landscape for communication/ language use and language learning
  - human beings interconnected $\rightarrow$ increasing multilingual and intercultural encounters – complex contact zones; exchanging knowledge/know-how and values across transnational communities
  - Multilingualism as the norm
- Layered with diversity is the use of the internet and mobile technologies/AI; mobile communities
- Coronavirus reshapes the global 'order'
- Diversity is key: the 'experience' economy; blended community and civic spaces; fragmented work; lifelong learning and co-learning
- And more!

$\rightarrow$ Role of language learners as language users, language learner and persons (Liddicoat & Scarino 2013), engaged in communication across languages and cultures

Language learning as multilingual and intercultural

In the complex world of meaning-making (interpreting, creating, exchanging meanings, i.e. actual communicative exchange rather than pseudo communication):

- Learning an additional language or one's home language in a 'new' linguistic and cultural world involves minimally two languages and cultures in interaction.

- Both learners and their teachers of language/s are situated in their own linguistic and cultural world, as part of their socialisation in the world; this situatedness is not just a 'background' to be noted, but rather it is constitutive of learning. Language learning involves drawing upon and examining one's own language and culture. As stated by Levine:

"meaning-making must be observed and analysed as process rather than object and language regarded as embodied cognition, and therefore both language and the people who use it are in a constant state of change".

(Levine 2020, p.11)

Expanded goals of language learning

A multilingual and intercultural orientation implies an expansion of the goals of language/s learning:

- reaffirming the multilingual character of communication and learning to communicate understood as –
  - the interpretation, creation and exchange of meanings – personal meanings; learning area content, etc.
  - learning to decentre (step back), analyse and reflect on the situated exchange of meanings; the role of language and culture in the exchange and on self as communicator
- re-inserting the importance of personal development and aesthetics
  - attention to the person and the formation and transformation of identities through language/s use and language/s learning
  - an expansive, arts-based, experiential, humanistic understanding of education
- recognising the centrality of reflectivity and reflexivity in communicating
  - such that learners come to understand the genuine exchange of meanings and ways of negotiating differences.

(Leung & Scarino 2016)

'Today it is not sufficient for learners to know how to communicate meanings; they have to understand the practice of meaning making. This is because mediation relates to how language users, teachers and students understand and come to understand the process and entailments of meaning making' (Kramsch 2006, p.251)

Understandings of mediation in communication

Mediation in the act of communication (Byram & Zarate 1994; 1996; Dendrinos 2014; Council of Europe 2018; Liddicoat 2022):

- Involves interpersonal negotiation/ exchange of meaning in interaction with diverse participants across languages and cultures

- Mediation in the 'contact zone' between different linguistic and cultural worlds, which may or may not be conflictual or sites of misunderstanding

- Mediation as a reciprocal process of decentring and 'bridging' diverse interpretations of meaning and ways of creating meaning: diverse experiences, positions, perspectives, understandings, recognising that meaning is not only linguistic but also cultural; this entails participation, analysis, reflection, reflexivity.

- Attending in the act of communication to subject matter/ideas/knowledge; dimensions of *context of situation* (setting, participants and their experiences, knowledge, understandings, roles, relationships) and the *context of culture* (Halliday 1993); attending to responses, reactions and the emotional investment of participants involved.

→Foregrounding learner as language user and person
→Foregrounding the process and entailments of the exchange of meaning in communication and self awareness as an intercultural communicator and mediator

Understandings of mediation in language(s) teaching and learning

Mediation in the act of language(s) teaching and learning:

- Learning within a sociocultural perspective understood as an inter- and intra-personal process: social activity with more knowledgeable others leads to internalisation and transfer (Vygotsky 1986; Kohler 2015; 2020); intercultural mediation as a process through which learners are brought to new knowledge and understanding, that connects the familiar with the new
- Mediation as a goal of languages learning and to understand the processes and entailments of the interpretation and creation of meaning in the context of diversity and multiplicity
- Necessitates scaffolding – learning supports, especially language itself, resources, texts, etc. to mediate between experience and thought
- Engaging students in reflection and reflexivity through which they develop meta-awareness/ consciousness in relation to communicating in multilingual and intercultural contexts.

→Foregrounding learner as language learner and person

→In relation to mediation both in communication and in teaching and learning languages, reflection and reflexivity are crucial; students decentre and abstract from the experience, and in doing so come to develop capabilities as an intercultural communicator/learner and mediator.

Teacher as mediator: pedagogical guidelines - 1

- Guidance for teachers in working within a multilingual and intercultural orientation

Teachers…
model and support learners to mediate meaning, including focussing on how to translate meaning across languages and cultures, considering language choices and how and why meaning changes
engage in instruction, explanation and questioning, such as encouraging noticing; facilitating connections; probing students' interpretations, conceptions, memories and assumptions; inviting students to share and compare interpretations; prompting students to think critically and creatively
develop a metalanguage with learners for exploring aspects of the target language and culture, and the nature of language, culture and learning in general

Teacher as mediator: pedagogical guidelines - 2

Teachers:
provide texts (print, digital, visual) and artefacts, including authentic texts and those created specifically for language learning, that depict a range of perspectives, inviting students to consider diverse representations and perspectives
using a range of tools and technologies to support interaction and processes of engaging with language, culture and learning
encourage and model reflective thinking about experiences of intercultural exchange/communication, and promote reflexive (intracultural) thinking about our own role in communication, including our assumptions, reactions, perspectives e.g. 'What does this mean to me?', 'Why do I react as I do?', 'Where do my reactions/views/interpretations come from?'

Developing learners as mediators: learning experiences - 1

Second language learners of Indonesian

(a) Develop a resource to support an Indonesian person/family coming to live in Australia. It could include what to know about Australia in terms of the environment, people, values, past-times/lifestyle and of course, language;

(b) Write a reflection about what you have learned about how language and culture shape who we are and how we interact, and what is involved in becoming bilingual and acting interculturally – What does it take to 'fit in', what do you notice about your language use, interaction, identity, sense of your own language and culture?
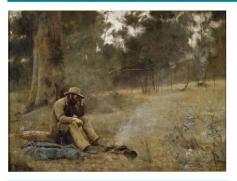
→Positioning learner as intercultural mediator

→Mediating meanings through meaningful/memorable experiences of communication/language use

→Mediating self/cultural perspectives and values through intercultural and intracultural reflection

BUDAYA 'BUSH'
PENGARUHNYA TERHADAP KEHIDUPAN DI AUSTRALIA

'DOWN ON HIS LUCK'
FREDERICK MCCUBBIN, 1889

Orang Eropa-Australia tiba di Australia pada tahun 1788. Penduduk Aborijin dan Penduduk Kepulauan Selat Torres menghuni di sini jauh sebelumnya kedatangan pendatang Eropa. Kedua kelompok memiliki hubungan dengan darat, tetapi hubungan tersebut berbeda dari sama lain.

Penduduk asli Australia memiliki hubungan yang lebih keagamaan. Mereka tinggal dengan dan dalam lingkungan. Sebaliknya untuk orang Eropa-Australia, ada ketegangan dengan darat, karena lingkungan di Australia sangat berbeda dengan lingkungan Eropa.

SEJARAH

Identitas Australia dikelilingi oleh kontroversi. Kami adalah bangsa multikultural. Ini berarti tidak ada satu saja budaya Australia. Walaupun begitu, ada budaya yang unik Australia. Budaya tersebut dipengaruhi oleh hubungan dengan darat/lingkungan, dan sekarang mempengaruhi nilai-nilai kami dan kehidupan di Australia.

Bush adalah kata dipahami secara budaya berarti lingkungan apapun yang jarang penduduknya atau tidak berpenghuni. Itu juga dikenal sebagai 'Outback'. Australia adalah benua yang besar dan sebagian besar negeri dianggap 'bush'. Walaupun lebih dari dua pertiga penduduk tinggal di kota, semua orang Australia dipengaruhi oleh budaya bush.

LINGKUNGAN

Lingkungan Australia di luar kota bervariasi. Misalnya, di beberapa daerah iklim itu sangat gersang. Australia adalah benua terkering di bumi. Di daerah tersebut, tidak ada pohon atau tanaman, melainkan semak garam.

Tetapi, ada daerah lain dengan hutan-hutan yang memiliki pohon, khususnya pohon eukalipyus dan pohon akasia.

NILAI-NILAI

Menghadapi dan menaklukkan lingkungan berbentuk karakter dan idenitas. Di bush sering ada banjir, kekeringan, dan kebakaran. Orang yang tinggal di bush harus menjadi keras dan

banyak akal untuk bertahan. Mereka juga harus membentuk persahabatan dan berjerka sama untuk mengatasi kesulitan.

Dari perjuangan ini, nilai-nilai Australia dibentuk. Nilai-nilai ini termasuk ketekunan, kelucuan, informalitas, egalitarianisme dan juga persahabatan yang spesifik, dianggil 'mateship'.

Walaupun kami berkerja keras, orang Australia dianggap sangat santai. Bahasa Australia mungkin tampak kasar karena kami selalu bercanda dan berbicara secara informal. Lagi pula, sebenarnya tidak ada hirarki social; setiap orang memiliki status yang sama. Tentu saja, ternyata ada beberapa perbedaan, tapi idenya adalah kami semua sama. Selain itu, budaya bush mempengaruhi kesenian dan sastra Australia.

'NED KELLY'
SIDNEY NOLAN, 1946

Sidney Nolan adalah seniman modern. Dia sering melukis Ned Kelly, bushranger dan penjahat yang sangat terkenal. Ned Kelly melambangkan akal orang yang tinggal di bush.

Developing learners as mediators: learning experiences - 2

Translated from Indonesian (extracts only)
'Bush' Culture: Its influence on life in Australia

History
Australia's identity is surrounded in controversy. We are a multicultural nation. This means there isn't one Australian culture. Although there is a unique Australian culture. This culture is influenced by connections with land and influenced by our values and life in Australia.

The Bush is a word that means any environment that has few people or is uninhabited…. Although more than 2/3 of the population live in cities, everyone is influenced by bush culture… Indigenous Australians have a spiritual connection. They live within the environment (land).

Values
Although we work hard, Australians are considered relaxed. Australian language may appear rough because we always joke and speak informally. Further, there is not a social hierarchy, everyone has equal status. Of course, there are many differences, but the idea is that we are all the same.

A student's reflection:
I was trying to get the meaning of 'land' across. To me it is so much more than the physical thing, so I thought 'tanah', 'daratan', and 'lingkungan' just did not convey what land meant to me. Growing up the concept of land was such a visual, physical experience, that evolved overtime, and was attached to the word land, but it is so hard to communicate how that feels. I also had a horrific revelation; if this is how I as a non-Indigenous person feels towards the land, I couldn't imagine what it must feel like when you have an obvious spiritual connection. This applies also to the Indonesian experience. Indonesians grow up in a particular landscape, and so lots of words, although they have a translation to English don't mean the same thing. Our type of 'farm' is different. To become bilingual, you really need to understand the everyday experience of the other culture.

Concluding comments

- Understandings of mediation
  - in (multilingual and intercultural) communication, and in language(s) learning
- Crucial role of the language teacher
  - as mediator of communication across languages and cultures, in mediating teaching and learning/interaction, in selecting texts and representations of language and culture, in connecting with learners' lifeworlds, as an intercultural communicator and reflective/reflexive lifelong learner
- Developing students as mediators, and the crucial role of learning experiences and reflection
  - Through learning experiences of communication and reflection, learners develop increasingly sophisticated understandings of the intercultural exchange of meaning, processes of mediation, and the role of language and culture in intercultural mediation and learning as part of their evolving meta-awareness.

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