Creativity and Mobile Language Learning Using LingoBee

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the authors explore the ideas of mobility and creativity through the use of LingoBee, a mobile app for situated language learning. LingoBee is based on ideas from crowd-sourcing and social networking to support language learners. Learners are able to create their own content and share it with other learners through a repository. The authors have analysed the language content created by second language learners in several European countries to identify creativity in mobile language learning. Three perspectives of creativity could be found: creativity spurred by the situated context or what the authors call “LingoBee moments”, collaborative creative construction of content and creative use of language. Examples of each are presented and discussed. This work has been conducted within the EU LLP project SIMOLA, Situated Mobile Language Learning.

INTRODUCTION

Creativity encompasses a number of different issues and concepts that have been addressed under many different disciplinary and methodological perspectives over the past few millennia. We could for example refer to Plato in Symposium (205b) defining creativity as the passage from non-being to being - in this sense creativity is linked to the notion of newness and originality. About 2500 years later, we still use a similar definition for creativity, but we live in a totally different world where the meaning of newness has changed dramatically. On the one hand, in fact, it becomes harder and harder to find something really new. On the other hand, we balance the difficulty of achieving novelty with the potential to manipulate, re-design and share things already in existence, giving them new shapes and/or new functions. This latter aspect is the most interesting for us, as it is based mostly on technology and can help us in understanding the creativity that is based on or results through the use of technology.

DOI: 10.4018/jmbl.2013070103
More recently, according to Torrance, “It has become traditional to consider creativity from four different viewpoints: person, process, product, and press… the process is an element of responding constructively to existing or new situations, rather than merely adapting to them. Such a definition places creativity in the realm of everyday living and does not reserve it for ethereal and rarely achieved heights of creation” (Torrance, 1993). Some of the notions of creativity that have been discussed in the literature more recently include “connecting with others, sharing and putting together ideas” to produce something new (Jahnke, 2011), collaboration or “collaborative creativity” (Hermann, 2009) and “connective, social activity” (Fischer, 2011). These definitions fit well with the notion of creativity that was perceived by Torrance, placing creativity as a part of everyday activities. In particular, there has been a lot of attention on looking at creativity in social activities; as Csikszentmihalyi suggested, much of our creativity results from interaction and collaboration with other individuals (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) as reported in (Fischer, 2004).

Our focus for this paper is on creativity in mobile, collaborative and situated language learning through technological support. Whalley et al. pointed out, “(an) ‘augmented learning environment’ combines the rapid researching and organization of information with the creative ability to manipulate, interpret and redesign this material into new forms (e.g. using photos, descriptions, audio recording), as well as the power to share, collect and distribute the results of the investigation” (Whalley et al., 2006). Marek talked about “mash-ups” and the collective creativity afforded by modern technology and user-generated content. “One of the key changes is the opportunity for everyone to create (user-generated) content. “One of the key changes is the opportunity for everyone to create (user-generated) content. In a growing number of cases, the consumer of information takes on the role of information provider as well (Marek, 2011). Kukulska-Hulme states, “a mobile learning experience is an occasion to capture a moment of interest” (Kukulska-Hulme, 2009). Such moments are situated in context, opportunities to learn a new word or an expression that is stimulated by something around a language learner, perhaps during a walk in the city or while shopping, e.g. (Adlard et al., 2012). These language learning moments often provide answers to questions or problems that have not been defined (Fischer, 2011); yet learners can find creative ways of enhancing their knowledge of a language or culture while they are on the go.

In this paper, we will explore the ideas of mobility and creativity in language learning through the use of LingoBee, a mobile app for situated language learning. LingoBee is designed to support collaborative language learning, using ideas from crowdsourcing and social networks. LingoBee users create language learning content that is stored not only on their personal device, but is shared with other users via the cloud-based repository. Although Marek was talking about the role of digital video and YouTube, it equally applies to user-generated content created on apps such as LingoBee. Language learners in several European countries have used this app over the last year as a part of their language learning process. We also want to give particular attention to what Kukulska-Hulme calls a “moment of interest”, a brief period of time when creativity seems to concentrate/polarize. We will call them “LingoBee moments”. In this respect, this paper provides an insight into creativity in language learning and how this can be supported through technologies such as mobile apps. LingoBee was developed through the European Lifelong Learning Programme’s SIMOLA (Situated Mobile Language Learning) project (SIMOLA, 2012b). The mobile app has been used by a number of second language learners in several different countries over the last two years. We have analyzed the content of the crowd-sourced LingoBee repository (SIMOLA, 2012a) and identified several examples of language and culture related content contributed by the language learners that are creative. In this paper, we describe creativity in language learning, in particular using mobile technologies and illustrate this through the use of examples. The rest of this paper is organized as follows:
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