Does Technology Promote Second Language Learning?

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Abstract:

Several decades ago, the use of technology in language classrooms attracted only a small number of language teachers / researchers and curriculum / material developers. However, with the rapid growth of computer applications, communications technologies and open-access information available on the Internet, the role of technology in language instruction has now become an important issue confronting large numbers of language specialists throughout the world. Thousands of language educators have embraced technology as their useful instructional tool. Many believe that technology can be used as a catalyst for second language development. The major questions one needs to ask are these: (1) does technology really aid language teaching and/or learning process?; and (2) is there any connection between a theoretically-based understanding of the language learning process and the implementation of technology-based materials?. To answer these questions, in this presentation, I discuss the intersection between technology and second language acquisition (SLA) that is how the principles of Instructed SLA proposed by Ellis (2008) can be useful in the development and evaluation of technology-related materials.

Scholars state that our students (and children) who were born in the 1990s and 2000s belong to the Z Generation. This generation is also known as the digital generation because they are accustomed to use technology in their daily life including in their language learning process. As language teachers, we cannot avoid this generation's preference. Besides many studies have shown that there are many advantages that technology offers in supporting and enhancing language learning (and teaching). However there is a possibility that some teachers and curriculum developers still have doubts whether the use of technology is in line with the principles of second language learning. This presentation will try to answer this curiosity by looking at the principles of second language learning proposed by Ellis (2008) and free resources available on the internet.

There are 10 principles proposed by Ellis (2008), but for this presentation, I will group them into 6 focuses:
- Focus on form and meaning
- Focus on explicit and implicit knowledge
- Focus on input and output
- Focus on individual differences: language attitude and motivation

- Focus on assessment: free and controlled production
- Focus on learners' built-in syllabus and sequence of acquisition

Focus on form and meaning

Form can be taught / learnt through grammar lessons and/or through focused tasks that ask students to understand specific grammatical structures in the input, and/or to produce the grammar structures in the tasks given.

There are two types of *meaning*: semantic and pragmatics. Semantic meaning is concerned only with the exact, literal meaning of the words while the pragmatic meaning focuses on the *inferred meaning*.

Websites available:
Dave's ESL Café: http://www.eslcafe.com/
Games for Learning English: http://www.eslgamesplus.com/
Oxford Owl: http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/welcome/for-home/reading-owl/reading
Negotiator Game: http://gtds.net/The-Negotiator

Focus on explicit and implicit knowledge

Explicit L2 knowledge is that "knowledge of rules and items that exist in an analysed form so that learners are able to report what they know" (Ellis, 1994, p. 702). This is obtained by joining formal study. The ultimate goal of learning is to have the implicit knowledge. In this way, an individual uses his/her 'intuition'to deduce the correctness of an utterance. Students need to do communicative activities continuously to develop their implicit knowledge.

Websites available:
Facebook: http://www,facebook.com
Edmodo: https://www.edmodo.com/
Skype: http://www.skype.com/en/

Focus on input and output

If the only input students receive is in the context of a limited number of weekly lessons based on some course book, they will probably never achieve high level of L2 proficiency. Students need to have extensive input in the form of extensive listening and extensive reading. This can be done outside the classrooms.

Input alone is not enough. Students also need to produce output. Teachers need to provide context and opportunities for students to speak and/or to write.

Websites:

Bookboxinc: http://www.youtube.com/user/bookboxinc/videos

Oxford Owl: http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/Reading

Breaking News English: http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/index.html

Natural Voice Reader: http://www.naturalreaders.com/

Vocaroo: http://vocaroo.com/

Blog Wordpress http://wordpress.com

Make Beliefs Comix http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/Comix/

Facebook: http://www,facebook.com

Edmodo: https://www.edmodo.com/

Skype: http://www.skype.com/en/

Focus on individual differences: language attitude and motivation

It is teachers' responsibility to ensure that their students stay motivated. Using technology is one of the techniques to motivate our students.

Websites available:

Windows Movie Maker http://windows.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/get-movie-maker-download

Go!Animate http://goanimate.com/

Cartoon Story Maker http://www.education.vic.gov.au/languagesonline/games/cartoon/#4

Windows Photo Story http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/download/details.aspx?id=11132

Hero Machine http://www.heromachine.com/

Lyrics Training http://www.lyricstraining.com/

Focus on assessment: free and controlled production

According to Norris & Ortega (2000) as cited by Ellis (2008), there are four types of measurement:

- Metalinguistic judgement (e.g. a grammaticality judgment test)
- Selected response (e.g. multiple choice)
- Constrained constructed response (e.g. gap filling exercises)
- Free constructed response (e.g. a communicative task)

Websites available:

Hot Potato http://hotpot.uvic.ca

Wondershare Quiz Creator http://www.wondershare.com/

Project Works http://www.learningreviews.com/Project-Based-Learning-Lesson-Plans.html

Focus on learners' built-in syllabus and sequence of acquisition

Ellis (2008) argues that each learner has his/her own built-in syllabus and sequence of acquisition. In this case, teachers need to, for example, teach grammatical structures in accordance with what learners's built-in syllabus and with what learners are ready to acquire.

In conclusion, technology especially free resources available on the internet should be viewed as an important tool in language education. However it should not be the goal of the learning process. Teachers are the ones who hold the responsibility for bringing and using these resources effectively in their classes.

Main Reference:

Ellis, R. (2008). *Principles of instructed second language acquisition*. CAL Digest. Retrieved from http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/digest_pdfs/Instructed2ndLangFinalWeb.pdf.