

## **Transmedia Storytelling and CLIL approach: the perfect allies in the English Language classroom.**

Graciela Heit and María Alejandra Sánchez.

Universidad Nacional de Hurlingham. Instituto de Educación.

graciela.heit@unahur.edu.ar ; alejandra.sanchez@unahur.edu.ar

### **Abstract**

During the last two decades the concept of a post- method for teaching foreign languages gained wide acknowledgement in the educational arena. This approach also known as CLIL ( Content and Language Integrated Learning) aims at articulating students' general curricula with the teaching of the foreign language. Similarly, transmedia literacy also proposes a new form of learning in which students are expected to expand the content of their studies by means of different platforms in a more engaging and cooperative way. It seems to be that both concepts of CLIL and Transmedia Storytelling can interweave towards the same objective, one becoming the support of the other. This article presents a brief theoretical framework, and the implementation, results and future implications of an educational project. Such experience was performed with two different groups: one with a third form students

from a secondary school in their English class, and another one with students who are attending Geography as part of their educational programme from the Teacher Training course (TTC) of English from UNAHUR. The project pivoted around the topics of the exploitation of Natural Resources and the environmental impact it may cause by means of the use of different media platforms.

**Key words:** CLIL, Learning , Transmedia literacy , Transmedia Storytelling.

### **1. Introduction**

Carlos Scolari (2016) states that there has been a transformation from multimedia to transmedia in the media ecology. This means consumers have taken up an active role in the media they engage in and consequently turned into prosumers. Robert Pratten (2011), another relevant figure in transmedia studies, goes a step forward considering the application of transmedia strategies

in education. He affirms that telling stories across different platforms can satisfy the interests of different audiences, and since students are the teacher's audiences the use of those strategies may become of paramount importance and usefulness in the classroom.

In the last decades, students have tended to display more critical, creative and interactive competences both in formal and informal learning situations. CLIL teaching approach is also interactive and aims at promoting problem solving and critical thinking activities among students. The thesis statement of this article proposes that transmedia storytelling may go hand in hand with the implementation of the CLIL method in the classroom since both place their audience and their active role at the centre. They both propose a transversal, decentralised and deconstructed approach.

The first objective of this educational project was to motivate students to carry out some research about certain ecological issues, raise awareness and ultimately take some action. Another objective was to promote the use of informal transmedia skills in the formal

context of the classroom as a means to reach the former goals. As a result, students improved their language performance, increased their knowledge about environmental problems and developed their critical thinking and creativity in a cooperative way.

## 2. Theoretical background

As regards the theoretical framework of the project, it was based on the works of Exequiel Alonso and Viviana Murgia (2020), Do Coyle (2010), Mariana Ferrarelli (2015), Henry Jenkins (2006,2009), Carla Montoya (2019), Robert Pratten (2011) and Carlos Scolari (2017, 2020).

Robert Pratten (2015) claims that "Transmedia Storytelling "is telling a story across multiple media and preferably, although it doesn't always happen, with a degree of audience participation, interaction or collaboration" (p.1). Carlos Scolari (2016) adds that in this context another concept arises: transmedia literacy, understood as "a set of skills, practices, values, priorities, sensibilities and learning/sharing strategies developed and applied in the context of the new participatory cultures" (p.126). This new

form of literacy, which is the result of the permanent evolution of the means of communication, has transformed the way literacy had been conceived for a long time. Traditionally, it was associated with a process of creation and interpretation of a written book. Later on, with the rise of the media, the focus was placed mainly on the television, and at present with the arrival of the web it evolved into new digital and interactive competences. In *Transmedia Narratives in the Language Classroom: a pedagogical experience at the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice, Czech Republic*” Carla Montoya (2019) affirms that “transmedia literacy is a set of competences that allow people to analyse, evaluate and create messages in a wide variety of communication modes, genres and formats. It has been promoted by organisations such as the UNESCO (2010, 2011) and aims at promoting knowledge/ tools of critical analysis that enhance consumers, empowering them as citizens” (p.3)

In line with these changes, the educational scenarios have also been transformed. The new digital culture questions the previous, hierarchical roles teacher/students in which the educator was regarded as a source of knowledge and consequently an absolute authority

in the classroom. Nowadays, students rapidly develop competences and build up their lives in the informal context of the web, while the educational institutions still find it hard to adapt to these techno-cultural ecosystem. Lesley Baktlett (2011) in her research paper *Adolescents literacy in Latin America and the Caribbean* states that literacy within the classroom is still associated with fossilized school-based instructions instead of new digital competences. There seems to be an abyss between the school sphere and mediatic sphere. Therefore, the incorporation of these abilities within the classroom may become a powerful tool to ensure a successful learning process, as new generations are developing their literacy skills outside the classroom in informal learning contexts.

In *Transmedia Pedagogical Narrative: Strategies, Contexts and Dimensions for its Inclusion in the classroom* (2020), Exequiel Alonso y Viviana Murgia analyse two experiences in secondary schools in Argentina in which transmedia narratives were applied. The main findings of the work propose addressing three different contexts: institutional, classroom and community in order to implement the transmedia narrative as a teaching and learning

strategy. Also, it describes the different steps of the narrative experience: selection of the curricular contents, problematisation and contextualisation of them, production and expansion of a transmedia narrative and the resignification of the already constructed knowledge.

As regards the classroom context, it is focused on the teacher's planning and includes the learning objectives, the cognitive processes, the inclusion of ICT and all the activities students will be engaged in. As to the institutional context, it puts an emphasis on the articulation between the teacher's objectives and the institutional project. In this sense, the project discussed in this work reflected a concern about ecology, which is a transversal axis in education at present. In relation to the community context, it contemplates the relation between the students and other members of the community. Also, it encouraged students to establish a contact with ecological organisations and eventually collaborate with them. Considering the different steps of the narrative experience, a special emphasis was placed on the problematisation of the contents dealt. In the project under discussion, students researched, analysed and evaluated the use of

agrochemicals in agrarian practices and its impact on the soil as well as the surrounding communities, or the production and consumption of meat in a global scale and the negative consequences on the environment and other ethical implications.

In *Revenge of the Origami Unicorn: Seven Principles of Transmedia Storytelling* (2009), Jenkins depicts the seven principles or "core concepts" for transmedia entertainment, which can also help design different activities for the students. He makes a distinction between Spreadability versus Drillability, Immersion versus Extractability, Continuity versus Multiplicity, Worldbuilding, Seriality, Subjectivity and Performance. For the purposes of this educational project, the focus will be placed on the principles of spreadability, subjectivity and immersion. According to Jenkins (2010), "Spreadability is related to a process of dispersal - to scanning across the media landscape in search of meaningful bits of data", "Subjectivity refers to looking at the same events from multiple points of view" and "Immersion implies moving through a virtual environment which replicates key aspects of a historical or geographical environment". In the case of this project, after becoming

acquainted with a specific environmental problem students can expand that universe across different platforms (spreadability), they can provide different outcomes or versions for the current situation ( subjectivity), or they can create real life experiences triggered off from the problem in question ( immersion).

Professor Do Coyle (2010) when discussing CLIL states that the second language is used to teach certain subjects in the curriculum other than the language lessons themselves. This dual -focused educational approach uses the language to teach content and develop different language skills at the same time. The main features of this method are:

- it is student-centred since they are the main agents in the construction of meaningful learning for which their previous schemata are taken into account.
- it is interactive and promotes critical thinking and problem-solving activities because students need to work cooperatively in order to carry out the tasks suggested.

- and it is content based as they part from specific content matter included the curricula (inter-curricular).

This pluriliteracy approach in which content and language are integrated seems to be a perfect ally for Transmedia Storytelling in the English classroom. Students are given agency to choose, discuss and develop topics related to their school curriculum resorting to different platforms and varied resources .As Mariana Ferrari (2015) affirms the expansion or generation of new contents that results from this pedagogic proposal takes place within a creative and collaborative environment from the part of the students.

### 3. Educational experiences

In order to implement this educational project students of were presented with two different resources: a documentary on transgenic soya production in Argentina<sup>1</sup> (although some parts are in Spanish and subtitles in English are

<sup>1</sup> *Soy Story* (2015). YouTube. Compassion World Farming.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Kv>

[rH4dNyNo&ab\\_channel=CompassioninWorldFarming](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rH4dNyNo&ab_channel=CompassioninWorldFarming)

provided, most of it is in English) with students from the TTC , and a video clip from the Simpsons about veganism<sup>2</sup>- which is a topic of interest among adolescents- for secondary school students. Both materials were first meant to trigger off further research about the current concerns. Students were separated into groups- each one dealing with one of the topics in particular . They were provided with guideline questions to focus their research and asked to prepare a presentation on the main ideas using different tools such as a **PowerPoint Presentation** , **Prezi.com**, **Canva.com**, **Easel.ly**, **Genial.ly** , **Visme.co** among others. Then they created a quiz with platform activities for their classmates.

On a second stage, students were invited to perform different activities that implied further expansion and their intervention towards the topics under discussion as well as their creativity. For example, students from the prepared a panel discussion programme for which they assumed different roles such that of

doctors, victims of glyphosate chemicals , peasant farmers , members of agricultural corporations, Bayer /Monsanto representatives among others to express their views on the topic . The programme was ultimately uploaded in a **Padlet** and members of other groups were expected to react to it publishing comments.<sup>3</sup> Students from the secondary school were divided into groups, each carrying out a different activity. One group created a fictional **WhatsApp** family group belonging to the Simpsons, in which the different members of the family interacted reacting to Lisa's decision trying to dissuade her out of it or supporting it. Another group created and published podcasts taking up the role of either Lisa or a member from an agrarian community expressing in a synthetic way their claim - and later uploaded them in the **Facebook** or **Instagram** of the school . Others, created a fictional blog (user-generated content) belonging to Lisa in which she explained how to become a vegan to her followers and also used it as a news article blog in which potential members of the agrarian community uploaded the

<sup>2</sup> *Lisa de Vegetarian*. (2015). YouTube.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YLoV9xS9rxk&ab\\_channel=MaddalenaErcole](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YLoV9xS9rxk&ab_channel=MaddalenaErcole)

<sup>3</sup> See Annex

latest news about soya production and their insights on it. Both types of blogs were shared through the above-mentioned platforms. For those who enjoyed working with visual design they were asked to create some relevant cartoons or memes and later post them in a social web such as **Twitter, Instagram Pinterest or Facebook**. Finally, the students were encouraged to establish a contact with any ecological organisation such as “Friends of the Earth” to become acquainted with their work and eventually collaborate with them; or they organise a food fair (real-life experience) in which different vegan dishes (elaborated by students) could be offered and sold at school and whose profits might be donated to green organizations as the one above mentioned (immersion).

#### **4. Results and future implications**

Having discussed the assets of the implementation of Transmedia Storytelling in an English learning class and how it can be combined with the CLIL approach, it might be confirmed that when asking students to work with meaningful content by interacting, transforming and expanding it in a cooperative way the results were very

favourable. Students felt motivated, developed their critical thinking and eventually became more aware and committed to current issues. Certainly, they were invited to apply their digital competences acquired outside of the classroom inside the classroom recapitalising their previous knowledge. They were given agency in the design and development of the activities performed, placing them at the centre of the learning process.

However, some reservations might be mentioned as well in relation to connectivity issues – which at times hindered students work and progress.

Finally, in terms of future implementations the same experience might be applied in other academic areas too. It would probably become of interest and use the implementation of transmedia activities in any other curricula subjects both at schools and TTCs.

#### **Bibliography**

Alonso, E. and Murgia, V. (2020). *Transmedia Pedagogical Narratives: Stages for its Inclusion in the Classroom*. Retrieved from <https://ri.conicet.gov.ar/handle/11336/140080>

Baktlett, L. López, D.; Mein E. and Villenas, S. (2011). *Adolescent Literacies in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41349016>

Coyle, D.; Hood, P. and Marsh, D. (2010) *CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning*. UK: Cambridge University Press.

Ferrari, M. (2015). *La Textualidad Desbordada: Transmedia y Educación en la Cultura Digital*. Retrieved from: [https://www.academia.edu/21040947/La\\_textualidad\\_desbordada\\_transmedia\\_y\\_educaci%C3%B3n](https://www.academia.edu/21040947/La_textualidad_desbordada_transmedia_y_educaci%C3%B3n)

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York: New York University Press.

Jenkins, H. (2009). *Revenge of the Origami Unicorn: Seven Principles of Transmedia Storytelling*. Retrieved from [http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2009/12/the\\_revenge\\_of\\_the\\_origami\\_uni.html](http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2009/12/the_revenge_of_the_origami_uni.html) and

[http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2009/12/revenge\\_of\\_the\\_origami\\_unicorn.html](http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2009/12/revenge_of_the_origami_unicorn.html)

Lisa de Vegetarian. (2015). You Tube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YLoV9xS9rxk&ab\\_channel=MaddalenaEricole](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YLoV9xS9rxk&ab_channel=MaddalenaEricole)

Luizzi, A. (2014) *Transmedia "Historytelling"* from *Hacia una Comunicación Transmedia*. [1era ed.] 6° Foro Internacional de Periodismo Digital y 1° Encuentro de Narrativas Transmedia. Editorial de la Universidad Nacional de Rosario.

Montoya, C. (2019) *Transmedia Narratives in the Language Classroom: a pedagogical experience at the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice, Czech Republic*. Retrieved from: [https://www.aacademica.org/1.congreso\\_internacional.de.ciencias.humanas/1547](https://www.aacademica.org/1.congreso_internacional.de.ciencias.humanas/1547)

Pratten, R. (2015). *Getting Started in Transmedia Storytelling. A Practical Guide for Beginners*. [2nd ed.] CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

Rampazzo Gambarato, R. (2018). A Design Approach to Transmedia Projects. In M. Freeman, & R. Rampazzo Gambarato (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Transmedia Studies*. New York: Routledge.

Scolari, C. (2017) *Transmedia Storytelling as a Narrative Expansion*.

*Soy Story (2015)*. YouTube. Compassion World Farming  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KvrH4dNyNo&ab\\_channel=CompassioninWorldFarming](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KvrH4dNyNo&ab_channel=CompassioninWorldFarming)

*What is CLIL*. (2019). YouTube. El\_Blog\_de\_Trinity.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wZ-9fvAP74&t=13s>

**Annex : Panel discussion on soyabean production conducted by a group of students from UNAHUR .**

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Pw4Mzd\\_sh2u-i6tn\\_Yn5N544CIfRllyT/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Pw4Mzd_sh2u-i6tn_Yn5N544CIfRllyT/view?usp=sharing)

*Interview with Carlos Scolari*.  
<https://www.nordicom.gu.se/en/publikationer/young-creative>

Scolari, C. A. (2020). *Teens, Media, and Collaborative Culture. Exploiting teens' transmedia skills in the classroom*.