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MP3 and the language teacher

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Summary

This paper focuses on some of the digital technologies emerging today like the personal computer, laptop, cell phone, iPod and the MP3 audio player. Compressed files in combination with emerging technologies in the 21st century present new opportunities for language teaching in a portable manner. Teachers and students do not need to be limited to a physical space as the classroom. The adoption of technologies may be a factor in career development and giving opportunity for the teacher to be part of a virtual network of professionals focused on high educational practices.

MP3 and the language teacher

The digital world of digital technology today seems to point in a direction that is higher storage capacity, and greater functionality integrated into smaller components. Today the laptop, cell phone and iPod have functions that have not had a few years ago. Among the features included in these technologies are the calendar, calculator, stopwatch, compass, clock, alarm, text messenger, email, internet access, Wi Fi, camera, radio and more. But for some people having all these functions at hand, and integrated in electronic components represent unnecessary luxuries. However, for language teachers interested in

innovation and using the new information technologies of communication, these technologies represent new pedagogical opportunities. (Godwin, 1999).

Emerging Technologies

Personally I find it surprising to see how emerging technologies can convert digital information that are nothing more than zeros and ones in visual and audio information. Those zeros and ones can be converted to images, music, voice, text, animation and video. It seems that there is in the market a new sophisticated electronic component with more and new features. These ongoing changes in the world of emerging technologies make it difficult to predict what will exist in five or ten years from now in the digital world. Even though is not always easy to predict the futures in this area, emerging technologies are gaining momentum in all the different fields of knowledge. Experts can't point out exactly all the advantages and disadvantages of certain technologies in the present, but their potential to change education in the future must be considered carefully today by educators (Lever-Duffy & McDonald , 2010, p. 369).

There are a two questions that I would like to addressed to language teachers. What do these technologies have to offer in the language teaching field? How can a language teacher enhance and apply these technologies in his particular and world context? In the opinion of McDonald Duffy and McDonald, technologies bring new teaching opportunities and become tools that support pedagogical practices. These authors note that students are the first to adapt the latest technologies and for this reason teachers should be ready and open to adopt and adapt technologies for teaching effectively (2010, p. 370). When

observing these changes, what should be the role of teachers? Do they have to wait for other in the teaching field to take the lead and wait and see how others innovate new teaching and learning practices using these new emerging technologies?

In my opinion, I would say this should not be the case for teacher with a desire to grow professionally and keep abreast with the changes that happen in our modern society. Language teachers can join the educational opportunities that technology provides and should look for ways to device materials that students can use with the technologies that are available to them and that can facilitate the way how, where, and when they practice or learn a language. It is very common to hear students in class who say they are interested in learning a language, but at the same time they say they do not have time to do it due to their busy schedules. Today, like the students, nobody seems to have the time for anything. Well, if this is the case, they should find the means and the appropriate way to achieve what they want to do. It “seems” that there is a need for more time, and perhaps the traditional way to learn and study in a four wall physical classroom is not enough. But now, thank to these new emerging technologies, motivated, organized and disciplined people can do so while driving, walking to school, going to work, while waiting for the bus or moving in some form of public transport. The time spent using portable devices like the iPod or MP3 player during this time that we are on the move may provide good results if it becomes a frequent habit.

MP3 language learning

In my own experience, as a language learner, having a cell phone with MP3 player with memory card capabilities, has allowed me to develop the acquisition of French to another level in a very versatile manner. There is a website called *Daily French Pod* from where I can download and storage the MP3 files into the memory card of my cell phone. According to (Ivers & Barron, 2006, p. 210) an MP3 file is a compressed audio format which greatly diminishes the size of an audio file of 10:1, but maintains optimum sound quality. In English MP3 means (Moving Picture Experts Group, Audio Layer III). Due to the small file size I can download a couple of hundred MP3 files to my device. The contents of the files that I download are dictations, daily conversation, reading excerpts, vocabulary and even news reports exercises. No matter where I am or where I go, I take my cell phone with me, connect the headset to my phone and I can start listening to the exercises as often and as many times as want. As time passed I can say that my vocabulary, writing, listening and speaking French skills have improved. Mobil technology in my experience has proven to be successful.

iPods, cell phones and these type of devises can connect to the Internet through Wi-Fi, or wireless signal. Today there are plenty of Web sites containing mp3 files properly designed for language learning purposes. These kinds of files can be download it easily to any of these mobile technologies. There are different types of pages *ESL Podcast* and *Daily French Pod* and many others of which you can download news, songs, lessons to learn the language and other kind of information. Several sites are available with different types of materials for language learning or language practice in MP3 format.

MP3 Teacher

Thanks to the development and reduction of integrated circuits the emerging technologies turn out to be highly practical and portable (Duffy & McDonald, 2010, p. 381). The characteristics of the emerging technology in the hands of an interested and motivated person to learn a language either intrinsically or extrinsically turns out to be another option and an appropriate means for learning a language. Yamaguchi (2005, p. 57) comments that a desktop personal computer is better than a mobile phone handling various types of visuals, auditory and textual element, but the mobile phone or iPod outperforms the desktop personal computer in terms portability. But, on the other hand, new devices as small as an iPod or cell phone now have the same of even better capabilities.

Moreover Colpaert (2004, p. 262) notes that the mobile movement has led to new applications, materials and tools. For (McNicol, 2004) important factors that appeals to busy learner in mobile language learning are well designed content and short lessons provided in small blocks of information (p.12 .) Thornton and Houser's (2003, p. 13) results of their study dealing with language learning through internet have been positive. As we can see, after commenting on these new emerging technologies and some of their benefits for teaching and learning a language, there are implications that these technologies bring to teacher interested in joining the mobile language movement. Chinnery, (2006) considers some of its implications for the teacher.

Implications for language teachers:

The adoption and adaptation of emerging technologies involve some adjustments to the teacher of the century 21.

- It is necessary that teachers acquire skills for a specific digital electronic media. For example, learning to operate simple to use computer packages such as *Audacity* which is used to record, edit and convert audio into MP3 files. *Audacity* is a free program and can be downloaded from the internet.

- Learn about voice recording techniques and features that an MP3 file must have

- Consider the range of users of these emerging technologies and their needs.

The material to be designed has to have the pedagogical element proper for that technology in order to be effective.

- The nature and characteristics of the material designed should be share and downloaded by the user if desired by the author.

- Getting acquainted with the new emerging technologies allows teachers to gradually become an expert and producer of their own mobile or portable language.

- Join the evolution and movement of digital technologies and understand how it works and make contributions in the field of global cyber language learning.

- Innovative learning materials can be share through a personal blog, personal website which can be consulted by students or other interested learners elsewhere in the world.

- Use the free service of some sites on the Internet as *mipodcast.com* to upload and share your ideas.

According to (Wu, 2010) emerging technologies mean that the teacher should not be isolated in the classroom, but become part of a network of professionals focused on high educational professional practices. With the expansion of resources available today, through technology, students will be much better than what we imagined. Technology will play a pivotal role in our society in general and in particular in education. Having knowledge of emerging technology enables the teacher to anticipate and make changes in the future in the digital age. It will also help the teacher to have the tools available that he will use to produce successful students. The tools are available now and students are expecting to use them.

Conclusion

Some technologies already exist, but their capacity is changing. Other technologies are coming and others are on the drawing board, but with no doubt have the potential to affect our professional lives. As teachers, we have a professional responsibility to keep abreast of these changes and prepare to cope with a conscious preparation in the use of emerging technologies. Portable digital devices provide the learner with new opportunities to practice, develop and study the language in the go if that is what he wants and is willing to pay the price.

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