

Using Computer-animated Materials to Assess and Improve Spoken Communication Skills

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Abstract

The theme of the paper is using digital technologies to assess and improve the spoken communication skills of English as a Second Language (ESL) students during their UK study abroad experience. A Computer Animated Production Task (CAPT) was designed for this investigation and has a specific focus on the language of requests and apologies. It offers an interactive, audio-visual dimension to oral practice which is lacking in standard published material.

This research intends to investigate whether the CAPT can effectively elicit authentic, albeit simulated, non-native speaker speech samples. In addition its effectiveness as a stimulating learning tool given the trends for many learners to be involved in gaming and 3D worlds as a social activity outside of the classroom and calls for practitioners to embrace digital technologies inside it, are also analysed. The presentation will demonstrate the types of animations possible with the software, chosen for its accessibility, and intends to encourage even the technologically-shy practitioner.

The investigation employs a mixed method approach of stimulus-led oral and written Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs), supported by post activity student questionnaires. The data was captured from 45 undergraduate Chinese learners of English studying at a British Higher Education institution and assessed by 3 experienced native speaker EFL tutors on a 5-point Likert scale. The results indicate that the CAPT Task was able to stimulate responses which were assessed as being more 'satisfactory' than their written DCT counterparts. In addition, the students themselves found the activity both enjoyable and motivating and recommended it as a potential learning tool for developing their awareness of the two speech acts.