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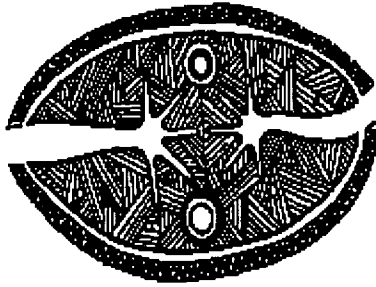
ED 454 103

SO 032 102

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TITLE Do You "Speak" the Visual Language?
INSTITUTION Australian Inst. of Art Education, Melbourne.
PUB DATE 1999-09-00
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual World Congress of the International Society for Education through Art (InSEA) (30th, Brisbane, Australia, September 21-26, 1999). This paper has been assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australian Council for the Arts, its art funding and advisory body.
AVAILABLE FROM Australian Institute of Art Education, C/Suite 125, 283 Glenhuntley Road, Eisternwick, VIC 3185, Australia.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Art Education; Communication Skills; Elementary Education; *English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; Instructional Innovation; *Interdisciplinary Approach; *Language Role; Program Content; Visual Literacy
IDENTIFIERS *Croatia

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the relationship between "language" and "visual language." The paper describes two integrated teaching projects (children ages 4-11) in Croatia in which English as a Foreign Language and the visual language are presented as two potential common languages for young people to improve their communication in the process of learning to live together. The visual language is given the role of communication with others (children and elders, locally and internationally), the environment (natural, urban, global, endangered by wars), oneself (own feelings), and artworks (language of art, multiculturalism). The paper concludes that the analogy between a verbal language and a visual language has proved to be quite justified, on condition that the polysemy of visual forms is kept in mind. Contains 25 references. (BT)



InSEA

“Do You ‘Speak’ the Visual Language?”

by

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Proceedings from the InSEA 30th World Congress “Cultures and Transitions”

21-26 September 1999
Brisbane Australia

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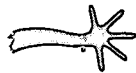
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DO YOU “SPEAK” THE VISUAL LANGUAGE?

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SUMMARY

The relationship between “language” and “visual language” is discussed.

The two integrated-teaching projects (children 4-11) present English as a foreign language and the visual language as two potential young people’s common languages for improving their communication in the process of learning to live together.

The visual language is given the role of communication with others (children and elders, locally and internationally), the environment (natural, urban, global, endangered by wars), oneself (own feelings) and artworks (language of art, multiculturalism).

All the main points of the projects are visually presented by a slide- and video-projection.

WHAT DOES “LANGUAGE” / “VISUAL LANGUAGE” MEAN?

The term “language” chiefly means “the systematic, conventional use of sounds, signs or written symbols in a human society for communication and self-expression”, as cited in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (D. Crystal, 1995: 454).

Some other definitions are “the system of human expression by means of words” and “a system of signs, movements, etc. used to express meanings or feelings” (*The Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture*, 1993: 736).

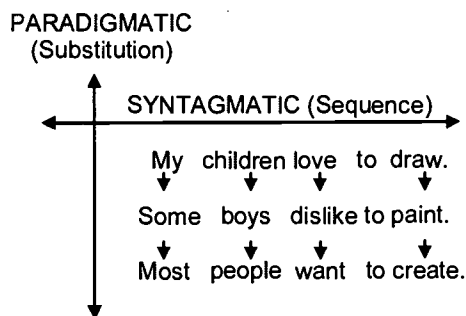
The parallel may be drawn with “visual language”, although the idea about a visual language (VL in the further text) is not widely accepted, not only by linguists but in educational systems world-wide as well, let alone accepted to an equal degree with *the* “language”, i.e. verbal language.

The “VL” can be defined as, what is only one of possible definitions, the use of visual elements / formal elements of an artwork / visual-tactile-kinesthetic signs (i.e. line, colour, plane, surface, shape, space, and – point, the latter one being a basic unit of all the rest) in particular composition relations (i.e. contrast, harmony, rhythm, balance, symmetry, asymmetry, proportion, dominance, unity) for communication with other people, environment, oneself, or artworks (Tomašević-Dančević, 1993/94: 20; 1996: 53), or by analogy with D. Crystal (1995:454), for communication and self-expression.

What are the theoretical possibilities for the establishment of a sensory language (e.g. VL / auditory language – music)?

First, it is the two-dimensional model of language structure established by the Swiss pioneer of modern linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857 – 1913) presented in his book *Cours de linguistique générale* (1949).

LEXEMES, units of lexical meaning, traditionally called WORDS, are related along two intersecting dimensions, as shown in the figure (adapted from *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, D. Crystal, 1995: 160).



On the horizontal dimension, now described as SYNTAGMATIC (SYNTAGMA: a string of elements forming a unit in SYNTAX, i.e. sentence structure), we sense the relationships between lexemes in a sequence.

On the vertical dimension, now described as PARADIGMATIC, we sense the way in which one lexeme can substitute for another and relate to it in meaning (Crystal, 1995: 160).

As a result of Saussure's approach, the term "language" is not used narrowly linguistically any more, and new logic and linguistic disciplines are established, i.e. SEMIOLOGY and SEMIOTICS (the science of signs and symbols).

Language as a semiotic term can now also refer to non-verbal sign systems, provided that they fit into the syntagmatic and paradigmatic dimension of the language structure (Damjanov, 1991: 185).

Roland Barthes (1985: 56) looks upon semiology as translinguistics researching any sign system as a language. Some of his examples of sign systems are clothing, food, furniture, architecture, whereas, e.g. cap / hat / beret is a paradigm, since these items of clothes can not be used at the same time on the same part of the body and also show different patterns of clothing (N.B. We can draw a parallel with a linguistic "paradigm" as "an example or pattern of a word, showing all its forms in grammar; *child*, *child's*, *children*, *children's* is a paradigm", *Longman Dictionary*, 1993: 957). On the other hand, putting different items of clothes, e.g. hat, blouse, skirt, blazer, is a syntagma, making a unity, wholeness.

The validity of this model of language structure in case of a sensory sign system, as for instance a visual sign system, can be checked, as well. Since the modern art has liberated itself from meaning and utility, the visual elements, e.g. colour, line, surface got defined as signs and the establishment of a VL based on forms was made possible.

Taking all aforementioned into account, the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes of colour as a sign totality system can be drawn, as well, and a colour syntax, as a method of exploring a painting, can be examined.

Each colour contains a natural sintagma as a possibility (e.g. the *form* of red searches for the *form* of green); in each natural sintagma a hidden colour totality is contained (i.e. the secondary colour in a complementary pair contains the two other primary colours as a possibility).All derived (forms of) tones and chromas are a paradigm (Damjanov, 1991: 187; 1998: 67) .

However, Barthes states that, contrary to a verbal system, signs like a blouse, a column, or a table function in such a non-verbal system as concrete (grown into one) signs, since they can not be divided into their smallest CONTRASTIVE UNITS WITHOUT MEANING (Damjanov, 1991: 185).

Yet, quite opposite to this Barthes' statement, as to a visual language, some authors draw another parallel with a semantic system of a verbal language including a smallest contrastive unit (e.g. Paul Klee, although implicitly, 1961: 24, 113, 468; Robert Tanay, 1988: 12; J. Damjanov in her earlier theoretical works, 1981: 25, 29, 34).

As a result of such an approach, a parallel can be drawn between the verbal and non-verbal (in this case: visual) SMALLEST UNIT OF MEANING / sign: a lexeme and a form/al / visual element, as well as between the smallest contrastive unit: a phoneme (in the sound system) / grapheme (in the written system) and a point (as a primal element; Klee, 1961: 24). Consequently, the verbal process: phoneme / grapheme ⇒ lexeme

(word)⇒sentence⇒discourse⇒verbal text / literary work of art, by means of syntax, is parallel with the visual artistic process: point⇒form/al element⇒visual text / visual artwork, by means of – visual syntax / composition relations.

However, a characteristic of an artistic visual sign, opposite to a verbal sign and similar to a poetic use of a sign, is polysemy, ambiguity, having more than one meaning.

In the end of this comparative explication one more parallel could be added: same as a writer / poet has their own, individual language i.e., author's speech, a (visual) artist has their artistic visual speech.

WHY AND HOW TO INTEGRATE ART EDUCATION / VL AND (EARLY) LEARNING OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Interdisciplinary teaching / Cross-curricular teaching / Teaching across the curriculum enables integrated learning to children, the advantages of which are: more integrative and coherent knowledge and (ideally) a holistic picture of the world, as an opposition to divided and unrelated segments of knowledge achieved by "classical" educational systems based on separate school subjects.

The reason for integrated teaching of English as a foreign language (FL in the forward text) to young learners are: meaningful content (of other subjects), learning a FL as a natural part of other teaching / classes, and use / interchange of methods and skills already attained by other subjects, or vice versa (Halliwell, 1992: 130-131).

Some reasons specific for integrating English and art can be added to the above list: 1) more balanced education (verbal / logical content and non-verbal / intuitive content), that is, if not an aim than at least, the result of such integrated teaching; 2) non-verbal and familiar-to-children support of the VL, as, usually, pre-verbal and universal, in learning a new / FL, especially with very young children (Tomašević-Daněvič, 1999: 17-18).

As deduced from the aforementioned, in integrated teaching of English the linguistic aims are achieved indirectly by learning about other subjects (history, geography, ecology, art/s, etc.) or different non-linguistic content (sports, art, music, dance, play, everyday activities), using the support of non-verbal languages (visual, auditory – music, body language, etc.).

DO YOU SPEAK THE "VISUAL LANGUAGE"?

It seems quite absurd to ask this question. But its seemingly extravagance can only provoke considering the roles of the VL in the children's / human life, both potential and realized, and as to the realized roles, e.g. in education, both recognized and overlooked ones.

Concerning the aforementioned importance of art / the VL in interdisciplinary teaching, its equal role to other subjects is to be welcomed. Nevertheless, even in such advanced methods of teaching, the role of art is quite often reduced and transformed to a mere support and supplement to logical and verbal educational content. Again, the primal teaching aims of art education are ignored, i.e. learning to "read" and "write" (Gardner, 1990:9) / (self-express and) communicate in the visual language.

Similarly to "literacy" (the state or condition of being literate, i.e. able to read and write; *Longman Dictionary*, 1993: 771), "visual literacy" (Barnes, 1992: 9) can be applied to looking and drawing (Barnes, 1992: 9) or to visual perception, (conceptualization of art, mostly for elder pupils) and (artistic) production (Gardner, 1990: 18).

The fully attained "visual literacy", i.e. developed perception, visual thinking and artistic production / creativity (the latter term being parallel to creative writing in the mother tongue or a FL) including creative thinking, can considerably help further learning of other subjects and expanding contemporary-highly- recognized life skills and abilities.

Furthermore, as an almost universal language, the VL can help communication between different cultures: both between contemporary cultures and between contemporary ones and past ones.

Another interesting postulate about the VL as a mostly pre-verbal language (excluding some cultures and individual exceptions, Cox, 1992: 12) is that every adult has once spoken it, but, unfortunately, in many cases

has neglected and forgotten it, as well. (N.B. While the aim of art education is to nurture, prolongate and extend the VL of children and young people, the aim of art workshops / courses for elders is to possibly reconstruct and reactivate it (Tomaševič-D., 1997 a: 76-83; Silberstein-Storfer, 1982: 15, 17).

Moreover, by analogy with the psycholinguist Noam Chomsky, who has postulated for "language" (verbal language) a "DEEP STRUCTURE" in the brain (meaning that verbal language derives from innate, inherited structure), Betty Edwards (1995: 55, 76) states that "drawing on intuition brings to a level of conscious awareness and makes visible what is already in your mind" (Edwards, 1995: 97-98). According to the same author (Edwards, 1995: 132) you subconsciously know the vocabulary of the VL, since it already exists at a subconscious level.

These postulates can relate to art therapy beliefs. The American art therapist M. Naumberg (according to Dalley, 1996: xiii) states: "The techniques of art therapy are based on knowledge that every individual, whether trained or untrained in art, has a latent capacity to project his inner conflicts into visual form. As patients picture such inner experience, it frequently happens that they become more verbally articulate." She also states that "The process of art therapy is based on the recognition that man's most fundamental thoughts and feelings, derived from the unconscious, reach expression in images rather than words."

Here again, art is used as a means of non-verbal communication.

Each mark made on the blank sheet in an art session is believed to be a unique, personal commitment of the self (Dalley, 1996: xxi). In this way children who do not communicate verbally can start communicating without being forced to speak, since their drawings "speak" for them. (Oaklander, 1978: 200, 238).

In art therapy "art offers a medium which can give both communication with others and confrontation with the self" (Dalley, 1996: xxi).

When all the aforementioned is taken into account, the question "Do you 'speak' the VL?" is expected to seem less unreasonable, especially when actuated in practice with children learning English as a FL. Moreover, the question is asked as an analogy to the quite reasonable "Do you speak (the) English (language)?"

TWO PROJECTS OF INTEGRATED TEACHING OF ENGLISH WITH EMPHASIS ON ART (CHILDREN 4-11)

The first interdisciplinary project in which the presenter of this paper took part was *The Zagreb Project of Teaching Foreign Languages in the Early Grades of Primary School (1991/92-1994/95)*, with children aged 6-10/11 (Tomaševič-D., 1993:184-191; 1995: 75-87).

The second one, with the author's authentic early childhood education programme, was *The development of creative thinking in early learning of English as a FL through art activities, music, drama (...) and everyday situations (1994/5 - 1998/99)*, with children 4-6/7 (Tomaševič-D., 1997 b).

The author has tried to give in her teaching an equal role to English / FL and the VL identifying these languages as two potential young people's common languages for improving their communication in the process of learning to live together.

The integrated "living together" topics can teach children, besides English and art, as two significant communication systems themselves, understanding, tolerance, mutual respect, non-violence.

Other non-verbal, almost universal languages (music, dance, body language) successfully support this communication.

The VL is given the role of communication with: 1) others (children and elders, locally and internationally), what is in this occasion audio-visually presented by pre-school / primary school children's artworks, performances, short film, internationally published and recorded hand-made picture book; 2) the environment (natural, urban, global, endangered by wars) by means of both eco- and danger-of-war-topic artworks, displays, performance, story; 3) oneself (own feelings), i.e. own fear of war / death / nightmare, anger, joy, love, happiness, etc., presented by artworks, performances, story; or feelings / ideas: joy, sorrow, death, anger, fear, illness, tiredness, love, as inner thoughts and feelings, given visible / tangible forms by means of the VL of line (Edwards, 1995: 67-95); 4) artworks (language of art, multiculturalism), through children's artistic interpretation of the masterpieces of art and design, as well as through exploring the elements of

different cultures.

CONCLUSION

The analogy between a verbal language and a VL has proved to be quite justified, on condition we keep in mind polysemy of visual forms.

In interdisciplinary education, the English language and the VL represent two potentially universal languages that can help communication of young people in the process of learning to live together.

The role of the VL should be communication with others, the environment, artworks and a child oneself.

Children can start learning how to (interdisciplinary) communicate in both languages, the FL and the VL from their quite early age.

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