



A Binary Model for Future Language Learning through ICT

Dönercan Dönük
Mersin University (Turkey)
candonuk@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The current role of technology and its contributions to education is an issue that has received widespread recognition. For this reason, education in the broader sense is changing dimension. This change is felt most at language education, which is a field that benefits from technology both as a learning tool for the improvement of language skills and as a web-based support. However, despite the abundance of the language learning materials, ICT (Information and Communication Technology) cannot be used effectively for language teaching and learning. Teachers and students want to use internet as an easy and productive source of knowledge, but in most cases, they end up with no proper result that will meet the need of the learner for the unique classroom context. To Larsen Freeman & Freeman [1] language as a subject is being redefined again and again. This might be because of the fact that language cannot make its content or theories of learning constant as in other disciplines (p.150). It is a fact that second life for language learning is just a complementary process and that nothing can replace real teachers and real, dynamic classroom settings.

Although language learning at a distance is not something new, rapid improvements in technology have increased the need for online learning, which connects the learner on the synchronic and asynchronous grounds besides autonomous learning [2]. To Warschauer [3], according to some authorities, the role of the computer in education has been transferred from a tutor to a tool, which he states is certainly the case for L2 teaching and learning. With these issues on the agenda, this paper aims to introduce a new language learning model making use of technology in the form of virtual classrooms.

2. The Binary Model

2.1. Theoretical background

The model relies on the input enhancement and autonomous learning as the basic theories and aims to create environments for learners to improve their competencies. Related research point out the importance of two concepts: one of these concepts is input enhancement, which suggests that language learning can be realized only through exposure to a lot of input. It is commonly used by selecting more salient features of a second language in a way to facilitate acquisition [4], [5]. The suggestion by the theory can be adapted to second language learning as the continuous flood of instruction that can be used both at formal and informal settings.

The other concept is autonomous learning as a school of education that considers learners to be individuals, who are responsible for their own learning. Chapelle [6] states that many English teachers agree on the need for the use of language outside the classroom to support communicative competence [7] and social interaction [8]. Therefore, this binary model uses the ICT as an additional component of language learning to realize the acquisition of these two competencies. The model has binary poles in the form of teachers: the co-operation of virtual teachers and real teachers as suggested by blended learning. Since language learning requires a kind of systematization, the model proposes such a co-operation for more productive results.

Garcia-Ruiz et al. [9] point out that the educational setting was limited to the classroom before, but technology has changed the way practices in education are handled, and educational practices help expand the limits of the classroom (p. 236).

In line with this, the virtual teacher in the system is within the reach of the learner without time and place constraints, and the components of this web-based learning environment is designed parallel to the curriculum. Therefore, skill based activities and lessons can be conducted through this system. To Warschauer [3], language learning theory has been identified by a wide vision of the product desired and a renewed emphasis on the learning process. The focus being grammatical competence; and relatedly, communicative competence, the goal is not just formal knowledge, but the knowledge that can be used for meaningful interaction and agency [10]. Naturally, this brings about more emphasis on the classroom processes or more specifically, the combination of product and process [3].

2.2. Role assignment and course design of the model

The starting point of the model is based on the changing role assignments: There has been a shift in roles of the tutors, who used to be experts; there has also been a shift in the roles of the learners, who started to become content-creators and peer-supporters [11]. The model re-considers traditional language teaching, and the binary model program components are as follows:

Tutor roles

Unlike traditional classroom settings, which appoint the teacher to a central position, the virtual tutor works as the substitute teacher to the class teacher in this program. The class teacher acts as the primary source of information that follows the curriculum and guides the learner to the virtual tutor on this basis. On the other hand, virtual tutor is also a source of information, but the order of the courses and the access to the web page is



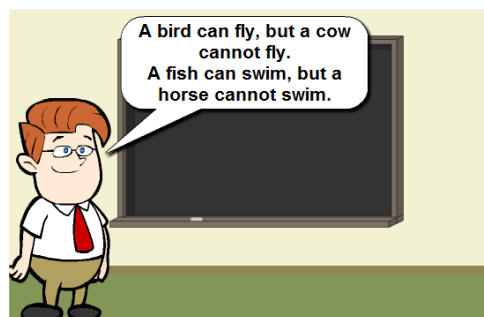
organized by the class teacher. The new trend towards teacher roles accommodates the class teacher at more impassive roles such as being facilitator, role model, and planner. Being information provider and material developer roles need more active involvements, and these roles are not solely assumed by the class teacher; the virtual tutor also acts as the helper.

The learning context and course design

Learning takes place in formal and informal settings. The formal settings realize the learning within a system as required by schooling. However, informal settings do not impose the learning at a specific place or time, but still sticks to the program determined by the class teacher. This makes the difference between random learning and systematic learning. The learner has been defined as constructivist, who can combine both learning systems, and form the knowledge through personal attempts. While constructing knowledge, the learner can go through enjoyable processes. Roed [12] states that as students have different behaviors in online environment compared with classroom setting, the dynamics of language alter to a great extent. This seems to eliminate the psychological barriers set between the teacher, and the learner who receives negative feedback. Berlanga et al. [13] proposes that by providing a tool for prompt formative feedback, it is possible to eliminate tutor intervention, and that learners will benefit if they are informed about the content of the key concepts within the objectives and compare this with the knowledge of the peers. Besides, Engwall & Balter [14] states that virtual tutors provide more opportunities than impersonal softwares as they make the students engaged, communication-oriented and efficient with their different feedback types. The course of the virtual teacher has been formed through a web 2.0 tool (see [16]), which enables the creation of animations among many others that can be used for second life. The course is based on A1 level young learners. The steps designed are as follows:

1. The objective of the course is to teach 'can' for ability. The teacher presents the grammar point in a context. The traditional PPP (Presentation, Practice and Production) steps are followed. The teacher presents a text that includes the grammar item. (S)he focuses on the grammar point in the context.
2. She asks some questions to elicit the meaning comprehension.
3. The teacher asks some concept checking questions to understand if all students have mastered the form and meaning of 'can' as the modal for ability.
4. The teacher writes the form of 'can' on the board after the students have discovered all the forms and functions.
5. After the lesson, the teacher tells the students to have access to the web page and follow the instructions there.
6. The student is now free to choose the time and place for the revision and homework.
7. The student has access to the web page. The virtual teacher is ready to summarize the grammar point and present more examples.

Fig. 1. The screenshot of the course summary



8. The learner repeats the grammar point with the virtual teacher, and then answers the questions directed to him. The feedback is provided by the teacher for each response. Roed [12] states that tasks created via computers give chance to the students who do not want to participate in conversations in the class.



Fig. 2. The screenshot of the concept check questions



9. The virtual teacher responds as 'true' or 'false' according to the choice of the learner.

10. If the grammar point has not been mastered, the teacher can see it from the handouts of the learners. Besides, peers can share experiences on the page through their posts.

11. As the next step, the class teacher does a mini-grammar lesson based on the mistakes that learners had in the virtual classroom.

3. Conclusion

The model suggested in this paper combines classroom practice and technology in language teaching. Despite the availability and accessibility of many tools, the lack of a system in language teaching using ICT needs to be considered, and remedial solutions should be put into practice. The level of learners and the nature of the language item may not be appropriate for the virtual classrooms, and as Roed [12] states, such environments may not be advantageous for all levels; however, flexibility of the time and place for the learner make them invaluable tools for the class teacher. The model does not eliminate or underestimate the role of the class teacher; on the contrary, it places emphasis while assigning a secondary role to the virtual teacher.

Teachers of the future generations need to know about ICT and its components. These tools can be devised and implemented by the teachers; and for this to happen, there is a need for Initial Teacher Education Programs to include courses of technology integration into language classes. Despite a great deal of research and related publications, there is a lack of resources for how to prepare teachers for online language teaching and a guide for how to gain skills and competencies needed for this teaching environment [2]. Besides, Mattos [15] points out the importance of CALL modules in teacher development courses. If used in line with the classroom practice and under the control of the classroom teacher, virtual classrooms promise a bright language learning future, and ease the job of the language teacher as well as eliminating the clutter of work to a large extent.

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