Chapter 46

Challenges and Perspectives of Language Education Technology in Brazil:
From Confronting Native Language Loss to Implementing EFL Classes

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ABSTRACT

Our chapter aims to explore the challenges, advances, and perspectives of language-education technology in Brazil. Language-education is an extremely important topic for Brazil because many indigenous languages are nearing extinction due to the legacies of colonization and the fact that Portuguese, the national language of Brazil, is the only official language and thus the single most utilitarian method of communication. This issue is further complicated by Brazil's increasingly globalized economy, which, for many individuals, demands the acquisition of a foreign language in order to compete. The English language has been introduced into the curriculum of the vast majority Brazilian public schools over the course of the past few decades. Additionally, several private, for-profit English learning enterprises now have widespread services throughout the country. But rates of English (and even Portuguese) fluency still vary greatly among the population. This raises a number of critical questions that will be discussed in this work. Why is learning a new language such a challenge? Which methodologies can be utilized to increase language acquisition and build fluency? What are the new technologies that are used in teach

ing a second language in Brazilian schools, and how is their impact being measured? Are Brazilian teachers prepared to integrate new technologies and innovative methods of teaching and learning? Our methodology involves bibliographical research including a literature review, a case-study, and participatory research through semi-structured interviews. Our results have shown that several technologies are being implemented in Brazil, and that as a theoretical framework, educational communication has been recognized as a powerful tool to incorporate such technologies in language education. Overall, the use of learning technologies is common and growing among students, while it is increasing at a more institutional pace among teachers.

1. INTRODUCTION

Brazil is the largest country in South America and contains the largest portion of the Amazon rainforest of any country within its national borders. It also has a unique and exemplary role as a post-colonial multicultural developing nation, one that can raise important questions for the world in terms of the contemporary intersection of language and technology. Our work aims to explore the challenges and perspectives of language-education technology in Brazil. Our methodology involves a bibliographical research including a literature review, a case-study, and participatory research through semi-structured interviews.

The need for presenting a case-study and a participatory research emerges from the contrasting educational realities found across the country. For instance, in the north, where the Amazon rainforest is located, many indigenous languages are nearing extinction, there are few resources to preserve what is left, and technologies to learn a new language or revitalize an indigenous one are scarce. In the South, the native forest of the so-called Atlantic Jungle slowly gave space to development. Currently, only 8% of it remains, and is found in state parks or areas of conservation. Such development not only dramatically impacted the environment, it also brought major changes and new technologies to the developed communities, including tools to learn a second language.

Portuguese, the national language of Brazil, is the only official language recognized by the government and thus the single most utilitarian method of communication. However, Brazil is home to approximately 200 distinct indigenous groups who collectively speak 170 different languages (IBGE, 2007). For these groups, the need to communicate in Portuguese for economic survival brings forth simultaneous challenges of learning a second language and maintaining the primary indigenous language. These challenges will be presented here in this chapter through a case-study conducted in 2011 in a Northern Brazilian indigenous community. This section explores trends in local autochthonous languages and the threats manifested by globalized "Brazilian" culture, which inundates indigenous communities and replaces traditional language use with necessarily utilitarian linguistic choices (Meuth Alldredge, 2011).

To address the situation in Southern Brazil, we will consider ways in which language learning is influenced by our increasingly globalized economy and highly competitive job market. The acquisition of a foreign language as a personal asset can become of great interest to citizens in the South. By and large, English is the most popular second language among Southern Brazilians. It has been introduced into the curriculum of the vast majority of public schools over the course of the past few decades. Additionally, several private, for-profit English learning enterprises now have widespread services throughout the country. Nonetheless, it has been observed that the availability of English classes is not necessarily proportional to fluency. To illustrate this situation, we present participatory research conducted in

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