

Chapter 27

Addressing Cross– Linguistic Influence and Related Cultural Factors Using Computer–Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this research, a work in progress, is to address areas in second/foreign language acquisition prone to cross-linguistic influence, and to examine related cultural factors. More specifically, the authors aim to identify such areas, map available knowledge in this respect using ontological engineering methodology, and devise appropriate teaching strategies and learning scenarios to help overcome cross-linguistic influence with the help of computer-assisted language learning systems. The authors have been working mainly with Japanese-speaking students of English and first-year university English-speaking students of French. In this chapter, the authors describe culture in relation to foreign language learning, cross-linguistic influence, their cultural framework as well as ontological engineering methodology. They demonstrate their work with examples of the use of modals by Japanese students/speakers of English. They further provide an illustration of ontological modeling in addition to a basic simulation of how a CALL system based on an ontology could potentially work.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is imbued with culture. When people communicate, they do so in relation to one another, as well as in relation to prior experience. In other words, their voice is not only individual, but collective: they regularly express the knowledge and social patterns accepted within their native community (Kramsch, 1993).

This chapter discusses research work in progress. We address the issue of cross-linguistic influence and related cultural factors while using computer-assisted language learning (CALL) in an attempt to help overcome such influence through the use of teaching strategies and learning scenarios aimed at students of English and French as a second / foreign language. Cross-linguistic influence is a phenomenon that, simply put, can be observed when, namely in the process of language acquisition, speakers use skills that can be traced to their native language (or another language they might have learned) when using a second, third or foreign language. For the sake of simplicity, in the course of this chapter, we shall term the target language, or the one being taught / learned, as L2, and the native language as L1. When cross-linguistic influence expresses itself in the form of errors, this is also labeled interference. Interference may appear linguistic in nature, yet cultural differences often underlie the phenomenon. Indeed, language and culture are intrinsically linked, and the process of acquiring L2 is also one of coming into contact with the culture of those people using this L2 (Byram 1988; Kramsch 1993; O'Dowd 2003; Lomicka 2006).

We thus seek to identify sources of interference and related cultural factors, and to map knowledge to this effect using ontological engineering methodology, which can then serve as a foundation for articulating teaching strategies and learning scenarios, as well as creating CALL applications. The student population we have been working with is composed of Canadian native speakers learning French and English, and Japanese native speakers

learning English, all of them enrolled in first-year university level language classes.

We begin by providing a brief outline of culture within language education, an explanation of cross-linguistic influence, of our current cultural framework, of our research goals and of ontological engineering methodology. We illustrate the nature of our work through the example of modals in the context of English learning in Japan. We end with a succinct illustration of ontological modeling and a basic simulation of how a CALL system based on an ontology (a map of relevant knowledge) could potentially work.

CULTURE IN SECOND / FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING / LEARNING

Dubreil (2006) outlines how culture has been approached in L2 education. Until the 1960's, it seems that culture was essentially included in the curriculum in the form of literature presented in textbooks. At the end of the 60's and for most of the latter half of the last century, educators were urged to move beyond what was termed Culture—with a big “C”—as manifested through civilization's accomplishments in literature, the fine arts, social institutions, history, geography and politics, and consider culture—with a small “c”—as expressed in lifestyles, or the habits and patterns of daily living.

With the turn of the millennium, culture in L2 education appears to take on a more fluid definition. Culture (regardless of capitalization) expresses itself through discourse. In other words, cultural reality is expressed, embodied and symbolized through language (Kramsch 1998). As such, culture is understood to have more to do with human interaction, in an encounter of native and target cultures being juxtaposed, potentially compared, and reflected upon. The theories underlying this view have led professional associations to provide members with guidelines for the teaching of culture in the L2 classroom, not only

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