Language instructors on their emergency remote teaching pedagogy during the pandemic

Marie-Josée Hamel[1], Jill Landry[2], and Louis-David Bibeau[3]

Abstract. In this paper, we report on a study that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and for which we interviewed ten experienced, university level, language instructors about their digital practices as they found themselves teaching in an Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) mode. The study sought to describe how, through their professional activities and experiences, they developed new and/ or further online competencies and how the ERT context brought them to rethink their pedagogical practices and namely, their Written Corrective Feedback (WCF). Our results show that language instructors' digital competencies are on a dynamic continuum of changes with some who faced challenges, while others sought opportunities or provided solutions during that unprecedented period. An adapted version of the SAMR (Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition) model (Puentedura, 2010) is suggested, which takes into consideration this ERT context.

Keywords: emergency remote teaching, professional didactics, digital competencies, language instructors, written corrective feedback.

1.   Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic precipitated language instructors into an ERT mode (Jin, Deifell, & Angus, 2021), finding themselves teaching in an unfamiliar professional context for which they were not prepared. Consequently, they had no choice but to cope, develop some online competencies (Cf. Hampel & Stickler, 2015), and

adapt their pedagogy to be able to continue to meet their expected and institutional professional standards, as well as their language courses' requirements and students' needs.

Adopting a 'professional didactics' stance (Pastré, Mayen, & Vergnaud, 2006), we designed our study seeking to describe how, through their professional activities and experiences, language instructors developed new and/or further online competencies; how the ERT context brought them to rethink their pedagogical practices and namely, their WCF ones (Cf. Hamel & Bibeau, 2021). Professional didactics view and define professional work as training and transformation opportunities (Mayen, 2012, p. 60), both within and outside of formal professional development training contexts. It is an intersection of work, learning, and training. It aligns well with the ERT context where training was done rapidly, in vivo.

This study is part of a larger CALL design and development project for which we are currently prototyping a digital tool to support and optimize language instructors' digital WCF practices (Hamel & Bibeau, 2021; Hamel, Slavkov, Inkpen, & Xiao, 2016). We investigated these practices in order to better understand the ergonomics of the 'teacher-task-tool' interaction in that specific digital context (Caws & Hamel, 2016) and to identify desirable affordances (Gibson, 1979) for our prototype.
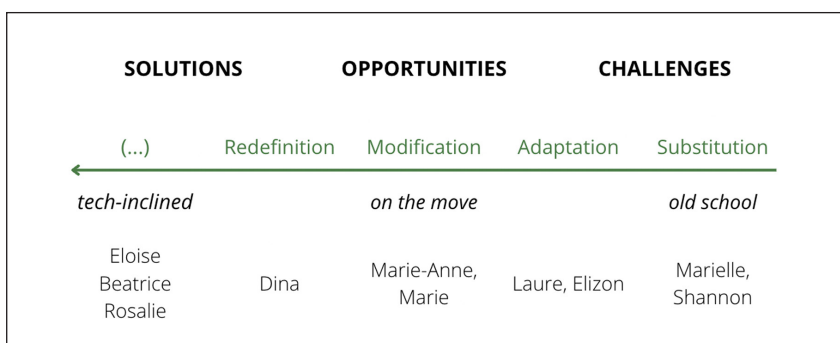
2.   Method

In October 2021, we conducted ten semi-guided interviews with experienced language instructors from five universities in Canada and one in Brazil. These interviews followed two questionnaires that were distributed before (2019) and during the pandemic (February 2020), which focused on language instructors' digital practices in general, and WCF practices specifically (Hamel & Bibeau, 2021). The interviews were in two parts: first, the language instructors describing their ERT context, coping pedagogy, and developed competencies, and second, focusing on their specific WCF practices: namely, digital written tasks, tools, and feedback strategies as well as how they envision their post-pandemic WCF practices.

The interview data were analyzed thematically with NVivo, with reference to the SAMR framework (Puentedura, 2010), which allowed for coding, word clouds, and a careful reading for the patterns to appear.

3.　　Results and discussion

At a glance, our results show that our ten language instructors' digital competencies can be situated on a dynamic continuum of changes (Cf. Figure 1). The ERT context has brought **challenges** for 'old schoolers' (Shannon and Marielle) who, with reference to the SAMR model, show substitution and adaptation digital competencies; **opportunities** for those 'on the move' (Dina, Marie-Anne, and Marie) showing modification and redefinition digital competencies; and/or **solutions** for the 'tech inclined' (Eloise, Beatrice, and Rosalie) who have gone beyond redefinition.

Figure 1.　Language instructors' digital competencies on a dynamic continuum of changes

SOLUTIONS		OPPORTUNITIES		CHALLENGES
(...)	Redefinition	Modification	Adaptation	Substitution
tech-inclined		*on the move*		*old school*
Eloise Beatrice Rosalie	Dina	Marie-Anne, Marie	Laure, Elizon	Marielle, Shannon

Challenges identified by the 'old schoolers' (n=2) throughout the pandemic had to do, for instance, with not finding the comfort of their traditional practices. One instructor said that she found the time required to learn a new digital tool daunting; she also feared 'wasting time' in the classroom if things did not go smoothly. Other challenges identified were digital fatigue, lack of opportunities for synchronous interactions with students, and lack of engagement from the students, especially concerning the feedback they received. This category of instructors took advantage of informal opportunities to develop their digital practice, for example by reaching out to colleagues and others in their personal network, as well as training opportunities provided by their institution. They did not identify an evolution or change to their practices over the course of the pandemic. One instructor, after this year and a half of online teaching, still described herself as 'very hesitant' (Shannon).

Most of the instructors (n=5) could be placed in the middle category, representing those 'on the move', that is, willing to change. While several instructors expressed

that they found the initial switch to ERT 'a challenge', they also felt that they 'managed'. The situation provided the opportunity to empathize with their students, for example: "ça m'a amené beaucoup à me mettre dans la perspective des apprenants. Davantage, je dirais" [it has helped me a lot in putting myself in the perspective of the learners. More I would say] (Dina). These instructors were able to gain confidence in the new modality, discover new digital tools, and provide more detailed, interactive, and multimodal feedback. They reported using a mix of methods for their own professional development. This included expanding their use of existing competencies, as well as trial and error, which resulted in their being about to challenge the status quo in their university language teaching practices. Overall, the instructors who were placed in this category reported a positive self-perception when teaching online.

In the category of the tech inclined (n=3), the instructors already had a high level of comfort with digital tools and tasks before ERT and found themselves "not in panic mode" (Rosalie). Instead, their familiarity with digital tools and tasks meant they could select from those that they were already familiar with. For example, Rosalie said that she "made a deliberate choice to use less technology because of the students". The instructors in this category still engaged in professional development, but since they were already starting from a place of comfort with technology, they identified less evolution: "I don't see myself changed" (Rosalie). Another instructor perceived herself as "comfortable, confident, and efficient" (Beatrice) when teaching online.

These three categories that we identified align with Jiang and Yu's (2021) profiles of change in teachers' feedback practices (positive, negative, and unchanged) while bringing continuity in the equation. The teachers are, after all, dynamic agents in their own practice.

Teaching in the ERT context has been transformative for some language instructors. This was especially noticeable from those who we placed in the middle as on-the-move. They had a sufficient level of ease with digital tools and tasks so that they were able to significantly modify, that is, 'redefine' their teaching practice. At the same time, the results show that the SAMR model does not completely capture the experience of instructors in ERT, particularly those who are already tech inclined. Hence, we suggest adding an extra step to the SAMR model called *Refining*, with a sidebar description of Affirmation (Figure 2). This step describes the reality of instructors who already exploited technology for various affordances, had it fully integrated into their pedagogical practice, and had enough tools available to choose those most efficient and best adapted to their context and their students' needs.

Figure 2.   An adapted SAMR+R model considering the ERT context
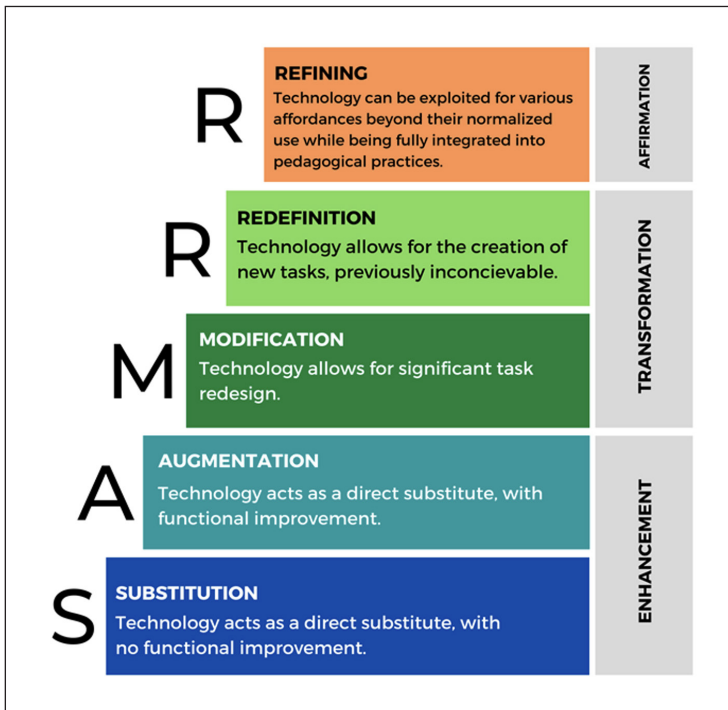
4.   Conclusion

Overall, the results reveal language instructors' perceptions of themselves as teaching professionals in their ERT context: their strengths and weaknesses, challenges and needs. It also shows how some redesigned their learning tasks, making most of the dynamic and collaborative affordances of digital tools and how they engaged in more bidirectional WCF practices with their learners, enhanced by multimodality. It will be interesting to conduct a further study on these language instructors' post-covid digital practices and pedagogy.

5.   Acknowledgments

References

Caws, C., & Hamel, M.-J. (2016). CALL ergonomics revisited. In C. Caws & M.-J. Hamel (Eds), *Language-learner computer interactions: theory, methodology and CALL applications* (pp. 17-40). John Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/lsse.2.02caw

Gibson, J. J. (1979). *The ecological approach to visual perception*. Houghton Mifflin.

Hamel, M.-J., & Bibeau, L.-D. (2021). Pratiques (numériques) de rétroaction corrective des enseignants de langue et prototype d'outil numérique pour les optimiser. *Apprentissage des langues et systèmes d'information et de communication (Alsic)*, *24*(2). https://doi.org/10.4000/alsic.5550

Hamel, M.-J., Slavkov, N., Inkpen, D., & Xiao, D. (2016). MyAnnotator: a tool for technology-mediated written corrective feedback. *Traitement automatique des langues*, *57*(3), 117-140.

Hampel, R., & Stickler, U. (2015). *Developing online language teaching: research-based pedagogies and reflective practices*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137412263

Jiang, L., & Yu, S. (2021). Understanding changes in EFL teachers' feedback practice during COVID-19: implications for teacher feedback literacy at a time of crisis. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher, 30*(6), 509-518. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-021-00583-9

Jin, L., Deifell, E., & Angus, K. (2021). Emergency remote language teaching and learning in disruptive times. *CALICO Journal*, *39*(1), i-x. https://doi.org/10.1558/cj.20858

Mayen, P. (2012). Les situations professionnelles: un point de vue de didactique professionnelle. *Phronesis*, *1*(1), 59-67. https://doi.org/10.7202/1006484ar

Pastré, P., Mayen, P., & Vergnaud, G. (2006). La didactique professionnelle. *Revue française de pédagogie*, *154*, 145-198. https://doi.org/10.4000/rfp.157

Puentedura, R. R. (2010). *SAMR and TPCK: intro to advanced practice*. http://hippasus.com/resources/sweden2010/SAMR_TPCK_IntroToAdvancedPractice.pdf

Intelligent CALL, granular systems and learner data: short papers from EUROCALL 2022
Edited by Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir, Branislav Bédi, Linda Bradley, Kolbrún Friðriksdóttir, Hólmfríður Garðarsdóttir, Sylvie Thouësny, and Matthew James Whelpton

Publication date: 2022/12/12