Digital communication as a Topic for Foreign Language Education

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Fake news, hate speech, self-aggrandizement in social media, "global logorrhea" (T. Garton Ash)… When it comes to digital communication, the public discourse lately seems to emphasize problematic aspects of the Web 2.0. But global digitalisation is irreversible and has become as such an important issue in school education. But how do curricula and learning programs and materials face the complexity of the digital phenomena? Do they focus on technical competences or do subject-specific approaches exist?

By taking foreign language education as an example my paper will point out, that with regard to digitalisation, pedagogical objectives are combined to a technic-orientated approach. On the one hand, digital communication is perceived as a challenge for students. They need to build up a reflective attitude and critical competence to be able to evaluate digital information, to control and to protect their own identity in social media and to participate in digital communication.

On the other hand, a technic-orientated approach focusses on the use of digital devices and applications (cf. i.e. KMK 2012). It is evident that subject-specific aspects as the transformation of narratives (cf. Nünning et al. 2012), changes in the author-reader-relationship (cf. Hartling 2009) or the building of new media genres in this cultural process of worldmaking (cf. Goodman 1992, Nünning et al. 2010) until now – with only a few exceptions – do not determine the examination of digitalisation in the foreign language classroom.

To analyse some of the reasons for this lack of subject-specificity, the paper will focus on the political decision of the German conference of secretaries of education and cultural affairs to establish media competence in a top-down process as an educational cross-section as well as on the inadequate interaction between subject-specific and media-didactics. The paper will conclude with some considerations on a subject-specific approach to the topic of digital communication in the foreign language classroom.