

Technology and Task-based Approach in ELT



Literature

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ABSTRACT

The society is going through a major paradigm shift from Industrial age to Information age. The shift has its natural impact on the field of education. The traditional long lecture format of teaching needs a reviewing in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) paradigm nobody can predict the future development. But we know for sure that the technology will be present also in education. We have found many significant indicators that ICT changes the educational environment and influences the teaching methods. Teaching and learning of language are crucial at all levels. Teachers teach language to students using different techniques. The latest digital technologies help the students to learn the language easily and efficiently. These digital technologies are both potential and fragile. The potentiality of the technology lands many opportunities and the fragility of it lands many challenges. This paper is an academic as well as a practical expression of the commitment of academia to be sensitive to and involved in the issues of Technology enabled English Teaching on the one hand, and to use Task-based approach in ELT.

Introduction

The significance of English Language Teaching (ELT) has been with us for many years and it continues to grow, by the Internet. Graddol's study (2000) suggests that in the year 2000 there were about a billion English learners - but a decade later, the numbers will have doubled. There are more non-native than native users of the language and diversity of context in terms of learners' age, nationality, learning background etcetera has become a defining characteristic of ELT today. It is fair to assert that the growth of the Internet has facilitated the growth of the English language and that this has occurred at a time when computers are no longer the exclusive domain of the dedicated few, but rather widely available to many. Warchauer (2002) has discussed this change in terms of conflicts between local identities and the globalization of the English language

The Internet and the rise of computer-mediated communication in particular have reshaped the uses of computers for language learning. The recent shift to global information-based economies means that students will need to learn how to deal with large amounts of information and have to be able to communicate across languages and cultures. At the same time, the role of the teacher has changed as well. Teachers are not the only source of information any more, but act as facilitators so that students can actively interpret and organize the information they are given, fitting it into prior knowledge. Students have become active participants in learning and are encouraged to be explorers and creators of language rather than passive recipients of it. Technological innovations have gone hand-in-hand with the growth of English and are changing the way in which we communicate, work, trade, entertain and learn and it is non-native users of English, frequently from Asian countries, who are arguably, at the heart of this.

Computers in ELT

To understand the impact that computers are currently having on ELT it is firstly necessary to step back and consider how their role has developed.

Firstly, computer assisted language learning developed and concerned itself with the pedagogical applications of the technology. Students used the computer to develop and practice their English. Secondly, the use of computers for assisting and understanding of what constitutes the English language and how it works. Corpus linguistics and the arrival of lexis as an item to be included within the syllabus began in the 1980s with Sinclair (1987) and others, and work of this type continues today. One positive outcome from all this has been the arrival of a range of publications for teachers and students - such material can now be based on how the language is actually used rather than what the traditional grammar book prescribes. The work of Biber et al. (1999) is particularly useful; they found, for example that the modal verb 'may' is hardly ever used in spoken language for permission! For students, resource publications such as McCarthy and O'Dell (1994) provide good practice of such real language.

Computers can/will never substitute teachers but they offer new opportunities for better language practice. They may actually make the process of language learning significantly richer and play a key role in the reform of a country's educational system. The next generation of students will feel a lot more confident with information technology than we do. As a result, they will also be able to use the Internet to communicate more effectively, practice language skills more thoroughly and solve language learning problems more easily.

The Internet and a changing language

The Internet is changing the language partly because it gives rise to new vocabulary, but more importantly because the medium and its users drive the language in certain directions (Crystal, 2001). The following verbs are just one illustration of the influences on vocabulary, they all either meant different things, or did not exist, only a few year ago; to ... Email, text, boot, chat, surf, bookmark, e-shop, Google, etc. More fundamentally, the Internet is changing language, a 'Netspeak' and a 'Netiquette' is emerging, and the former refers to a language variant, the latter to the conventions which surround its use. This changing language is rapidly evolving and does not have a long history to inform syllabus designers and ELT practitioners. Emails do not have, and arguably do not need, to follow punctuation conventions. Typos and spelling mistakes are also, depending on context, more acceptable with this medium.

The Internet, as these simple examples show, is clearly impacting upon the ways in which we use language and what constitutes language. And this rapid and largely uncharted evolution of language is surely set to continue unabated - like it or loathe it we all, especially as language teachers, have to come to terms with it.

Implications

Technology is developing so rapidly that it can often be difficult or even overwhelming to harness. In order to make effective use of new technologies, teachers must thus take a step back and focus on some basic pedagogical requirements. The linguistic nature of online communication is desirable for promoting language learning. The use of electronic discourse tends to be more lexically and syntactically more complex than oral discourse and features a broad range of linguistic functions beneficial for language learning. Another possible reason for using the Internet is that it creates optimal conditions for learning to write, since it provides an authentic audience for written communication. A third possible reason is that it can increase students' motivation. Learning computer skills is essential to students' future success; this reason suggests that it is not only a matter of using the Internet to learn English but also of learning English to be able to function well on the Internet.

There are so many ways to integrate the Internet into classroom instruction, it is important for the teacher to clarify his or her

goals. The teacher may want to choose Internet applications which will be most useful to them outside of the classroom, with activities structured so that students steadily gain mastery of more skills. Greater involvement on the teacher's part in creating learning activities that create sufficient linguistic and cognitive demands on the student is needed to get maximum benefit from Internet exchanges.

This teacher intervention is most successful when it brings about activities and projects that are well-integrated into the course curriculum as a whole. The e-mail classroom connections seem sufficiently complex and time-consuming that if there are goals beyond merely having each student send a letter to a person at a distant school. When the e-mail classroom connection processes are truly integrated into the ongoing structure of homework and classroom interaction, then the results can be educationally transforming.

The teacher can work with students to create research questions which are then investigated in collaboration with foreign partners. Students and long-distant partners can work collaboratively on publications. Teachers need to provide support sufficient to prevent students from being overwhelmed by difficulties. This kind of support can take numerous forms: creating detailed handouts that students can refer to when class is finished and the teacher's personal help is not accessible; building technology training sessions into the class schedule, not only in the beginning but on an ongoing basis; working with the computer center to set up log-on systems and other procedures which are as simple and intuitive as possible; assigning students to work in pairs or groups, both in and out of the lab, so that they can provide assistance to each other; providing details to the students about how and when they can get assistance from technology specialists or others on campus outside of class; and being available to help students at times when they are most likely to need it.

Network-based teaching involves a number of special complexities. It will be difficult, indeed, for a teacher to be fully aware of the impact of these complexities without regular consultation with students. This might involve anonymous surveys, class discussions, or similar means of involving students in expressing their opinions about the process of implementing technologies. A situation which is based on communication between students but in which the students have little say over the topics or outcomes of that communication is not likely to lead to the kind of atmosphere optimal for language learning.

Involving students in determining the class direction does not imply a passive role for teachers. Teachers' contributions in a learner-centered, network-enhanced classroom include coordinating group planning, focusing students' attention on linguistic aspects of computer mediated texts, helping students gain meta-linguistic awareness of genres and discourses, and assisting students in developing appropriate learning strategies.

As students need to understand the information that is communicated to them, they need the opportunity to practice communicating themselves incorporate cooperative learning activities into your classroom and allow students to work together to accomplish instructional goals. When students are communicating with you or each other, consider both the form and comprehensibility of their messages. Technology provides many opportunities for students to interact with fellow classmates or real-life audiences outside of their own classroom, city, or even country. Students can interact with classmates by working on technology activities together, such as working on a software program in pairs, writing and revising a story with a partner, or creating an "electronic book report" using multimedia software such as PowerPoint. In all of these instances, students benefit from one another's knowledge, practice their verbal skills conversing with one another. Making learning authentic has two primary benefits. First, learning that is authentic is more likely to equip students for English communication in "the real world." Second, students are more likely to engage actively in classroom activities that they see as relevant to their own lives or the real world.

Students learn English only through scripted dialogues and Fill-in-the-blank grammar exercises in the classroom is not enough. Students needed to interact in the classroom more like they would under real-life circumstances. The Web is an endless source of authentic English language communication. Students can go to the Web to listen to sound bytes of authentic conversations on varying topics, watch video clips of current news headlines, or listen to popular American music. The Internet also provides endless opportunities for spontaneous communication through such Web-based tools as e-mail, chat, or videoconferencing technology. The computer makes it an ideal tool to help second language learners feel sufficiently secure to make and correct their own errors without embarrassment or anxiety.

Task based approach and Technological Classroom

A task-based approach is very much process-orientated because it focuses on "learning through doing" i.e. on tasks. Tasks mean different things to different people and the work of Ellis (2003) has been particularly helpful in documenting and discussing these issues. It is useful to distinguish between pedagogic and authentic tasks. In the case of the former, students are asked to do things which are unlikely to occur outside the classroom, information gap activities or ordering scrambled sentences are examples of these. With authentic tasks students are asked to complete activities which are likely to be carried out in real life once the student has left the classroom.

The approach can be implemented at various levels - it is really about encouraging learners to do useful, interesting and meaningful activities with language and this can be applied in a range of contexts. Indeed, the various levels at which task-based approaches can be delivered. Computers are introduced into the ELT curriculum, and then task-based approaches become arguably the only way to effectively take into account the changes in language.

Task-based approach represent is very easy to devise simple, achievable tasks which encourage students to use email to communicate with each other, their tutors and the wider world; likewise it is not difficult to find useful meaningful ways in which students' access and even post information on the web. The needs of the learners and the contexts in which they work will ultimately determine the most appropriate tasks.

Jarvis (2004, 2003, 2001) for example provides extensive accounts of how such thoughts can be realized with English for Academic Purposes students. This could involve accessing web sites to note and decide upon the best places to visit, using the web and email to arrange flight bookings to and from the city, negotiating amongst them (via email etc. There are hundreds of task-based activities across the globe which involves students using computers to access information and to communicate with others. The task is specified and students generate appropriate language, with help as required. Success is measured by the extent to which the task is successfully completed and the language is viewed as the tool to achieve the ends; it is not prescribed. The learners are viewed as working with tools which belong to them as much as to anyone else.

Conclusion

Computers are, on the one hand, impacting on the way in which we define our subject matter and, on the other hand, are also impacting upon the English language, upon the subject matter itself. Task-based approaches and represents challenges for everyone involved in ELT as it is tied up with the new age. Computers have now become much more than a tool or a tutor for developing language skills. This traditional distinction (Levy, 1997) would no longer seem adequate. Warschauer and Healey (1998) have observed that it is now less a question of the role of computers in the language classroom and more a question of the role of the language classroom in an information technology society.

Language teaching is clearly entering a new and largely unexplored phase. Warschauer and Kern (2000) have identified this as a "socio cognitive phase" where, unlike in previous phases,

students interact with each other and the world via the computer. A great deal of work has focused on the value of computers in learning or second language acquisition and on the implications of the content of teaching itself, i.e. the syllabus. Even less consideration seems to have been given to how we see, define or classify our learners.

A task-based syllabus offers a way forward and practitioners will need to reflect upon what is achievable within their own

contexts. In addressing these challenges it clearly needs to develop a sense in which English belongs to the students and their fellow countrymen and women just as much as anyone else and to do this it is necessary to avoid classifying the vast majority of users as “foreign” or “second” language learners. ELT would seem to be at a crossroads and it is heartening to see that much of the force for change is coming from, practitioners and students non-native speakers.

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