

Chapter 13

An Exploratory Study on the Interaction Beyond Virtual Environments to Improve Listening Ability When Learning English as a Second Language

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, an exploratory research on people's interaction with a virtual environment as tool in a way in which listening comprehension occurs while improving English as a second language is addressed. Unlike technologies such as virtual environments, where users have to use hardware in order to get immersed inside of a fictional world, it is through holographic technologies that it is possible to extract virtuality and insert it into reality, and thus, have an approach to the real nature of the virtual world without using electronic devices. Why is it important to focus on the ability of listening to understand when people want to acquire English as a second language? What are the strategies that must be employed to improve this ability? What kind of advantages may users achieve through their interaction with holography? These are some of the questions that will be answered in this chapter.

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INTRODUCTION

Be proficient in English language provides access to a great library of ideas, scientific and technical resources in that language. Likewise, Richards (2008) mentions that English is the language of human communication that it is holding a growing demand in the incorporation of effective mechanisms to assist in its learning. According to experts, for non-native English speakers, mastering this language brings access to quality studies, especially abroad. English language proficiency offers more and better opportunities, not only in education but also in the workplace (Heredia & Chacón, 2015). English fluency empowers people, allowing them to make demands, to publicize achievements not only in their context but also in a globally, among others. In Latin American countries, overcome difficulties of learning English, it is a task with great personal, educational and social consequences. For example, in the case of Mexico, despite being the neighbor of the United States, Mexican people have low English level (Calderón, 2015). According to data produced by the results of the human capital in Mexico survey in 2008, the Center for Development Research (CIDAC, in Spanish) reported that 35% of respondents say they only have minimum English knowledge, while only 2% say master the language at a high level (Heredia, & Rubio, 2015).

In the struggle for trying to improve English skills as a second language, in recent decades, several researchers have tried to use different techniques and technological tools to support different educational practices. Examples ranging from “simple” technology as audiotapes, to more flamboyant technologies such as 3D virtual environments. However, the mere fact of integrating a technological tool to enhance different or several English skills, is nor efficient neither effective by itself. On the one hand, the selected technological tool needs to be accompanied by an instructional design, which in turn contains the necessary teaching strategies according to student needs in a certain context; and on the other hand, it should not represent a shock or a sudden change for the learner at the time to interact with it.

Therefore, as an exploratory study, in this book chapter we present the holographic technology as a mean of interaction to improve the listening ability named “listening to understand” on the acquisition of English as a second language. The chapter begins with a background, where results of different instruments applied in order to know English level reached by Mexicans are presented; as well as research projects that propose the use of several technological tools used as an educational support in order to improve English skills of different users or learners in particular contexts. After the above, there is a subsection that explains what does interaction mean, and then emphasize its importance as a means of communication between the learner and the technology used as educational tool support. Following the background, a section which defines listening, and listening to understand in a second language is presented. In this same section we argue about choosing the right strategies for effective improvement in the listening ability of the learner. After that, a set of references is shown in order to demonstrate that technologies by themselves do not represent an improvement, and that there are certain parameters that must be defined to choose the right technology for solving the problem that it is faced. Likewise, we introduce the context as one of the main variables to take into account in order to get good interactions; we explain the need of knowing the environment in which the learner is involve, as well as her experiences and knowledge of the world. On the next subsection, we argue about the opportunity to improve listening to understand ability by certain types of technologies and effective strategies, given way to the solution and recommendations section where holographic technology is proposed as a mean of interaction in order to improve the ability mention before. Finally, we present conclusions and future work.

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