Introduction on Views of Emergent Researchers in L2 Teaching and Learning with Technology

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Abstract

Although technology has become embedded in our everyday life, researchers and practitioners constantly strive to find ways of incorporating technology in education, with language learning being one of those fields (Garrett, 2009). Numerous publications on this subject are available, mostly on condition that one is affiliated with a university, and that this university subscribes to a broad spectrum of publications. With the aim of widening free access research publications, we have elaborated a peer-reviewed eBook published under a Creative Commons licence which provides not only protection but also freedom for authors and editors. Young researchers from a variety of countries participated with a chapter of their ongoing projects. The themes approached within these projects represent topical areas of language learning and teaching, and technology within collaborative, personal and virtual learning environments. After providing an overview of the steps taken to develop this eBook project, this chapter gives a brief account of the innovative applications of technology in second language teaching and learning found in the eBook.

Keywords: language learning and teaching, technology, open access publication, eBook, creative commons licence, peer-reviewing.

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1.   Introduction

The field of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is expanding. Since Burns' (1979) doctoral dissertation, arguably recognised as the first study on the impact of computer-assisted instruction on learner uptake (Hawisher & Selfe, 2007), CALL has "evolved at a remarkable rate" (Levy & Stockwell, 2006, p. 1). The term CALL, as opposed to other acronyms, such as CAI (computer-assisted instruction), or TELL (technology-enhanced language learning), is preferred in this publication mostly "because of its now well-established presence in the discourse surrounding the topic", and because of its focus on "the technology itself" (Hubbard & Levy, 2006, p. 9).

Defined as "the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning" (Levy, 1997, p. 1), CALL, and more precisely technology in CALL, has been widely used to promote learning, assess learners' language, and collect data for all kinds of investigation. As mentioned by Hernández-Ramos (2005), the effects of technology used by teachers and students should not be merely defined as questions of access, but instead be further regarded as questions of (a) availability in terms of appropriateness of software and technical support, and (b) integration in terms of a person's training. In other words, the effect of technology use should support teachers' productivity and students' accomplishments with regard to language learning.

Learners may have access to technology in educational settings in two distinct ways: learning from and learning with technology (Reeves, 1998, p. 1). While the former implies a relative passivity from the learner, the latter infers an active participation (Hill, Wiley, Miller Nelson, & Han, 2004). More specifically, a learning from technology approach generally considers computers as tutors, and takes various forms to deliver the instructional material to the learner, such as computer-assisted instruction (Ringstaff & Kelley, 2002). On the other hand, learners, in a learning with technology method, are "no longer solely taking the information, [but are also] contributing to the knowledge base" (Hill et al., 2004, p. 443). Computers

connected to the Internet are, therefore, regarded as tools or "resource to help [students] develop higher order thinking, creativity, research skills, and so on", thus promoting social interaction and learning (Ringstaff & Kelley, 2002, p. 2).

Recent forms of CALL research where the web is involved has implied moving into more interactive environments where learners are active participants (Davies, 2007). For CALL there is a great value in investigating the increasing number of Internet-based technologies that are in constant flux, developing further understanding of the impact of these technologies in relation to learning processes. From exploring what such technology can do, there is also a need to investigate how the Internet can support teaching and learning processes and why (Hill et al., 2004). At the present time, existing research frequently highlights the use of technology as rewarding for both learners and teachers in second language learning classrooms. Yet, there are issues to consider. Although technology has become embedded in our everyday life, incorporating technology in education is a challenging endeavour.

2.   The eBook project

The idea behind this eBook project was targeting young researchers, having just completed, or nearly completed their Ph.D., with a research focus on language learning by means of Internet technology and web-based computer applications. The two editors who started this project are Ph.D. students. Also part of the idea was making the eBook easily accessible for anyone on the Internet. Since the eBook deals with research studies of web-based language learning, the nature of the content embraces the openness of the Internet. This is why it is digital rights management free and accessible online, free of charge.

In order to verify a high quality of all chapters, there has been a reading committee consisting of seven prominent senior CALL researchers together with the two editors. As mentioned by Bucholtz (2010), "scholars who opt out of peer review

don't get the chance to sharpen and refine their work in response to the critical evaluations of specialist readers, and thus they may not be spurred to produce the best research of which they are capable" (p. 89). The work process has consisted of several stages from the original selection of approved abstracts by invited Ph.D. student writers, to at least two versions of blind reviewing of the full chapters, to ensure highly qualitative scholarly work.

Our aim with this eBook is to present innovative applications of technology in second language teaching and learning, as well as to explore the transformation of the different techniques to different theoretical frameworks. It has also been desired to have a representation of researchers from different parts of the world as contributors. When the reviewing process was finished, there were nine selected chapters from seven different countries: Canada, Finland, France, Ireland, Spain, Sweden, and Singapore. Thus, the chapters of this eBook consist of the work of eleven young researchers within the field of netbased language learning. These nine chapters all deal with topical areas of internet-based CALL.

3.   Contributors to this eBook

Each chapter in this volume presents current projects within web-based language learning performed by young researchers. There are different aspects brought up revolving around self-learning, online interaction and negotiation.

Chapter 2. Ilona Laakkonen with *Personal Learning Environments in Higher Education Language Courses: An Informal and Learner-Centred Approach* discusses the use of personal learning environments (PLE) based on Web 2.0 applications for language courses in higher education. As a technological approach, the PLE can be seen as a response to institutionally controlled learning systems dominating the educational field. Student PLEs are individually tailored learning spaces placing the control of the learning tools and processes in the hands of the learners to design. The F-SHAPE project is presented where a PLE is integrated in higher education language courses.

Chapter 3. Peter Wood with *QuickAssist: Reading and Learning Vocabulary Independently with the Help of CALL and NLP Technologies* brings up the concept of independent learning in foreign language instruction and takes a critical look at available tutorial CALL software. He describes the development of a natural language processing (NLP) technology that can be used to promote independent language learning and reports of his findings of a user study.

Chapter 4. Ana Sevilla-Pavón, Antonio Martínez-Sáez, and José Macario de Siqueira with *Self-assessment and Tutor Assessment in Online Language Learning Materials: InGenio FCE Online Course and Tester* address different modalities of assessment processes of the basic skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking tested by the Cambridge First Certificate in English Examination. They explore ways in which a content manager and courseware delivery platform contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of the assessment of those skills.

Chapter 5. Agnieszka Palalas with *Mobile-Assisted Language Learning: Designing for Your Students* reports on a design-based research study seeking to enhance ESL students' aural skills by means of mobile devices through integrating mobile-assisted language learning (MALL). The design of the MALL solution evolved from a set of podcasts to a suite of learning tools which enable access to a networked community of practice and other resources required for the completion of language tasks.

Chapter 6. Linda Bradley with *A Design for Intercultural Exchange – An Analysis of Engineering Students' Interaction with English Majors in a Poetry Blog* investigates student interaction over a blog in a cross-cultural student exchange between native speakers and non-native speakers of English in higher education analysing and interpreting poetry. In the blog posts, the students' cultural voices are seen, offering a meeting between very contrasting groups from different disciplines, nationalities and language backgrounds. In such an environment, there are a number of features at play, where language and translation issues are prominent parts.

Chapter 7. Mathy Ritchie with *Developing Sociolinguistic Competence through Intercultural Online Exchange* explores conditions for the development of sociolinguistic competence of second language learners in a computer-mediated communication intercultural exchange such as in the form of text-based chats and discussion forum. Non-native speakers were exposed to stylistic variation and made minor changes in their use of sociolinguistic elements, showing that they developed sensitivity to the vernacular style used by native-speakers.

Chapter 8. Yinjuan Shao with *Second Language Learning by Exchanging Cultural Contexts through the Mobile Group Blog* demonstrates the use of mobile group blogging among Chinese learners of English. Recording and sharing learners' experiences in the target culture are helping learners who are far away from the target language surroundings to enhance the understandings of 'real' language use in 'real' culture. Results show a spontaneous shift from using native language to second language in the target culture, how students' learning motivation and language efficacy has been improved.

Chapter 9. Sylvie Thouësny with *Dynamically Assessing Written Language: To what Extent Do Learners of French Language Accept Mediation?* addresses the area of dynamic assessment and investigates how learners of French respond to assistance when correcting their texts. The learners were asked to correct themselves with and without assistance by means of a computer-based application. Results not only show that learners' acceptance of mediation is unsystematic, but also demonstrate that learners may refuse and argue the mediation offered.

Chapter 10. Cédric Sarré with *Computer-Mediated Negotiated Interactions: How is Meaning Negotiated in Discussion Boards, Text Chat and Videoconferencing?* investigates voice-based computer-mediated communication (CMC) in second language acquisition compared with other text-based CMC modes. The aim was to investigate the three modes of discussion board, text chat, and videoconferencing, to see how negotiated interaction was fostered as well as the influence of task type on interaction. Overall, videoconferencing was conducive

to more negotiation of meaning than the other two modes. Also, discussion board interactions did not generate any corrective feedback.

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