Chapter 64

Incorporating LINE Smartphone Affordances:
Cross–Cultural Collaboration, Willingness to Communicate, and Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

This study used MALL technology to mediate a collaborative learning environment focused on cross-cultural understanding. Research questions addressed the participants' perceptions about the role of the English language today, the use of technology to assist language learning, their attitudes about studying English via cross-cultural interaction, and their perceptions leading to instructional technology design best practices for English learning activities using LINE. Students from Japan and Taiwan wrote collaborative 700 word essays, collaborating via the LINE smartphone app. Data collection used a survey, open-ended questions at the conclusion of the study, and analysis of the actual essays. The instructional design was shown to be successful in fostering beneficial responses by the participants and a strong willingness to engage in future international communication. The affordances provided by LINE are analyzed, and best practices offered for using LINE as a platform for learning.

INTRODUCTION

There is a growing emphasis around the world on interaction processes and the socio-cultural aspects of language learning. Raising cultural understanding and increasing cultural sensitivity are both necessary in the language learning process, if the student is to progress beyond basic knowledge into idiomatic language use (Wu & Marek, 2013).

Collaboration is a key ingredient of teaching and learning (Bruning, Schraw, & Norby, 2011). Many studies have shown the benefits of collaborative learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Li, Liu & Steckelberg, 2010; Shih, 2011; Tchounikine, Rummel, & McLaren, 2010). Collaborative learning is also a major focal point of research in Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) (Carter & Stockwell, 2008; Wu & Marek, 2010). The understanding of other cultures as a tool for language learning has also been an area of research emphasis (Chun, 2006) and Web 2.0 technology can be a tool for improving cultural understanding (Toetenel, 2014), given its ability to provide fast, interesting, and low-cost channels of communication among collaborators from different cultures. Stockwell (2014) found that while there is considerable research citing development of cultural awareness as an outcome of the study, these elements are often unplanned and not a purposeful goal of the study.

One way to gain these advantages is to use Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) smartphone applications which facilitate communication among identifiable groups. CMC/CALL scholarship is paying growing attention to such applications because today's college students virtually all have mobile data access allowing learning to take place at many different times and places (Chen & Li, 2010; Huang, Huang, Huang & Lin, 2012).

This study used MALL technology to mediate a collaborative learning environment focused on cross-cultural understanding. The researchers used the LINE text messaging platform because it provided a strong level of student privacy, while allowing individual and group interaction. LINE was well-known to Asian college students and did not require a significant learning curve for convenient use, yet it has not been widely researched. The goals of the study were to (a) understand the experiences of students who used LINE as a MALL platform, (b) raise cultural understanding via cross-cultural collaboration in language learning, (c) identify the *affordances* of the technology used, and (d) develop best practices recommendations for instructional use of smart phone applications, such as LINE, for cross-cultural understanding. The specific research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the perceptions of the participants on the role of the English language today and their resulting attitude toward learning English?
2. What do the participants feel about using technology to assist language learning, which technology or network do they prefer, and why?
3. What are the reactions of the participants about learning via cross-cultural interaction and how did cross-cultural interaction affect their willingness to communicate?
4. What are instructional technology design best practices for English learning activities using LINE?

Although determining the *affordances* of the technology used was a key goal of the study, the authors determined that they should not ask students about *affordances* directly, because it is an academic term outside their experience. The research questions addressed the perceptions, feelings, and reactions of the students. The data were then used to understand the resulting *affordances*.

This study is significant, therefore, because of the resulting analysis of *affordances* provided by purposeful use of the little-researched smartphone application LINE for collaborative learning about culture. Authentic experiences while learning about other cultures can improve motivation to learn English (Kim, Rueckert, Kim, & Seo, 2013) and therefore, the *affordances* demonstrated in this study can be used by other instructional technology designers to promote a positive state of mind among students.

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