Engelbert Thaler (ed.)

Lit 21

New Literary Genres in the Language Classroom

Lit 21 – New Literary Genres in the Language Classroom

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Introduction

Panta rhei. The world is in motion. So is literary production. The "Big 5 -ation waves", i.e. globalization, digitalization, visualization, diversification, and multi-optionalization, are rocking the literary boat by adapting traditional genres, spawning new text types and modifying demands put on contemporary readers. New literary genres like visual literature, transcultural imaginaries, crunch lit, doodle fiction, fanfic, clifi, cosmopolitan novels, text-talk fiction, email novels, twitterature and digi fiction are gaining ground, and should be evaluated as regards their foreign language learning potential.

For all these reasons, this book is dedicated to the use of Lit 21 in TEFL. As all edited volumes in the SELT (Studies in English Language Teaching) series, it follows a **triple aim**:

1. Linking TEFL with related academic disciplines
2. Balancing TEFL research and classroom practice
3. Combining theory, methodology and exemplary lessons

This triple aim is reflected in the **three-part structure** of this volume. In Part A (Theory), the topic of Lit 21 is investigated from the perspectives of three academic disciplines, i.e. from the viewpoints of TEFL, literary studies and media studies. Part B (Methodology) assembles four contributions on selected genres, media and techniques. Six concrete lesson plans can be found in Part C (Classroom). These lessons were designed by lecturer (editor) and students at university, then conducted and assessed by teachers at German schools, and finally revised by the editor. Each of these chapters is divided into genre (brief background information on the new text type), sample texts, procedure (source, synopsis, competences, topics, level, time, phases of the lesson), materials (texts, worksheets, board sketches), solutions (expected answers), and bibliography.

Part A is introduced by the **TEFL perspective. Engelbert Thaler** adopts a five-step approach to examining the didactic potential of post-millennial fiction in the language classroom: What is the 21st century like? Who are the 21st century readers? What are the features of 21st century literature? What new literary genres can be identified in the 21st century? How should you teach these genres in the 21st century language classroom?

The perspective of **literary studies** is adopted by **Ansgar Nünning**. First, his essay accounts for the cultural dynamics of generic change by providing a brief look at some salient contexts and new concerns which serve as catalysts for the transformations of new genres of Lit 21. Second, it gives a selective overview of some emerging genres and new trends in 21st-century British novels, including hybridization, 'fictions of the Internet' and the rise of frag-mentary essay-novels. Third, the author proposes some reasons why reading and teaching contemporary fiction matter in an age dominated by digital and social media.

Thomas Strasser adopts the perspective of **media studies**. He investigates the potentials of digital storytelling and tag cloud applications in a blended learning context focussing on productive and receptive skills in the EFL litera-ture classroom. His findings show that certain educational applications, which consider various dimensions of the teaching of literature, elicit motivating phases of L2-acquisition among the learners.

Part B is introduced by **Frauke Matz**. She makes students realize the 'terrors' of the 21st century by recommending **dystopian narratives**, as they offer fic-tional insights into global discourses and serve as suitable texts when pursuing global education. Her article informs us about the genre and its current devel-opments as well as discusses ways of fostering critical thinking skills, global attitudes and democratic participation within the context of global education.

Katrin Thomson is convinced that **text-talk fiction**, which attracts espe-cially a young adult readership, offers great, yet still mostly untapped potential for the EFL literature classroom. She explores the characteristic features of this genre, discusses the didactic and methodological implications of reading text-talk narratives in the foreign language classroom, and presents a series of specific classroom activities.

Sophia Finck von Finckenstein explains the Netflix effect and the narra-tive power of series 21 by turning to the **political drama series** *House of Cards*. Taking one of the first Netflix originals as an example, she demonstrates how to foster media literacy, political learning and literary competence (via al-lusions to Shakespeare tragedies) in advanced TEFL classes.

Claudia Deetjen uses **comics journalism** to help learners engage critically with the multi-modal ways of making meaning. When dealing with the graphic report of a Syrian refugee family or the account of Hurricane Katrina, learners may acquire multiple literacies, develop skills in selecting relevant information and critically assess multi-modal texts in terms of their constructedness.

Part C comprises six contributions, which demonstrate how new literary genres can be made use of in the English language classroom:

- Shorties, to put it tautologically, are ideal texts for TEFL because they are short and narrative. Among the wealth of Shorties, also called flash fiction, skinny fiction, prosetry, short short story, or mini-fiction, we also find the sub-genre of **drabbles**, which consist of exactly 100 words. **Valentina Kleinert** has teenagers reflect on everyday life, stress, making ends meet, nature, and yearning for peace by reading a drabble titled *What might not Happen.*

- **Cherelle Hobson** encourages learners to discuss similarities and differences between growing up in an Islamic and a Western culture by reading *Persepolis*. This autobiographical **graphic memoir** by Marjane Satrapi deals with her childhood and coming of age within a loving family living in Tehran during the Islamic Revolution and Iran-Iraq War.

- **Isabel Mair** is convinced that **digital picture books** are among the most exciting innovations in literature for children in a long time. That is why she familiarizes us with the International Children's Digital Library (ICDL), which makes children's books from all over the world accessible, online and free of charge. To pave the way for the introduction of the ICDL in elementary TEFL classrooms, she suggests a lesson on *The Jungle School.*

- **Maximilian Leoson** and **Julian Schafroth** are fans of **fanfiction**, i.e. a fan's interpretation of a well-known text of popular culture, which leads to the creation of a narrative text produced by this fan. They intend to make learners become fans of *Game of Thrones* and write their own pieces of fanfiction.

- Twitterverse can be a confusing place, especially when friends act differently online than they do in person. This painful insight is gained by Claire, a hopeless romantic, Lottie, who is determined to set up her BFF with Mr. Perfect, and Will, who wants his secret crush to finally notice him. *Tweet Heart*, a **text-talk novel** written entirely in emails, tweets and instant messages, is recommended by **Eduard Gitt**.

- **Anja Wahler** introduces us to the innovative text type of **digi fiction**, i.e. fiction written for and read on a computer screen, combining visual, auditory and textual stimuli. The topics of immigration, intercultural encounters and refugees can be explored with the sample text of *Flight Paths*, which supports a multiliteracies approach in class.

The theoretical, methodological and practical contributions in this volume may open the doors a bit to accessing Lit 21 in our English language classrooms, so that we can strike a fair balance between pre-millennial fiction und post-millennial literature. As a matter of fact, there are not only the omnipresent DWEMs (Dead White English Males), but also the LANGs (Living Authors and New Genres). Cuncta fluunt.

A. Theory

Lit 21 – Teaching Post-Millennial Literature

Engelbert Thaler

Panta rhei. The world is in motion. So is literary production. And TEFL has to reflect that. Addressing the topic of this paper, one should adopt a five-step approach: What is the 21st century like? Who are the 21st century readers? What are the features of 21st century literature? What new literary genres can be identified in the 21st century? And how should you teach these genres in the 21st century language classroom?

1 21st Century

Attempting to summarize contemporary developments is bound to be both a challenging and selective endeavour. The following seven trends, which are highly interrelated, have affected literary studies and teaching literature to a considerable degree.

- Globalization:
  It is a truism to state that today's world is an increasingly transnationally configured one. "Indeed, globality seems to emerge as the new mega paradigm, superseding even post-modernism and post-structuralism, while transcultural studies are taken for granted in most disciplines today" (Gohrisch/Schmidt-Haberkamp 2017: 211). It is also a dialectical platitude that modern phenomena both have their blessings and draw-backs – or as the Indian-American literary scholar Spivak (2011: 1) in her seminal essay proclaimed: "Globalization takes place only in capital and data. Everything else is damage control." This damage control ensues in numerous fields, whether in migration, law, police, identity formation, education, or teaching.
- Digital Era:
  The process of converting information into a computer-readable format, where the information is organized into bits, is also changing TEFL meth-odology. Tools of digital transformation such as computer, Internet,

smartphone, digital camera, projectors, and the IWB (interactive white-board) provide students with a widespread availability of authentic re-sources, the chance to communicate with people online in- and outside the classroom (extra-mural English), and a huge variety of learning apps on the go; teachers can access digital platforms, make use of online cor-pora, profit from online CPD (continuous professional development) and the global staffroom (Lütge 2018). However, long before digital media entered the classroom, Albert Einstein already demanded in his famous dictum: "The human spirit must prevail over technology" – and, more recently, the popular computer scientist Jaron Lanier (2018) proposed "10 Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now."

- Visual Turn:
  The humanities have also witnessed a *pictorial* or *iconic turn* (Boehm/ Mitchell 2009). The linguistic turn is challenged by the *visual turn* (*imagic turn*, *visualistic turn*), in which the picture has dethroned the written word. Today's world, more than ever, is determined by visual artefacts, and the image seems to have thrown the letter from its pedestal.

- Multiliteracies:
  As we seem to have a paradigm shift every second day, we are also facing a multi-modal turn, in which "sit-back" media are increasingly substituted by "lean-forward" media. "In the 21st century, meaning-making is multi-modal in orientation with different semiotic systems interacting in complex ways" (Delanoy 2017: 13). In the mid-1990s, The New London Group (1996) coined the term *Multiliteracies* to describe an approach to literacy theory and pedagogy which, apart from linguistic diversity, high-lights multimodal forms of linguistic expression and representation. A words-only approach has become outdated because "written-linguistic modes of meaning interface with oral, visual, audio, gestural, tactile, and spatial patterns of meaning" (Kalantzis/Cope 2012: 2).

- Multi-optionality:
  A variant form of the *affluent society*, the *multi-optional society* reflects the profound influence technology has had on society, as consumers are accustomed to having everything literally at their disposal. In our *Multi-optionsgesellschaft* (Gross 1994), "nothing is impossible", everybody has the right to demand more and better things, for which Gross has coined the neologism "Mehrgott" (1994: 366). *Multi-optionalisation* increasingly affects every domain of life: consumption, ownership, work, family, re-lationships, education – and reading. With the decrease of traditional ob-ligations, a space has opened for the individualisation in society, "Why

not?" and "I construct myself" have advanced to the most frequently heard mantras in a *multioptional I-society*.

- Diversity:
  Another mega-trend can be observed in the growing respect for group differences, whether they refer to race, ethnicity, age, gender, religion, physical health, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, mental health, personality, or behaviour. Terms like *superdiversity* and *intersectionality* reflect the fact that these categories overlap in various forms (Walgenbach 2014). The acceptance of diversity is connected with *cosmopolitanism* (or *multi-/transculturalism*), which claims that all human beings belong to a single community, and individuals from different areas and domains form relationships of mutual respect. Political creeds supporting the notion of diversity being desirable are convinced that promoting these diverse cultures will aid communication between people of different backgrounds. Critics of diversity voice concerns, among others, about the buzzword character of the term (bandwagon hopping), PC excesses (*Political Correctness*), or the oppression of the *silent majority* (Thaler 2016a).

- World risks:
  "The time is out of joint. O cursed spite that ever I was born to set it right!" (*Hamlet* I, v). What Shakespeare's protagonist bemoaned more than 450 years ago, has lost nothing of its significance. With his concept of the *world risk society*, Beck, however, distinguishes between the 'old risks' and the 'new risks': "Old risks (industrial accidents, wars) and natural catastrophes (earth-quakes, tsunamis) overlap and are becoming associated with new risks (catastrophic climate change, global financial crises and suicide attacks) and thus can trigger in turn new, incalculable and unpredictable turbulences" (Beck 2012 [2009]: 19). The contemporary Hamlet has to set right calamities like a tremendous global population increase, mass migration, terrorism, religious clashes, global warming, vanishing cropland, extreme poverty, economic crunches, impeding shortages of fresh water, oil and other natural resources, just to name a few. In the 21st century "crisis" may be the new "normal".

2 21st Century Reader

Contemporary trends, of course, affect the conditions of reading and the demands made on modern readers (Delanoy et al. 2015, Hall 2005, Hammer et al. 2012, Lütge 2013, NCTE 2013, Paul 2010, Proserpio/Gioia 2011, Ribbat 2005, Wyse et al. 2010, Thaler 2016b, 2012). The New London Group (1996) has brought to

our minds the need of a new definition of being literate in modern culture. With society and technology changing and literate environments becoming more complex, readers have to possess multiple literacies, which are dynamic and malleable (Friesen 2011). Since digital natives grow up using technology as a learning tool, they can navigate and comprehend digital media, interpret coded language and decode graphics. They are expected to read, understand, analyse, evaluate and create multi-modal texts.

Compared to older digital immigrants, however, younger readers tend to have a shorter attention span, which calls for shorter, varied and more attractive input. In our *multioptional society* it seems important to give people more options on how they consume entertainment – and books.

Until recently, the intended reader was mainly an upper-secondary student with rather advanced linguistic abilities and some intrinsic interest in literature. Recent developments now offer the opportunity to include new reader groups. "In contrast, the focus on young learners and multi-modal texts includes engagement with less advanced and more reluctant learner groups" (Delanoy 2017: 19). More diverse and alluring text formats may also counteract the so-called *Leseknick*, i.e. a considerable decrease of reading interest at the beginning of adolescence (Bland 2013: 74, Lewis 2015).

3 21st Century Literature

Post-millennial literature, as heterogeneous as it may appear, can be characterized by the following features (Friesen 2011, Nünning et al. 2012):

- It has been written by contemporary authors and comprises new literary work created from 2001.
- It deals with current topics and issues, and frequently reflects today's technological culture.
- It builds on traditional genres. For example, the new text-talk genres like email novels have their predecessor in the epistolary novel, the novel of letters like Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* or Henry Fielding's parody *Shamela.* So the ancient terms for this process of interaction with the literary past, i.e. imitatio ("imitation") and aemulatio ("competition"), are still relevant; "imitation", however, does not mean slavish copying, but creative adaptation of the tradition.
- It adapts classical texts. Adaptations, remixes and mash-ups are en vogue, so Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* becomes *Wuthering Bytes* (ostensibly a vampire story), Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* is changed to *Jane*

Eyre Laid Bare or *Jane Slayre* (with a blood-sucking twist), and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is extended to *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*.

- It often breaks traditional writing rules. Rules are meant to be broken – which holds true for post-modernism or any other literary movement. Whether unconventional pieces really create something inspiring and original, or give novelty a bad name due to an overweening desire to achieve newness, is often a matter of dispute.
- It sees the emergence of new genres (Surkamp 2019). Various forms of electronic literature such as hypertext (interactive) fiction, animated poetry, or SMS (text-message) fiction, to a certain degree, reflect the much heralded "death of print".
- It consists of numerous multi-modal texts. In teaching literature, "this multi-modal turn has shifted attention to the interplay of words and pictures in text-types such as picturebooks, comics and graphic novels" (Delanoy 2017: 14), and in language learning, "symbolic competence" (Kramsch 2006: 251) is the new goal.
- Its genre lines are blurred. Whether a certain piece of visual fiction must be classified as a graphic novel, an illustrated novel or doodle fiction, is often hard to decide. The boundaries of genres are fluid and are often breached for literary effect.
- It is immensely diverse in at least three dimensions: aesthetic quality, intended reader group, technical format.

4 21ˢᵗ Century Literary Genres

The genre of a literary work still remains an important factor today – in spite of post-structuralists' aversion to classification. One may argue that every text belongs to a genre and that it is not possible not to write in one as even the most ingenious writers trying to break free of convention are still involved in "experimental" literature. A genre can be characterized as a dynamic group of texts which share certain similarities – whether of form, style, subject matter, historic origin, intended readership, mode, or performance context (Nünning/Nünning 2018, Nünning et al. 2012). The following survey attempts to briefly describe the genres and sub-genres as well as suggest a few representative texts, which may also be read in class.

4.1 Visual Fiction

The *visual turn* (cf. 1.) has increased the presence of images in fiction (Elsner et al. 2013, Kimes-Link/Steininger 2012, McCloud 1994, Rüschoff 2013) and produced at least four sub-types.

- **Graphic Novels**: Although the origins of the form are open to interpretation (Baetens/Frey 2015), "[b]ook-length, high-quality comic books that introduce children and adults to a wide range of literary fiction and non-fiction subjects" (Burdge 2006: 166) really became popular after the commercial success of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986) – in TEFL classrooms as well.
  Example: *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang (2006)
- **Illustrated Novels**: Compared to a graphic novel, an illustrated novel, i.e. "an extended narrative with multiple images that, together with the text, produce meaning" (Godbey 2010: 418), still views the text as predominant.
  Examples: *Middle School Is Worse Than Meatloaf: A Year Told through Stuff* by Jennifer Holm (2007), *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie (2007) (cf. also Thaler 2010)
- **Manga**: Manga is Japanese for comics, knows at least four target audiences (boys, girls, youths, matured), and, in its original form, is read from the right to the left (pages, panels, text).
  Examples: *Chi's Sweet Home* by Konami Kanata (2004 ff.), *Adolf* by Osamu Tezuka (1983-1985), Shakespeare's *Macbeth* by Robert Deas/Richard Appignanesi (2008)
- **Doodle Fiction**: Doodles are "drawn by hand, include speech or thought balloons, interjections or some other form of text" (Merklinger 2018).
  Examples: *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* by Jeff Kinney (2007 ff.), *Wonkenstein – The Creature from My Closet* by Obert Skye (2011)

4.2 Text-Talk Fiction

Text-Talk novels are hybrid texts in the sense that they combine features of 21st century modern literature with features of the traditional 18th century epistolary novel (cf. Thomson in this volume, Lomicka/Lord 2012, Page/Bronwen 2011, Schmidt et al. 2010). Starting with *Deep Love* (2003) by Yoshi, the cell phone novels (mobile phone novels) were originally written on a cellular phone via text messaging. The stories are told almost completely in dialogue simulating social network exchanges, display a strong visual component, are often multimodal and always intermedial (different medial formats like letters, emails,