Chapter 31
Using YouTube and WeChat to Promote Communicative and Intercultural Competence in Japanese and Mandarin

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ABSTRACT

Web 2.0 technologies are omnipresent in the lives of the digital natives who are the majority of learners in the language centre's non-specialist programme. However, there is no automatic transfer from personal to pedagogical use especially when linguistic and intercultural competence is also at play. The Japanese and Chinese teachers, who are the chapter's co-authors see technology as an affordance and thus necessary for developing their students' proficiency. The chapter examines learners' perspectives on the technology used and whether it facilitates the degree of engagement intended.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines learner and teacher feedback on using YouTube and WeChat in Japanese and Mandarin teaching in one higher education context. The enquiry relied on a classroom based action research perspective situated in the "watching" and "asking/doing" quadrants of van Lier's research types (see, Allwright and Bailey, 1999, p. 43). The case therefore is similar to the kind of enquiry that a teacher practitioner might conduct within the confines of his/her own classroom in order to understand what worked or did not work, and why. The context may be unfamiliar, but the challenge of exposing

foreign language learners to the target language and culture in the less commonly taught languages is easily appreciated. The discussion and recommendations could prove useful in helping teachers come to a realistic evaluation of the affordances and constraints of the technologies referenced should they wish to incorporate them into their teaching/learning contexts.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The case on technology use in Japanese and Mandarin is situated at the Centre for Language Learning, the language centre at The University of the West Indies (UWI) in the twin-island state of Trinidad and Tobago. The premier tertiary institution in the Anglophone Caribbean, UWI is a federal university serving 17 nations, with three physical campuses in Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Barbados, and a fourth open campus with its administrative headquarters in Barbados. UWI, established in 1948, is a comprehensive university. The St. Augustine Campus, established in 1961, makes UWI the only comprehensive university, and one of only 12 fully accredited tertiary institutions in Trinidad and Tobago. With its 14,000 undergraduates in seven disciplinary fields, and close to 6,000 students pursuing graduate degrees up to the doctoral level, UWI is the intellectual beacon to the country's 1.3 million inhabitants.

The language centre was established in 1997 at the St. Augustine Campus as the "institutional means for organising and expanding the teaching of foreign languages" (FGP, 1997). Initially, the languages taught were Spanish and French—the languages of the secondary school curriculum. Since then the number of foreign languages offered as extracurricular options has grown to 10. The university has no foreign language requirement; only a few programmes in the social sciences make the study of a language mandatory and, even then, students are graded on a pass-fail basis. Beginning in 2010 and progressively over a five-year period, credit-bearing options were introduced in Spanish, French, Mandarin, and Japanese, the most popular languages. Nevertheless, the extracurricular option continues to be more heavily subscribed, since the vast majority of students desire to learn a language as enrichment. Some students appreciate that foreign language competency is a likely boost to their employability, and it is this group that expressed a keen desire to obtain credits for language study. However, that number remains small, so the approach piloted in 2010, whereby credit and non-credit students follow the same core syllabus—with modifications to the content and the assessment of for-credit students—is expected to continue for the foreseeable future.

Another characteristic of the language centre's "languages-for-all programme" is that it is truly inclusive, accommodating, not only credit and non-credit students, but also university staff and members of the public. Indeed, the language centre is the only institution in Trinidad and Tobago offering several less commonly taught languages and, as such, it occupies a singular place in adult foreign language learning. (In 2014 non-credit Mandarin classes began at two additional locations through the University's Confucius Institute.) Approximately 1,000 learners enrol each semester, with university students representing fifty percent of the cohort. In this chapter, the term "learner" is used to designate all those who enrol in the foreign language programmes. "Students" specifically refers to university students.

The mixture of for-credit and not-for-credit students, adult learners from the university community and general public, young adult learners who might be described as "digital natives," and older learners who tend to be "digital immigrants" (Prensky, 2001) challenges the language centre's "languages-for-all" programme to find ways to engage and motivate such a heterogeneous group. Its population is some-

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