Novice Language Teachers’ Selection Criteria and Uses for Digital Voice Recording Software

Pete Swanson, Department of Modern and Classical Languages, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA, USA

ABSTRACT

In order to address a lack of motivation to learn a second language, second/foreign language teachers must overcome a multitude of impediments in which to bring students to higher levels of language learning. Research on the integration of digital voice recording software into the language learning curriculum has focused primarily on the perceptions of veteran instructors and their students. However, there is a dearth of research on novice language educators and what influences their decisions to select such software. Following the literature review, the author discusses results from a study investigating novice language teachers’ criteria and selection of digital voice recording software. The research has implications for language teachers as well as teachers in other content areas.

Keywords: Digital Voice Recording Software, Language Learning Curriculum, Language Teachers, Novice, Second Language

INTRODUCTION

The narrowing of the curriculum due to the lingering effects from No Child Left Behind and now Race to the Top continues to prioritize instruction in and the allocation of resources to the core areas of science, mathematics, and reading. Fostering student motivation to learn in today’s classroom regardless of content area continues to challenge teachers due to multiple obstacles such as student misconduct and a loss of time preparing for seemingly endless testing (Zellmer, Frontier, & Pheifer, 2006). The challenges novices educators face daily can be particularly unnerving because many times these neophytes are given the most challenging assignments with little to no professional support (Kalogrides, Loeb, & Teille, 2011). Additionally, they struggle with classroom management issues, are burdened by a lack of curricular freedom, and suffer from benign neglect in professionally unsupportive environments (Fry, 2007; Mathews, 2011; Melnick & Meister, 2008; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). While all novice educators must develop strategies to overcome such barriers to teaching and learning, newly-minted second/foreign language (S/FL) instructors must learn to rise above other obstacles such as student perceptions of the irrelevance of authentic language applications.

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and lowering student anxiety about learning a second language.

Theoretically, as anxiety increases, learners may experience stress and a lack of self-efficacy, which tends to hinder second language acquisition. Conversely, as students begin to feel more comfortable in the learning environment, students demonstrate risk-taking behaviors when practicing and acquiring a new language (Krashen, 1981). In the area of S/FL learning, performance anxiety in the target language is often reported as one of the most influential factors impediments to language learning (Horwitz, 2001; Krashen, 1985; Swanson, 2013a). However, research suggests that the blending of technology and best practices in the teaching languages can foster a low-anxiety learning environment, improve student motivation, and foster innovative S/FL learning practices.

Background

For decades free and open source software has been of interest to government agencies, military, and educational institutions to name a few. Among other notable ideas, open source software is freely distributed, includes the source code, allows for derived works which can be redistributed under the same license, is absent of discrimination against persons, groups or fields of endeavor, and must not contaminate other software (Open Source Initiative, 1998). Additionally, it is free. That is, any one is freely licensed to use, copy, and even change the software in any way (Coppola & Neelley, 2004). In fact, people are encouraged to improve upon the software’s design and functionality.

The movement to create such software began in the 1950s when software accompanying the first large-scale computers produced by IBM and other technology companies was distributed with modifiable source code that could be improved and shared (Koch, 2007). UNIX, a popular operating system, is a fascinating example historically. In the mid-1960s AT&T Bell Labs and others were working collaboratively to develop an operating system. While the system was functional, it was burdened with a plethora of problems and Bell Labs ultimately pulled out of the project. However, others decided to remain and work on the system, but on a much smaller scale. Although UNIX was developed by programmers for programmers, over the years, it has become a powerful and flexible operating environment that is used widely in business, science, and academia (Abang, 2010).

To that end, educational institutions have begun to produce and use free and open source solutions for course management systems and electronic portfolios due to constricting budgets, growing resentment of vendor power, and a lack of innovation (Coppola & Neelley, 2004). Researchers have been examining the effectiveness of such technological advancements, and in the case of language teaching and learning, the research based on integrating technology into S/FL instruction for oral/aural purposes has focused on veteran teachers and their students’ perceptions of technology integration. Swanson, Early, and Baumann (2011) noted that the teaching and learning of S/FLs in the communicative classroom is dedicated to the ideals, if not the practice of developing second language proficiency. As the paradigm of teaching languages has changed from the Grammar-Translation Method to the Communicative Language Approach, language teachers now place focus on the three modes of communication: the Interpersonal, the Interpretive, and the Presentational (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006).

Instead of basing language study on the four skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) individually, communication in the target language becomes three parts of a single goal, communication. Within the framework of the three modes of communication, language learners demonstrate proficiency through thematic integrated performance assessments.

To that end, learners first listen to watch, and/or read an authentic text (e.g., radio broadcast, podcast, magazine article) and then answer informational questions so that instructors can assess comprehension of the material. During the process, instructors guide learning by providing students consistent and constant