Critical Literacies, Multiliteracies and Foreign Language Education

Abstract. This article aims at analysing the relationship between the concepts of Critical Literacy and both Multiliteracies and foreign language education. A definition of Critical Literacy and an overview of the process of how this concept has developed are given. We understand Critical Literacy as an educational approach and an ideology. It is an inherent part of the concept of Multiliteracies, to which it contributes a necessary querying element. Finally, we explore political, pedagogical and didactic consequences of teaching for Critical Literacy within the context of school-based foreign language education.

1. Introduction

For a person to be critically literate means, in a broad sense, that she or he is able to take a step back from the obvious, from what is perceived as normal, from established practices with regard to the use of language. In the following, we will argue that, from a critical perspective, ‘use of language’ can be located within two analytical domains: one is the social, the other is the individual. Concerning the social domain, language practices (=use) denote the ‘normal’, i.e. the mainstream view of how to make sense of the world and give meaning to mundane affairs by using linguistic symbols. The same would be true for other symbolic systems. Concerning the individual domain, personal language practices signify practical statements of identity and membership within particular discourse communities using the same symbolic system. In brief, critical literacy (CL) will, in our case, denote a person’s awareness of these two domains as such,
including the implications both of ‘conforming’ and ‘divergent’ language use, and the language users’ ability to initiate a transformation of the status quo of linguistic – and thus social – practices through transformative language use.

Therefore, it will be necessary to introduce the concepts indigenous to CL and to present an overview of the development of this approach. Continuing this train of thought, we will then argue that CL can be linked with the concept of Multiliteracies in so far as it continually emphasises the double-edged nature of the fundamental changes happening in the wake of globalisation and the rapid development of digital media technology in the business world and the work place, in the community at large and in individual life worlds in particular. The effects of these changes have been analysed by the NEW LONDON GROUP as inherently ambivalent: On the one hand, they can be considered as potentially positive and emancipatory, regarding the improvement of the communication among individuals and communities in the world, and on the other hand, as potentially negative, as they are also complicit in propelling the dynamics of capitalist individualism, especially regarding economic deregulation, communal individualism, and the gradual perforation of people’s private sphere (NEW LONDON GROUP 2000). Seen from this perspective, in order for literacy education to be able to address the ambivalences inherent in these changes, a critical dimension for the concept of literacy is needed.

The stance we take in this paper is that literacy education in the sense described above is also a relevant task for foreign language pedagogy. We will therefore argue that CL-oriented foreign language pedagogy will have far-reaching implications at various levels, such as the curriculum, the power relations within the classroom and the language itself, as it is taught and used. Teaching for CL would therefore change the face of language teaching to a certain extent, as other than the ‘traditional’ aims will be brought to the fore.  

2. Critical Literacy: Definition and movement

The concept of CL is, as will be shown below, inherent in the concept of Multiliteracies, a factor often overlooked if not forgotten. Therefore, it is necessary to define CL, as its importance is such that we cannot consider Multiliteracies to be complete without CL. LUKE defines it as the “use of technologies of print and other media of communication to analyse, critique, and transform the norms, rule systems, and practicing governing the social fields of everyday life” (2012: 5). Already in this definition we can find notions that connect the concept of CL to the theory of Multiliteracies, especially when linked with, as in Luke’s definition, communication media and their continuous

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1 The authors are indebted to Gerhard Bach and Jean-Paul Narcy-Combes, who were true critical friends and provided numerous very helpful comments on an earlier version of this text. The responsibility for any remaining shortcomings of this text is, of course, ours.
developmental changes. At the same time, the concept of CL is not that new; it has been present in the social and educational sciences for many years.

2.1 CL and the Banking Model

Many authors identify the beginning of CL in the studies conducted by Freire in Brazil in the 1970s. Grounded in Marxist and phenomenological philosophies, his research materialized in a series of diverse educational projects. One basic concept developed by Freire is the “banking model” which describes a type of education in which an individual learner’s life and his or her ethnic or cultural background are considered to be irrelevant for learning. Freire (1970) argues that traditional schooling is based on this model of education. It describes a type of education in which students are considered an empty bank account and receive ‘knowledge’ through deposits made by the teacher. Knowledge then becomes a general and supposedly ‘neutral’ currency as it is stripped off its specific relation to the context of how it was generated or what it is needed for. Teaching students according to this model means to “[transform] students into receiving objects”, as it “attempts to control thinking and action, leads men and women to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power” (ibid.: 77).

Luke refers to Freire’s concept as the beginning of the field of Critical Pedagogy and reflects Freire’s ideas about the banking model when he says that “school literacy creates a receptive literacy, involving a passive reproduction of knowledge” (Luke 2012: 7). According to Wallowitz (2008: 3), in the banking model, introduced by Freire as a criticism of current practices, “students were trained to adapt to their world of oppression”. This view is shared by the New London Group (2000: 9 ff) in their criticism of traditional schooling and the more affirmative responses in teaching to a new understanding of literacy, i.e. one which is compatible with the individual’s workplace and life world in “fast capitalist” and globalised societies.

2.2 Antecedents of CL and its double nature as an ideology and teaching programmatic

Throughout the 20th century, a number of poststructuralist schools, including Critical Theory, Critical Race Studies, poststructuralist Gender Studies, and Queer Studies, have contributed to and shaped the approach of CL. They share a focus on cultural analysis geared at questioning the status quo and recognizing the histories and experiences of marginalized communities. Poststructuralist models of education have focused on ideology critique and cultural analysis as key elements of an education that aims at giving a voice to marginalized communities. Examples would be working class communities and minorities related to culture and language, as well as groups of people and individuals marginalized on the basis of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, social class and other types of difference.

With regard to educational contexts, the development of CL was influenced by a general shift of emphasis from behaviourism towards cognitivist models of meaning-
making (LUKE 2012: 6). These foreground literacy as the result of an “internal cognitive process reliant upon readers’ background knowledge or schemata” (ibid.). Drawing among others on systemic functional linguistics, the development of so-called higher-order thinking skills became one core feature in these literacy concepts (ibid.). Other models of critical reading responded to the increasing influence of reader-centred literary theories which operate under the assumption that textual meaning is fundamentally diverse and is actualised only in the act of reading and thus depends to a large extent on the reader’s “background knowledge, acknowledging the cultural bias of the resources children bring to school” (ibid.: 7). These early models of approaching text and canonical meaning through an attitude of critical reasoning and of accepting individual response helped to move school curricula “beyond FREIRE’s typification of school as a banking model” (ibid).

Bearing this conceptual expansion in mind, it can be said that CL relates to practices of analysis, criticism and transformation but is also a moral and political program for education. In fact, both aspects can be seen as the different sides of the same coin. As an educational programmatic, CL functions as a corrective idea or as a counter-ideology, while seen as a practice of textual and/or discursive criticism and transformative action, it can be regarded as a competence of the subject which has to be acquired by the individual through learning.

2.3 Moving CL beyond the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): The discursive construction of the self and the questioning of truth claims in discourse

RUSSEL (1995) related the idea of critical literacy to the concept of ZPD derived from VYGOTSKY (1962, 1978). In this zone, individuals who do not have the full capacity to achieve a goal in their learning process will interact with a teacher, who will help them to achieve the goal they could not have achieved on their own. According to SHOR (2009: 291), critical teaching is reflective in the way that both the teacher and the student will ‘progress’, whereas in Vygotsky’s description of ZPD it is only the student who advances owing to the teacher’s mastery. Besides, VYGOTSKY does not consider power relations as the social backdrop in front of which learning takes place. As SHOR (2009: 291) puts it, CL brings together the socio-cognitive model of individual learning and development put forth by VYGOTSKY and the “FREIREan” notion of “mutual learning” for the development both of teachers and learners.

CL implies looking critically at the established power relations and the status quo within a society. A more detailed answer to the question of what CL precisely questions will lead us to refer to two complementary approaches. Firstly, CL questions the notion of truth, or rather, wonders “what truth is, how it is represented and by whom and in whose interests” (LUKE 2012: 4). This idea is closely linked to the notion of language as a means to construct meaning. Consequently, “knowledge is not a hidden and invariant truth, but is inseparable from the language that it gives birth to and from its social use” (MCLAREN 1992: 13). Secondly, we can point out with SHOR that CL is
essentially “language use that questions the social construction of the self” (2009: 282). This is echoed by the New London Group in their presentation of Multiliteracies: “Each discourse involves producing and reproducing and transforming different kinds of people [...] One and the same person can be different kinds of people at different times and places” (2000: 21).

3. Multiliteracies and Critical Literacy

COPE/Kalantzis (2000: 5) refer to the creation of meaning as a process that is “increasingly multimodal”, and to how the new communication media reform the use of language by individuals. These media allow the crossing of and communication across cultural and national borders. Also, the multiplicity of communication channels and media increases cultural and linguistic diversity. Following the New London Group, Breidbach/Küster (2014: 136) describe Multiliteracies as “the capacity of learners to negotiate and generate (new) meaning in linguistically and culturally heterogeneous life worlds, using ‘old’ and ‘new’ media and adopting responsibility for themselves as well as for the community”.

The link between Multiliteracies and CL is made clear by Norton (2007: 6), who argues that CL is not only concerned with written text, but with “any other type of representation of meaning.” CL questions texts as parts of the discourse in which groups of people as well as individuals transmit a ruling ideology within a given power structure with the purpose of challenging that power structure (Wallowitz 2008). Considering the nature of texts a little closer, Morgan/Ramanathan (2005: 153) describe texts as “multidimensional, informational or genre-specific and also person-formative” carrying “a dual materiality [...]”. They “carry and address the rules of exchange of the social milieu in which they circulate, giving voice to the tensions of their times by means of both implicit and explicit reference” (ibid.), and this materiality also makes reference to the particular modality used (written, spoken, photographic, digital etc.). “Texts shape what we mean and how the experience of those meanings will be understood and retained over time” (ibid.).

In non-CL education, as was stated before, the discursive transmission of ideology occurs as a matter of default. However, a critical pedagogy and a teaching for CL can permit what Morgan/Ramanathan (2005: 154) call a “process of unlearning internalized and habitual ways of seeing and being, naming the world and imagining social futures”. Wallowitz (2008: 2) thus extends the definition of CL to include, apart from an engagement with print and non-print texts, “attitudes, behaviors, and values that accompany each discourse event, or the way of using language associated with any given genre, culture or vocation”. According to her, we cannot ignore the negotiation of meaning present in communication media such as TV, music, film, advertising and the Internet, among others. When dealing with literacy issues, teachers nowadays must work with the notion of multiple literacies.

Literacy practices of whatever kind are therefore almost by definition a site of con-
stant contest and conflict (NORTON 2007), and CL in addressing this struggle cuts across the range of literacies. Even though we find it inherent in the concept of Multi-literacies as it has been proposed by the NEW LONDON GROUP, it seems important to us to point out the nature of CL as a transversal concept. Seen from this perspective, no concept of literacy or model of literacy education can be considered complete without incorporating a critical dimension.

4. CL and foreign language education

So far, we have looked at CL as a theoretical concept or ideology. We will now inquire into CL as a pedagogic approach with pertinent consequences on multiple levels of education. Before we move into a deeper analysis of the relationship between CL and foreign language education, relevant questions regarding the presence (or absence) of CL in the education field need to be raised.

4.1 Educational implications of CL

The presence of CL in education has effects at multiple levels: the level of educational policy and administration, the curriculum and the level of interaction between teachers and students as well as students among themselves, and the level of texts and topics chosen by teachers and students. According to SHOR (2009: 300), “the position taken by critical literacy advocates is that no pedagogy is neutral, no learning process is value-free, no curriculum avoids ideology and power relations”.

At the political level, the COUNCIL OF EUROPE (2010) developed the concept of Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, and makes reference to the importance of including in this specific education the values of diversity and equality, appreciating differences in aspects such as gender and ethnicity. Any concept based on difference that is employed by the powerful to marginalize others and preserve the status quo (race, gender, class, age, sexuality, religion, etc.) can be brought into the focus of critical analysis and thus become the subject of the teaching for CL. CL is then a critical investigation into how these “differences” are written into the cultural text, i.e. how they are created, defended, invested with hierarchies, but also subverted by marginalized groups.

The COUNCIL OF EUROPE warns against reducing learning in this field to only knowledge and skills, pointing to the importance of empowerment and action. Therefore, we see a close relationship between CL as a pedagogical approach and Education for Democratic Citizenship, understanding such education as social action (MIHAN 2012). When WALLOWITZ (2008: 4) relates the idea of teaching for CL to a “pedagogy of discomfort” (BOLER 1999) that moves students – and teachers – out of their comfort zones, she also links this idea to an education for responsible citizenship in a democracy. She argues that this type of pedagogy “propels students and teachers into social action and prepares citizens in a democracy to understand multiple points of view”
In the same line of argument, McClaren (1992) suggests that if teachers take into account Freire’s ideas, they will question the dominant culture and power. What is more, “educators need to examine cultural choices and consider the degree to which they are liberating or oppressive” (ibid.: 23).

The New London Group (2000) calls for a pedagogy of Multiliteracies because of the fundamental changes in people’s private, community and working worlds and the inherently ambivalent nature of these changes. The pedagogical responses to these changes, such as developing a new understanding of literacy teaching, can turn out to be affirmative (i.e. non-critical, non-transformative) or non-affirmative (i.e. critical-transformative) in their intentions and their outcomes. In effect, neither of these two ways can be seen as the only source of responsible pedagogies. If teaching is, as we argued earlier, an inherently political act, it follows that “remaining neutral – or silent – in the face of discrimination always condones the behavior of the oppressor” (Wallowitz 2008: 5). Teaching one way after the other may be acceptable in a temporal, but not in a conceptual sense: Affirmative teaching does not have precedence over critical teaching. Rather, both are mutually supplementary.

This brings into view the context of schooling and the classroom in particular. “Classrooms are not simply the physical location where learning takes place; they are also the site of teachers’ embodiment in theory/discourse and disposition as theorists, within a specific politics of location” (McLaren 1992: 19). Shor (2009) stresses the importance of the teacher when transmitting values and ideas through the content and subject matters she or he chooses. This role of the teacher as the provider of the curriculum could be questioned if we regard teachers also as learners. If teachers and students engage in a shared learning process, teachers will begin to share their power of choice and interpretation and will negotiate the curriculum with the learners (ibid.: 291). Of course, a possible criticism of this view might be that it is divesting the teachers’ authority as an educator. Freire places this difficulty not on the authority itself, but on when the teacher would make use of it and how she or he would use it in order to stimulate the student’s agency. For Wallowitz (2008: 5),

 […] the teacher’s role is always changing; at a moment’s notice s/he is a guide, a facilitator, a devil’s advocate, and/or a learner. However, one behavior is imperative – self-reflection. Critical pedagogues continually self-reflect (on their own and with their students) and critically read their own classrooms as spaces of unequal power relationships, conflicting ideologies, resistance, and possibility.

Pratt (1991: 34) coined the term “contact zones” for “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power […].” Wallowitz (2008) refers to this zone as the one where educators should teach. Teachers would place themselves and their students into these zones, thereby moving students out of their comfort zones. Boler/Zembylas (2010: 111) define the comfort zone as “the inscribed cultural and emotional terrains that we occupy

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See also Kumashiro’s (2002) concept of “troubling education” in the service of an anti-oppressive education.
less by choice and more by virtue of hegemony”. According to these authors, the comfort zone is related to emotional factors that the individual has stitched into what they call “the everyday fabric of what is considered common sense” (ibid.). All individuals are subjects of this hegemony, as we all have been exposed to media publications, laws as well educational curricula, which convey existing power structures. A pedagogy of discomfort will enhance teachers’ and leaners’ abilities to use critical thinking to question these structures and the knowledge transported within certain power relations, “subverting the comfort offered by the endorsement of particular norms” (ibid.: 131). In this situation, “teachers should recognize that the knowledge and understanding that students are prevented from bringing up is as important as the knowledge and understanding that students are permitted to narrate” (MCLAREN 1992: 16).

4.2 CL and foreign language teaching/learning

When we are now turning to CL and foreign language learning, we will readdress the levels discussed in the previous section on CL and education: the political, the curricular and the level of teaching methodology and classroom interaction. To this list, we will add the cognitive level to start with.

At the cognitive level, one important question has to do with the capacity of the learner to be critical in a language which is not his or her first language. With respect to the language level necessary for using the target language in a critical fashion, we need to remember that CL developed in a context of learning and teaching with the L1 as vehicle of communication and transmission of knowledge. In this case, we need to ascertain whether and under what conditions CL can be translated to fit foreign language teaching and learning, with students with limited means of expressing themselves in the foreign language. This is first and foremost a question of cognitive development, but also linguistic challenges have to be overcome. Learners can face grammatical structures or lexis they do not understand and miss the meaning of parts of the discourse. Of course, this will vary depending on the level of competence of the learner. To our knowledge, no attempt has been made to define and empirically validate a linguistic ‘threshold’ level for CL teaching and learning. Still, the question brings to attention the theoretical underpinnings of communicative language teaching, which can be considered as the dominant method informing foreign language teaching in the past two decades. NORTON points out that neither the four-dimensional model described by CANALE/SWAIN (1980), nor the notional-functional model of communicative competence, which were both influential in North America and Europe, “address relations of power between language learners and target language speakers” (NORTON 2000: 138). To this, we can add SCHMENK’s (2005: 66) observation that HYME’s concept of communicative competence, which also became important for communicative language teaching approaches, was intentionally descriptive rather than critically analytical. The attempt to incorporate CL into communicative language teaching, therefore, will mean to rethink this approach in a way to accommodate opportunities for critical analysis of the linguistic curriculum, as well as of the discourses in and for
which the foreign language is used. Rethinking communicative language teaching would then imply, among other things, to accept a more central role in the learning process for further languages other than the language taught, in particular the languages the learners bring to the classroom. It would also imply to reconsider the relation of the learners’ proficient and developing languages (i.e. their first, second and ‘foreign’ languages) and the function they have for the different elements of the curriculum.

We cannot deny that much more thought will have to be given to this, but what we propose here is that CL-oriented communicative (foreign) language teaching can – and should – be based on a two-dimensional curriculum: the ‘traditional’ language curriculum on the one hand, and on the other a curriculum of discourse addressing issues of critical analysis. Here, the foreign language can take over as medium of communication in relation to the learners’ growing proficiency. The analytical differentiation of a language curriculum and a curriculum of discourse seems helpful to understand that learners at all stages of language learning – including the early ones – can and should be allowed and guided to analyse discourse related to the foreign language critically, and that communicative language teaching will need a second focus besides providing tasks for functional language use and simulating a quasi-natural environment for language acquisition. BREIDBACH (2011) suggests distinguishing between first- and second-order tasks in language teaching. Whilst first-order tasks are considered non-reflexive and refer to the language curriculum in the sense just mentioned, second-order tasks take a reflexive structure and “are open for and the product of negotiations of content, aim, structure, and mode of learning with respect to specific learners and learning contexts” (ibid.: 107).

Conceptually, it is not a long shot to extend the descriptive models of communicative competence by a critical dimension. The notional-functional approach derives from systemic functional linguistics, which in terms of CL have inspired rationalist educational models that focus on systematically teaching developing cognitive operations – “higher-order thinking skills” – and their linguistic exponents (LUKE 2012: 6). Also drawing from systemic functional linguistics as its “explicitly political derivative” (ibid.: 8), FAIRCLOUGH (2001) advocates the use of critical discourse analysis in teaching for what he calls ‘critical language awareness’ (ibid.: 198 ff). Similarly, the four-dimensional model put forth by CANALE/SWAIN (1980), who describe communicative competence in terms of grammatical, sociolinguistic, strategic and discourse competences, underlies the model of intercultural communicative competence developed by BYRAM (1997). BYRAM adds to the four dimensions by CANALE/SWAIN a fifth one, which he calls intercultural competence and which itself splits into five domains. While four of them refer to knowledge and strategic skills in intercultural communication, the fifth makes explicit reference to political education, bringing thus into the model the learner’s ability to make critical judgments. Here, we find another argument to advocate the expansion of the foreign language teaching curriculum and its differentiation into a language curriculum and a curriculum of discourse from the early stages on. Foreign language teaching could be a site particularly suitable for critical reflection. As students learn a new language, they will be more aware of specific characteristics of
that language than L1 users. Teachers and learners have the opportunity to create in their language classroom a discursive community (HALLET 2002) that uses anti-oppressive language (MIHAN 2012). Yet, “[t]he space that a teacher might create will vary across educational domains, subject to the application of standardized curricula and high-stakes testing and the relative autonomy afforded local administrators and educators” (MORGAN/RAMANATHAN 2005: 155).

What seems to be far more difficult is to transport CL pedagogies to the level of language education policy. Within the European context and basing on a functional understanding of communicative competence, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has become the core-document for language teaching in the new millennium. Within our context, one of its important limitations is that the competences the CEFR describes are by and large non-reflexive. All syllabi based on the CEFR alone must therefore be lacking in developing reflexive competences relevant for CL. A striking example is the case of the national achievement standards (Bildungsstandards, KMK 2004) in Germany. These achievement standards describe the average level of competence which learners are expected to have reached by the end of compulsory education, i.e. at the end of grade 10. They have also subsequently been defined and used as a yardstick for appropriate student learning and an indirect measure for the quality of teaching, which is why they are implemented through a series of large-scale tests. Regarding CL, there are several issues with standardising language learning outcome. The first and most obvious is that the standards make only weak reference to Byram’s model of intercultural competence, and none at all to critical discourse analysis or critical language awareness. Consequently, tasks addressing skills and capacities for critical judgment or action are not within the scope of the large-scale testing.

The fundamental assumption made not only in language education to justify the heavy if not exclusive focus in testing on functional competences is that these constitute a necessary condition for social and economic participation for foreign language learners. The claim made is that such ‘basic competences’ (Basiskompetenzen) can be considered universal in so far as they form the knowledge-base for reflectively accessing various forms of rationalities, which in turn constitute the fundamental modi of understanding the world (BAUMERT/STANAT/DEMRRICH 2000: 21). Nevertheless, this argument leaves two crucial points undiscussed which should be addressed from a CL perspective: The first query is that if basic (communicative) functional competences in the domains defined are the necessary conditions for social participation, this does not automatically imply that they are also sufficient. We assume that they are not, and we find ourselves in agreement with the same authors of the PISA survey, who strongly emphasise that the functional competences tested in PISA “do not cover the full range of skills and attitudes deemed elementary for a fully developed personality in the sense of general education (Allgemeinbildung)” (ibid. [our translation]). The second point that raises our scepticism is that functional approaches tend to accept the factual as the prime source of educational norms. This often leads to a latent and often manifest delegitimization of critical, transformative thought. It can, for example, be shown that
choices made in central standardised tests in Germany carry a pertinent bias privileging dominant middle-class learners (Breidbach 2011, for an overview of the discussion of the effects of high-stakes testing in language education cf. Shoamy 2007). The bias may be subtle but it exists nonetheless if, for example, in tests communicative tasks are set within an imaginary holiday-trip to Britain. In this case of test items used in standards-based assessment tasks, the choice for British culture is made on methodological grounds to capture the real-life experiences of what the authors argue to be the majority of learners in German schools (Rupp/Vock/Harsch/Köller 2008: 38–39). The implication, of course, is that learners who are lacking the relevant experience with this kind of holidaymaking are less well catered for by the context of the tasks. It seems at least justified to suspect that they are less likely to perform equally well in the task as learners who can draw on such experience first-hand.

We do not wish to advocate large-scale testing for CL. However, the absence of any CL-related tasks we observe in nationwide tests in countries like Germany is problematic, as it reduces competences associated with CL to the status of sunshine-competences. Once this happens, they can easily be downplayed at the political and administrative level as competences to be addressed only once the nitty-gritty work of developing basic functional competences has been done. Considering the washback-effect of large-scale testing (in particular if it happens in combination with high-stakes testing), this leaves the implementation of CL-oriented pedagogies to the teachers more or less exclusively. Thus, universities may find it necessary to respond to this situation in taking sides with teachers, by highlighting and developing teacher autonomy and reflective practice in their teacher education programs. Also, clearly, learning to teach for critical language awareness (Fairclough) and critical culture awareness (Byram) is an option for teacher education.

Policies for standards-oriented foreign language teaching also quite clearly (and sometimes deliberately) overlook the question of power relations. We will explore two perspectives regarding this point. Firstly, foreign language teaching is traditionally based on the notion of linguistic mastery. Even though this does not necessarily imply teaching for full bilingualism, the notion of mastery still works as a corrective idea. Byram refers to this as the native speaker norm. The problem with the native speaker norm for (foreign) language learners is, as Byram argues, that it is tantamount to an “impossible target” (1997: 11). Not only does it eventually lead to “inevitable failure” (ibid.), but it would also “create the wrong kind of competence” (ibid.). Thus, the learner would be disallowed to be a person with multiple languages and linguistic identities, which “suggests separation from one’s own culture and the acquisition of a native sociocultural competence, and a new sociocultural identity” (ibid.: 12). Besides, in a native-speaker type of view, learners are put and kept in the inferior position by definition. From a CL perspective, there would be a need to subvert this view. In so doing, learning the dominant standard form of (foreign) languages becomes a tactical move, as Hor (2009: 299), following Freire, explains: “[S]tandard usage, rhetorical forms, and academic discourse make democratic sense only when taught in a critical curriculum explicitly posing problems about the status quo based on themes from the
students’ lives”. Teaching for CL in foreign languages, therefore, should entail a reflection on how the language taught and learned is entangled within processes of globalisation and embedded into local (or national) language education policies.

This brings to the fore the second perspective on power relations in foreign language teaching, namely the issue of linguistic ownership. SEIDLHOFER (2007) observes that it has been stated oftentimes that English in particular has developed into a European, if not a global, *lingua franca*. In practical terms, this means that speakers of different languages increasingly use English between them. SEIDLHOFER explores the implication of this phenomenon for the teaching of English (or any other *lingua franca*) in stating that language teaching cannot reasonably ignore and will have to address such ‘new’ communicative situations with which language users will have to cope. Therefore, the language curriculum will have to move beyond the traditional frame restricted to (mostly national) language communities of any particular language. In this context, BACH/BREIDBACH (2013) argue that the teaching of English will have to redefine its inherited conception of the so-called English-speaking world and move beyond topics related to the Anglo-American cultural sphere. Possibly, also the language itself taught in classrooms will gradually change, as linguistic descriptions might draw on *lingua franca* versions (e.g. ELF) of national languages.

After all, the use of English as a *lingua franca* (ELF) plays an important part in how Europeans conduct their everyday lives, and the existence of such a widespread use of English will have to be acknowledged as common and appropriate linguistic behaviour. It will, therefore, be inappropriate to simply decry this means of communication as bad English and to dismiss the users of ELF as mere language learners striving to emulate endo-normative models of English. Teaching ELF, for example, implies reflecting about notions such as ‘RP’, ‘BBC English’, ‘Queen's English’ and other normalized views of standard language as the desirable goal to achieve. It is true that there is an active debate regarding the role of Standard English as the norm-giving variety for teaching English as a foreign language (e.g. HÜLLEN 2005; GNUTZMANN/INTEMANN 2005). In any case, seen from a CL-perspective, learning standard usage of languages is not a self-sufficient aim but a means to an end, which is different from affirmation of the social status quo. Not only in European post-industrial, knowledge-based societies, English language proficiency (and to a slightly lesser degree foreign languages in general) is valued to the extent that it has gained currency as what BOURDIEU would call ‘symbolic capital’. Foreign language teaching geared to CL – including English as a foreign language in particular – will have to address this, both open-fronted as a topic to be taught and at the level of classroom pedagogy. Such a move towards ELF may carry some potential for critical language learning, as DECKE-CORNILL suggests: “But within a multilingual educational framework, the shift from Standard English to ELF may, indeed, open up new possibilities – both by transcending the cultural and symbolic weight of English […] and by facing it” (DECKE-CORNILL 2008: 169).

We would like to conclude this section with another look at the role of teachers and the structure of classroom interaction in CL-oriented foreign language teaching. As an “expert” on the selected topics, the teacher will be able to analyse critically the dis-
course and the material used in the teaching activity. Therefore, there is a responsibility on his or her side in the transmission of knowledge through these teaching-learning situations in which the autonomy of the learner to do so may be restricted due to linguistic limitations. In the wake of Freire, Critical Pedagogy and CL stress the importance of teachers’ working out solutions and thus learning together with the learners, instead of pouring knowledge into their heads. However, as CL is clearly a normative approach to teaching and learning, the question about who sets the norm of what and how is to be learned is an important one. In the same vein, it needs to be considered who points out what is to be considered problematic, calling for critical-deconstructive analysis. This is not at all an easy task, and when it comes to teaching for CL, teachers are always walking on thin ice, as Morgan/Ramanathan (2005: 155) point out: “In this respect, the preferred goal of critical literacies is to create space for the agency of others and not to determine if or how that agency will be realized”. Following from our previous discussion, creating space for agency can in fact include to teach and learn the ‘discourses’ of power, albeit embedded in a continuous attempt to keep them open for transformation and change (in the classroom and beyond). Complementary to agency-related approaches are voice-oriented approaches to CL, which in terms of curricular decisions focus on learners’ life worlds and/or on marginalised communities. These approaches revolving around agency and voice (we follow the systematic in Luke 2012) are complementary with the pedagogical styles of ‘enabling’ and ‘allowing’.

Finally, we would like to draw the attention towards a practice that Norton suggests for teachers of second language learners, which she terms “classroom-based social research”. From our point of view, this classroom practice has the potential of combining both pedagogical styles:

Through social research, the learners will become increasingly aware of the opportunities available to them to use the target language in the wider community and how they might transform such possibilities in keeping with their desires for the future. As well, […] learners are encouraged to investigate the conditions under which they interact with target language speakers, how and why such interactions take place and what results follow from such interaction. In this way, learners will develop insight into the way in which opportunities to speak are socially structured, and how social relations of power are implicated in the process of social interaction. As learners develop an understanding of how power acts on and through social interaction, they might learn to challenge social practices of marginalization (Norton 2000: 152).

While it is true that Norton has second language learners in mind, we can see that a slightly modified but similar approach will also be suitable in foreign language education in order for teachers to help learners to get in touch with their actual position as foreign language learners, but also their learning experiences and learning needs – and for teachers to be able to explore with their students the possibilities for their learning investments.
5. Further questions and research

Several questions need to be considered for future research and study. The first one concerns the effects of teaching for CL in English as a foreign language. Specifically, this analysis would include the subjects and topics covered, the selection of texts, the tasks given to students, and the use of classroom language, among others. Concerning appropriate texts, research can be done with canonical texts but also with new texts that have a high potential in terms of highlighting and commenting on specific social issues.

A second question concerns possible guidelines for the teaching of CL. If such guidelines can be determined, this begs the question whether or not the notion of CL is actually compatible with the existence of – ultimately restrictive – guidelines. As CL and the concept of Multiliteracies are closely related, we can also wonder if the pedagogical guidelines of the latter can be useful for the teaching for CL.

Finally, the effect of the concept of CL on the hierarchies between teacher and students, as well as assessor and assessed, also needs to be considered for a deeper analysis. This would also include an inquiry into teacher education at university, and how future language teachers can learn to teach for CL.

Any assumption that the development of CL will follow automatically from language learning is little convincing. Rather, purposeful pedagogies for the development of CL are required, and these need to be grounded in reflective theory and solid empirical work. The many published case studies and project reports in the field of CL education in English-speaking countries – although most of them not from foreign language classes – indicate that waiting for CL to emerge coincidentally is hardly a responsible option for language educators.

Literature


BREIDBACH, Stephan (2011): “Teaching for ‘strong voices’: reconstructing the reflexive dimension in communicative language teaching”. In: BREIDBACH, Stephan / ELSNER, Daniela / YOUNG, Andrea


