Drama-Linguistics Based Story Narration for Young Learners

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Abstract

The digital age has introduced different learning styles and strategies that can be employed via ICT tools [1]. In this sense, the impact of these learning mechanisms can be seen in all walks of life, including language learning. This paper aims to describe an applied and tested course design that is based on drama in the form of games narrated as stories with the help of a computer and the internet. These games take their strength from linguistics which provides support for the discourse to be utilized in a context. Besides, the way stories told in the narrative form are sure to offer a story line and recurring vocabulary that enable the use of drama in language courses. The design makes a bridge between vocabulary, grammar and language functions which integrate the four skills in an authentic context for language teaching. In this way, integrative CALL, padded through linguistics, is facilitated as the language learning platform; drama helps as a tool to narrate the stories, and ICT and other Web 2.0 tools enhance the impact of these stories through the audio-visual effects.

Keywords: *ICT, web.2.0, linguistics, story narration, young learners, drama*

1. Introduction

Digital education has been on the agenda of educators for a long time in the synchronous and asynchronous modes, gaining momentum owing to the fact that 21[st]century is witnessing a pandemic time when all the educational contexts has had to rely on the use of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) tools heavily to fulfill the requirements of standard education. As a result of this unexpected phenomenon, people have realized that classical education can now be shaped into blended learning form, which "blends online learning with more traditional methods of learning and development" [2]. In this sense, the impact of these learning mechanisms can be seen in all walks of life, also including language learning and teaching.

As language educators, we are all aware of the fact that the core of our work lies in the humanness and human interaction, which can be facilitated through language. Apart from the natural conversation, this interaction is also produced by means of different ways such as social media tools, e-mailing, messaging with other media means and computer based communication. Therefore, when the world has commenced a new stride in human relations and interaction, it has become a must to meet this need on such digital platforms that digital natives [1] have got used to exploiting in life.

Under the circumstances, there remains the problem of making these non-human communication tools give the impression of human beings to live up to the expectations of people learning through virtual second lives since they are deprived of human touch and social interaction, an irreplaceable tool for language acquisition [3].

If it is considered that the core of foreign language teaching lies in the Initial Teacher Education programs, it can be seen that the need for teacher candidates to be endowed with such competences arises. In order to offer an additional practice to the current applications on the agenda of language educators, this paper aims to describe a course content based on drama in the form of games narrated as stories with the help of digital tools. This representation intends to incorporate separate disciplines such as linguistics and ICT into language teaching for the creation of a multidisciplinary approach.

2. Drama and language teaching

Drama as an art form serves for the purpose of language teaching as it involves any kind of verbal or non-verbal human activity to produce a speech. There are countless advantages of using drama in a language classroom:

1. Through the improvisations that people can "think themselves into" a role (Holden [4], p.1) and by doing "let's pretend" [4] types of activities, learners can transfer identity from one body to another as it often happens with children during play time. The timid and inhibited characters become more fluent and social thanks to the new role they wear through their avatars. Furthermore, as drama tasks are widely collaborative, learners can also develop their social competences [5].

2. The problem of mixed ability is decreased when drama tasks are used. While more fluent students can take the lead roles, the weaker students can make up for this lack of linguistic skill by means of other ways of language expression such as body language and general performance ability [6].

3. Drama facilitates the simulation of the outer life in the classroom. When learners encounter the real life situations, they are motivated to learn and practise more in real life tasks.

4. Drama increases motivation and class unity. Learning by doing releases negative energy accumulated due to staying impassive for long hours, and it boosts the positive energy in the learning environment.

5. As for the context of learning, such activities assign meaning to linguistic forms by enabling the learners to experience these forms in concrete cases, also enabling holistic learning from a context [5].

Teachers are expected to leave aside their perceptions of traditional craft (Zeichner,1983 cited in [7]), but assume some other roles to be more effective in their teaching. Teachers should realize that teaching is art [8], and that they cannot become ideal teachers without lifting the filter of "anxiety" [9] before their students. As [10] states, on condition that the teacher has enough information about the class and (s)he has good rapport with the students, all ages and all degrees of aptitude should be able to benefit from taking part in drama tasks if they are prepared effectively and feel confidence in their work.

3. Interaction of other disciplines with drama

This paper aims to lump three distinct disciplines under one practice, thus merging them in a homogeneous way:

Firstly, linguistics as an individual discipline makes its way to this application due to the fact that language itself is comprised of linguistic elements such as verbs, nouns and prepositions. Therefore, linguistics contributes to drama by means of morphology, syntax and semantics. To be more precise, word meanings [11] [12] and structures help the formation of larger units in a context, which eases holistic learning.

Secondly, ICT (Information and Communications Technology) is a great assistant, and as long as teachers can use web 2.0 tools for drama activities, they can commit new vocabulary and structures to the memory of learners through visuals, which often happens through incidental vocabulary "pick up" [13]. Moreover, digital games give the opportunity to remove affective barriers such as low motivation or lack of self-confidence, and facilitates interaction and willingness to grasp the chance [14].

Thirdly, drama as an art form boosts group dynamics and enhances learner concentration through play and games, and the abstraction of fantasy and imagination helps children gain cognitive maturity. Drama activities can be used in ELT in the forms of miming, simulation, role play, scripted play, script creation and improvisation among other applications [10].

4. Sample Drama Activities for Language Instruction

4. 1. A simulation narration to enhance cognitive maturity

This narration assigns new situations with themes such as nature, social life, health, etc. The students are seated, not looking at the teacher, who is telling a story with the help of dramatic narration.

> T: …………..A sudden **gust** lifts your bag and **drags** it.
> A sudden **strong wind** lifts your bag and **moves it by pulling it along a surface, usually the ground**. (The teacher repeats the sentence with the word's definition in the dictionary)
> (The teacher imitates the sound of a "gust", and makes the sound of something on the ground to pretend "to drag")
> T: You can hear the **impact of the rain drops**. You can hear the **force or action of one rain drop hitting another.** Now a drop has fallen onto your arm, and you **shiver**. Now a drop has fallen onto your arm and you **shake slightly because you are cold**.
> T: You **curl up** to keep warm. You **sit or lie in a position with your arms and legs close to your body** to keep warm……….

After the teacher finishes the narration, (s)he starts the online version of the story including some clues such as a gust of wind, and asks the learners to tell the story once more and act at the same time.

4. 2. A miming narration

The teacher uses pantomime technique to transfer the verb meaning. In the narration, the teacher makes use of action verb gifs or stick figures to teach verbs with a semantic relationship to focus on the meaning (e.g. verbs related with a restaurant: eat, drink, serve, order, pay, etc. or verbs of action such as walk, jog, leap, jump, etc.). The teacher mimes the verbs and asks the students to create a story, giving some clues in the game form such as a plate, a glass, etc.

4. 3. An improvisation narration through online games
The narration is conducted with the help of Web 2.0 tools with which the teacher has designed a game. The online game is started by the teacher, and when the learner clicks on the button and sees a picture or a story fragment, (s)he adds a new line to the narration. The improvisation is intended to make a meaningful product (e.g a story narration of a firefighter, or a migrating bird).

4. 4. A role play narration
The narration is conducted with a digital story including dialogues. The teacher starts the story created with a web 2.0 tool, and the learners are expected to fulfill their roles either through learning by heart or reading aloud.
……….Tini Mini is talking to the Mother Nature:
MN: Hunters often poach my animals illegally, and people are burning my rainforests.
TM: What happens to wild animals then?
MN: They die, and I cannot produce enough oxygen for you…………

4. 5. A script creation (see [15])

5. Conclusion
Drama is not a remedy for classes in which no other teaching system works. On the contrary, it should be handled as a golden key to open all the heavy doors into which conventional teaching methodology cannot move. Drama should be regarded as a teaching assistant and it should be incorporated into teaching in all phases of the 3 Ps (Presentation, Practice, Production). When merged with web 2.0 tools and linguistics, it becomes an invaluable classroom resource.

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