Chapter 77

Integrating Chinese Community into Canadian Society:
Podcasts, Technology Apprehension, and Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

The use of podcasting technology in language learning presents a unique set of challenges and holds a great deal of promise for digital natives as well as for newcomers to technology. The literature on podcasts in learning mainly focuses on student experiences in formal educational settings, while questions related to nontraditional students in freely-available language programs provided by non-profit organizations remain unexplored. Taking a case study approach, this research examines how podcasting enhances the English learning experiences of students in an English as a Second Language (ESL) course offered by a non-profit organization that provides community services to immigrants in Canada. This chapter discusses instructional and organizational benefits as well as the challenges of applying podcasts in language training. By triangulating the experiences of the students, instructor, and program coordinators, we are able to examine the effectiveness of such a program and offer recommendations for similar programs in the future.

BACKGROUND

Technology and Language Learning

Although podcasting is a relatively new technology, the use of computer technologies has a relatively long tradition in education (Collis & Moonen, 2001), including language education. Computer-Assisted Language Learning dates back to the early 1960s when simple repetition exercises were used in language education (Levy, 1997) as a direct result of behaviorism. In the 1970s and 1980s Computer-Assisted Language Learning attempted to follow the communicative approach, albeit without success (Bax, 2003). "Integrative Computer-Assisted Language Learning" (Warschauer & Healey, 1998), which originated in the 1990s and is still prevalent today (Ranalli, 2008), endeavored to include cultural contexts and to foster social interaction. These changes are the result of two forces: the rapid evolution of techology and the shifts in language acquisition theory. Meaningful social interaction (e.g., Long & Crookes, 1992) underpins current theories of language acquisition; therefore, this project adds to the extant body of research on the use of computer and online technologies in language acquisition by providing a contextualized understanding of an accessible learning tool, podcasting, and investigating its pedagogical feasibility for increasing student participation and interaction.

SETTING THE STAGE

Communication Apprehension and Language Learning

As may be the case for students in general, language learners are prone to experiencing anxiety. Communication apprehension, an important factor affecting students' participation and interaction in learning environments, is a key concept informing this case study. McCroskey (1977) defined communication apprehension as "an anxiety syndrome associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (p. 28). Although there are many types of communication apprehension, oral communication apprehension is the most common and has been shown to affect at least 15 to 20% of students (McCroskey, 1977). Since language learning classes necessarily involve oral participation, it is reasonable to expect that some students will experience communication apprehension in such courses.

The effects of communication apprehension can be quite negative for learners. Some evidence suggests that classroom communication apprehension does not affect academic performance (Olaniran & Stewart, 1996). However, longitudinal data indicate that students with high communication apprehension are at risk of dropping out of school, even though their grades do not differ significantly from those with low communication apprehension (Ericson & Gardner, 1992). It is, then, reasonable to expect some second language learners to fit this profile of being at risk.

Communication apprehension also plays a critical role in students' second language acquisition (McCann, Hecht, & Ribeau, 1986). Having high communication apprehension has been shown to have negative effects for individuals in a variety of cultures (McCroskey, 2009). Therefore McCroskey, Fayer, and Richmond (1985) argued that language instructors must address the communication apprehension of different types of students in order to facilitate second language acquisition. In doing so, one must keep in mind that individuals who experience communication apprehension in their native language also experience communication apprehension in their second language (Jung & McCroskey, 2004), and students' level of communication apprehension in their first language has been found to set a baseline for their level of communication apprehension in a second language (McCroskey, Gudykunst, &

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