Writing in the foreign language classroom: creativity and identity

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Writing to Learn – Learning to Write
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Writing in German in upper secondary: Jens

16 years old – just started in upper secondary

Line of study: Bio-technology

Second foreign language: German (after English) (compulsory) – 4 years of German

Jens is interested in science and technology – he is not ”linguistically minded” (fieldnotes). His out of school activities: Football and working in a supermarket.
Writing in the foreign language classroom: double purposes

Research in second language acquisition and writing research have stated "double purposes" of writing in various ways:

Writing to learn the language - Learning to write (Manchón)
Writing school assignments for assessment -
Students’ engagement and meaning making in writing (Smidt)
Development of grammatical complexity and accuracy –
Communicative and creative writing tasks (data)

How does Jens manage to write?
How does he construct himself as a writer in the foreign language? (Ivanič)
-> Linguistic and aesthetic form (Jakobson)
-> Sociocultural theory (Swain, Kramsch)
-> Potentials for writing in a second foreign language
Writing assignment

Schreib ein Lied  (Write a song)

After having worked with German music, you are going to try to write lyrics, a rap text or a poem in German.
You are nothing!

1 of 25 in the class
1 of 57.000 in X community
1 of 2.000.000 in Y Island
1 of 730.000.000 in Europe
1 of 6.500.000.000 in the world!

You as small as:
A snowflake at the North Pole
A drop in the boundless Pacific
A grain of sand in the Sahara
You may compare to a star in the sky

You are as small as:
An ant in an anthill
A hair at the head
A germ in a rotten banana
You may compare to a star in the sky

Jens
Analysis of Jens’ poem

**Semiotic resources**
- Verbal resources and numbers
- Vocabulary: Geography Biology
- Syntax: Prepositional phrases:
  - “a snowflake at the North Pole”
- Genre knowledge: stanza and verse

**Construction / style**
- foregrounding of form
- parcellism - repetition - variation
- metaphors:
  - Local – global world
  - Anorganic – organic nature < -- >
- Conditions of human existence

**Construction of self / “identity draft”**
- Capable of creating meaning in written foreign language
- Conscious of linguistic and aesthetic form
- Trying to say how it is to be in the world
How does Jens handle double purposes / expectations?

Jens uses writing in a foreign language as meaning making opportunity to creative language use identity draft

Jens does not meet the teaching agenda:
writing as instrumental for language learning focus on grammatical complexity / accuracy teacher assessment: “very simple syntax” “no variation” “you stay on safe ground”
Two conceptions of language learning through writing: tool and sign

Writing as a **mediating tool** for
- > problem solving, e.g. grammar
- > construction of linguistic knowledge
(Swain)

Writing as a **dialogic process of sign making**, exchanging, interpreting
- > conveying meaning for readers
- > discursive constructions of self
(Kramsch, Ivanič)

In order to understand writing in the FL classroom, both conceptions are needed.
Potentials of writing in a foreign language

Space for

• writing in different genres, including genres with aesthetic-poetic semiotic functions
• letting students draw on experiences / imaginations from different domains (school, media...) -> ”reworking of various elements of experience” (Vygotsky) in FL
• addressing students as authors, readers, critics, editors
• developing a workable metalanguage for writing experiences in a foreign language
Literature


