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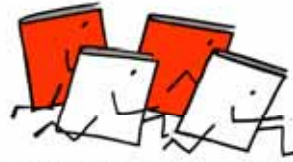14. europska konferencija o čitanju · Zagreb · Hrvatska
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Reception of Fairy Tales in Printed and Digital Media

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In the context of a global society, a linkage between literacy and technology is now more strongly emphasised than ever. A multimedia and hypermedia project, *Croatian Tales of Long Ago*, presented on CD-ROM and Internet by Bulaja publishers, transforms the classical literary work of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić into the visually and acoustically attractive cartoons, games and interactive stories. Research is starting from the hypothesis that there is a difference between readers' perceptions of a digital animated version of the *Tales* and printed book in original or translated version. The qualitative research based on the collected data about perceptual and cognitive experiences within different age groups is directed towards examining the correlation between reception of chosen fairy tales in printed and digital media, and includes analyses of how the CD-ROM influences reading competence, intercultural consciousness, and the development of learning skills and interest in reading.

INTRODUCTION

In the post-modern age, digital media helps in transmission of cultural values across national boundaries. The teaching and development of skills that could improve processes of communication is becoming more complex and includes application of new tools and technologies. Education for global communication has to develop communication competence of contemporary children including exchange the information through electronic media and development of cross-cultural skills. Even the definition of literacy is changing. Nowadays basic skills, the ability to convert spoken language to written language and vice versa, are not enough to describe this complex phenomenon. In the various resources, authors mention different types of literacy including ability to communicate in different written and spoken languages, intercultural literacy, media, digital, visual and information literacy. The review of definitions, features, description and educational material about different types of literacy are available on the eduScapes website developed by Annette Lamb and Larry Johnson and dedicated to the problems of literacy.

According to the Queensland Government summary document dedicated to problems of contemporary education, literacy is "the flexible and sustainable mastery of a repertoire of practices with the texts of traditional and new communications technologies via spoken language, print, and multimedia." (Literate Futures: Report, 2000, p. 9). From the last decade of 20th century, authors in search for definitions of literacy suitable for 21st century also use the term multi-literacies. (The New London Group, 1996)

Developed countries have recognised the complex set of skills necessary for the 21st century, and, through organised institutional educational changes, are working to advance educational systems on all levels.

EXAMPLE: *CROATIAN TALES OF LONG AGO*

Croatian Tales of Long Ago is the title of the collection of fairy tales written by Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić and published as a book in the second decade of the 20th century. It is also the title of an international electronic publishing project presented on CD-ROM and Internet (www.bulaja.com.fairytales) by Bulaja publishers, based on the book with the same title. The project contains animated interactive stories, cartoons and games based on eight fairy tales from the book. The authors of visualised and digitalized transformations and translations of the stories are from Australia,

Scotland, England, Germany, France, Belarus / United States and Croatia, representing the diversity of persons working in the field of Flash animation over Internet. It is a good example of global communication and team co-operation in process of animation and electronic publishing.

The project of digitalising a written collection of stories based on the Slavic folk tradition and mythology involved a combination of audio-visual elements (pictures, sounds, music, written and spoken language). It presented written text and interactive electronic games in two different electronic media (stories are available in Croatian, English and German versions on CR-ROM, although on the Internet is presented only English version).

For presenting, the digital version of stories on CD-ROM, *Croatian Tales of Long Ago,* was divided in two parts, with four different stories in each, with the first part only available at the time our research was conducted. Flash animators that contributed in this part of project were Al Keddie from Scotland (cartoon *Stribor's Forest*), Ellen McAuslan from England (interactive picture book *Brother Jaglenaz and Sister Rutvica*), Katrin Rothe from Germany (interactive picture book based on an old manuscript, *Toporko and His Nine Brothers*) and an Australian of Latvian descent, Natan Jurevicus (cartoon with music spots and interactive electronic games based on *How Quest Sought the Truth*). As animation and production of cartoons is a complex process and requires teamwork and cooperation, with each of the authors directing his/her own small team of contributors.

The activation of *Stories* starts with sounds of birds and bells and the appearance of the year 1916, the time when the printed collection *Tales of Long Ago* was presented to the public. This is followed by an explanation on using icons for navigation within CD-ROM. Finally, the titles of the four stories are given. Navigation is based on hypertext technology and in the corners of the screen there are icons with the written instructions for their use: eye as a sign for *Watch the story*, lips for *Change language*, and options for *going back* and *exiting* from the program. As the cover page of each story appears, so too does an E-mail message as a sign of communication in cyberspace. The frame is based on the layout of the web page, and includes animated figures of the main characters of the story, which can be accessed with a hyperlink.

Presentation of the stories is much complex than simple animation and within the menu of each story there are explanations and meta-textual references that help viewers with the process of setting the content in a historical context and specific narrative frame. Navigation similar to the web page contains features common for the whole project (a biography and information about Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, explanations of the main characters from Slavic mythology that inspired author in her own artistic creation, and a story about the digital multimedia project presented as a worldwide fairytale adventure)

and features specific for each of the stories (self representation of the authors of each story and information about stories and characters, accompanied by the text of the original or translated story). Transformation of narrative structure is adjusted to the requirements of screen presentation. Frames (or windows) are used in the multimodal situation and the conventions of different media are used as a sign for different types of communication. The voice of the narrator can be turned on and off during the process of reception. Each story is presented in a different way, either as a cartoon on the screen, or as an interactive picture book or imitation of an old manuscript with written text. This can help the process of making connections between spoken and written language and learning orthography in early literacy and in the context of acquiring foreign languages). Children can animate the pictures and turn over the leaves using hyperlinks. They can produce comical sounds and interesting visual effects. This way of presentation could be interesting for "screen-agers", the generations grown up within the television and computers environment that perceive the world "as a series of screens that they both access and manipulate in a constantly evolving stream of shared communication". (Thoman & Jolls, 2004; Rushkoff, 1996).

METHOD

The digital project *Croatian Tales of Long Ago* is an attempt to present the classical literary collection of the stories in completely different way to a population that is living in a completely different context than the primarily targeted audience of written and printed stories. This population has developed different communication skills, mostly through informal communication rather than institutional education.

The purpose of the research was to identify specific features of reception of fairy tales in digital media and how the semantic potential of traditional written stories changes through the process of animation and presentation in global media. Reception of a narrative pattern shaped like an artistic product is always an individual experience connected with the previously accepted cultural patterns and set of values and skills. This type of digital media also includes a strong interactive aspect connected with possibilities of manipulating hyperlinks that are interesting for very young children who could not express emotions and feelings in the form of written language. It was also interesting to look for differences in the reception of multimedia tales within different age groups.

Qualitative research was used because the most interesting aspects are not measurable and appropriate for a positivist form of research. As qualitative research is directed towards understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspective, not the researcher's, it takes into the consideration the interactive aspect of both observed phenomena and research process. As Merriam (1998) noticed:

> In contrast to quantitative research, which takes apart a phenomenon to examine component parts (which become the variables of the study), qualitative research can reveal how all the component parts of the phenomenon work together to form a whole. It is assumed that meaning is embedded in people's experiences and that this meaning is mediated through the investigator's own perception. (p. 6)

For the interactive aspect of the multimedia presentation of fairytales, individual use of a computer was much appropriate for observing, but, as we wanted to enlarge number of participants, it was necessary to use an LCD projector. In this situation, manipulation with hyperlinks could only be carried out by the presenter of animated stories, who guided the navigation through the CD-ROM. The process of collecting data for different age groups was observations of the participants of the subjects, so it is reasonable to assume that participants did not express all their feelings, and, as with the process of reading traditional books, the participants' impressions were deeper than their verbal or visual (children drawings) expressions. If the educators and developers of curricula paid more attention to multi-literacies, media literacy competences would development more, and help the generation of "screen-agers" to deal with contemporary media environment.

RESULTS

The research of response to fairy tales embraced three different age groups: children in the kindergarten (mainly preliterate children, for whom use of digital media could help in the bridging boundaries between oracy and literacy), teenage users in the library "Halubajska zora", and students of Croatian language and literature at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences on the University of Rijeka.

Workshop in the Kindergarten "Delfin" Group "Seashells"

Workshops were organised over two months, once or twice weekly, for the group of about 15 children in the 4-7 years age range. In the guidance of workshops helped me Irena Vitez, the nursery school teacher at the kindergarten "Delfin" in Rijeka. Emphasis was on the aural response to visual aspects of the CD-ROM. The children expressed their personal experiences orally and through drawings. The first projection involved an interactive picture book based on the story *Toporko and His Nine Brothers*, and was presented in a way that would develop the ecological consciousness of the children. The participation in the workshop was optional, and some of the stories were too long for one workshop for this age group where concentration is limited to half of hour. The ability to perceive stories using digital media was very useful to promote children's understanding of the content of tales. Children preferred cartoons which, in the picture books, were linked to the animated links. Some of the archaic expressions in the stories needed an explanation from the nursery school teacher, although children looked only at animated version in their own mother tongue. Analysis of tales, drawings and interviews about impressions show differences in the children's interests connected with their previous contacts with computers and stories. Generally, children did not previously know the printed text of the stories, and presentation of the CD-ROM caught the attention of children in this age range. They were especially interested in the interactive electronic games in the story *How Quest Sought the Truth* rather than in the content of stories.

Workshop in the "Halubajska zora" Library, Marinići

Analysis of response to the CD-ROM *Croatian Tales of Long Ago* was based on previous analyse of the Croatian literature curriculum and media culture and the questions directed to participants considered the expected background knowledge. The research followed interpretation of the written story *The Stribor's Forest*. Danijela Štokić, librarian at "Peoples library and reading-room Halubajska zora" at Viškovo helped me in preparing and developing questioners and guidance of workshops in the library "Halubajska zora", Marinići. Although work was previously planned as a group activity within the teenage population, individual use of CD-ROM was seen as a better solution and it attracted the attention of the users of library. In this situation, collection of data was based on interviews and questionnaires with possibilities for descriptive answers. The workshop included about 15 teenagers, more girls than boys. Participants' interests were dispersed according to their age. Younger participants concentrated on cartoons and on the known tale *The Stribor's Forest;* older participants liked stories that were not known before. Foreign language options were used only sometimes and after looking the version of tales in mother tongue. Only the highest-achieving students used the *Tales* as a help in learning a foreign language.

There was an unexpectedly strong correlation between interest in reading books and in digital transformation of tales. The written version of *Tales of Long Ago* was known only to some examinees before the contact with the CD-ROM. Children with less well-developed literacy skills concentrated on the watching cartoons and on the voice of the narrator. The meta-narrative elements of the CD-ROM did not attract the examinees' attention. In the workshop, participants were briefly presented with information about Slavic mythology to help understanding of the motivation and actions of some characters in the *Tales*.

Students of Croatian Language and Literature

Parts of the CD-ROM *Croatian Tales of Long Ago* were used for discussion of term "applied folklore" and issues in the comparative history of Croatian literature, with university-level students. Work was directed towards comparative analysis of different aspects of printed and digital media and analysis of

intercultural competence. Problems connected with those topics were stressed in discussions and students had the opportunity to view a web site presentation of the digital project before expressing opinions about transformation to digital format of the well-known classical collection of the tales. In addition, the choice of theme for the essay was elective – students could chose between writing about a book or the digital transformation of *Tales*. The group was divided evenly between the two options. Students of Croatian and English language and literature showed interest in the English version of the stories and recognised regional linguistic features in the *Stribor's Forest*.

DISCUSSION

During the process of transformation from printed to digital media, different types of decoding and encoding of messages and different symbolic systems were used. The option to use the interactivity of digital media to represent the "possible world" of narrative fairytale fiction is very powerful in motivating students, especially younger children. Transformation of narrative patterns from print to digital media can occupy different aspects of participants' attention and activate different senses. Availability of written and spoken language at the same time, which is an option with digital picture books, could help in the process of developing literacy skills. The ability to use the computer to design an illustration of tales can help the children in process of developing their own digital abilities.

Members of different age groups had different reactions to the CD-ROM version of *Tales*. The more mature they were, the more attention they paid to meta-textual, and meta-narrative aspects of the digital and animated product. The story presented as a worldwide fairytale adventure could be a strong motivation for developing global awareness. The animated versions of the stories created in a completely different cultural background and presented to students unacquainted with the printed version of the *Tales* could provide information about opportunities of multimedia and present an invitation to read the original version of the *Tales*.

The reactions of all three groups had shown that transformation from printed to digital media isn't only the transformation; the change in content must also be considered (McLuhan, 1994) But the digital stories under name *Croatian Tales of Long Ago* are also an ironical synthesis of the history of popular culture and media in the last century with allusions to rock music of the vinyl-generation, the Hollywood film industry, comics, photography, etc. Complex use of visual and acoustical abilities of multimedia underlines differences between visual and aural perception that could be used in the educational process to help develop multi-literacy skills. Changes in the process of perception have a strong influence on symbolic systems and on dominated cultural patterns.

As writer Alvin Toffler pointed out: "The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn" (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2003, p. 4).

At the beginning of the 21st century, digital media are the strongest stimulus for changes in the educational institutions, and a powerful tool that cold help this process.

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