

Chapter 7.7

Culture and Language Learning in Computer–Enhanced or Assisted Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores computer-mediated communication (CMC) and information communication technology (ICT) use in language learning. More specifically, the chapter addresses the impact or implications of CMC tools for computer enhanced language learning. The chapter attempts to present a review of key literature in adaptation of communication technologies to teaching or learning language in general and specifically second language acquisition. The chapter stresses the need to understand culture and contextual appropriateness of language, thus, it argues for communication technology to be used as a secondary resource rather than a primary tool for language learners. The discussion addresses the dimensions of cultural variability with respect to language learning. At the same time, features of synchronous and asynchronous CMC were ana-

lyzed in the context of language learning. Finally, the chapter addresses implications for language learning in computer mediated communication or computer assisted environments.

INTRODUCTION

The increased use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) technology has brought a lot of evolutionary shift in learning and academic settings in terms of the type of courses that can be thought. One of the appealing aspects of communication technologies in learning is the ability to use CMC to offer courses in both asynchronous and synchronous environments. Specifically, CMC is considered an important tool for learning because it facilitates interaction and active learning (Driscoll, 2000; Kanuka & Garrison, 2004; Olaniran, 2004).

In this chapter the author attempts to present a review of key literature in adaptation of communication technologies to teaching and language learning in general with specific emphasis on second language (L2) acquisition. The chapter addresses the need to understand culture and contextual appropriateness of language. It also argues for communication technology to be used as a complementary secondary resource rather than a primary tool for language learners. The discussion then focuses on the dimensions of cultural variability with respect to language learning. The features of synchronous and asynchronous CMC were analyzed in the context of language learning. Finally, the chapter ends with implications for language learning in computer mediated communication or computer assisted environments. Therefore, this chapter attempts to evaluate available literature in order to identify the benefits and challenges of computer enhanced language learning from a cultural level and then offer some suggestions for implementing effective language learning via communication technologies.

BACKGROUND

Deep learning which involves the use of class projects with the aid of technology and inquiry to engage students in with practical issues they can relate, in comparison to active learning – that puts responsibility of learning on learners has been offered by the constructivists as a good approach to foster learning environment that allows students to take control of how they learn with a key emphasis on social interaction (Driscoll, 2000; Gunawardena, Low, & Anderson, 1997). However, there is controversy about the degree to which synchronous CMC (e.g., Chat) offers a greater level of interactivity than asynchronous CMC in terms of immediate feedback that can enrich cognitive learning in online courses (Herring & Nix, 1997; Ko, 1996; Wang & Newlin, 2001). The main question to be addressed is whether

language, especially new language learning, can be enhanced by CMC when taking culture into account. After all, it is not sufficient to learn just the rudiments of a language, but rather the contextual appropriateness of a language is what determines the competency at which a second language (L2) learner will be judged and evaluated. Furthermore, the contextual appropriateness of 2L points to the importance of culture in language learning.

Main Focus

The challenge of culture in e-learning environments has been identified (Olaniran, 2007a). Furthermore, students participating in computer-mediated or online courses where foreign language is the mode of interaction are at a disadvantage when the courses involve collaboration and discussion (Bates, 1999; Olaniran, 2007a; Osman & Herring, 2007). The reason is that absence of visual cues and nonverbal cues affects mastery of language accuracy and fluency, which affects effectiveness of communication interaction as a whole. Culture introduces certain complexity to learning as a whole and specifically to second language (2L) comprehension with CMC and accompanying communication technologies. To this end, a number of scholars have called for the importance of considering culture and language when designing curriculum for international students in computer environments (Morse, 2003; Olaniran, 2007a, 2007b; Osman & Herring, 2007; Patsula, 2002; St Amant, 2005; Usun, 2004). First, however, it is necessary to introduce the dimension of cultural variability as an overarching point of departure in the role of culture learning and specifically in e-learning. The dimension of cultural variability is important to draw implication for computer enhanced language learning.

Dimension of Cultural Variability

There are four dimensions of cultural variability consisting: power distance, uncertainty avoidance,

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