

TECHNOLOGY & MEDIA: APPLICATIONS IN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS (TEFL, TESL & TESOL)

Sebastian CHIRIMBU, Dara TAFAZOLI

Spiru Haret University, Bucharest, Romania

University of Applied Science & Technology, Mashhad, Iran

Abstract: Today, our life is deeply immersed in web-based technologies. Digital media have dramatically affected almost every aspect of human life. The field of education has been slower to integrate new technologies than many other fields of endeavor, but that is now changing. The role of digital media in language and learning is especially important, given how new technologies are transforming reading, writing, and communication. For many language learners around the world, new digital environments represent not only a useful means for learning language, but also the main medium in which they will actual use their second language in everyday life. Teachers and educators use web-based technologies in their classrooms to enhance their teaching and students' learning. Language-related field of studies such as TEFL, TESL and TESOL are connected to these technology-based platforms. We can assume many benefits to technology-based teaching and learning, but research shows that psychological aspects are much more dominant than others are.

Keywords: Technology, language classrooms, web-based technologies, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), media

1. Introduction

Using media in pedagogy is important for both teachers and students. Media can handle a range of activities and carry out programmed functions in different situations. However, media have not yet gotten to the point where it can make a real difference in educational environments. This short introduction is aiming to offer an overview on different tools and devices that can be used in our classrooms.

Perhaps the most important aspect of applying different media in the classroom is computer competence. Most our students have had little or no experience with computers; or some have technophobia. But we can use some more user-friendly technologies in our classes.

One of the major advantages of using media in education is that this field is highly eclectic. An example of how a curriculum was developed focusing on the use of various technologies and tools in translation classes is given in Dejica-Cartis (2012). The advantages of application of technology in language learning classes or what is called Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is mentioned clearly by several scholars in Leech and Candlin (1986):

1. Computers can cope with real needs of individuals. (Phillips, 1984)
2. They increase motivation, mainly in non self-motivated students. (Windeatt, 1984)
3. Computers are more and more familiar with everyday even for young students and contribute to break the walls between the classroom and the outside world. (Phillips, 1984)
4. There is an improvement of security. (Alderson, 1984)

2. Brief History of CALL

From the middle of nineteenth centuries to date, some learning theories are emerged. The rise of Behaviorism, inspired by the ideas of Skinner (1957), has had a significant influence on language learning. Behaviorists believe that utterances and speeches served as conditioned and stimulus response. Thus, they consider reinforcements and associations as the main factors in language acquisition. The applications of CALL from 1960s to 1970 were greatly influenced by Behaviorism. In that era, most of the CALL programs were usually based on grammar and vocabulary tutorials, drill-and-practice programs which followed the computer-as-tutor model (Warschauer, 1996; Warschauer & Healey, 1998). According to Behaviorism principles, we can guess that these programs were designed to provide immediate feedback on the learners' accuracy, and that their emphasis was on explicit grammar instruction.

Cognitive psychologists focused on the significance of meaning, knowing and understanding that construct internal representations. The second phase of CALL development emerged along with cognitive constructivist views of learning in the late 1970s and early 1980s. According to them, CALL should concentrate on using languages more than language itself. In this period, the first principles of the communicative approach to language learning manifested. The focus on forms shifted to focus on form by computer-based learning. Moreover, it encouraged students to produce original utterances rather than manipulate prefabricated ones.

Vygotsky (1930) placed more emphasis on the social context of learning, although he shared many of Piaget's assumptions about learning. He believed that social interaction plays a fundamental role in cognitive development. He claimed that everything is learned on two levels: (1) through interaction with others, and then (2) integrated into the individual's mental map. In Vygotsky's opinions, the social cultural environment gives people the cognitive tools needed for learning. This attitude towards learner's interaction developed CALL programs for meaningful interaction in authentic discourses.

3. Media in Classrooms

3.1. Podcasts & Ras

One of the first tools in our all classrooms is audio files in CDs, USBs and other devices. Graham Davies (2005) claims that the single piece of technology that has affected language learning most is the cassette recorder. After those audio and MP3 files, today other audio files such as podcasts are created. Podcast or audio blogs are downloadable broadcasts with Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds which allow listeners to subscribe (Salameh, 2011). It is a new way in teaching languages and provides better materials (McNicol, 2004; Chartrand & Pellowe, 2007; Kargozari & Tafazoli, 2012). The major difference with traditional Internet audio or radio broadcasts is that podcasts can be listened to when and where the user chooses, and that they are automatically delivered to subscribers (Diem, 2005; Sloan, 2005).



Figure 1. Taxonomy of uses of podcasting for language learning (Rosell-Aguilar, 2007: p. 477)

Real Audio (RA) is another audio file that may help us in language classrooms. Nunan (1993) believes that allowing students to choose the information they will listen to or watch is inherently motivating. Tuzi (1998) in a study mentioned that “RA sound clips are intrinsically motivating as the materials themselves are of interest to the students”. He also claimed that RA has some benefits to students such as:

“...listening to information that interests them, listening to sound clips over and over again, listening to a variety of voices which strengthens listening ability, being encouraged to become more independent learners, listening to spontaneous speech, and reading and listening at the same time”. (Tuzi, 1998)

3.2. Video clips & Vodcasts

The use of films in classes has been a popular method of teaching for many years. Some research papers reported the positive effects of language learning with video clips (McGreal, 2004). Naturally, watching full-length films is not always the best way to spend classroom time with our students (Heffernan, 2005), but it is possible to bring some movie and trailers into classrooms.

Vodcast is a combination of "vod" and "cast". Vod is an acronym for "video on demand" and "cast" stands for broadcasting (Kargozari & Tafazoli, 2011). Vodcasts are posted on the internet and can be played back on mobiles, personal computers, or laptops. Vodcast that is called video podcast has one advantage over podcast and it is its ability to connect visuals to audio. Vodcasts as well as podcasts have potential to support learning in a range of settings and across multiple disciplines. Kargozari & Tafazoli (2011) in a study confirmed the fact that the use of vodcasts was a valuable means of instruction. Students had access to the material of instruction whenever and wherever they liked.

3.3. Mobile

Cell phones are one of the most widespread and available devices for education in the hands of almost every university student. Most of them are equipped with functionalities including internet access, mp3/mp4 player, digital camera, video recorder and many are Flash-enabled and/or Java-enabled and can run multimedia contents including audio and video. Among different disciplines which took advantage of mobiles we can mention language learning. Today Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is moving into the field of language acquisition and is used as a

device to improve different aspects of language learners' proficiency (Kukulka-Hulme & Shield, 2007). Mobile devices have the potential of moving language learning from predominantly classroom-based learning contexts into contexts that are free from time and space and in which learning is to a larger extent defined by learners' participation, engagement and context awareness (Levy & Kennedy, 2005). Mobile devices such as the mobile phone enable the learner to learn from context and in context, gathering information from the environment and requiring support and assistance when this is needed. This kind of appropriate support can be seen as a form of scaffolding (Naismith, et. al., 2004). Song & Fox (2008) found that some learners were capable of using a mobile device to support and extend their learning in self-directed ways. Michelsen (2008) suggested a self-directed and learner-centered design of mobile learning which enables second language learners to practice language by their own pace. Stockwell (2007) has explored vocabulary learning on a mobile device. They found that mobile phones facilitated vocabulary learning among their subjects. Several studies tried to integrate cell phones into language learning, for an example using SMS to teach English language (Qing Li, 2008; Thornton & Houser, 2003; Kargozari & Tafazoli, 2011).

3.4. Internet & Web 2.0

The Internet has become a very powerful tool in our daily life. Using email, weblog, social networks, etc. is become a vital part of our life. This amazing invention becomes popular in education, too. With the widespread use of the Internet, many online tools are increasingly available for use in educational and non-educational settings. In view of the need for CALL researchers and practitioners to find, choose, use and evaluate educational tools for further development and implementation of CALL, it should be fruitful to introduce new and useful tools that can be used for language learning and teaching.

Bicknell (1999) stated that using the Internet and its applications act as a motivational apparatus which gives students the chance to use all four language skills. The Internet also allows students to connect with each other in ways they normally would not be able to do (Haffernan, 2005). Web-based activities such as message boards, chat rooms, email, and discussion groups provide learners with a healthy forum in which to communicate with others. Healy (2000) noted that the above activities give learners a "direct and immediate communication between peers while using genuine language". From a psychological point of view, Warschauer's study (1997) noted greater participation by so-called "shy" students when using the Internet as a language-learning tool.

3.4.1. Internet Communication Tools

Communication tools enable students and teachers to make audio and video calls over the Internet. By these tools, it is necessary for users to have a microphone and audio capabilities. Some scholars used the Internet communication tools in their education (Davis, 2006; Mirtschin, 2008; Smith, 2009; Stephenson, 2009; Waters, 2008; Eaton, 2010). One of the main features of these tools is cross-cultural exchanges with other students in different countries. Eaton (2010) believes that Skype, a communication tool, can be used to provide a variety of authentic learning experience to students.

3.4.2. Emails

Email as one of the Internet-based devices, "the mother of all the Internet applications" (Warschauer, Shetzer, & Meloni, 2000), has been under investigation of so many scholars and they find it a useful device in education (Belisle, 1996; Liao,

1999; Fox, 1998; Trokeloshvili & Jost, 1997; Muehleisen, 1997). Wilkinson (1996) tries to encourage other teachers to introduce e-mail into their classrooms by giving the most basic guidelines for teachers and students, together with the URLs of places to find teacher partners to set up a successful e-mail connection. Nagel (1999) in a study deals with more advanced issues connected with the use of e-mail in teaching, and specifically with how to be most effective and to get optimal results in the use of e-mail as an instructional tool. Oxford (1997) believes that emails can be a medium of real communication in the target language, including composing and exchanging messages with other students in the classroom or around the world. According to Gonglewski, Meloni & Brant (2001) emailing has so many benefits in pedagogy such as:

“...extends language learning time and place, provides a context for real-world communication and authentic interaction expands topics beyond classroom-based ones, promotes student-centered language learning, encourages equal opportunity participation, and connects speakers quickly and cheaply”.

3.4.3. Concordancing

Hasselgard (2001) defined that corpora, plural term of a 'corpus', refer to electronic authentic language databases that can be available via internet or as software installed in desktops. A concordance is a list of the occurrences of either a particular word, or a part of a word or a combination of words in context and it is drawn from a text corpus, which is presented in context. A corpus is a large body of text often in electronic format. (Baker, 1995; Francis, 1993; Johansson, 1995; Leech, 1991; St.John, 2001) Nowadays, concordancing is a tool that has been used by teachers, linguists and researchers in different fields as it provides authentic context. There are some free online resources from the Internet such as British National Corpus (BNC), Virtual Language Center (VLC), and the International Corpus of English (ICE). Moreover, a study of Gaskel and Cobb (2004) shows that learner also can use concordance feedback for writing errors.

3.4.4. Weblogs

Godwin-Jones (2006) describes weblogs as “one, large, loosely interwoven net of information, as blog entries are linked, referenced, and debated”. Weblogs are other useful devices that have some features such as interactivity, collaboration and achievability. The number of educational blogs soars in recent years. Some papers are published and presented about the potentiality of weblogs in education (Williams & Jacobs, 2004; Kadjer & Bull, 2004; Blood, 2002; Godwin-Jones, 2006; Oravec, 2002; Martindale & Wiley, 2005; Murray & Hourigan, 2006).

3.4.5. Word Clouds

Wordle is a kind of data visualization tool. Barret (2010) defines data visualization tools as devices which use for representing information in the form of charts, maps, tag clouds, animation or any graphical means that make content easier to understand. Friendly (2008) mentioned that data visualization serves as a way to communicate information clearly and effectively through visual representation. These tools can help to make the understanding of complex thing easier because they provide data in multi aspects incorporating visual, textual animated input, etc. Wordle.net is a useful web 2.0 tool for English for foreign or second language classes, enables teachers and students to provide word clouds for language classrooms. Tafazoli (2012a) used some techniques for teaching different language skills and components in which teachers benefit from and use them in their classes.

3.5. Video Games

Today, playing video games is detachable part of every child's life. Although there is a tendency towards using new technology in language classes, but there is a less tendency towards video games. Some teachers believe that video games are time consuming and they are not very efficient tools.

Game-Based Learning (GBL) refers to different kinds of software applications that use game for learning or educational purposes. In recent years, both in potential of computer game as learning and teaching tools and in research into their use, there has been interesting interest. So many studies supported the applications of video games in classrooms (Wolfe & Crookall, 1998; Reiber, 1996; Tafazoli, 2012b).

Integrating game-based learning into more coherent view of learning relies upon two factors: (a) preparation of learners to adapt to a new learning tool, and (b) institutional support. Oblinger (2004) says: "Games also offer advantages in terms of motivation. GBL has this ability to integrate different cognitive tools, such as discussion forums, bulletin boards and concept mapping software. Whitton (2007) stated that "games researchers tend to be highly motivated to play games themselves, and do not consider those individuals for whom game playing is not motivating, or indeed is actually demotivating".

4. Conclusion

To sum up, we would like to conclude with some general remarks about successful planning and implementing technology in our classrooms taken from Warschauer and Whittaker (1997). They stated that teachers should carefully consider their goals, since little is gained by adding random on-line activities into the classroom. Clarifying course goals act as an important first step toward the successful use of technology in classrooms. The next vital aspect of the technology-based instruction is integration, and the teacher should think about how to integrate technology-based activities into the syllabus. Also, the teacher should be aware of all the complexities of using technology in learning environment, such as cultural, infrastructural, structural, etc. difficulties.

We have to be careful that computers can not change the role of teachers, but that they are used to support and assist teachers and learners in different situations, more precisely in both written and oral communication scenarios (Dejica-Cartis, A. & Dejica-Cartis, D, 2013). Technology offers learners opportunities for much more valuable communicative interaction in the target language than was ever possible in the traditional language classes.

We would urge language teachers to make use of technology in their language classrooms. Such projects are a good way of motivating students to use technology outside the classroom and to make learning a part of their daily lives. Although it is to some extent impossible to present all technology tools and devices in a paper, but this paper has presented a range of projects, papers and studies; while it would probably not be desirable or even possible to use all of these devices with one class, we hope that you will use some of the ideas here with your classes.

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