

The Use of Technology In-and-outside Second Language Classrooms: How, What, and Why?

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The growing popularity of computer-mediated communication (CMC) has given rise to virtually endless possibilities for second language (L2) teaching and learning. For one, computer-mediated tasks allow learners to work at their own pace, while maintaining the anonymity of the interlocutor(s). Such anonymity in turn lowers learners' anxiety level(s) and arouses their interest in participation, resulting in a higher level of learner autonomy (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2009). A case in point would be computer-mediated instruction of L2 writing using Wikis. More specifically, multiple participants can edit a piece of writing and leave comments outside of the second language (L2) classroom; instead, learners write extensively via such media as blogs. This has shown (e.g., Nonaka, 2011; Sato, 2008) to have a positive effect on increasing the learner's level motivation.

Indeed, digital materials (e.g., online web content and downloadable files) may overcome the boundaries of physical distance, given their accessibility and portability. What this suggests is that learners are more likely to be exposed to target language usage and its variations on a frequent basis. The Internet, for that matter, serves to expose learners to enormous amounts of authentic language samples produced by native speakers. As pointed out by Bhatia and Ritchie (2009), computer-mediated instruction can be interactive both synchronously and asynchronously. For example, interlocutors can provide corrective feedback and attest to learners' real-time responses in synchronous in online chatrooms. Blogs, Wikis, and many other video-sharing sites, on the other hand, offer asynchronous feedback.

This is not to say that CMC can take the place of face-to-face communication completely; nor is there any "one-size-fits-all" computer mediated task that is universally applicable across different communicative contexts. Research on transfer-appropriate processing (TAP) has shown that learner retrieval is the most efficient and accurate when similar psychological demands similar to those in the learning environment are available in the naturalistic, real-life communicative environment (Morris, Bransford, & Franks, 1977, as cited in Lightbown, 2008). Theoretically speaking, synchronous forms of computer-mediated instruction such as online text chatting should then be conducive to automatizing learners' L2 production skills in spontaneous communicative contexts, given that both the instructional and naturalistic contexts are "on-line" (i.e., real-time) in nature. These production skills include ways in which learners may express their meaning both efficiently and effectively, as well as how they may critically read between and beyond the lines (e.g., Blake, 2008, Richardson, 2006). In reality, however, CMC takes place mostly in the written mode rather than the oral mode, the latter of which online video chatting via *Skype* would be an example. While online video chats does involves oral interaction and therefore simulates face-to-face communication to some extent, it also differs from the latter in that the interlocutor gets only a limited range of paralinguistic cues such as body language and gestures.

Two issues with pedagogical implications, therefore, await to be addressed empirically: (1) whether CMC would make a difference to the psychological demands on the learner; (2) what

type(s) of language and/or language-related skills may be optimally improved via computer-mediated instruction. In other words, Until these issues are sufficiently explored, instructors should be extra careful in their selection of tasks in order that the nature of the chosen tasks would be consistent with the goal(s) of instruction.

As can be seen, computer-mediated instruction has some obvious benefits to offer. It is crucial, therefore, for the instructor to be aware of the range of CMC options available, and more importantly, the specific language or language-related skill(s) that each option or solution is likely to address.

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