

From the message to the code

Recall of the principles that direct us

Supposing the meeting of writing constitutes a linguistic working knowledge is conceiving proceedings considering the apprentice will meet the code through the message. The message, it's the object produced by those already using that language to exchange what it allows to conceive, in a wider sense, the social conditions in which this message is conveyed, welcome, treated, sent back, in short, integrated in a dialogue. The code, it's all the unities and the rules of their combination the apprentice will build, firstly by implication, when discovering the invariants of this particular linguistic system which allows the group to work upon its experience. So the characteristic of a linguistic apprenticeship is that through messages he integrates though he hasn't got the means of their self treatment yet, the apprentice succeeds in relating meanings to linguistic, to the point of conferring specific functions to isolated unities and operations carried out with them.

Clearly, it's what he understands in the message which allows him to discover how the code works up to being able to consider it separately at last. Contrary to the approach in use in schools in the long run of elimination of illiteracy, one cannot enter a new language but by its use as a tool for thinking and communicating.

Not eager to invest economically in the conditions of reading for the part of the productive backbone that the division of labour was to leave out of a skilled relation as far as writing was concerned, during the last century, the social body chose an entry through the code in order to reach the message by transcribing the native linguistic system, in this case, orality. A realistic choice only possible in phonographic prevailing writing systems, but reducing the definition of reading to this operation taught in a way forgetting the common operations in the treatment of all the written systems by skilled readers.

This reducing of reading allows quite sincere teachers to keep away from thinking about the conditions of a linguistic apprenticeship of writing on account that orality would be natural (therefore would be related to the linguistic apprenticeship conditions) but writing would be social and so would justify a non – linguistic apprenticeship. It's to take position in reverse of this accepted idea that Freinet invented the word of 'natural' method to tackle writing, which simply consists in re-creating the social conditions of a linguistic apprenticeship.

For the last 20 years now, we've been suggesting to find Champollion in any apprentice, he who learnt to read hieroglyphics supposing that the Rosetta stone was reproducing 3 times the same matter in 3 different languages. This intercourse between the Egyptian and Greek texts had to do with the meaning and not the words, even less the sounds. What was in common were the purpose and the meaning, no linguistic matter. What is being constituted, we would suggest, are assumptions on how writing builds sense. And it's the evolution, through messages, of thinking about the way writing works which constitutes the apprenticeship of reading.

Hence the obligation, to be able to learn, to commit genuine reading acts. For every written message encountered, two processes, distinct though indissociable, are working on : the attribution of a meaning to the message, in other words, its reading ; and linguistic assumptions on the working of the code.

In fact, our pedagogical research lies on the assumption that a direct interaction between message and code benefits the meeting of writing as well as orality, here between text and writing system as well as speech and oral system, therefore without the mediation of another code. For us, this assumption of similarity between linguistic apprenticeships is opposed to the traditional ruling idea which yet claims the importance of orality but not for thinking about the conditions of its apprenticeship. This traditional idea, by favouring the alphabetical source, will consider in writing, first of all, the system of notation of an already known language. For us, on the contrary, meeting writing as we meet orality leads to not introducing outside helps which interposes another code on the pretext it would be less difficult to understand the graphic code in its relation to the phonologic one rather than its relation to writing.

The result, in the end, is connected to the initial investment when the pupil stops meeting texts transcribed for 'learning' to read and has to confront himself with texts produced by a writing work, texts having object, effect, subject, matter, dialogical project which have no oral counterparts, texts issued specifically from the exchange of the hard job of writing and the hard job of reading, texts which are as irrelevant to the transcription of something orally worked out as a description of the Gioconda can be from Vinci's painting.

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