Chapter III
Transformations of the Language Laboratory

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the relationship between remediation and educational innovation in information and communications technology (ICT) intensive learning environments, as exemplified by the language laboratory (language lab) and its digital descendants. Historically, the language laboratory has been affected by a number of technological and instructional changes, transforming the deadend of behavioural methodology into the current sociocollaborative paradigms of language learning. The language laboratory has thus been transformed into a learning environment that incorporates and refers to several generations of technology-based language learning. The principles of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) will serve as this chapter's theoretical framework. It will also deal with the issues of repurposing and remediation raised by Bolter and Grusin (1999). Remediation is defined as a process of transformation wherein older media are represented and refashioned in new media contexts. It will also be argued that there is a dialogical relationship between the processes of remediation inherent in the genealogy of the language laboratory and the processes of educational innovation. In addition to this, the chapter will suggest ways of rethinking and reforming the language laboratory through mobile-assisted language learning (MALL).

INTRODUCTION

The debate on the educational uses of technology has taken a number of turns, including the well-known argument that technology will eventually force practitioners to reform educational practices (Lemke, 1998; Warschauer, 1999). While this argument may still be essential in the manner

in which educators see the role of technology in education, it may also be increasingly imperative to discuss the way they conceptualise technology and learning, and how these conceptualisations may affect the way technologies are integrated in education. Warschauer (2003, p. 205) argues that technology is embedded socially, including the workings of organizations, institutions, and society at large. Similarly, Bolter and Grusin (1999, p. 19) claim that new media "are not external agents that come to disrupt an unsuspecting culture. They emerge from within cultural contexts and refashion other media, which are embedded in the same or similar context. The difficulty of integrating technologies in social and institutional contexts may precisely reside in the complexity of these social and cultural relationships, including those that affect education.

This chapter will discuss how institutional conceptualisations of language teaching and learning, as exemplified through the multimedia language laboratory, interact with technological change. The language laboratory is an example of how language teaching and technologies are embedded in institutional settings, as these are technology-rich environments that have had a central role in language instruction since the 1950s. Over the years, language instruction has significantly benefited and continues to do so from technologies because they either give access to authentic communication or provide "comprehensible input." The language laboratory is embedded in the viewpoints that technology supports and interacts with language teaching and learning, the language laboratory being a learning environment that incorporates several generations of technology-based language learning, both analogue and digital.

In this chapter, the theory of remediation will be used for the purpose of tracing media implementations in analogue, digital, and Internet-based language laboratories. Bolter and Grusin (1999) have developed a general theory on how older media are represented and refashioned in digital media on the basis of what they call a *genealogy* (Foucault, 1977). This genealogy, rather than a history of mediation, is "an examination of descent [that] … permits the discovery under the unique aspect of a trait or a concept, of the myriad events through which—thanks to which, against which—they were formed" (p. 314). From the perspective of education, the process of remediation similarly involves a process of redidactisation, a process defined by Sørensen, Hubert, Risgaard, and Kirkeby (2004, p. 59, our translation):

Redidactisation can be understood as the process through which traditional ways of teaching and learning are integrated into new media and embrace the potentials of these media. In this process traditional ways of teaching and learning are transformed and changed in their representational forms.

In this chapter, we argue that the processes of remediation inherent in the genealogy of the language laboratory involve processes of redidactisation, that is, of educational change in media contexts. The dialectics of this interaction will determine how technology can reform traditional ways of teaching and learning, and how teaching and learning a language can incorporate and embrace the potentials of the media.

The chapter sets out by outlining the history of the language lab, focusing on the relationship between technology and theories of language acquisition. The concepts of *remediation, immediacy,* and *hypermediacy* are then introduced to establish a connection between the changing uses and representations of technology within the language lab's conceptual matrix. The language lab and its educational uses will then be discussed through an empirical example based on the use of language labs in a college of military education. Finally, the future of the language lab will be outlined, and recommendations will be forwarded for rethinking and reforming the lab through mobile learning.

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