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Extended Abstract

As we think we may teach: Ideologies on IT in the classroom

Tamás Péter Szabó[1,*]

[1] University of Jyväskylä / P. O. Box 35, 40014 Jyväskylä, Finland

E-mail: tamas.p.szabo@jyu.fi

* Author to whom correspondence should be addressed; Tel.: +358-40-805-4644

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Introduction

The extended use of IT devices has raised scholars' awareness to its impact on the organization of classroom interactions. Studies claim that the intensive use of IT in the classroom has the potential of revolutionizing education in a way that it increases students' ownership and control over their learning processes (Ryberg 2013). Others claim that devices such as interactive whiteboards contribute to the emergence of an "effective style" of teaching (Gillen et al. 2007: 254). Further, Lotherington & Ronda (2014) emphasize the role of IT, multimedia, multimodality, collaborative communication, agentive participation and multitasking for a contemporary understanding of what they call "communicative competence 2.0" (p. 19). However, as both Gillen et al. (2007) and Ryberg (2013) establish, it is not the technology in itself but the "role of teachers" (Ryberg et al. 2013: 102) and the transformation of "underlying pedagogy" (Gillen et al. 2007: 254) what count in pedagogical revolutions.

Based on the above considerations, I investigate how IT-based classroom scenes are discursively reconstructed in teacher training videos. These videos explicitly aim at influencing current practices, so their investigation illuminates (sometimes hidden) policies in teacher education as well as in curriculum planning and implementation.

Approach, materials and methods

In this paper, I apply the framework of interaction-oriented language ideology studies (Laihonen 2008), focusing on how language ideologies and ideologies of education emerge in the analyzed teacher training videos. I put special emphasis on the discursively reconstructed agency of teachers and students. That is, I examine whether the demonstrational videos reconstructs participants as individuals who display "the ability to act with initiative and effect" (Hunter & Cooke 2007: 72).

My data comes from an online video portal (http://mestertanarvp.ektf.hu) which has been launched by a Hungarian teacher training college in 2010 with a stated goal of sharing good practices, e.g. the advanced use of IT in education. This site aims at enhancing pre-service and in-service teacher education with training videos, providing background materials and editorial notes that summarize, explain and evaluate the methods demonstrated. From this database, I use 72 videos (16.3 hours).

In my analysis, I build both on the editorial notes and the video materials themselves. I use Discourse Analysis (DA) for the interpretation of the notes, focusing mainly on the explicit ideologies in the text but also considering implicit ideologies that emerge. I analyze video materials with the method of Conversation Analysis (CA), providing the microanalysis of representative excerpts from the corpus.

For a CA study, edited materials such as the training videos in question mean a methodological challenge. Usually, CA studies work with unedited materials in order to investigate "naturally-occurring […] human interaction" (Jakonen 2014: 15). However, while working with edited materials, it is inevitable to consider not only the participants' but also the editors' actions. As Laurier (2014) has pointed out, editors work as ethnomethodologists, making use of the same characteristics of human interaction in the production of the video than the CA analysts in the interpretation of the data. That is, as editing is built on a profound understanding of verbal and multimodal features, so does the analysis of the final cut illuminates those editing policies which contributed to a certain reconstruction of the recorded event. What makes this aspect relevant in the analysis is that the videos I am working with are training videos, so these aim at reconstructing 'good' or 'ideal' classroom scenes for the purposes of demonstration.

Results and Discussion

In this paper, I analyze examples from videos that thematize the use of IT in English (EFL) lessons. There are recurring statements in the editorial notes and in the voice-over narration of the videos which highlight the higher level of 'student activity' as one of the main achievements of IT usage in the classroom. My main question concerns the relationship between activity and agency: does the claimed increase of the activity level result in a situation where the actors' initiatives are appreciated and their personal goals are efficiently reached? In other words, do the participants in the videos seem to be agents, or are they rather patients who are dependent on others' actions? (Cf. Aro 2012)

As the central example of my paper, I analyze an excerpt in which the students use a voting system while practicing vocabulary in connection with family life. The voice-over video introduction highlights the voting system as the facilitator of student activity which makes it easier to 'control' students' work. The aspect of 'control' pushes the teacher to the center of the classroom scene. Similarly, the editing technique highlights the teacher's role in interaction: her instructions can be heard in detail, the camera zooms on her regularly, while students' voice can be heard only when responding to the teacher's utterances. Further, students' individual or pair work is only illustrated with short shots, with music in the background (without the students' own voice).

From a CA perspective, I argue that the observable interactional practices are very teacher-centered, i.e. the teacher dominates and controls the verbal production of the students and their use of the IT devices. The case is similar to what is called 'form-and-accuracy' context where "the teacher is in strict control of the turn-taking process and decides who gets to speak and when" (Kääntä 2010: 46; cf.

Seedhouse 2004). Further, the control of the classroom discourse is extended from the management of turn-taking in verbal interactions to the manipulation of the students' work stations. Handling the computers is not under the students' control: the display of ability to use the computer independently and thus construct agency is prohibited by the teacher. The presented design of IT use supports the mechanical reproduction of teacher-centered interactional routines and the total control of students' activities. However, the teacher also makes some gestures and self-reflective comments which contribute to the construction of her limited agency as well. This limitedness is mainly demonstrated by her comments on the 'progression' of the lesson with reference to its pre-set schedule.

The analyzed example is typical for the video collection that often reconstructs classroom scenes in which "transmission-oriented" (Cummins 2006: 54) pedagogical practices are dominant. These practices are mainly associated with "mechanical exercises" (Ruohotie-Lyhty & Kaikkonen 2009: 299), controlled by the teacher. In these settings, the student is expected to be a "passive recipient" (Kember 1997: 265), to "consume and reproduce" (Ryberg 2013: 101) what is told and shown, according to the teacher's instructions. The IT applications presented in the videos often contain mechanical drills or tasks based on reproduction: "student-owned and controlled P[ersonal] L[earning] E[nvironment]s" (Ryberg 2013: 101–102) in the form of web 2.0 tools seem to be futuristic in the context of this video collection.

Conclusions

My study is part of a research project which investigates authoritative and democratic learning environments and targets the better understanding of the situated co-construction of agency and identities, and their significance in learning and teaching. Against this background, a possible application of this study lies in the development of learning environments in which students are responsible for their own learning and contribute to the creation of learning materials (Reinders & Darasawang 2012) in a way that "the learner is in control of the lesson content and the learning process" (Fotos & Browne 2004: 7; cited in Reinders & Darasawang 2012: 50). The collection of documents I investigate makes the impression that student-controlled and student-developed environments are currently not among the priorities of the editors of the video portal in question. What is more, the edited materials do not reconstruct the teachers as highly agentive characters either, and it also tells about implicit ideologies concerning education.

Turning back to the initial claim of my paper which emphasized the importance of the added value and the personal factor rather than the technological features of IT in education, I quote Knausz (in press) who stresses that "some pedagogical innovations require a shift in pedagogical culture, that is, they cannot materialise without a turn or change in the entire culture (mentality). This means that even the smallest changes prove to be futile if intervention does not focus specifically on cultural structures". Implementing IT-based or IT-supported curricula is far from being the 'smallest change', so when thinking about the potential of IT in education, it seems to be essential to consider ideologies and discourses which are continuously reconstructed through and circulated around methods and practices. My work aims at making such ideologies and practices explicit and visible in a way that initiates reflections and enhance self-reflection among practicing and future teachers.

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Keywords

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