

DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE OF PEDAGOGIES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES BY COMPUTER TECHNOLOGIES

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ABSTRACT

In the last two decades, a number of changes have occurred in educational system of Uzbekistan. For instance, the decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan was promulgated (In December 10, 2012). There are serious reasons for this step. As a result of this extremely important document, learning foreign languages, mainly English, has started at the first grade of secondary schools. According to the decree it is stated that “the analysis of the current system of organization of foreign language teaching shows that educational standards, curricula and textbooks do not fully meet modern standards, especially in the use of advanced information and media technologies. Continuously organising foreign languages learning at all levels of the education system, and also upgrading the skills of teachers and the provision of modern teaching materials should be further improved”, and/or “teaching special subjects, especially on technical and international specialties at higher educational institutions will be conducted in foreign languages”. All these measures are undertaken to further integration of Uzbekistan into the world community. We are living in a rapidly changing communication landscape. Nowadays, mobile phones send text messages, photos and voice, allow us to connect to the Internet from any location served by a wireless network; webcams provide visual contact between Internet interlocutors. All these facts are interacted with language in Web-based communication, as animation, color, and visual design. There will be one question: how do these changes affect the ways of learning, using, and teaching languages? The article examines some of the issues involved in addressing this question, identifying what we have learned so far and what we still have to understand. We focus on key issues arising from the recent technology related literature. This article outlines four controversies related to information and communication technologies: the status of Foreign Language Learning by Computer (FLLbyC); theoretical grounding of technology based teaching and research; the notions of effectiveness, and cultural neutrality of computer environments. Moreover, the article presents the research findings from three current areas: computer mediated communication, electronic literacies, and informational technologies. We examine the implications of this research on teaching and future research. We know that a comprehensive overview of technology and foreign language learning should include the technologies of writing, sound recording, film, and video. Furthermore, these technologies have become somewhat invisible (Bax, 2003, p. 23), and we will restrict this discussion to digital technology. The rapid functional convergence of computers, televisions, telephones, and other telecommunications devices leads to the first controversy: how to label this area of research.

COMMUNICATION COMPUTER TECHNOLOGIES WITH CULTURE

Negroponte (1995) and Rheingold (1993) scientists think that computers as culturally neutral tools, offering universally adaptable media fostering global communication and, ultimately, global communities. But some of researchers, contend that informational technologies, as cultural products shaped by cultural environments, cannot be culturally neutral, and they have begun to study the cultural particularities of computer-mediated environments. Researchers, MacFadyen, Roche, and Chase (2004) have identified a foundational but invisible culture of

efficiency reflected in the design of a widely used course management system and similar Internet based communication platforms. This kind of culture values speed, reach, openness, quick response, questions and informality in communication.

Bowers (2000) has described the proliferation of decontextualized data on Internet and has suggested that “computer-mediated communication should be viewed as a degraded form of symbolic interaction—one that reinforces the rootless individual who is comfortable with the expressions of self-creation which the computer industry finds profitable to encourage.” We know that putting a more positive spin on the question, Kramsch, A’Ness, and Lam (2000) have found that the computer medium “imposes its own aesthetic logic on the creation of material”, it promotes an enhanced sense of agency among users: “authorship becomes a privilege of any language user, at equal par with any other”.

Though, what may be natural values to those who are well socialized into computer culture and may seem quite unfamiliar to those who are not. Also, Hawisher and Selfe’s (2000) collection of essays on computer-based literacy practices from countries around the world have explored the interaction between global computer uses and local cultures. For instance, Dragona and Handa (2000) have argued that logical and navigational procedures of hypertext are not universally intuitive and may be “a mode of thinking that reflects cognitive constructs and connections that are particularly English”. They have mentioned that a novelty of multimodal texts may short-circuit people’s critical sensibilities and make the texts appear “more as ‘pure’ information and ‘pure’ entertainment rather than a medium fraught with cultural baggage”. Well, Reeder et al. (2004) have found that learners’ online “self-introduction” postings differed significantly in terms of their underlying notions of how identity is established online and attributed these differences to the gap between the individual learners’ communicative culture and computer skills. They have come into conclusion that “the kind of e-tools for communication and education such as bulletin boards, which cater to publicity, and learning platforms such as Foreign Language Learning by Computer (FLLbyC), which are based on the notion of Western-style efficiency, are not necessarily appropriate tools for international groups of learners, even though one of the main driving forces of Internet-based learning is internationalization of education”.

Thatcher (2005) has found that his Ecuadorian students were frustrated using e-mail and hypertext because these media lacked familiar social cues. One student, who reported that “I lose all the emotion on email and the Internet—I cannot communicate all that I want to,” ended up using the telephone instead, so that she “could be more herself”. However, Thatcher has noted that the lack of physical context in e-mail and hypertext permitted more abstract group discussions, which many of his students found more “objective,” “reasoned,” and “productive”. Thatcher thinks that the use of e-mail and the Internet might ultimately foster a less collective approach in other forms of Ecuadorian communications, including standard writing. Another scientist Ess (2005) has discussed the idea of CMC as “computer-mediated colonialization,” that is, the notion that CMC technologies impose Western values and practices on peoples whose cultural values and communicative preferences are very different. On the other hand, he does not capitulate to a black and white distinction between “a homogeneous McWorld and a fragmented plurality of disconnected cultures and people”. And Rather (2003) has argued that by studying the values and communicative preferences embodied in Western CMC technologies we can succeed in developing models for “middle grounds that conjoin global connectivity with a plurality of local cultural identities”. As teachers, we need to recognize two things. The first, because computer environments have their specific cultures, we need to attend to both the positive and negative valences of the

value categories we create and think with. When do speed and informality become glibness? The second, we need to recognize that computer cultures are subject to transformation not just by hardware and software design but also by computer users. As we know that more and more people from different cultural backgrounds, speaking languages other than English, come to use computers, the communicative cultures of computer environments will change totally.

There is one question: Do computers improve language learning? This question has traditionally driven Foreign Language Learning by Computer (FLLbyC) research. It is counted an important question because it is tied to funding decisions and curricular overhaul. As with other learning resources, we need to refine the question to examine the myriad ways in which computers are being used, by whom, in what contexts, and for what purposes. When these parameters are pinned down, the answer is sometimes yes, often no, sometimes yes for some learners but not for others.

Though, Zhao (2003) has identified in his recent literature review and meta-analysis, three problems with assessing the effectiveness of technology. The first is the problem of defining what counts as technology (videos, FLLbyC, tutorials, and chat rooms, for example, are obviously very different). The second problem is separating a technology from its particular uses. Because any given technology may be used in a variety of ways, some of them efficiently, some not, it is difficult to generalize about the effectiveness of a technology itself. And the third issue has to do with the effects of other mediating factors, such as learners, the settings, tasks, and types of assessments. Zhao has wanted to solve these problems by performing a meta-analysis of stringently selected studies published between 1997 and 2001. Including computer technologies ranging from video to speech recognition, to web tutorials, Zhao has found a significant main effect of technology applications on student learning. However, Zhao's analysis has been limited to only nine studies that provided sufficient data for a meta analysis. Moreover, Zhao thinks that most studies had small sample sizes, seldom used random sampling, and were often directed by the students' teachers, introducing the possibility of a Pygmalion effect. Also Zhao has conducted his meta-analysis meticulously, it is hard to know how to interpret and make use of his positive finding. As Zhao himself has pointed out and others have supported (e.g., C. Jones, 1986), it is not only about technology itself whether it's effective or ineffective, but it's about particular ways in which the technology is used. Nowadays, given the common presence of computer technologies in many institutions of learning, we may be past the point of deciding whether or not to use computers in language teaching. But we still need to know how to make the best uses of them to accomplish specific goals. Furthermore, it is important to ask what it means to use computer technologies for learning and using a language, that is, to reflect critically on the social, cognitive, cultural, as well as educational implications. However, if we look at language learning from a broad semiotic perspective, we will be less interested in whether learners successfully acquire a particular linguistic structure and more interested in how they attempt to deal (sometimes successfully, other times not much) with specific communicative situations and with the linguistic, cognitive, social, and material resources available to them. All these perspectives put the accent on learners' agency and teachers' responsibility rather than on the effect of computer technology itself. Questions about overall effectiveness limit us to yes-no-maybe answers that are sometimes hard to interpret without thick description of the context, content, people, and procedures involved. Analyzing effectiveness also inadequately accounts for the symbolic or prestige dimension of using computers (i.e., the computer's association with progress can lead some programs and schools to promote (FLLbyC) activities regardless of whether they are shown to improve student learning). As a

result, the complexity of the issues involved in computer technology and language learning is pushing us to look beyond gross decontextualized measures of effectiveness to understand effectiveness in terms of specifics of what people do with computers, how they do it, and what it means to them.

Foreign Language Learning by Computer (FLLbyC) may be defined as “search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning.” (Levy, 1997 pp. 1-2) FLLbyC means students learning foreign languages in any context with, through computer technologies. (Egbert, 2005, pp. 3-4) While the first definition prioritizes “applications of the computer technologies” in its information structure, the second definition not only prioritizes “foreign language learning” but also broadens the potential types of relationships between computer technologies and language learning. Above counted high level of integration of digital technology in people’s everyday lives in many parts of the world, Warschauer (1999) has argued that the term foreign language learning using computers has outgrown its usefulness as a construct for teaching and research. The problem, Warschauer states, is that a FLLbyC framework posits the computer as an “outside instrument rather than as part of the ecology of language use”. While this may have been acceptable in the early periods of FLLbyC when computers were used to perform structural drills, it is no longer appropriate when online communication has become a normal part of daily life. Warschauer thinks that the use of computer technologies should not be framed as a special case but rather as an integral aspect of foreign language learning and language use.

As we know that powerful technologies are so integrated as to be invisible. We have no “BALL” (book-assisted language learning), no “PALL” (pen-assisted language learning), and no “LALL” (library-assisted language learning). When we have no “FLLbyC,” computers have taken their place as a natural and powerful part of the language learning process. Warschauer and Bax (2003) believe, but views “normalisation” as an end goal of FLLbyC rather than a current reality, given the still incomplete integration of computer technology and education. They think that the success of FLLbyC integration will be marked by the disappearance of the term FLLbyC.

Egbert and Petrie (2005) have generalized the computer as a “tool” status. The epistemological question for our profession, then, is whether computer technologies can be broadly treated as tools, and if so, whether we need to have a special category for foreign language learning by computer. The last third dimension of the question has to do with the evolution of computer technology itself. As suggested in the introduction, the rapid convergence of functionality across digital devices, and our growing reliance on such devices for communication means we may soon need to refer broadly to information and communication technologies rather than computer technologies in our research.

REFERENCES

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