

TECHNOLOGY-ASSISTED FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING (TALL) IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Jumazoda Shohidai Jaloliddin
Shohidajumazoda1@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Language is a comparable and complex term stemming from the different ways it is researched, learned, utilized in the digital age. Language reflects thought and can include any form of synchronous or asynchronous communication that leads to negotiation of meaning which may include not only the words we speak, write or listen to but also language gestures, signs, and symbols in off-line or online communication in the digital age.

Keywords: Technology-Assisted Foreign Language Learning (TAFL), Technology-Assisted Second Language Learning (TASLL), Digital Age, Distance learning.

INTRODUCTION, LITERATURE REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

Linguists examine the range of linguistic components including grammar, utterances, code-switching, or sociolinguistic discourse (Gumperz, 1982). Similarly, the paralinguistic aspects of language such as intonation and volume are examined for emotion and intent (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990) and nonlinguistic forms of communication associated with the intended meaning of non-verbal behavior has also been explored (Baxter, 1984; Brown & Levinson, 1987). These modes of examination have been utilized in language as well as foreign language study to study various language learner discourses and speech patterns including the study of phatic digital text communication on social networks.

The Digital Age Is the Learner's Age: Teachers and Students as Digital Language Learners (DLLs).

Advances in technology change and so does what counts as language learning and acquisition. The speed of this technological innovation makes it difficult for individuals to keep pace with novel technology, some of which becomes outdated before audiences can adapt to it. The role of the instructor is being challenged. Moreover, instructors across the globe feel less prepared and supported to teach with technology in classroom environments.

Key aspects that promote a successful learning experience for the language student in a technology enhanced environment, especially a web environment, include the following: (1) institutional support with appropriate technology to meet a learner's needs in the language learning environment (e.g., software and hardware requirements, high speed internet); (2) specific instruction and learner training to ensure continuous learning (e.g., technology software, trouble-shooting ability), (3) authentic digital opportunities for student-to-student language interaction; (4) student training and support to troubleshoot software and hardware technology failures. These aspects not only enhance the learning for the student but also are of benefit to the instructor. Additionally, institutional support should be available as well as release time for instructors to engage in digital language learning professional development that supports instruction and research in foreign language education.

From preschool up to university settings, technology is changing the way language is taught and learned as well as our perceptions and conceptual understandings. Technological change in the routes of language learning calls for new definitions in the field of language education. Similarly, possibilities created by innovations for the ways foreign language learning might be juxtaposed against the backdrop of second language, heritage language, as well as dual language online learning environments.

Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) was an appropriate and prominent term in the field of computer-mediated language study, but the term CALL might not be inclusive of other forms of technology in the digital age. Although many digital devices have a micro-computer such as a smart-phone depending on how “computer” is defined, it has been suggested in the literature that the CALL term does not provide an overarching frame for understanding innovative and more nuanced contexts of language learning (Otto & Pusack, 2009; Andrews & Haythornthwaite, 2007). The creation of interactive web technology, mobile technology, along with a series of new technologies (e.g., hologram, artificial intelligence), drives education to a new realm beyond desktop/laptop designations. Paradigmatic changes in conceptual designations of terms, such as CALL, need to be reviewed and updated. Instead, Technology-Assisted Language Learning (TALL) might be a more appropriate term that is broader and encompasses an entire group of technological possibilities beyond the computer. Furthermore, there may be a need to differentiate between TALL, Technology-Assisted Foreign Language Learning (TAFLL), Technology-Assisted Second Language Learning (TASLL), Technology-Assisted Dual Language Learning (TADLL), Technology-Assisted Heritage Language Learning (TAHLL) and Technology-Assisted Heritage Language Maintenance (TAHLM).

Traditional face-to-face classes can be quite interactive or less so depending on the instructor’s educational philosophical stance. Thus, should the instructor have a more progressivist (learner-centered) philosophy, the course will include some lecture but also social language interaction for language development. An instructor that is an essentialist might engage in more teacher-centered learning approaches of lecture, such as the audiolingual method, or focus on grammar, while providing fewer opportunities for social language interaction. In the traditional face-to-face classroom, the instructor lectures, writing on a white board. Students engage in physical note-taking, paper and pencil tests, and handwritten or typewritten work or homework. Instructors could utilize language dramas, the audiolingual method, and the study of language and literature through reading and writing with paper and pen, then typing, followed by computer use. When utilizing traditional approaches of the past, there were fewer opportunities for authentic exchange.

With increased computer access and the ability to go online, face-to-face classroom practice has changed. Increased usage of technology provides opportunities for multiple learning styles, and multiple modes of communication, interaction, and understanding. Authentic language exchange has become available through present-day digital media and devices that provide windows into virtual realms. Different from the traditional classroom, novel features of Skype and other virtual face-to-face formats connect world learners through internet exchange.

Digital devices and digital media applied to note taking elevated the importance of typing skills over the writing tradition. Instead of merely emphasizing hand note-taking skills at the beginning of the course, teachers suggest optional methods for note-taking such as laptops, smartphones, recorders, or iPads. Students utilize laptop computers for group projects, presentations, and demonstrations in classroom settings as well.

The spaces for language learning have similarly expanded to hybrid, online, distance learning, and outside language class learning frontiers.

In the digital age, geographic distances, which were once barriers for face-to-face foreign language classes, can be bridged through *online and distance learning*. Teachers, students, and technology support staff can attend the same class without being at the same geographic location. Given that “in front of your teacher” can be interpreted as “in front of your computer screen,” technology changes people’s sense of distance and draws one another virtually closer. Prior definitions of classroom, whiteboard, and vocabulary may be interpreted differently by newer and younger DL learners in the digital age as a transition from the physical to virtual.

Videoconferencing software (Adobe Connect, Zoom, Moodle) have revolutionized foreign language teaching and learning. Videoconferencing provides virtual platforms that can be utilized to practice and reinforce what is learned collaboratively in the classroom. It permits authentic tandem language learning with peers and overcomes the limitation of the traditional foreign language classroom—the ability to invite learners unable to attend face-to-face learning class (Hubbard, 2009; Zarotsky & Jaresko, 2000). Whether an online course is delivered via content management systems or through synchronous videoconferencing, distance learning technology breaks down physical walls that separate local as well as global learners.

Language is generally understood as the medium of communication of ideas and thoughts. Technological advances have assisted with language communication processes. When we speak about technology, we generally refer to computers and digital forms. However, technology refers to anything that is developed that makes life easier.

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