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Connected or Mismatched?

Theorising and Researching (Dis)connections Between Teenagers' Formal and Informal Literacy Practices in English as a Foreign Language

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Advising committee: Assoc.Prof. B. Mitsikopoulou (supervisor),
Assoc.Prof. K. Karavas and Assoc.Prof. D. Koutsogiannis

The study

- Part of my PhD work (English literacy practices of 15 teenagers from varied sociocultural backgrounds living in Athens, Greece)
- Focus on: the *'hybridity'* of teenagers' English literacy practices



Young people's engagements with English cannot be easily disaggregated into separable home and school practices

Theoretical & methodological underpinnings

A social view of language as a social semiotic

■ Ethnography

- Barton & Hamilton 1998

■ New Literacy Studies (NLS)

- Bernstein 1996, Barton 2001, Street 1995
- Key notions: Literacy events, literacy practices, identity

■ Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

- Analysis of discourses and strategies as socially situated (Fairclough 2003)
- Situated meanings, social language (Gee 2005)

■ Multimodality

- Multimodal analysis of visual data

Social view of literacy

Literacy in **traditional** approaches

- grounded in cognitive psychology
- the **ability** to read and write (functional view)
- a set of discrete **skills** to be mastered in isolation

The **social** approach to literacy

- what people **do** with language and texts and what these activities mean to them (Barton & Hamilton 2001)
- literacy as **situated social practice** embedded in the activities of **everyday life** and underpinned by people's attitudes, concerns and values (Gee 1996, Barton & Hamilton 1998)

Everyday literacies

- **everyday** (Knobel 1999)
- **out-of-school** (Hull & Schultz 2001, Yi 2005)
- **vernacular** (Barton & Hamilton 1998)
- **informal literacy practices** (Marsh & Thompson 2001)



- ✓ used in literacy ethnographies to describe the reading and writing activities outside institutional settings
- ✓ often compared and contrasted with those inside school walls
- ✓ celebrating the rich and dynamic quality of adolescents' everyday experiences

Everyday vs. school literacies

The **'home-school mismatch hypothesis'** (Maybin 2007)



- ✓ the **divergence** between the school and out-of-school worlds
- ✓ everyday literacies: **playful, oppositional, unregulated, unvalued**
- ✓ school literacies: **strictly regulated, formally instructed**
- ✓ growing interest in **bridging** the two for positive educational outcomes



The situation is perhaps more complicated

The 'hybridity' of literacy practices

- **boundaries** between different literacies may not be as easy to draw **in practice** as they are in theory (Hannon 2000)
- **overlaps** and **crossings** within and across literacy domains occur (Moss 2001)
- Dyson (1997): '**permeable**' home-school boundary
- Barton & Hamilton 1998: '**negotiated literacies**'
- Gee's (1996) '**borderland Discourse**'
- Bulfin 2009, Richardson-Bruna 2007, Tan 2011, Koutsogiannis 2009: recent studies illustrating the **hybridity** of adolescents' literacy practices



The present study adds further evidence on the hybridity of young people's English literacy practices

Overview of study

Research approach

Multiple case studies with an ethnographic perspective

- ✓ Alternative to 'full-scale' ethnography
- ✓ Participants' homes & private spaces: the departure point and the primary site of my research
- ✓ Mar 2010 - Oct 2011 in Athens (18 months)

Participant selection

Participants as "information rich cases" (Merriam 1998), "purposeful" (Patton 2002) sampling

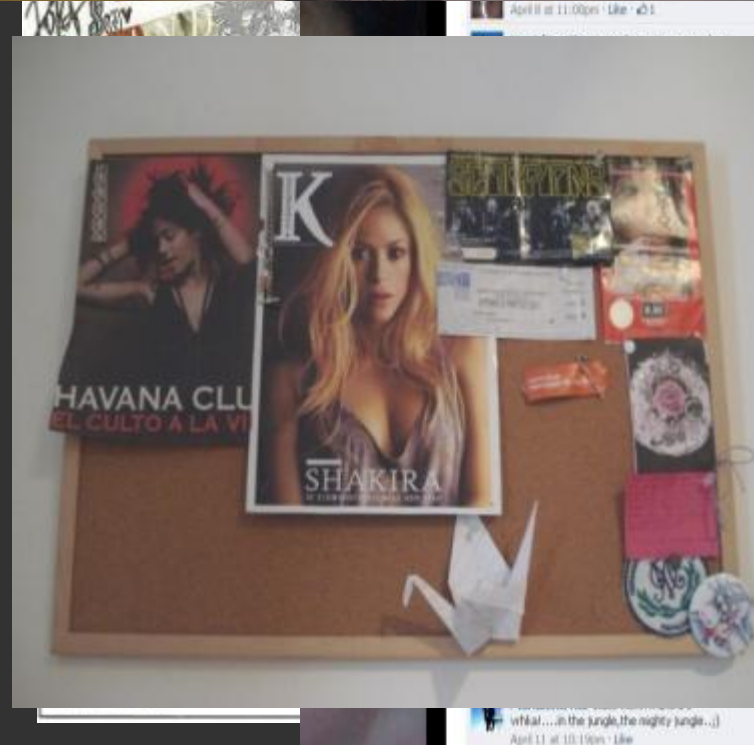
- ✓ 15 Gymnasium students (girls & boys); from private & state schools; high & low academic achievers; from different backgrounds

Overview of

Data collection from

- ✓ Interviews
- ✓ Informal talks
- ✓ Observations
- ✓ Field notes
- ✓ Literacy diaries
- ✓ Participants' texts (notes, lyrics, online messages)
- ✓ Photos (both participant- and researcher-generated)
- ✓ Visualisations & drawings

Ημερομηνία	Ώρα
8/4/2011	8:30:56 μμ
8/4/2011	8:31:46 μμ
8/4/2011	8:32:13 μμ
8/4/2011	8:32:42 μμ
8/4/2011	8:33:10 μμ
8/4/2011	8:33:20 μμ
8/4/2011	8:33:28 μμ
8/4/2011	8:33:46 μμ
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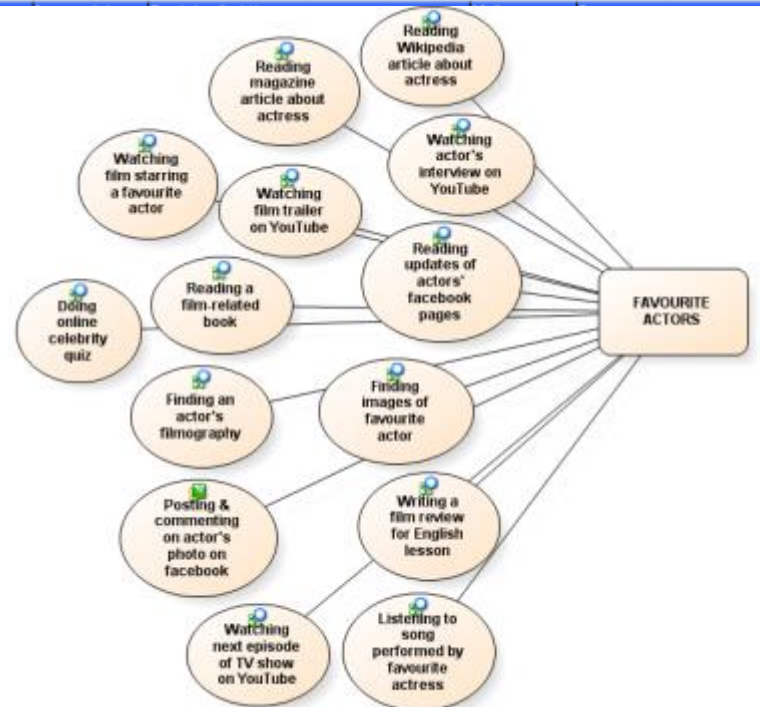


Overview of study

Inductive approach to data analysis

- ✓ Identification of literacy events (Nvivo 8 software)
- ✓ Taxonomic analysis
- ✓ Classification of literacy events
- ✓ Identification of literacy events
- ✓ Focus on language

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Setting	Library artifacts	Participa					
Home / Bedroom	Paper with graffiti art	Therassi					
Home / Bedroom	History of Rock Stars pages	Alexandr					
Home / Bedroom	The Who book pages	Alexandr					
Home / Stairs	Book pages for dresses	Nikos					
Home / Classroom	Tolstoy's novel (Where love is, there God is also)	Joak, Engl teacher, classmate					
Home / Bedroom	Diary of a Wimpy Kid book pages	Joak					
Home / Bedroom	Old English textbook pages	Markos					
Home / Bedroom	Harry Potter last book pages, dictionary pages	Orestis					
Home / Bedroom (Xmas holidays)	The Island of adventure, Roald Dahl's book pages	Melina					
Home / Bedroom	Book parts about 100 best films	Nikos					
Home / Kitchen	Recipes in cook book	Joak and m					
Home / Bedroom	Dictionary pages, Twilight book pages	Alexandr					
Home / Bedroom	Sleepwalkers is the Striped Pyjamas book pages	Konstant					
Home / Bedroom	The Making of Jazz book pages	Alexandr					
Home / Classroom	Withering Heights-Ransmay Jary book pages	Nikos					
Home / Living room (listening to U2 CDs)	U2 lyrics and their translation	Alexandr					



Overview of study data

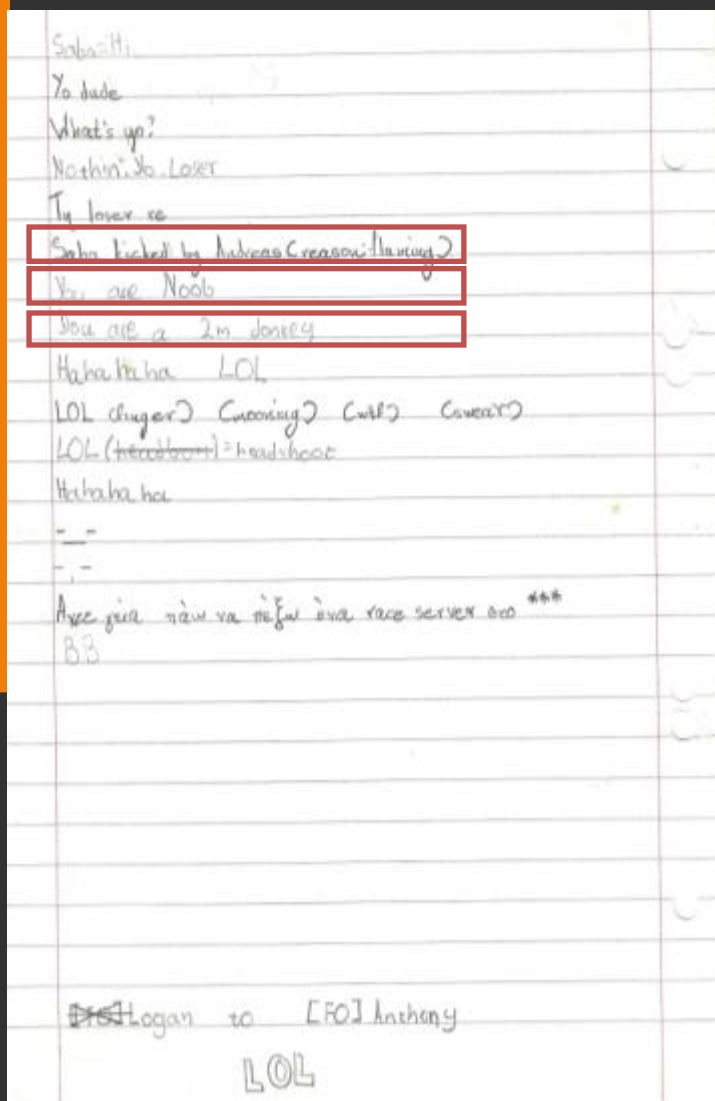
Data collection tools	Sources of data	Amount of data
Observations	Participants	84 hrs
Informal & Semi-structured interviews		<i>743,293 words</i>
Semi-structured interviews	Participants' parents	10 hrs <i>88,212 words</i>
Documents / artefacts	Participants' texts (reading materials, writing samples)	875
Field notes	Interviews & observations	285 pages <i>155,442 words</i>
Researcher journal	Researcher's weekly recordings	11 pages <i>5,129 words</i>
Literacy diaries	Participants' weekly recordings	70
Visual data	Participants' photos	73
	Participants' visualisations	19
	Researcher's photos	203

'Underlife' classroom resistance (Goffman 1962)



- ✓ School: a space where **unofficial** text production takes place when young people engage in acts of resistance to official school practices
- ✓ '**Hidden**' (Finders 1997) activities with song lyrics: framed as a response to **boredom** and **frustration** or as an attempt to give a tone of fun in an otherwise normal school day
- ✓ Identity work: **resistant** to school demands and a young music-savvy person participating in **global youth culture**

Unofficial text 'flow' in the classroom



- ✓ Exchange of written short 'chat-like' messages among teenagers during the lesson (an **unofficial** 'time-out')
- ✓ Expressions in English typical of in-game communication ("**you are Noob**", "**you are a 2m donkey**") and in-game system messages ("**Saba kicked by Andreas (reason: flaming)**")
- ✓ **Identity work**: rebellious students, humorous young people and tech-savvy game players

Appropriation of school resources in English literacy practices

✓ **Playful** employment of the affordances offered by the *moodle* platform not for school work but for informal communication purposes

✓ Exchange of personal chat messages in Greeklish (creatively mixed with English), YouTube song links and parts of song lyrics

✓ A schooled space has been **reconfigured** as a permeable play space where youngsters interact in ways characteristic of out-of-school practices (cf. Finders 1997)



In sum...

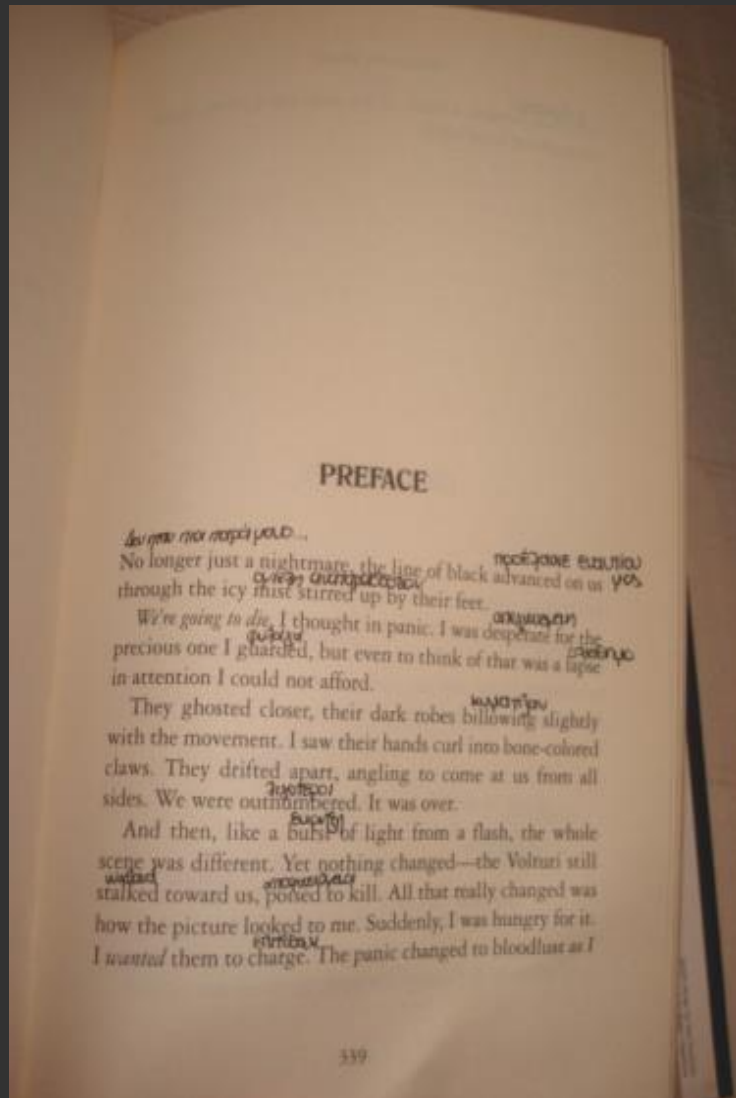
- unofficial, hidden practices providing teenagers a “safe house” (Canagarajah, 2004)
- tactical and collective acts of “resistance” (Goffman 1962) by members of a loosely defined “affinity group” (Gee 2004)
- English: a linguistic resource used by adolescents to act in institutionally unauthorised ways, thus opening up acts of identity
- Texts symbolise “counter-discourses” (Canagarajah 1999): discourses which students use to resist the ideologies of the textbook and curriculum and to construct for themselves more favorable identities

The 'colonisation' of home by schooling (Koutsogiannis 2009)

Formal schooling or practices of school life **infiltrate** home life affecting young people's English literacies:

- Engagement in **structured, formalised** out-of-school practices (e.g., attending English language courses in the afternoon)
- Engagement in **pedagogically-oriented** activities appreciated by the formal school system in out-of-school settings (e.g., watching an English-spoken film without subtitles for extra practice, reading an English-language novel for practice)

The 'colonisation' of home by schooling: An example



The 'school-valued' reading of the novel *Twilight* by a teenage girl in her free time:

- ✓ paying attention to the text
- ✓ identifying unknown words in it
- ✓ finding their meaning in the dictionary
- ✓ writing them in Greek
- ✓ aim: practice, not just pleasure
(«έτσι προσπαθώ περισσότερο να μαθαίνω λέξεις και να γράφω με σύνταξη»)

The 'home-school mismatch hypothesis' revisited

- distinction between in-school and out-of-school: a **false binary**
- literacy practices **cut across** the school / vernacular dichotomy
- home and school are not **mutually exclusive** domains
- in- and out-of-school literacies are **intrinsically connected** rather than simply mismatched

The construction of home and school as separate spaces in teenagers' accounts

- ✓ *school literacy*: structured, regimented and educational
- ✓ *informal literacy*: fun, careless and unrestricted

- ✓ e.g., use of **strong modal verbs**: “we must be careful” («*πρέπει να είμαστε πιο προσεκτικοί*»), “we mustn’t make many mistakes” («*δεν πρέπει να κάνουμε πολλά λάθη*»), “we have to use it correctly” («*πρέπει να τα λέμε σωστά*») → **norm-bound, focused use of English in the classroom**

vs.

- ✓ e.g., “it’s more free” («*είναι έτσι πιο ελεύθερα*»), “outside school we don’t really care” («*έξω δε μας πολυνοιάζει*»), “it’s something much more interesting and joyful” («*είναι κάτι πολύ πιο ενδιαφέρον και χαρούμενο*») → **unrestricted, fun engagements with English outside school**

The construction of home and school as separate spaces in teenagers' accounts (2)

- ✓ *school literacy*: valuable, important
- ✓ *informal literacy*: frivolous, trivial, of lower value
 - ✓ use of 'formal literacy' concepts from educational discourse (e.g., "grammar", "tenses", "syntax", "vocabulary") to describe the important aspects of school
e.g. «Εντάξει, και στο σχολείο κάνουμε και λίγη γραμματική. Αυτό είναι το πιο σημαντικό».

VS.

- ✓ use of same concepts to negatively frame everyday practices
e.g. «...ενώ εκεί [στο facebook] είναι καμιά φορά δεν έχει ούτε γραμματική. Είναι τελείως χύμα έτσι όπως μιλάνε. Ε, βασικά (...) δεν είναι αγγλικά / δε μαθαίνω και πολλά πράγματα ας πούμε απ' αυτά τα αγγλικά.»

To conclude

- ✓ English literacy practices: ‘multisourced’ (Prinsloo 2004) or ‘multiply situated’ (Bulfin & Koutsogiannis 2012)
- ✓ Teenagers engage in “a nexus of school and out-of-school literacy practices” (Tan 2011: 267), mobilising resources from one domain to another
- ✓ The relationship between school and everyday literacy is verbally constructed in terms of binaries and tensions
- ✓ Teenagers’ perception of English literacy: framed by the dominant discourse of literacy as a traditional, school-based skill (cf. Nikula and Pitkänen-Huhta 2008)

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