
Technologies and Literacies in Language Education: Looking Beyond Communicative Competence

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“The quality of language that makes it unique does not seem to be so much its role in communicating directives for action as its role in symbolizing, in evoking cognitive images. We mold our “reality” with our words and our sentences in the same way as we mold it with our vision and our hearing. And the versatility of human language also makes it a unique tool for the development of the imagination. It allows infinite combinations of symbols and, therefore, mental creation of possible worlds.”

—François Jacob, *The Possible and the Actual*

Heuristic Questions for Language Teachers (Chun, Kern, & Smith, 2016)

1. What learning goals do I have for my students?
2. What language, culture, and instructional resources do I have available?
3. How can these resources be used and combined most effectively to serve the established learning goals?
4. How will I assess how effective students’ use of these resources is in their attainment of the established learning goals?

Heuristic Questions for the Five Principles (Kern, 2015)

Principle 1: Meanings are situated and relational

- What are the contexts relevant to the interpretation of this text (e.g., material, situational, social, ideological etc.)? How might the text and context inform one another?
- How does this text allude to, contest, build on other texts, even in other mediums?

Principle 2: Language, literacy, and communication rely on both convention and invention

- How have conventional semiotic resources been appropriated, adapted, or recontextualized for individual or collective purposes in this text? To what effect?

Principle 3: The medium matters

- How does the text’s medium affect language *form*? Are words written/spoken differently? Is syntax modified? Is text length affected? Are cohesion and coherence devices the same and if so, are they used in the same ways?
- How do such differences affect listening, reading and writing?
- How could the meanings expressed in the medium be expressed/re-mediated in a different medium? (to achieve a similar or a different effect)

Principle 4: Texts are multimodal

- How do linguistic elements interact with nonlinguistic textual design elements to produce particular meanings?
- How are time (e.g., rhythm, timing) and space (e.g., visual layout, movement) used to create particular meanings or effects?
- What communicative acts (e.g., establishing rapport, sharing ideas and information, persuading, negotiating, expressing feelings) are facilitated or rendered more difficult by the medium?
- What are the social consequences (in terms of who is included or excluded, how participant interactions might be reconfigured, how cultural processes and products might be affected) of using one medium and technology versus another?

Principle 5: Language, technologies, and texts mediate

- How does our use of language, technologies, and texts affect how we think about, produce, and use knowledge?
- How are traces of the communicator's identity or persona signified?
- How do aesthetic qualities contribute to meaning?
- Whose interests are at stake, and how are those interests identifiable? Are beliefs, attitudes, myths, and assumptions marked as such or can they be mistaken for facts?

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