Chapter 12
New Trends in ICTs and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores information communication technologies (ICTs) (e.g., computer-mediated communication) and the implications for use in language learning and second language learning (L2). Further, the chapter presents culture and new trends in ICTs for L2 learning. Specific modality, challenges, and issues for future considerations in L2 learning are discussed. The chapter argues for the need to understand culture and contextual appropriateness of L2 learning in ICT environments. Finally the chapter contends that ICTs are best relegated as a supplemental role or tools, rather than as an outright substitute for traditional L2 learning and curricula.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing role of technology in fabrics of our lives is noteworthy. Technology, the likes of computer-mediated communication (CMC), is changing the way and where learning occurs. E-learning is one direct result of the technology revolution that is continuously taking place. One

of the appealing aspects of communication technologies in learning is the ability to use CMC to offer courses in both asynchronous and synchronous environments (Olaniran, 2009). Specifically, CMC is considered an important tool for learning because it facilitates interaction and active learning (Driscoll, 2000; Kanuka & Garrison, 2004; Olaniran, 2004).

One area of learning that is gaining increased traction with communication technology is lan-

guage learning or second language learning (i.e., L2). With communication technology students or L2 learners are able to interact with speakers of target languages at convenience (Egorov, Jantassova, & Churchill, 2007). Technologies allow people to communicate either one-on-one or one-to-many while allowing teachers to use technology to disseminate curricula or assist instruction. In an earlier work the author addressed the question of whether language, especially new language learning, can be facilitated by CMC especially when accounting for culture? After all, it is not sufficient to learn just the rudiments of a language; instead, the contextual appropriateness of a language is what determines the competency at which a second language (L2) learner will be judged and evaluated. Hence this chapter revisits this questions and attempts to present new trends in L2 learning with technologies.

It has been argued that the contextual appropriateness of L2 reinforces the importance of culture in language learning (Olaniran, 2009). To this end, Garrett (2009a) identifies two factors that are crucial to contextual appropriateness of technology in language learning. First that *language context "*be correct, authentic and appropriate" (p. 709). Second, that the technology or program run as it should without problems or crashing (Garrett, 2009a). Both of these are what Garrett (2009a) called absolute in language learning and technology. Garrett (2009a) argued that a technology package or platform that is presumed inadequate by one teacher may be deemed appropriate by another. She went on to claim that no reviewer of a particular technology package for language learning can establish a rating that is equally valid for all users regardless of their technological expertise. In essence, Garrett (2009a) indirectly acknowledges the role of other variables, especially culture and contexts for L2 learning in technology environments. Thus, culture plays an important role in language learning. However, what is not certain is whether anything has changed and if so to what ends? It is the goal of this chapter to

identify newer trends in L2 learning to answer the proposed question. First however is a general review of relevant literature.

CULTURE AND LANGUAGE IN ONLINE ENVIRONMENTS & CMC

The challenge of culture in e-learning environments has been identified (Olaniran, 2006a). Culture introduces certain complexities to learning as a whole and specifically to second language (L2) comprehension with communication technologies. To this end, a number of scholars have called for the importance of considering culture and language when designing curriculum for international students in computer environments (Morse, 2003, Olaniran, 2007, 2007; Osman & Herring, 2007; Patsula, 2002; Usun, 2004). Addressing L2 learning or culture will be incomplete without addressing the dimensions of cultural variability, which offers a way to identify how culture influences human communication interaction and in particular L2 learning. Furthermore, dimensions of cultural variability helps to draw implications for L2 learning in technology environments. Following is a discussion of the dimensions of cultural variability proposed by Geert Hoftede and is often used to explain culture.

Dimensions of Cultural Variability

Originally, there are four dimensions of cultural variability consisting of: uncertainty avoidance, individualism, power distance, and masculinity (Hofstede, 1980, 2001; see also Olaniran, 2007). These four categories result from data collected from fifty countries and three world regions (Hofstede, 1980). Past research has used these four dimensions to evaluate cultural differences and their effects on uncertainty reduction in intercultural communication encounters (Gudykunst, Chua & Gray, 1987, Olaniran, 1996, 2004; Roach & Olaniran, 2001).

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