Functional Approach to Multiliteracy

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Abstract. This paper presents a cybertask designed to be performed by students of journalism within the subject "English for Journalists". As a departure point, students were provided with a website which gives access to all the British newspapers and magazines. In the paper, we also present the structure of that site and the results obtained through a self-assessment questionnaire completed by the students. Finally, we offer an overview of the potential future results that can be obtained after the analysis of all the data collected.

Keywords. EFL, cybertask, online directory, digital newspaper, wreading competence, autonomy.

1. Introduction

This chapter deals with the description of a cybertask related to the use of the English language mentioned in the introduction to this issue, and developed under the CIBERTAAAL R+D project framework[1]. The task presented here is *Un acercamiento a la prensa digital en lengua inglesa* (an approach to the digital press in English) which can be accessed at http://www.giapel.uji.es/cibertareas/ctprensadigital/index.htm[2] and was designed for its implementation in a degree on Journalism at Universidad Católica San Antonio, in Murcia, Spain.

In the first place, we will account for the criteria followed in the selection of the web page used for the design and implementation of the cybertask, and then we will provide a description of different aspects of the website like, for example, its contents, structure, link organisation, specific target audience, etc. Next, we will offer a detailed description of the cybertask and point out the specific objectives it pursues and how they relate to the CIBERTAAL project as a whole. The description of the task will include a reflection on the role played by each of the activities integrated in the task, including a methodological justification for their design and implementation. In the last section, we will show and discuss some relevant results obtained in a self-assessment test which students carried out after completing the activities of the cybertasks. This test, together with our own observation during the implementation of the tasks will be very helpful to learn about students' reactions and attitudes towards the cybertask they were presented with. In future publications, all this will also be contrasted with significant data extracted from the learning styles of different students and their behaviour when navigating through the web pages (i.e. specific navigation modes employed in order to fulfil particular task objectives).

2. Cyberjournalism through a new digital genre: the on-line directory

At the beginning of the academic year 2007-2008, the students of the subject 'English for journalists' were asked about their previous use of newspapers written in English and about their knowledge of them in order to know the origin of the papers they were more familiar

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[2] Last accessed: 2/11/2008.

with. Most students indicated that, although they had not really made use of newspapers written in a foreign language, they were quite familiar with the format and names of some British newspapers. This is one of the reasons why we decided to use as a departure point the web page British Newspapers Online (http://www.britishpapers.co.uk) which – as can be seen in Figure 1 – contains several categories leading to any newspaper, magazine, or mass media publication in Great Britain. Another reason for this choice is related to the fact that this page can be said to represent a new type of digital genre which could be referred to as 'online directory'[3]. Such directories contain features resembling both a newspaper library and a 'hypersite', that is, a site which does not allocate newspapers or publications, but that provides a complete battery of links to access them.
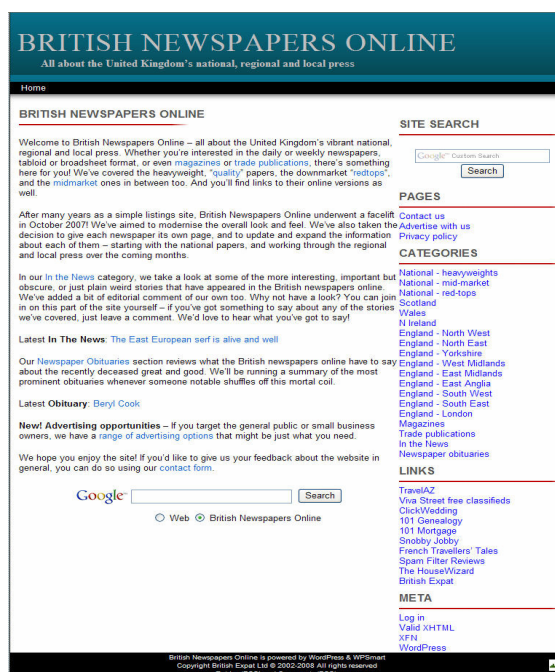

Figure 1. Initial Web page for the cybertask on cyberjournalism

These directories are made up of millions of pages. This was found to be a problem for our computer equipment and graph software in that such a vast amount of information could not possibly be gathered in a graphic representation, and often led to a system collapse (for more details see Navarro, Aguado and Silvestre, this issue). It is for this very reason – and, unlike in the analyses of other web pages presented in this monograph – that we are not presenting a graph derived from this web page. As suggested in previous chapters, the graph serves to illustrate the architecture of a page, and in this case we are not dealing with a "regular page", but with one that homes links to thousands or millions of them. Nevertheless, it might be interesting to point out that the graphs of pages related to the world of news often present a similar structure: one big and dense "ball" that may be connected to smaller ones, yet always indicating that the reader has entered a closed world, a world where everything (as far as information is concerned) is provided and therefore there is no need to access other pages. As an example, Figure 2 shows the graph of the page Sky News (http://news.sky.com/skynews/):

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[3] Other examples of online directories for mass media publications can be accessed at http://www.wrx.zen.co.uk/britnews.htm and http://www.londondirectory.co.uk/sites/7384.
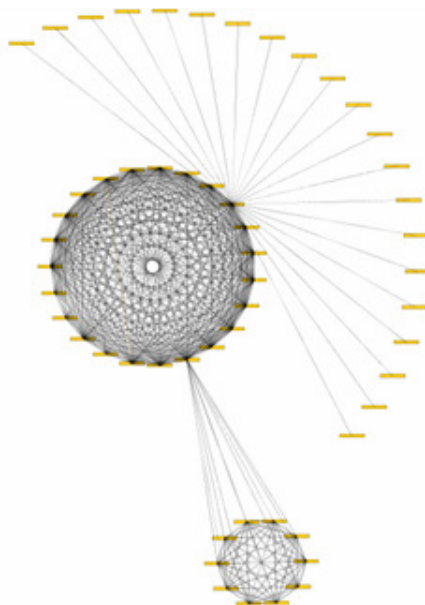
Figure 2. Graph of Sky News Website

When talking about a directory it is easy to imagine a resource which has been designed with informative purposes exclusively. However this is not the case of the directory we are concerned with; a closer and more in-depth examination of the site reveals that it is devised for and intended to reach a very specific target group: British expats (see Figure 3).
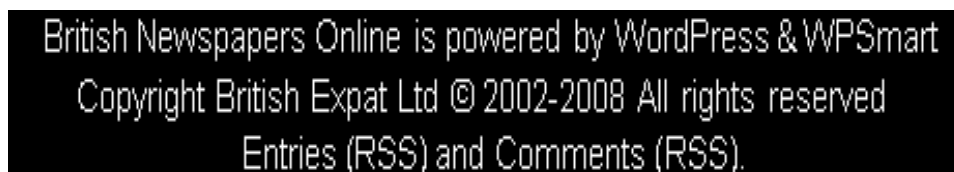

British Newspapers Online is powered by WordPress & WPSmart
Copyright British Expat Ltd © 2002-2008 All rights reserved
Entries (RSS) and Comments (RSS).

Figure 3: Bottom part of the Website *British Newspapers Online*

Thus, the site evaluates, categorises, and selects the information because there is a very clear profile of the group it is intended for. British expats are expected to be able to find in the site not only news, but everything they might be interested in; for example, through the menu "links" they may access a whole variety of topics, from "mortgages in Spain" to "Travel A-Z". Nonetheless, this is not so until the fourth navigation level is reached. Thus, the home page offers everything the target audience might be interested in, but in the fourth navigation level, the reader abandons this particular world and moves to a completely different one: the real world of digital newspapers and magazines. In fact, from this navigation level on, there are no internal links to let the reader return to the original site.

Instead of including a C-map, we consider it more representative for this page to show the different steps to be taken in order to reach that 'real world' of information and abandon the mini-world of the online directory. With that purpose in mind we are showing as an example the possible path that could be followed by a user who is interested in reaching the international section of a national newspaper. Figure 4 shows again the initial website of British Newspapers Online where this user would probably choose to click on the link 'National-heavyweights'.

Figure 4: Initial Website of British Newspapers Online- first navigation level

Then, in Figure 5 we can see the result of that move, namely, a page where we get a brief explanation of what is meant by the term 'heavyweight', followed by a list of some of those newspapers also offering a brief description of each. Within this site, our user can choose among nine different newspapers.

Figure 5: Example of second navigation level of British Newspaper Online

Given the case the user decides to click on 'The Independent', the next screen (Figure 6) will offer a brief history as well as a description of this paper which includes comments on its ideology, format (mainly of the printed version) and contents.

Figure 6: Example of the third navigation level in British papers online

At the end of this description, the user finds the URL that gives access to the newspaper 'The Independent' (Figure 7) and therefore leaves the online directory to enter the 'real world' referred to previously.

Figure 7: 'The Independent' Website

British Newspapers Online has served us to make a pedagogical use of a new concept, a new genre. We are aware that students of journalism are not the target audience of this site but the clarity it presents in the classification and structure made us select it for our own purposes. Apart from pedagogical reasons, the decision to use this site obeys as well further research criteria: in order to navigate in this site learners need to have a capacity to select and identify the links because this is broadly what the site contains: links which have been perfectly categorised. Indeed, and as far as mass media publications are concerned, the right side of the page offers a very clear classification according to different criteria such as the type of publication (heavyweight, mid-market, red-top) or its geographical location (England-North West, England-North East, Scotland, N. Ireland, etc.).

Furthermore, the page presents all the characteristics that had been considered necessary within the framework of the research project (CIBERTAAAL) to be included as part of our bank of web pages, namely hypertextuality, interactivity, and multimodality (see Villanueva, Luzón and Ruiz-Madrid 2008). These, moreover, have often been signalled as three of the most outstanding characteristics of journalistic language in cyberspace (Salaverría 2005). On the one hand, the great amount of links that the page contains shows a highly hypertextual page which in fact contains very little information and makes navigation essential. On the other hand, the page is also very interactive as the reader is given the opportunity to contact the authors of the page, to advertise with them and / or carry out other searches with the Google Search Engine throughout the World Wide Web or more specifically within the site 'British Newspapers Online'. Multimodality, however, is not a feature that can be expected from this type of pages, not at least from their first navigation level, but it is true that they give readers access to a whole world of digital media publications containing text, pictures, videos, and much more in just four clicks.

3. Cyberjournalism: the cybertask

3.1. Aims of the task

The task *Un acercamiento a la prensa digital en lengua inglesa* was designed for students in their third year of journalism who had had therefore previous contact with the world of the mass media. More specifically, these students have a compulsory subject in this third year called "English for journalists". The subject offers students the possibility to become familiar with the printed press in English by having a look at some vocabulary related to the mass media as well as at headlines, leads, bodies of news, etc.

Needles to say, the digital press has become a far more popular genre among students as compared to the printed one. Indeed it is not very common to find students who still read printed newspapers and this is one of the rationales behind the design and implementation of a task like the one under discussion, namely, to offer students the possibility to learn about the main features of the digital press and to compare them with the one they are more familiar with (i.e. the printed press). The different activities the task contains are a helpful tool to attain this objective and help students to collect and manage the information they need to write the final report demanded by the task.

Another objective of this task is to let students practice the language in a context which can be of use and interest for them because, as Navarro-Coy and Villanueva (2009) state:

> Learning ESP involves making students sensitive to this kind of changes (new genres) because, otherwise we are promoting an instrumental and narrow view which assumes that learning English is completely separated from the rest of their studies.

Moreover, as mentioned before, cyberjournalism is nowadays more popular than the traditional genre, but the panorama it offers is completely different from the one readers have been familiar with for decades. In this sense, we can point out the fact that in digital newspapers, information is generally fragmented in brief texts, summaries, and links, which can make readers lose the global perspective. Furthermore, the lack of hierarchical organisation is obvious in this kind of media, something which is promoted by the use of frames, internal links, and redundant paths to reach the same story.

Students are very likely to use this kind of media in a spontaneous way without taking into consideration any of the aspects mentioned above. It is therefore of great importance, as well as one of our main objectives, to have a knowledge of the way students approach and make use of digital papers in order to provide them with the necessary skills to make an efficient and effective use of cybergenres in general, and of digital newspapers in particular. Indeed, it is one of the aims of the CIBERTAAAL project to study the strategies used by students when dealing with web documents which, as Askehave and Nielsen (2005) indicate, not only act as text but also as medium when the navigation mode is activated. Moreover, the development of these skills is a key factor for the promotion of an autonomising wreading competence among learners, so much demanded in this new context.

3.2. Description of the task

The task *Un acercamiento a la prensa digital en lengua inglesa* contains five activities which place students in different situations which require of them different behaviours regarding their navigation modes. In general, the type of work they are required to do "forces" them to carry out non-linear reading as well as to navigate with different objectives. Furthermore, the final report they have to write constitutes an exercise of information management where learners have to select, gather and / or relate all the information they collected while navigating in order to do the task.

Thus, activities 1, 2, and 3[4] require a quick navigation through the web looking for different 'answers'. In these three activities, students must find certain information by accessing the web pages of different newspapers (for an example see Figure 8). Such information includes the way British newspapers can be classified or the most frequent sections of digital papers among others. Looking for similarities or differences is also a common practice in these activities. For all that, the navigation mode for these three activities is expected to be quick and fluid. On the other hand, and from a more pedagogical point of view, we can say that the search for information students carry out in activities 1, 2, and 3 intends to provide them with a global view of British newspapers in general, and of British digital newspapers in particular. In fact, by completing these activities, students can become acquainted with the different types of newspapers regarding content, origin, etc. as well as with the way they are organised, i.e. the sections they are divided into.

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[4] These can be accessed at
http://www.giapel.uji.es/cibertareas/ctprensadigital/activitat1.htm,
http://www.giapel.uji.es/cibertareas/ctprensadigital/activitat2.htm, and
http://www.giapel.uji.es/cibertareas/ctprensadigital/activitat3.htm respectively.

Navarro-Coy, Marta and Antonio José Silvestre-López (2008) Functional Approach to Multiliteracy. *CORELL: Computer Resources for Language Learning* 2, 83-99.

ACTIVIDAD 2

➢ ¿Cuáles son las secciones más frecuentes en que se dividen estos periódicos digitales? Da al menos un ejemplo de una sección cuyo nombre no te resulte familiar y explica qué tipo de noticias contiene.

➢ ¿Existen diferencias significativas entre las secciones de la prensa sensacionalista y la no sensacionalista? En caso afirmativo, da algunos ejemplos.

Figure 8: Activity 2 of the cybertask

Activities 4 and 5[5] also involve students in an exercise of information management through the comparison of different language registers (activity 4) and the different ways quality and popular press present the same news story (see Figures 9 and 10). Students need to gain insight into text itself, which requires a slower navigating mode because they have to engage in deeper reading processes. In activity 4, students are asked to analyse headlines belonging to the different types of press (quality and popular) in order to check the existing differences among them. This exercise tries to familiarise students with the headlines written in English and to let them discover the features that make this particular type of texts difficult to understand in a foreign language.

Activity 5 goes a bit further and engages students in the comparison of complete articles taking into account their different parts: headline, lead paragraph, and news body. Thus, apart from being a highly meaningful reading activity for them, in it they are required to carry out a more careful and in-depth reading that is intended to let them discover how differently popular press and quality press may handle the same piece of information.

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[5] These can be accessed at http://www.giapel.uji.es/cibertareas/ctprensadigital/activitat4.htm and http://www.giapel.uji.es/cibertareas/ctprensadigital/activitat5.htm.

ACTIVIDAD 4

Generalmente, el tipo de lenguaje que utilizan los periódicos sensacionalistas es diferente y nos crea más dificultad que el utilizado por la prensa no sensacionalista. Selecciona tres titulares de cada tipo (sensacionalista / no sensacionalista) que reflejen tales diferencias e indica mediante ejemplos qué es lo que los hace diferentes.

Figure 9: Activity 4 of the cybertask

ACTIVIDAD 5

Busca la misma noticia en un periódico sensacionalista y en otro no sensacionalista. Tras su lectura, haz una comparación entre ambas atendiendo a todas sus partes: titular, entradilla y cuerpo de la noticia.

Será interesante que incluyas esta comparación en el informe a modo de ejemplo.

Figure 10: Activity 5 of the cybertask

4. Results and discussion

The cybertask *Un acercamiento a la prensa digital en lengua inglesa* was completed by twenty-seven students with an average English level of A2-B1, according to the proficiency levels established by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

The amounts of data gathered throughout the completion of the task (i.e. proficiency level, learning styles, navigation modes, researchers' observation) as well as with the previous analysis of the Web pages allow us to approach the potential results from different perspectives. As has already been said, the aim of this monographic issue is not to present an analysis of all the results obtained in all the cybertasks included in the project. Our intention is rather to show readers some relevant outcomes which can be derived from this kind of approach given the popularity of digital texts in general and of digital newspapers in particular.

4.1. Self-assessment questionnaire

The self-assessment questionnaire (see Annex 3) gives us a unique opportunity to learn about students' opinions and reactions on the following aspects:

A) Technical skills: except for one student who admitted having very basic skills, most of them indicated that they master the search for information using the Internet and usually make a good use of links and key words:

> *"las búsquedas, suelo poner las palabras clave adecuadas para obtener la información que deseo".*

> *"la búsqueda de información en diferentes páginas"*

> *"la navegación por la red; el uso de diferentes enlaces que apoyan mis búsquedas"*

When they were asked about the technical skills they would like to improve there were four aspects which most commonly seemed to worry students: the language, the speed to find information, the efficiency to carry out searches and a better use of key words. In sum, they want to find what they are looking for in the shortest time possible, although most of them indicated that their command of the English language was an important handicap:

> *"saber llegar a la página adecuada en un tiempo inferior al utilizado"*

> *"escoger mejor las palabras fundamentales de la búsqueda"*

> *"claramente, el idioma. Me ha costado bastante obtener la información que me pedían porque estaba en otro idioma."*

However, this question of efficacy somehow seems to suggest that students might be looking for a 'right answer' which cannot be obtained as such in any Web page and, of course, they want to be taught 'infallible' methods to find the answer to any question by searching the Web. If this is not so, the Web can be perceived as an 'enemy' instead of as a useful tool. Indeed, the lack of a clear objective can give students a sense of confusion, disorientation and cognitive overload. The following comments, still answers to the second part of question I of the questionnaire, clearly reflect that feeling:

> *"El dominio de la navegación, conocer buscadores diferentes **y que me propusieran algún método distinto para buscar información**, así como saber a veces en las páginas que realmente estoy, ya que muchas veces al buscar información nos perdemos un poco por la red y encontramos cosas que ni siquiera buscamos."*

> *"No dar tantas vueltas a la hora de encontrar lo que quiero, **saber dónde me tengo que dirigir directamente."***

In a sense, students seem to expect what they have usually expected from teachers: clear directions to find specific answers instead of guidance to be helped to manage information and construct meaning from the possibilities offered by a limitless resource as the Internet.

B) Criteria used to select information: Table 1 shows the importance students give to certain criteria when they have to select information from the Internet. In the questionnaire, they were given four possible answers for each criterion, but here we only include the last two as they indicate that the criterion itself is of certain relevance for the person answering the questionnaire.

Table 1. Criteria to select information

Criteria	Important criterion	Key criterion
Key words	42.4%	48.5%
Site reliability	45.4%	42.42%
Importance of contents and information	48.5%	48.5%
Easy to read (language)	51.52%	21.2%

Criteria included in the questionnaire but not in Table 1 are those whose percentages did not reach 50% of the total. From that, we might conclude that these four are the most relevant ones for the students who completed the questionnaire. Next we offer some comments on them:

 "es importante saber utilizar adecuadamente las palabras clave, sobre todo en los buscadores porque así es más sencillo acercarse lo máximo posible a lo que estamos buscando en la red."

 "el criterio es fijarme en la objetividad y en las fuentes utilizadas, al igual que en la fama del mismo."

 "la importancia de los contenidos la determina quien los consulta. Mientras sean importantes para mí, es un criterio que tengo muy en cuenta.

 "es mucho más cómodo enfrentarse a un texto que se puede leer con fluidez, pero que el texto sea un poco más complejo no es razón para desecharlo, sino que hay que dedicarle un poco más de tiempo.

The fact that both in sections A and B students often talk about the relevance and use of key words seems to suggest that they have not made a great use of the numerous links offered by the Website and may have resorted to the search through a search engine like Google which is included on the site.

We have the possibility to verify this information by having a look at the tool used to analyse the students' navigation modes.

C) Information management: Table 2 shows the results obtained in the question related to the use students made of the resources available as well as their perception of such usage:

Table 2. Use of resources for information management

Resource use	Percentage
2 texts	45%
3 texts	58%
4 or more texts	36%
multimodality	61%
Different languages	42%
Online dictionaries	64
Own searches	61%
Random links	12%
Selected links	**64%**
Random+selected links	36%
All links	6
Resource perception	**Percentage**
Links=dispersion	12%
Links=comprehension	**76%**

The figures in Table 2 offer some interesting results as, for example, the fact that a significant number of students were able to manage information from three texts and in different languages. It is also worth noticing that many students reported to have taken advantage of the multimodality of the pages and to have been able to make their own searches and use resources from the web which had not been suggested by the teacher. However, we have highlighted two of the figures related to the use and perception of the use of links. As has been already mentioned, an analysis of the page British Papers Online, an online directory, lets us see its special structure which is mainly made up of links. This way, we may presuppose that such an organised structure can be of great help for students who only have to choose among very clearly defined categories of links. The results obtained seem to confirm this because, as we can see in Table 2, 64 % of the students selected the links and only 12% used them at random. Furthermore, 76% indicated that the links aided their comprehension while, again, only 12% felt that links had dispersed their search (for a comparison of results, see Sanz and Villanueva, this volume).

D) Interactivity: the graph in Figure 11 shows students' perception of the interactivity of the pages visited and the use they made of these or other resources. The figures in the graph represent the sum of the answers 'often' and 'almost always':
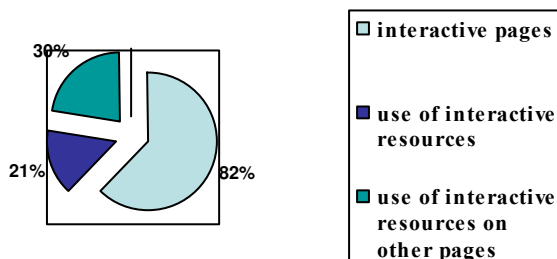

Figure 11 interactivity of websites

As can be seen in the graph, most of the pages used by students (82%) contained interactive resources such as blogs, e-mail, chats, etc. However the 51% who reported to have

used such resources mainly did it on other pages (30%) and only 21% used the ones offered on the pages used to complete the task.

E) Students' perception on Web pages: in general, students who participated in the project found very useful the initial page they were provided with, mainly because its structure facilitated the navigation and therefore the access to pages that could be used to answer the questions of the different activities:

"la web que se ofrecía como punto de partida para realizar la actividad ha sido sin duda mi mayor descubrimiento en esta tarea, pues en ella se ofrece una visión global de toda la prensa británica, muy importante para quienes no la conocemos."

"los enlaces que daban en la página principal me han sido de mucha ayuda ya que no conocía muchos periódicos de la prensa británica."

F) Understanding the foreign language did not seem to be a big problem to carry out the task, although we have to say that many students admitted to have difficulties in understanding newspapers articles in English, mainly the ones in sensationalist press. However, they indicated that this difficulty was only a disadvantage regarding the time needed to complete the task:

"al ser en ingles me resulta más difícil ya que la comprensión es más inexacta y tardo más tiempo en responder a las actividades…"

G) Other comments: Only nine students made further comments on this section of the questionnaire. Most of them found the cybertask an interesting and practical activity although some talked about the difficulties it presented. In this sense it is interesting to bring up here the comment made by a student who considered the activity a difficult one not because of the language but because of the high a mount of information available:

"la dificultad de la tarea reside, en mi caso, más en la abundancia de información que en el idioma. Conseguir una visión global y seleccionar lo más pertinente ha sido el reto más importante."

In the rest of the questionnaire, students had to assess issues related to the results of the task:

H) Level of satisfaction: the graph in Figure 12 aims to show students' level of satisfaction on different aspects related to the task. This time, the figures represent the sum of the options 'high' and 'very high':
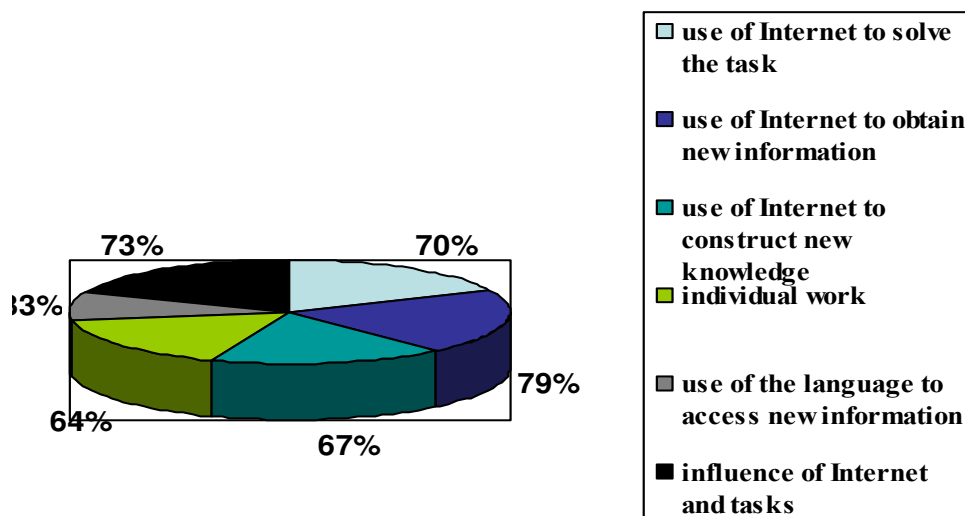
Figure 12. Students' level of satisfaction on the performance of the task

As shown in Figure 12, students' level of satisfaction proved to be very positive except for the aspect related to the use of the foreign language which was the only one to obtain less than 50%. Only 33% of the students showed a high (21%) or very high (12%) level of satisfaction in this sense.

I) Further comments: the comments made by students were more or less repetitions of the ones they had made in other parts of the questionnaire. Thus, they were mostly concerned with the difficulty to work with information in English and with the fact that they had to deal with too much information. However, there is a general positive feeling about the task and some students included in their comments adjectives such as 'interesting', 'dynamic' or 'useful' to refer to it.

J) In spite of the facts that all the students participating in the project made comments about their **own strengths and weaknesses when performing the task**, it is very easy to summarise the content of such comments. Except for five students who did not specify those strengths and weaknesses the rest coincided in pointing out the easiness to find information on the Internet as a strength and their command of the English language as weakness.

K) Students were also asked to assess the **strengths and weaknesses** of the task itself. Some of the comments obtained did not really refer to the issue they were asked to assess and even in two cases students indicated that the strengths and weaknesses of the task coincide with the ones they indicated in the last section. However there are some interesting comments we would like to highlight. Some students appreciated the task as an exercise to learn English and more specifically to know about the press written in English. Here are some of the comments which reflect that feeling:

"punto fuerte: aprender más cosas sobre los diarios ingleses viéndolos directamente, porque si no hubiéramos hecho esta tarea lo más probable es que casi ninguno de nosotros

viera por su cuenta estos diarios para conocer por ejemplo los tipos de secciones que contienen o las diferencias entre un diario sensacionalista y otro no sensacionalista."

"el punto fuerte es que me ha servido para aprender."

"la tarea me ha parecido muy buena para conocer la prensa inglesa en Internet y las diferencias entre los distintos tipos de lengua inglesa."

"me parece una buena iniciativa en general."

"sirve para obtener una visión completa de la prensa británica para quienes no la conocemos."

On the other hand it was also common to find students who considered the link provided in the introduction to the task very advantageous to carry it out.

Even though it is not quantitatively representative, there is one comment we consider worth highlighting because the student considered that the strength of the task has to do with the fact that it allowed them to manage information from different sources:

"el punto fuerte es que hay que comparar y obtener información de varios sitios."

In sum, this self-assessment questionnaire can be considered a helpful tool not only for researchers but also for students in that it allows them to become aware of and "reflect upon their own learning preferences, the demands of the language task and the strategies that they will need to complete the task" (Luzón and Ruiz-Madrid, this issue).

4.2 Further data analysis

A huge amount of data has been gathered from the experiments carried out using the different cybertasks included in the research project and we are now in the process of analysing information, and extracting quantitative and qualitative results.

Thus, at this stage we can not yet provide any conclusive pieces of information, however a thorough analysis of the data is to come and it is intended to allow us to find out mainly how students manage complexity and how they construct meaning in a hypertextual environment. This may be achieved for example by establishing relationships between navigation maps and learning styles or by establishing relationships between web page architecture (complexity, hypertextuality, links, etc) and how all this may influence navigation patterns.

These results will let us establish a difference between the three patterns under analysis, namely: browsing, navigating, and reading.

5. Final remarks

In this paper we have suggested a functional approach to multiliteracy through the description of a cybertask carried out by EFL students of journalism. On the one hand, as far students are concerned, this tasks allowed them to learn about the digital press in English by managing information on their own so as to fulfil specific task objectives. On the other hand, the observation of their "cybertask performance" and the use of a series of tools allowed us to

collect information about the way students tackle specific kinds of digital documents. Thus we intended to assess their wreading competence, to uncover specific sets of strategies needed to deal with these documents (digital newspapers) and to identify those which still need further development on the part of students so as to be able to eventually provide them with the necessary tools to achieve this goal and help them become more autonomous learners.

Each activity of the cybertask involved students in different navigating and information management processes (e.g. quick navigation to spot specific information, browsing, reading, or comparing information from different sources and text types). The self-assessment questionnaire allowed us to get an overall impression of the students' attitudes towards the task. Outstanding overall findings derived from the questionnaire suggest that, on the one hand, students display positive attitudes towards ICTs, perceiving themselves as capable of managing information efficiently – e.g. by quickly searching and efficiently selecting information bits, by discriminating reliable sites, or by ascertaining the importance of their contents and information as related to the fulfilment of specific objectives. On the other hand, however, they identified two main difficulties. The first one is related to the use of the English language in that, even if it was not a great hindrance, it seemed to slow down their task performance. As for the second one, even though their overall impression regarding the online directory was positive – especially because it presented all resources in an orderly way –, the high amount of information they had to manage during the task led to a cognitive overload in certain students (see also Oster, this issue). This suggests that not only the students level of English, but also their particular learning styles determine the way they process information in digital environments (see Oster, this issue) and hence their overall performance during the cybertask. All in all, it seems that students tend to manage information rather quickly as far as specific and well-defined blocks are concerned. However, in spite of this skill some of them might need further practice in the holistic processing of information of those sites identified previously, in establishing connections between different sources and abstracting meaning out so as to eventually build up a coherent and comprehensive product.

6. References

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