



A Multicultural Context and ICT: Adopt and/or Adapt the Educational Software to the Course of FFL?

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Abstract

Could ICT found “a new technological and cultural mythology (in Roland Barthes’s sense)?” [Saussan, 2012, p.9]. It is the question that concerns the world of education nowadays. Among the technological tools used in teaching/learning, the applications and foreign languages educational software, such as digital, educational and cultural products, concretise fundamental didactic problems in various contexts of use. We notice that these tools in “universalist tendency” aim at a wide range of public users and different nations, at the geographical level, which are very heterogeneous in language and in culture such as is the case of the Iranian multicultural context. Through the study of the problems of use of these digital tools in the Iranian multicultural context, we want to present questions at the same time that are appropriate to the Iranian context and that transverse the problem of the cultural content of the applications and software of French as Foreign Language (FFL). The results of our experiment reveal that the linguistic and comprehension difficulties, related to cultural differences, often created in the Iranian learner a profound feeling of incomprehension of “the other” and negative representation when using these tools, that have the “universalist tendency,” leaving the Iranian learner with the heavy task of building a cultural/intercultural skill by himself. This article’s objective is to study the adaptation of the cultural content of these digital tools in the Iranian multicultural context. It would thus be necessary to envisage in these tools jointly both a contextualized pedagogy, where the technological potential should be in the service of the learning, with a shaping of the intercultural content.

1. Introduction

New technologies are at present an integral part of the courses of foreign languages. Among these educational aids are educational software and applications. We noticed that there is a limited number of educational software, and in recent years, applications (Android or iOS) which aim at particular skills in foreign language (oral understanding and production). It is necessary to be reminded that there is no Iranian production that aims at the Iranian learners of the foreign languages. So, Iranian users are obliged to use “*multilingual and universalist*” imported software or applications such as “*Tell me more, Rosetta Stone, Easy Talk, Babbel, French in a month or Next Web Generation*” that are designed to teach various foreign languages (English, French, German, etc.) to any community. Their purpose is “*to offer to the learners the other ways to reach the foreign language and culture*” [Guichon & Soubrié, 2013, p.140]. The educational software and applications of the foreign languages are more and more sophisticated and give many educational and technological possibilities, for example, the personal rhythm, simulations etc. But, do these universalist educational software consider the characteristics of the cultural contexts of usage?

2. The activities and the proposed exercises

In terms of the methodological approach, linguistic conception and interactivity of the tasks, we can say that these “*ready-for-use*” educational software with a “*universalist tendency*” remain very poor at the intercultural level, because, mostly, they are based on an inconsistent educational track of the themes and the cultural and intercultural contents and they follow a formal approach of the foreign language (lexicon). The tasks based on authentic resources of cultural elements of the learners in foreign language are very limited or do not exist. In the majority of the software of the FFL on the market, a real knowledge, not stereotyped by the French culture, society and people is not presented. We notice the presence of the models of foreign culture “*often refer to forms of simplism*” [Abdallah-Pretceille, 2010, p.12] to teaching/learning.

The results of our experiment shows that the introduction of the educational software as a digital tool, in a course of the FFL in face-to-face, and mediatized with the essential objective being the teaching of the French language and culture, is perceived well by the learners. The learners confirmed at the end of training that the multimedia possibility (video, images, etc.) is advantageous for the use of the software, but, the software in use did not allow our learners to build an intercultural skill (a kind of



raising of awareness (sensitization) of “*the other*”) by proposing interesting and rewarding activities that take advantage of the multimedia of the IT tool.

3. Is it necessary to know the cultural context of use?

It is necessary to remember that there are cultural themes of foreign language which can shock and annoy the Iranian learners because they estimate them in contradiction with their moral and religious convictions. Therefore, the anthropological culture of the foreign language presented in multimedia (image, video etc.) by the software can strike the sensibility of the learners. Indeed, what is culturally effective and rewarding somewhere else can be unsuitable for the Iranian multicultural context rooted in tradition and religion. So, in the first phase of integration of these tools, it is necessary to know the cultural context which addresses an application or software (of FFL) in order to aim towards the learner’s culture which allows for the introduction of suitable themes.

4. Adoption and/or adaptation?

Our experiment and also our analysis made during our research show that the majority of the software of FFL, in their “*universalist*” forms in particular, cannot be adopted to the Iranian sociocultural context. The “*universalist*” educational software (of the FFL), is intended by its nature to address all type of learners by aspiring adaptation to every social and cultural context: we learn French with the same software as if we were German, or as if we were Iranian. So, for the Iranian learner, would the adoption of the imported educational software be the effective way to learn a foreign language?

Blanchet & Chardenet [2011], believe that the didactics and teaching aids of foreign languages have to be contextualized to meet the needs of various contexts. Then, to contextualize, it is necessary to build foreign language educational software which take into account the sociolinguistic and sociocultural characteristics of the Iranian learners/users also leaning on their representations and their local and national cultures. We propose a sociocultural and intercultural adaptation of the educational software (of the FFL) for the Iranian learners.

4.1. A sociocultural adaptation

We noticed that in the cultural speech of educational software of the FFL with “*universalist tendency*” used in the Iranian cultural context there exists a real gap. While the recent software of the FLE are generally favorable to a communicative and cultural approach of foreign language, we perceived that no question existed for the adaptation of this tool to the peculiarities of the Iranian multicultural context, their sociocultural dimensions and its impact on the construction and the development of the multilingual and multicultural directory of the Iranian learners. We have seen very well that in the software of the FLE used, as in most of the existing software on the ground, the culture of the Iranian students does not exist. It is to underline that the cultural theme is difficult to treat and apprehend for an Iranian student who has no cultural relation or not much cultural resemblance with the Occidental culture (for example, French people and the French culture).

The adaptation of the software has to take into account the references of the everyday life of the learner and present their situations of communication in foreign language, for example, in places which are familiar to them. The students must be able to recognize of whom and what the software speaks. The software has to adapt to the reality of the target learners, in their sociocultural life context. The sociocultural elements of the Iranian context must not be considered as an obstacle, but as a place of source and departure. This support on the reference context of the students as the engaging-facilitator of the learning by the software serves “*as a springboard towards the target language, that it is valued, that we look for the closenesses or for the differences with the target language*” [Larray, 2010, p. 242]. Thus, the consideration of the social, familial and daily context of the Iranian learners, their centers of interest, is a stake-key in the success of the CALL.

4.2. From identity to intercultural adaptation

From the cultural point of view, neither the French/Francophone culture nor the Iranian culture(s) are presented through the software used in the experimentation. The students learned nothing on the everyday life of the French/Francophone people, their lifestyles, habits, social practices, etc. The results of the research revealed that the students using the software of the FLE had at the end of the training no intercultural skill, a way of entering into a relationship with the “*other one*.” Indeed the software cannot answer the need of the “*inter*” which implies a cultural comparison (L1 and L2), a return on the culture of the Iranian learners what allows them to read what is “*a contest of his own situation*” [Berthelot, 2011, p. 53]. The maternal culture of the Iranian learners constitutes an essential factor to take into account for the success of the learning of a foreign language such as French. The mediatized learning for the majority of them was an emotional experience and the good progress of



which required to lean first of all on their culture to avoid any culture shock. We notice a big absence of any cultural data concerning, for example, the daily practices of the Iranians, the cultural and religious events in the country which are shaped by identity expression.

The results showed how much the use of educational software of the FLE and the multimedia documents can convey representations, and thus a simple exhibition in the foreign language and culture is not sufficient to cause changes or evolution of the representations for the students. Because, the role of the representations in the process of learning of a foreign language is immense, "*They play on the affectivity, who oblige to take a stand towards the values and who take root in our cognitive long-term structure*" [Zajac, 2010, p. 197]. The software of foreign language should start with familiar representations of the learner/user in order to develop his representations towards the otherness and create an intercultural dialogue. The educational contents of software (authentic documents, dialogues, etc.) should bring the Iranian learner to an understanding of the foreign culture (for example, French culture) but also to wonder about his own local and national culture. Entirely connected to the intercultural problem, the identity question is a strong stake in the adaptation of educational software to the Iranian multicultural context and institutional constraints.

We can say that the software does not address an anonymous learner without identity or learners of the same identity. It is so; the educational software for foreign language should be a socio-intercultural catalyst allowing for the coordination of a multitude of cultural and intercultural links (L1 and L2).

5. Conclusion

The research shows that the educational software (of the FFL) with a "*universalist tendency*" does not present a cultural image of the culture(s) of the Iranian learners. We notice the methodological absence of an intercultural approach in the educational software used in the experiment. The conversations with the students reveal the problems of cultural incomprehension which the students met during the use of the software. The results of the experiment confirm that the linguistic difficulties, related to the cultural estrangement, often created in the Iranian learner a profound feeling of incomprehension of the "*other one*," insecurity in front of this strangeness and thus a negative representation when he/she used the software. It is necessary that this panorama concerning the local and national culture of the Iranian learners reveals the advantages of the presence of the intercultural elements in a teaching aid and to develop technological tools allowing an intercultural approach for the Iranian multicultural and multilingual context. Thenceforth, the objective is not to propose educational activities with the foreign culture in the educational languages software but to introduce an intercultural didactic (of the culture of the learner towards the foreign culture) allowing the mutual understanding and not only descriptions of the cultural elements.

By considering the sociocultural heterogeneous context of the Iranian learners, we believe that they need at first, in the learning of a foreign language, to evolve in their local/national identity as well as in the "*other*." This research brings us the understanding of representations of the students in front of foreign language software that the educational software should:

- 1) Put the maternal culture of the Iranian learners at the center of the process of learning a foreign language and culture. It is so; the starting point of the learning begins with their identity and their culture in foreign language.
- 2) Connect the steps of the linguistic learning mediatized in the steps of the mediatized intercultural learning.

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