

***Digital Semiotics in ESP/EAP Materials  
Development: The Study of the Effects of DVD  
Options for Developing Text-Independent  
Thinking / Reading***

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In this article, the EAP/ESP materials are approached with a view to introduce a way for the promotion of critical thinking/reading ability. To this end, nature of the thought, language and written texts have been considered in the light of Oller's true narrative case, Piaget and Peirce's Schema theory and Montague's views toward indexicality; from there, the authors go on to suggest that subtitled videos (and in the case of the present article, Same Language Subtitles) alongside the potentials they have for the formation of abstract schemata, can be used to develop and enhance the critical thinking ability of the foreign language learners in general and the ESP students, in particular.

**Key words: Critical thinking/reading, EAP/ESP materials development, indexicality, Multi-modal Input, subtitled movies**

## INTRODUCTION

For a long time, it has been widely argued (cf., Johnson-Laird, 1983; Leech, 1969; Rommetveit, 1968, 1979; van Dijk, 1981) that the material contexts of ordinary experience must somehow be taken into consideration by the theories of linguistics and its cognate disciplines. Indeed, psycholinguists (e.g., Johnson-Laird, 1983; Rommetveit, 1968, 1979) and cognitive scientists (Kintsch, 1988; Mandler, 1992) have been progressing more and more to account for the relations between discursive representations and the facts of the material world. Yet, as Oller and Kennedy (in press) have shown with respect to Chomsky's government and binding theory (1982, 1988), Langacker's functional grammar (1987) and Givón's pragmatics (1984, 1989, 1990), the existential material world along with its persons, objects, etc., has generally been ignored. This is also largely true for theories of language teaching and acquisition in spite of the fact that it has been popular for about three decades to speak of communicative, social, and pragmatic aspects of these processes. For instance, the popular communicative and notional/functional approaches recommended by Widdowson (1990), Wilkins (1994), and others working in similar paradigms have notably come up short of incorporating the particular material contexts of the experience of real individual persons in a world of genuine risks (cf., Valdman, 1992; Walz, 1989).

But, how is it that such a gap can be filled? One possible solution to this problem can be found in Oller et al. (1993)'s "true narrative case" or something that he called "pragmatic mapping" in his earlier works (cf., 1975, 1990). Under the true narrative case theory, each such case as narrated is linked to three kinds of evidence showing its material facts. First, there are perceptual evidences in the experience of one or more observers. Second, there are memories of actions underway at the time of the narrated events. Third, there are meanings of the narrative representation that could be paraphrased or translated into another language.

If we want to relate these cases to three categories proposed by Saussure in

semiology, we have facts that are determined firstly by the sensory experience of those involved in the reported events (Icons). Secondly, the facts are determined by being pointed out by the representations that single them out for attention (Indices), as might be done with a pointing finger. Then, in a tertiary manner, the particular meanings of the linguistic forms in question (Symbols) are determined by the material facts (that is the events, persons, relations, etc.) in that context then and there. Taken out of that context, the same terms become indeterminate. For instance, a phrase such as the person doing the talking or a pronoun such as 'I' could refer to absolutely any speaker in any context. The word 'person' could be used to refer any conceivable one whether real, imagined, or non-existent. And so on. That is to say, a representation without any particular facts to determine its meaning, by definition must be less determinate (exactly to the degree that it is separated from determinate facts) than a true narrative case whose meaning is determined by the very material facts that it singles out for attention.

As a result of their structural peculiarities, true narrative representations have three logical perfections not found in any other representations (cf., Oller, 1993b). True narrative cases are more determinate with respect to their meaning. They are the only kinds that are connected to the material world of space and time, and they provide the only basis for achieving meaningful generalizations.

In this study, the author, having considered the Sager, Dung worth and McDonald (1980)'s definition of the term 'Language for specific purpose' (LSP) as a 'semi-autonomous, complex *semiotic* system' and also the importance given to the content of students' specialist disciplines (ibid), intends to investigate the applicability of true narrative case theory for ESP /EAP materials development, with special attention to the development of critical thinking / reading ability as one of the important study skills needed for EAP students.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

### **Psycho-Semiotic View of Thought: Schema Theory**

As construed in the exponentiation literature on the subject, a schema is a way of looking at states of affairs in experience including literature, films, and vicarious experiences. From Piaget (1947, 1952) forward, the term schema has come to describe the kind of organization that enables its user to handle certain kinds of tasks more efficiently than would otherwise be possible (see Kintsch & van Dijk, 1978; Mandler, 1984; Rumelhart, 1975; Schank, 1975; Schank & Abelson, 1977). In her landmark work on the subject, Mandler (1984) discusses scripts, scenes, scenarios, plans, and frames of reference. All these bear resemblances to the abstracted commonalities of memories and fictions (including fantasies, dreams, etc.) and are nearly equated by Mandler (1984).

With the foregoing as background, it is evident that there must be three kinds of schemata: 1) content schemata, 2) formal schemata, and 3) abstract schemata. Content schemata are based on abductive judgments about particular facts and states of affairs. These content schemata are concerned with particular arrangements of things (i.e., with facts) in the material world as known through perceptions.

Abduction involves the abstraction of an iconic representation (a perceptual one) from a particular logical object in experience. It pertains to bodily objects extended in time and space, an abductive inference merely supposes the material existence in a consistent form of its logical object. It is an inference to the temporal continuity of the bodily object. However, the abductive inference enables a higher sort of generality and a higher degree of continuity than could be justified by perception operating in the here and now all by itself.

But abduction alone will not enable the knowledge that an object perceived on a particular occasion is the same one that was perceived on some other occasion. To connect such separate and individual abductive inferences and

to know them as pertaining to the same logical object, induction is required. At this point, the theory requires that there must be formal schemata, and again, this is no surprise, as these are well documented in the literature. They are the result mainly of inductive connections established across distinct states of affairs that are indexed as being similar in some respect. The similarities of the indexed facts judged by induction are dependent upon structures and arrangements abstracted to some degree from the particular facts of any given context. Such formal structures remain relatively invariant in spite of the fact that the perceptual surroundings in which they are found may differ radically from one occasion to the next. Now, where abduction involves the abstraction of an iconic representation (a perceptual one) from a particular logical object in experience, induction involves abstraction of an indexical representation from one or more discontinuous perceptual cases appearing at different points in time. For instance, having once been to the Lord Baltimore, suppose someone were to go there again. The place will be recognized as the same hotel visited previously by virtue of indexing both occasions as pertaining to the same logical object. Yet the linking of the two distinct occasions will require an inductive inference over and above the separate abductive inferences which derive from the separate perceptions of the Lord Baltimore Hotel.

Abstract schemata constitute a third class and unlike the other two this class of schemata has not been recognized previously in schema theory as a distinct category (unless grammars themselves are taken to be schemata).

Abstract schemata carry the inductive integration to the completely general (abstract, non-material, non-syntacticized) level of pure symbols (in Peirce's sense of the term 'symbol'). Deductive inferences are not derived from the particulars of any given case, but are, to the extent that they are grounded in correct definitions of symbols, implicit in all possible cases to which the symbol might validly be applied. Thus, with deduction, a higher level of integration is achieved beyond the inductive level. Here the conceptualization reaches such a degree of integration and completeness that if the definition of the symbol is sound, the inferences drawn from it must be equally valid.

Except for the definitions upon which they are based, deductions, unlike abductions and inductions, are relatively impervious to errors.

In deduction, reason works on the basis of an abstracted symbol which applies not only to the case in hand, but to all possible cases. As Peirce showed, this kind of inference takes us across all spatio-temporal barriers and must have its basis in the non-temporal realm of abstract meaning.

The Peircean theory (semiotic theory of relations originally the 'logic of relatives', 1883, 1897, 1898) seems to be superficially noticed even by sympathetic semioticians. For instance, Eco (1990, p. 214) barely devotes a single page to the logic of relatives and the subject is not even mentioned by Sebeok (1991). It has been noticed even less by linguists (though Leech 1969 is an exception), not to mention practitioners in applied linguistics. What Peirce accomplished there was to show how indices linking general predicates to one or more particular arguments (whether existing or fictional) can be mathematically described-but not without all three of his major categories (icon, index, and symbol).

Oller and Kennedy (in press) have shown why the linking of indices to actual objects and states of affairs in genuine experience is essential to determining the data of discourse so that they can be used to test grammatical theories. Rommetveit (1979) anticipated the findings in part in the following remarks:

All natural languages contain elements by which particulars of an intersubjectively presupposed and/or temporarily established shared and immediate Lebenswelt (life space) can be introduced into the process of verbal communication. They are the so-called deictic ('pointing') linguistic tools ('indicators') such as demonstratives, time and place pronouns, tense of verbs, etc.

Regarding the Peircean's three category of schemata on one hand, and the requirements of the EAP students, on the other hand, to reach to such level of understanding of the content of the text that goes beyond what is appeared on the page, in this part the researcher turns to the academic discourse and the

role of the language within Systemic Functional Linguistic theory.

### **Socio-Semiotic View of Language**

Parallel to what has been mentioned in Kintsch's (1988) construction-integration (CI) model, *macrostructures* of texts can be explained in terms of the higher level 'macrostructures' of models: They may not be directly visible or expressed in the discourse itself, but the fact that people know what its general topics are, is represented in their mental model of an event. In other words, implicit information and inferences in discourse processing are represented in mental models, which thus also nicely explain the notion of *presupposition*, namely as the propositions in a model that are not expressed in discourse. Hüllen (1981) introduces the term *indexicality* to refer to such presuppositions. In the case of written text, this index role is played by the hedges.

#### *Indexicality: Going Beyond the Text*

In his essay "Pragmatics" (1968), Richard Montague generalized the concept of a possible world to deal with a number of phenomena, including indexicals. An index combines a possible world with other factors relevant to the truth value of a sentence. To study tensed sentences, for example, one incorporates times into indices. A sentence like "Elwood went to the store," is true *in* a world, *at* a time. A sentence like "I went to the store," would be true *in* a world, *at* a time, *for* a speaker: roughly, if the speaker went to the store prior to the time in the world.

#### Micro-Real time Dialectics

By this time we can surely say that the work of contemporary linguistic anthropology has firmly established that any linguistic, a.k.a. sociolinguistic, fact is necessarily an indexical fact, that is, a way in which linguistic and penumbral signs-in-use point to contexts of occurrence structured for sign-

users in one or another sort of way. To be sure, under the normal conceptualization of conformity of linguistic signals to Saussurean structural–functional assumptions, one indexical value of any particular sign-fraction so discernible is its “value” (valeur) in the standard intra-linguistic or cotextual sense that derives from its network of syntagmatic distributions and paradigmatic contrast sets captured by the concept of a grammar of sentences. Recognizing this, we can set it aside to focus for the time being on the more generally contextualizing indexical value in the more straightforwardly recognized cases of sociolinguistic analysis.

#### Socio-cultural Macro-Contexts

In this part, language use was seen in its “macro-contextual” surround. When we think of the “context” of linguistic signals macro-sociologically, we think of things that perdure in one or another intuitive sense beyond any particular token interactional moment, and which semiotic material in such an interactional moment may index. Note that the very idea of a Saussurean grammatical norm is something macro-sociological in this sense, as it is thought of as a property of a whole language community of speakers indexically invoked by following grammatical rule each time an utterance is used parsable into sentence parts under the grammar. In the same way, we think macro-sociologically of conventional or institutionalized qualitative and perhaps quantitative frameworks of social differentiation—partitions and gradations of social space, we might term them—that are presupposed/entailed in-and-by the species instantiated in micro-context as it develops during an interaction. Individuals inhabiting such roles as sender–receiver–referent–audience–etc. come to be identified with, even assigned to, positions in such social partitions and gradations in the course of discursive interaction.

Socio-culturally identified (from the presuppositional point of view) or placed, as it were (as an indexical entailment of language use). Just as at the plane of real-time denotational-textual function we assume that there are perduring grammars and (denotational)discourse genres, so also do we understand such perduring structures of categorical differentiation as sociological

age, gender, social and socioeconomic class, profession, and other aspects of what we term institutional/positional social identity as these are relevant to interaction ally accomplished indexicality.

Micro-sociological contexts are in a sense composed of a dynamic structure-in play of these categorical distinctions (see Silverstein, 1992; 1993; 1998). And indeed, interactional happenings are social-actional “events” of (to a degree determinately) interpretable cultural meanings only to the degree they “instantiate”—indexically invoke—such macro-sociological partitions of social space, in terms of which cultural values can thus be said to be indexically “articulated.” This connection of identity with value manifests itself in the micro-contextual order to be sure, where perspectival interests are played out; but it really constitutes a universe of cultural imagination that is part of a more encompassing order of semiotic representation, an order of connectivity of micro-contexts one to another—inter-discursivity, in other words—so as to license or warrant a semiotic gesture to their connectedness in any one of them. So the macro-sociological is really a projective order from within a complex, and ever changing, configuration of inter-discursivities in micro-contextual orders, some of which, it turns out, at any given moment of macro-order diachrony asymmetrically determine others.

The question, which ritualized contexts accomplish such indexical licensing or authorization is always a potentially shifting feature of a social system, historical change or at least dialectical dynamism being inherent in the way this centering of social semiosis seems to operate (Note that the synchrony/diachrony distinction is quite useless for explanatory purposes, not only for denotational-code structure—Saussure’s *langue*—but especially for the more general semiotic order of non-denotational indexicality).

#### Indexicality features of the visual mode

In the visual mode also, research (see details in Giardetti & Oller in press) showed that photographs without any visible indices or symbols (e.g., someone in the photo pointing to a particular object of interest) to guide their interpretation would be most difficult to categorize. In these cases, subjects

would have to rely on content schemata almost exclusively. However, photos with formal (indexical) elements to help determine their content would be more determinate (as judged by the degree of agreement on the categorization of the photos) than ones without visible indices. However, they would be less so than ones with one or more visible symbolic elements (primitive abstract schemata). (See John W. Oller, 1995)

As for the video also, there is evidence that comprehension of oral discourse associated with moving pictures (a voice-over with video) also conforms to the mainline predictions of the schema theory. Of course, in view of the substantial tradition of Peircean thought associated with cinematography (cf., Barthes, 1967; Kora, 1988; Metz, 1971, 1974, 1983; Tagg, 1988) it should surprise no one that a more elaborate Peircean theory should be relevant to video-tape comprehension. Below, the film in general and subtitle movies in particular have been studied within SFL.

*The Cognitivist View toward Film in the Light of Systemic-Functional Theory*

In this section, the semiotic nature of film language will be studied. For a system to be considered as semiotic, it must fulfill two criteria: a) stratification, i.e. the signifying relation between signifier and signified and 2) Instantiation/Schematicity, i.e. it must consist of different levels of specificity, from more abstract level (schemata) to more specific one (instances).

As mentioned by Thibault's *Re-reading Saussure*, 1997, the film fulfils the criteria for semiotic systems. Therefore, a semiotic approach in which various semiotic systems are studied both in their particularity and in their similarities with other semiotic systems appears to be justified. It is true that, in systemic-functional theory, the linguistic system is taken as the starting point for the construction of a theory of the cinematic system. This is so because the linguistic system is the semiotic system best studied. As both language and film are semiotic systems, the results of the study of the linguistic system should have at least some relevance for the study of the

cinematic system. However, this does not mean that the linguistic system is uncritically and blindly projected onto the cinematic system. In a systemic-functional approach to film, attention is paid to both meaning relations which are comparable to linguistic meaning relations, and meaning relations which are particular to the cinematic mode.

In this part, we turn our attention to the subtitled video as a synchronized multimedia and how systemic functional approach can be applied to the potential benefits accrued from using them as the input for teaching / learning of English especially for the development of critical thinking / reading ability in ESP / EAP students.

### **Poly-Semiotic View of Subtitles**

The creation of accessible and synchronized spoken, written and visual learning materials can address the problem that teachers may have preferred teaching styles involving the spoken or written word that may differ from learners' preferred learning styles. Speech, text, and images have communication qualities and strengths that may be appropriate for different contents, tasks, learning styles and preferences. By combining these modalities in synchronized multimedia, learners can select whichever is the most appropriate. Some learners, for example, may find the more colloquial style of Speech Text easier to follow than an academic written style.

#### *Cinematography of Digital Semiotics*

In this study, one type of speech texts, i.e. subtitles, has been considered with the assumption that such instantaneous texts along with integration of different semiotic modes of film not only can act at the three meta-functional levels of language, but also can help students' thought go beyond just focusing on microstructure of written text.

In this way, one of the best types of materials is DVD (Digital Video Disk or Digital Versatile Disk) which has vastly replaced traditional VHS as the

movie medium of the new millennium. In addition to its compactness, duality and availability, there are a variety of special features offered on DVD, including interactive menus, theatrical trailer, behind the scenes commentary, language and subtitles and immediate scene access. With these special features, DVD films provide more pedagogical options and are a rich resource of intrinsically motivating materials for learners.

Whenever affordability, dialog authenticity, acquisition of foreign-language and reading skills are prioritized in audiovisual translation, subtitling is the obvious solution. Historically, what began as an economic necessity in minor European speech communities during the Depression in the early 1930s soon became a linguistic virtue, and there is no doubt that especially the knowledge of foreign languages has been boosted in the subtitling countries (cf., Gottlieb, 2004).

As a matter of fact, any kind of translation is a multi-faceted entity. Traditional translation studies have almost exclusively dealt with texts that are seen as ‘verbal only’, whether written – e.g., literary or technical texts – or spoken, i.e. oral discourse to be interpreted. Although such texts communicate through one semiotic channel only, and thus deserve the label ‘mono-semiotic’, they are not abstract verbalizations of a message just waiting for someone to read, hear, or translate them. As Patrick Zabalbeascoa (1997, p. 338), having studied the workings of dubbing, aptly puts it, “no text can be made entirely of verbal signs because such signs always need some sort of physical support.”

Naturally, this ‘physical support’ gains semantic momentum in genuinely poly-semiotic texts. The most prominent poly-semiotic text type is the audiovisual text, defined by Frederic Chaume (2004, p. 16) as “a semiotic construct comprising several signifying codes that operate simultaneously in the production of meaning”.

The prototypical translation, sometimes termed ‘translation proper’, is not only intra-lingual (and thus, by definition, intra-semiotic), but also *iso-semiotic*, i.e. communicating through exactly the same semiotic channels as the original. Naturally, this embraces all sorts of printed translations – from

translated novels to localized software manuals reusing the original illustrations while adapting the verbal text to foreign-language markets. Iso-semiotic translation encompasses both mono-semiotic text types (oral discourse being interpreted for foreign-language speakers) and poly-semiotic texts (the most conspicuous example being dubbing, in which the original semiotic composition is maintained in translation).

I**lb**) *Dia-semiotic* translation is characterized by its use of different channels, while the number of channels (one or more) is the same as in the original text. A mono-semiotic example of dia-semiotic translation is written music (with notes representing musical sounds), while subtitling exemplifies dia-semiotic translation of a polysemiotic text (with letters representing speech sounds).

S**ic**) In super semiotic translation, the translated texts displays more semiotic channels than the original – as when a novel is semiotically unfolded into a film.

I**ld**) Lastly, the term *hypo-semiotic* translation implies that the semiotic ‘bandwidth’ of the translation is narrower than that of the original. When considering the translated *production*, we see this when, for instance, a mime artist performs a dramatical piece originally including spoken lines. However, when we focus on translation *reception*, audio-described stage plays for the blind, as well as TV shows captioned for the deaf fall into this category as well.

Gottlieb (2005a) defined subtitling as:

- A. *Prepared* communication
- B. using *written* language
- C. acting as an *additive*
- D. and *synchronous* semiotic channel,
- E. as part of a *transient*
- F. and *polysemiotic* text.

Interestingly, the inter-semiotic redundancy (positive feedback from visuals

and soundtrack) in subtitling often secures that the audience miss less of the film content than a merely linguistic analysis might indicate (Gottlieb, 2005). Put differently, in a poly-semiotic context, semantic voids are often inter-semiotically filled. Subtitle reading can be compared to a cloze test, in which “The viewer accepts to reconstruct those parts of conversation that are important for the comprehension but are not explicitly mentioned.” (Tomaszkiewicz, 1993, p. 267)

#### *Formation of Abstract Schemata in Viewing Subtitled Movies*

Watching movies, individuals have formed a concept of the film that is quite abstract (see episode hypothesis, Richard-Amato, 1988). They have a concept or schema of the film that is not dependent on syntactic forms of the dialogs uttered by the characters. It is unordered relative to any particular surface forms, but this episodic arrangement (Tatsuo Taira, 1993) when becomes associated with the formal schemata of the subtitles affords a higher level of structure from which to launch comprehension (Oller, W., 1995). It provides a richer formal schema than any schema produced by other media such as narrative text. Such sources influenced Oller, Sr. (1963-1965) to suppose that a series of lessons organized in the manner of a subtitled movies, would be easier to comprehend, to learn from, than any non-episodic arrangement even of the very same structures (also see Oller, Sr., & Oller, 1993).

Now we turn to the general questions proposed at the beginning: Which of the text components can help structuring the “thought” to be used critically? What kind of mental structure is needed to be formed to help our ESP/EAP students in developing their study skills? What kind of reading could texts help students better in forming schemata?

## **CONCLUSION**

Our being bodily situated (Dreyfus 1979, p. 62; McClelland & Rumelhart,

1986) in the material world is what enables the physical bodies and relations around us to be indexed (i.e., deictically pinned down by significant bodily movements and gestures). Only through bodily actions can indices be constructed so as to determine anything in one's present. In such acts of indexing, we also classify, name, and refer to perceived objective situations via symbols (mainly of the linguistic kind) articulately representing those states of affairs as facts of experience. We interact with the physical world across time exclusively through actions that ultimately constitute true narrative cases (no matter how many fictions, errors and lies we may entertain along the way). This interaction involves an indissoluble linking of representations with the material world. It comes out from the theory, then, that fictions, errors, illusions, hallucinations, lies, false generalizations, or generalizations of undetermined meanings, and in general all kinds of thinking are all dependent on true narrative cases. Not only do these degenerate cases not provide a basis for questioning the existence of true narrative cases (or the existence of a material world), on the contrary, they are *prima facie* evidence that some true narrative cases (and the material world to which they refer) must exist. Otherwise, we could not tell a fiction from an error or either of these from a lie, or any of them from a true narrative case.

Regarding the importance of critical thinking and reasoning ability as one of the study skills needed for EAP students, what has been mentioned in the present study showed the potentials that subtitle viewing could have for developing such higher order processing abilities in non-major students of English.

Language and literacy teachers and educators in general must have in their minds that bits of discourse cut loose from the moorings in experience that give them meaning ought not to be used in classrooms anywhere. The discourse that we introduce, use, and create in the classroom ought to involve the reasonable motivations normally provided by episodes of significant experience involving real material persons, events, places, and socio-cultural

relations with which our students can identify and find some common ground. In fact, community and communication entail common ground in the material world, so classroom procedures need to involve facts that are richly embedded in the dynamic episodes of ordinary discourse and which conform to the requirements of the true narrative case. To acquire a new language, or to become literate, or to achieve proficiency in a new subject matter, it is both necessary and sufficient that the student should be enabled to make the connection between abstract representations of the new material and concrete examples of texts, observed on the page. Only to the extent that such true narrative links are actively made by the student, is the desired learning assured.

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