Chapter 62

Implementing Linguistic Landscape Investigations with M–Learning for Intercultural Competence Development

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ABSTRACT

Portable multimedia devices shape the intensity of intercultural contacts not only through content consumption but also through content creation. Enabling learners to participate in content exchange via the Web 2.0 paradigm (audiences as both media consumers and media creators) can be employed to create new forms of acquiring knowledge. This study demonstrates an application of m-learning in a situated in-the-field examination of cultural diversity with the Linguistic Landscape approach. The application is shown from the pedagogical perspective of authentic, informal learning activities conducted in the framework of connectivism. The examination of cultural diversity is conducted in the context of a local environment, i.e. a location familiar to learners. This paper presents a scenario of m-learning activities intended to demonstrate that cultural awareness is often biased by subjective perspectives and stereotypes. Autonomous discovery of this phenomenon results in elevation of learners' openness toward other cultures, which contributes to intercultural competence development.

INTRODUCTION

The current pace of globalization and, at the same time, glocalization indicates that cultural diversity carries an enormous inherent potential for progress and expansion in the future. Development of *intercultural competence* has already been perceived for some time (CEDRPC, 2006; LACE, 2007; RHLEFM, 2008; CEDEFOP, 2009) as a basic condition for peaceful and prosperous coexistence at both global and local levels. An ability to deal with cultural diversity is no longer required only of business professionals working in international settings, but has become a key

qualification required of individuals to act productively in the modern world. This assumption has already been confirmed in research (Deardorff & Hunter, 2006; Hulstrand, 2008) pointing out that the ability to handle interaction in culturally diverse environments is a major skill employers seek. As put by Spitzberg and Changnon (2009, p. 4), "With ample opportunities for employment overseas, it becomes important for internationally competitive business to hire interculturally competent employees, if only for the future success of the business."

Cultural diversity is manifested through linguistic presence. An inextricable link between cultural and linguistic diversity is stated in the *Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity* (UNESCO, 2002) and the *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* (UNESCO, 2005). A linguistic, hence cultural, diversity can be studied efficiently with the Linguistic Landscape methodology, which is a rapidly growing field of research that has recently gained enormous popularity in a variety of disciplines. It can be essentially defined as a systematic examination of written displays of minority languages in the public space (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009).

The research presented in this paper is based on an assertion that "people who live in a particular country do not know intuitively or otherwise the whole of the culture of that country because there are in fact many cultures within a country" (Byram, Nichols & Stevens, 2001, p. 17). For that reason, the exploration of cultural diversity, as discussed in this study, can be situated in the context of an environment local to the participants. The hypothesis behind this study is that mobile learning activities conducted with proper interaction, collaboration, and interpretation of results can contribute important insights into the process of intercultural competence development.

INFORMAL, PERSONALIZED, SITUATED M-LEARNING

Mobile Learning (henceforth *m-learning*) is often associated with learning delivered by mobile (handheld) devices, such as smartphones, tablets, portable music players, etc., usually connected wirelessly to the Internet. Although such devices are central to conducting m-learning activities, technocentric conceptualizations of m-learning have been recently viewed as rather superficial (Kukulska-Hulme, 2010; JISC, 2011). Defining mobile education in terms of utilized devices seems to be constraining, since it is limited to current technological instantiations, which, at the pace of current technological innovation, tend to become obsolete before gaining widespread use in education.

Other proponents of m-learning (Winters, 2006; Sharples, Milrad, Sánchez & Vavoula, 2009) conceptualize m-learning in terms of the mobility of learning. This aspect is highly important, since extending learners' mobility changes both the nature of learning and the variety of ways in which it can be delivered. However, as noted by Traxler (2009, p. 15), the nature of learning mobility can be viewed differently by different people. For some learners it may be associated with reading on a laptop computer while commuting to school; for others it may be hands-free listening to audiobooks or podcasts while exercising.

Because the above interpretations somewhat constrain the understanding of m-learning, it has become apparent that the full conceptualization of this field is still emerging. The present distinction between *m-learning* and *e-learning* appears to be somewhat blurred. As noted by Traxler (2009, p.14), it may be temporary, since with the advent of portable devices, wireless connectivity, and extended battery life, these two concepts may soon merge into one. Consequently, Traxler (2009)

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