

Strategies for Italian Deaf Learners

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Abstract

This paper describes language teaching and learning methodologies adopted in the Italian funded FIRB-VISEL project, aimed at creating a Deaf-centered E-Learning Environment (DELE). DELE is an interactive e-learning environment where adult deaf people (both using sign language or not as their primary mean of communication) can improve their literacy skills. Existing research has revealed that deaf people have typical problems in the acquisition of written language and in the development of linguistic skills. The risk of addressing the literacy problems of deaf people in a text-based e-learning environment is to lose learner's motivation during navigation, for which often the knowledge of the written language is a prerequisite. Therefore the DELE we are working on aims to present language learning as an interactive and dynamic process in which new knowledge is most fruitfully acquired when learners can explore materials and resources flexibly. For the implementation of DELE, we have incorporated some concepts such as CLIL, web accessibility, text easification, embodiment and storytelling. In the original form, CLIL refers to teaching in content areas such as science, history or math, to learners through a foreign language. In our environment we aim to improve the linguistic skills of deaf people in their local language (Italian) focusing on the written language. The deaf users are immersed in a metaphorical environment in the form of a "university campus". In this environment, our CLIL "subject" is "The History of the Written Language", presented as an academic course: the texts are the subject of the course and there's a virtual final exam allowing the student to pursue the educational path. We will thus present the way in which CLIL principles can be used to create innovative e-learning environments with increased visual facilities, whose possibilities could go beyond deaf accessibility and learning.