Connecting Lives Inside and Outside the Classroom: Why and How to Implement Technology in the Language Learning Classroom

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Abstract—This paper is primarily addressed to teachers who stand on the threshold of bringing technology and new media into their classrooms. Technology and new media, such as smart phones and tablets have changed the face of communication in general and of language teaching more specifically. New media has widespread appeal among young people in particular, so it is in the teacher's best interests to bring new media into their lessons. It is the author's firm belief that technology will never replace the teacher, but it is without question that the twenty-first century teacher must employ technology and new media in some form, or run the risk of failure. The level that one chooses to incorporate new media within their class is entirely in their hands.

Keywords—New media, social media, technology, education

I. INTRODUCTION

IN the contemporary world, technology and New Media (NM) is everywhere and it is mobile. The chances are very good that the people around you have in their possession, and/or are currently using, a mobile device of some kind; be it an, 'old-fashioned' cellphone, a more up-to-date smartphone, or 'tablet' (e.g. the Kindle or an iPad). Additionally, the chances are also high that the younger the owner of the device is, the more up-to-date it will be.

Depending upon how one view it, the fact that younger people are such enthusiastic users of NM poses a dilemma or an opportunity for language teachers today. While the author is a firm believer that technology will never replace the teacher, technology is very prevalent in the world today. However, it has not yet been fully accepted into mainstream language education. Further, while it is true that a relatively small number of teachers have fully embraced the use of NM into their classrooms, many teachers are still uncertain about the benefits of introducing NM into their language-learning classroom. In addition, teachers who would like to implement the use NM in their classrooms are sometimes unsure about how to proceed. Regardless of where one stands on the spectrum for or against NM in the classroom, technology is making an indelible mark upon learning, and teachers today need to be aware of why and how to use NM now more than ever in the history of language learning.

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II. DEFINITIONS

NM is a form of communication, which is accessible to large numbers of people through the use of digital technology, such as the Internet. Hockley [1] explains that NM is often in the form of portable, hand-held devices. This includes smartphones (i.e. iPhones), tablets (i.e. iPads, e-readers, mini-laptops and even game consoles). These devices are usually small enough to put in your pocket of handbag. Although small, these devices have already caused widespread and far-reaching changes on the people who use them. NM has had its largest impact on teenagers and young adults. According to a recent study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project [2], eighty-six percent, or 'almost saturation point' of eighteen to twenty-four year olds own a cellphone or smartphone. Furthermore, a study by Kaiser Family Foundation [3] found that most teenagers use their NM devices for an average of seven hours and thirty-five minutes every day.

Furthermore, NM is altering the way that people view their world and themselves. NM is changing the boundaries between the way that people communicate with each other privately and publically. NM allows people to communicate using overlapping mediums, which were previously separate (i.e. Skype allows people to simultaneously use aural, visual and written mediums). In addition, as communicative speed between individuals has increased, our perception of geographic distance has dramatically decreased [1]. Not only are people communicating with greater frequency, we are communicating in real time with larger groups than ever before, from a more diverse range of geographic locations and cultural backgrounds.

III. NM AND LANGUAGE TEACHING/LEARNING

NM is becoming cheaper and connectivity is becoming more accessible, which leads to a sharp increase in their use on a global scale. As sales of handheld devices rises, the number of people who are using NM, with widely diverse backgrounds also increases. These users are no longer confined solely to developed countries, but a significant number of users are in developing countries, such as India, China, South-East Asia, South America and Africa.

Thus, the teaching and learning of English as the lingua franca vehicle of communication is more important now than ever before. So too is the need for language teachers to integrate NM into their classrooms. One force drives the other. Indisputably, the handheld devices, which more than

ninety-five percent of our learners possess, are an excellent place to begin. Moreover, it is most likely that our learners are already using NM to learn English outside the classroom. One method is to download and utilize applications, such as electronic word cards for vocabulary study. Learner dictionaries are also available as an application, often free of charge, which are both powerful and convenient. Additionally, learners can watch their favorite Western artists on music videos or interviews and connect with them via social media for updates, all in English. These are some methods that our learners are already utilizing NM outside of the classroom to improve their English study. Most importantly, not only is NM convenient for learners' intake of language (i.e. listening, watching, reading), but NM aids them in their outtake as well (i.e. recording conversations, videos, or taking photos for speaking and / or writing activities).

It is only a small step for learners to bring their NM experiences from outside to inside the classroom. There are, however, a series of questions that teachers need to ask before deciding to implement NM in the language classroom. If you are considering the implementation of NM in your classroom, you first need to ascertain the following [1]:

1) Why should you implement NM in the language classroom?
2) What are your goals for implementing NM in your classroom?
3) How will you implement NM in your classroom?

A. Why Should You Implement MN in the Language Classroom?

While there is no one correct answer with regard to any of the above questions, answering Question One: "Why" is relatively straightforward. The aforementioned points (i.e. the very widespread appeal and use of NM as a communicative and language learning tool and among high school and university / college-aged people in particular) leads to the conclusion that what is good for language learning outside the classroom will be good for it inside as well. Hence, the high level of intrinsic (self-derived) motivation that is attached to the utilization of NM within language classrooms is a significant factor. Thornbury [4] takes a different point of view; observing that technology in the classroom is able to solve the 'input problem' by providing students with a potentially unlimited range of input sources and exposure to language. Further, Traxler [5] observes that 'mobile e-learning' has inevitably lead to the cessation of the need for institutions to purchase the often prohibitively expensive learning packages, such as the CALL system, which is currently employed in a large number of schools throughout Japan, Asia and Europe.

B. What Are Your Goals for Implementing MN in the Classroom?

With regards to this question, here are a few consider-worthy factors:

1. Ownership

What devices will your students utilize (e.g. iPhones, iPads, laptop / desktop PCs)? Further, is the device the property of the school / institution, of each learner, or will you use both? One the one hand, the performance of school owned devices is generally uniform. On the other hand, students may own a variety of different devices, with varying levels of performance. What policies does your institution have regarding learners using their own devices in the classroom?

2. Linguistic Input vs. Output

Will one's learners' be exposed to linguistic input, output or to a combination of both? Input can be achieved through implementing the wide-ranging and various listening and reading (often simultaneous) activities, which are now widely available for language learning online. Output can be achieved by letting learners record themselves doing class tasks and activities, or by getting students to make slideshow presentations. For the most effective learning, a combination of input and output is recommended.

3. Global vs Local Content

What content learners will utilize on their, or their institution's devices depends upon the kind of learning you are permitted to employ. Global content, in this context, refers to learning content, which has a universal social appeal, such as multi-media. This includes audio and video, TV shows and movies, the Internet or social networking sites. In contrast local content, in this context, refers to activities that have a lower social appeal. Local content activities include quizzes, grammar and / or vocabulary learning sites, touch-typing courses and / or simple games or applications.

C. How Will You Implement NM into Your Classroom?

1. Location

Will the utilization of online learning take place in the classroom or outside the classroom? Clearly, their employment within the classroom gives learners access to online dictionaries, news and information for web-based research (e.g. Wikipedia). Alternatively, if learners employ their use outside the classroom, then they can complete online listening tasks, play vocabulary / grammar games, etc. The outside approach can transform both the type of homework that teachers can assign and their learners' attitudes towards doing homework.

2. Access to Content

Teachers have a responsibility towards the kind of content that learners are exposed to, especially during in-class activities. On the one hand, the teacher can adopt a top-down approach and send learner-appropriate NM content to learners. On the other hand, the employment of a bottom-up approach will result in learners being able to search for suitable NM material, which is in-line with their learning interests and research goals.

3. Utilization

Related to the above, teachers should decide whether learners might utilize NM activities in all classes, which will cover a wide-range of activities. This approach is a heavy commitment to online learning. Alternatively, teachers may employ online learning of NM resources sporadically and for

very specific purposes. One possibility is to utilize in-class time to introduce learners to correct usage of appropriate and recommended resources, which can then be employed by learners on a more on-going basis outside of class as homework or as part of a project-based task.

In summary, it is preferable if the above elements are considered as complementary to one another, rather than as diachronically opposed. These elements offer the greatest benefits when they are blended, rather than when they are taken in isolation. According to Reber [6], collaboration between seemingly opposing elements is superior to simply an either / or approach. This is because the interaction and blending of different elements (e.g. a linguistic input task that is combined with a linguistic output task) mirrors 'the way in which knowledge…is acquired'. As such, incorporating a blended approach for learners exposure to online learning content makes online learning an invaluable tool for language teaching.

IV. Tools for Online Language Learning

As mentioned above, the selection of institution-appropriate and learner-friendly NM content is an important consideration for teachers. This section introduces a number of online resources, which the author has successfully employed within his classes (and as homework assignments) over the past two years.

A. Teacher Training Videos

Teacher Training Videos [7] is the brainchild of Russell Stannard, winner of numerous teaching awards. As the name suggests, Teacher Training Videos is a website that teaches teachers how to utilize and employ online learning resources in the language classroom. This site contains step-by-step aural and visual instructions on a wide-range of first-rate, enjoyable and straightforward online resources (including the resources below).

B. English Listening Library Online (ELLLO)

Todd Beuckens, a Japan-based educator, created ELLLO [8]. ELLLO is a huge website, which contains learner-created videos, language learning games, news, entertainment and current affairs. Without a doubt, a focus upon the learner-created videos section will produce the greatest benefit for teachers. The premise is simple and very effective. English language learners from all over the world create a question, (e.g. 'What is the best city in your country?'), which the learner then answers with video not exceeding one minute in length. Additionally, learners are allowed to create and upload as many videos as they like. The efficacy of this section comes from a number of important factors: Authenticity, relevance, variety and reproduction.

1. Authenticity

All videos are screened to ensure that they follow the guidelines before being uploaded. All videos contain authentic samples of second language English from a wide-range of sources. As such, the language on these videos contains non-standard varieties and thus naturally occurring

learner-errors. Thus, the employment of these videos in the language classroom raises learners' awareness of not only of different varieties of English, but also of linguistic strategies that non-native speakers utilize to communicate their message.

2. Relevance

Relevance is closely related to authenticity and has three significant elements of efficacy. First of all, the age of most speakers on the videos is often closer to the age of our learners than the age of the teacher to his or her learners. More often than not, a person's message is more appealing not only when the message topics, but also the speaker's appearance, attitude, behavior and also his or her linguistic errors are similar to those of the listener.

3. Variety and Reproduction

Currently, there are more than one thousand videos of language learners from every continent available for viewing, study, reflection and critique and reproduction. When used in class, our learners are exposed to people from a wide range of nationalities, most of whom speak with differing varieties of English than that employed by our learners. Additionally, there are a large variety of questions that are discussed. This variety provides rich content for our learners. Furthermore, the topics discussed (e.g. 'What do you like most about your city?') can likewise become discussion points among our learners.

C. Lyrics Training

Unquestionably, Lyrics Training [9] is the most popular interactive website among my learners. Fundamentally, this interactive 'game' features contemporary music videos coupled with cloze (gap fill) texts. Learners 'play' by listening and typing in the cloze gaps. Failure to complete the cloze results in the song being paused. Lyrics Training is a surprisingly hi-tech learning platform. On numerous occasions, I have observed learners using this site outside of class and during break time. Clearly, the effectiveness of this site can be directly correlated to level of enjoyment that learners experience from using it.

D. Listen a Minute

Listen a Minute [10] is a four-skills (listening / speaking / reading / writing) language learning website, which was created by Sean Banville. It has a target audience of lower level learners. Each lesson contained within this site begins with a reading text, with an accompanying listening file. Additionally, a range of online interactive quizzes accompanies the reading and listening texts. These activities can be employed in pair or group work activities and provide a high-level language lesson for our learners. Finally, each lesson and accompanying listening file can be downloaded and printed as class work or as homework.

E. Facebook

Our learners are enthusiastic participants of the social networks that abound within contemporary society. However, in this sub-section, only Facebook (FB) [11] will be examined for its efficacy in classroom management and language learning. Mark Zuckerburg founded FB in 2004 [11], while he

was still a Harvard University student. In the last decade, FB has had a huge impact upon media, self and society. Most learners already have a FB account, which they often check more often than they check their email accounts. Hence, when used correctly, FB can be a very effective inside and outside classroom management tool.

The 'group' function may be employed to create a closed group ('closed' means that all posts made to the group may only be viewed by group members). Learners can be asked to use their smartphones to take and upload photos of English signs in their neighborhood. These photos can then be discussed either in class, or in the comment box. Additionally, learners can create and upload their own 'ELLLO-style' video (see sub-section IV.*B*).

In summary, the popularity of social media makes them very effective language learning platforms. Not only FB, but also Twitter and Line (not discussed in this paper) are also able to be effectively adapted for the needs of the language classroom.

V. IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Presenting on this topic and writing this paper have allowed the author to identify some important areas of research, both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Although the employment of technology and NM within the classroom is relatively new to language teaching and learning and even newer is research into this field, a relatively large number of scholarly articles and research has already been conducted. Nicky Hockly, whose work has been cited throughout this paper, is just one of the most prominent and respected advocates for NM.

This paper has addressed the following research questions:

1) Why should you implement NM in the language classroom?
2) What are your goals for implementing NM in your classroom?
3) How will you implement NM in your classroom?

With regard to answering these questions in light of their possibilities for research, a number of possibilities are available. First of all, the author is currently conducting qualitative ethnographic research into correlations between learner motivation and computer use in language learning. However, further possibilities include researching the employment of NM with one's learners' language test results. This quantitative research could be conducted in conjunction with the afore-mentioned qualitative project. The results could then be triangulated with teacher – student interviews on the efficacy of NM in language teaching-learning. Finally, it would also be very interesting to undertake a collaborative cross-cultural project, with teachers who teach in different countries and cultural environments.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper described the place of online learning and NM in language learning today. Technology is an inescapable factor of contemporary life, both inside and outside the language classroom. Further, the most predominant users of NM are members of the generation that was born at the end of the Twentieth Century (i.e. Generation Y). The opportunity that NM provides for language teachers today rests in its widespread popularity, its accessibility, ease of use and relevance to the life's of our learners. NM is here to stay; it is the responsibility of language teachers to become learners ourselves so that we may effectively lead our learners towards linguistic and technological autonomy. Our learners were born in a different time; thus we must not confine their learning merely to the limitations of our own learning.

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