

An Effective Role of E-Learning Technology for English Language Teaching By Using Meta Communication Actors

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ABSTRACT

Meta communication plays a key role in foreign language learning and teaching. Broadly speaking, meta communication is communication about communication. Meta communication is something that goes beyond communication and all language learners and teachers should be familiar with its existence. It should be stressed that meta communication which accompanies any message is very powerful. In face to face writing lessons, the student can make emphasis on any point by utilizing larger fonts, capital letters, or bold fonts in his essay. However, in virtual learning environments, students can make use of emoticons like :-), "happy", :-("sad", :-/ "perplexed", O.o "confused" to communicate about communication. Further, they can deploy some acronyms like (BTW= By the way, ASAP= as soon as possible, TM= tomorrow) to easily convey their messages. It should be emphasized that E-learning applications (virtual worlds, second life, ICTs) are very beneficial in foreign language learning and teaching since they create a platform for students and teachers to interact in a context with no boundaries of time and distance.

In Transformational Generative Grammar, foreign language teachers describe syntactic structures in English by using grammatical symbols with meta communicational elements. For instance, every English Foreign Language-EFL or English Language Teaching-ELT teachers or students is familiar with the symbols and related meanings like (S= sentence, subject, V= verb, O= object, N= noun, NP= noun phrase, VP= verb phrase, etc.). On the other side, when teaching English pronunciation to Turkish EFL learners, foreign language teachers utilize phonetic symbols like /è, æ, å, ğ, vŋ/ to write transcriptions of English words. These phonetic symbols have meta communicational elements in their composition because they communicate about communication. At this juncture, foreign language teachers should learn frequently used emoticons, keyboard symbols, acronyms, grammatical and phonetic symbols and they should teach them to their students to enable them to establish successful communication with other people.

Globalization is consolidated by the extraordinary invasion of higher education by new technologies, especially the Internet. Major changes in the social and economical conditions in Europe and worldwide force new needs and trends upon the technology. The main challenge for "the knowledge society of the future" is to ensure that each member of the society has the opportunity of continuous professional²⁰¹ development, frequent retraining and obtaining new competences, mastering new information technologies (IT), lifelong learning (LLL), and so on. Within the education

sector, a number of continuous efforts are taking place to stimulate the use of ICT at all levels of education.

E-Learning has introduced new approaches of instructional delivery where the roles of teacher and student have significantly changed. The integration of information and communication technologies into the education field is in constant progression and generates empirical approaches for educational environment design. Some research projects in distance learning are introduced in the world.

Keywords: Meta Communication, e-Learning, English Language Teaching

I. INTRODUCTION

Education in the 21st century is based on the improvement of global and information focused skills. These skills are searching in the Internet, reaching information, collaborative learning, effective communication, critical thinking and creativity. The Internet has the feature of being widely used in education and it is inevitable that this feature is becoming more important day by day.

Recently, the Internet has been seen as an important learning environment. This view is strengthened by the interaction of distance education students with one another and their teachers and the provision of high-speed interaction (Odabasi, 1998). Language learning is a growing sector in a globalised world. It is inevitable to make use of e-learning tools in language education. Traditional language teaching methods cannot cope with the new technology and they must be reviewed to meet the changing needs of the teachers and learners. The Internet-based interactive environments offer the interaction which supports the learners in learning. Through the use of computer, modem, telephone and related software, functional virtual classes can be formed in the Internet-based education. Li and Hart (1996) state that multimedia facilities of the Internet and its interactive sources are useful resources that make the Internet as an appealing medium for instruction. The Internet is especially attractive to educators on account of its authentic language, expected rise in student motivation, and promotion of global awareness (Meloni, 1998). The purpose of learning collaboratively is to acquire common knowledge and use this knowledge to solve a problem. Collaborative learning is beneficial for the teachers who want their students to gain benefit and share it with the other students. Related studies have showed that collaborative learning is more advantageous, especially for students who failed in traditional classes (Joyce, Weil, Showers, 1992). Collaborative learning creates a positive social atmosphere and facilitates perception. Collaborative learning in teaching through the Internet is fulfilled via planned or unplanned social interaction process. The nature of learning environment requires the regular interest with the topic and interactive study so the result is high level of learning (Istifci & Kaya, 2011).

Web 2.0 tools increase creativity. Students can make films, videos and publish them. Wikis and blogs make collaborative learning possible and support learner-centered learning. Nowadays, students are more open to share their life, work and educational experiences. By using Web 2.0 tools, students can think critically, learn independently and freely. Usage of Web 2.0 in learning and teaching leads to dramatic changes in the educational system. Tools of Web 2.0 give to the learner brand new opportunities to create flexible, more effective learning environment, which is pointed to the individualization of the learning process in the context of close cooperation with peer-learners and experts of the field. It enables learners to build up their knowledge based of their prior experience, to collaborate with each other, to reflect upon the new knowledge, contextualize it, and create their personal learning environment. The most important advantage of Web 2.0 tools in education, and in language²⁰² learning in particular, is its simplicity. To obtain required information about any subject it is enough to just enter the correct key-words into the searching system (like

Google), or in the social network, and wait for the replies. Some tools of Web 2.0 are used in language learning most effectively.

In the era of the WWW, Wikipedia has become the world's single largest encyclopaedia and one of the most diverse online communities (Ayers, 2007). Now, the encyclopaedia is more than its article content, illustrations and categorizations. The content grows and evolves continuously. Moreover, the Wikipedia site itself is also the facilitator for the voluntary, de-centralized editor community to come together, to coordinate the co-operative work (Kittur & Kraut, 2010; Kittur, Suh, Pendleton, & Chi, 2007; Viégas, Wattenberg, Kriss, & Van Ham, 2007), to ensure and improve information quality (Stvilia, Twidale, Smith, & Gasser, 2008), to resolve user conflicts (Kittur & Kraut, 2010; Kittur et al., 2007) and to sustain order against vandalism (Geiger & Ribes, 2010; Viégas et al., 2007). While Diderot, with a restricted circle of young French intellectuals, decided over the first encyclopaedia content and form, the principles and evolution of Wikipedia are open for all to see, to join, to support, to edit, and to criticize (Forte, Larco, & Bruckman, 2009). Hence, despite the fact that the primary content of Wikipedia still largely follows the traditional encyclopaedic format (Emigh & Herring, 2005; Haider & Sundin, 2010), the Wikipedia itself and the vast community of wikipedians with their continuously evolving coordination mechanisms provides a great opportunity for novel research (Kittur & Kraut, 2010) -both in its own right and for producing lessons to be learned for other on-line communities (Ayers, 2007). In addition to the primary content of articles, pictures, and article categorizations, coordination of the mechanisms materialize through meta communication, that is, communication that refers to other communications (De Vito, 2001). In this case, the Wikipedia's primary content and the emergent communication mechanisms themselves (Lanamäki & Päivärinta, 2009). Wiki is one of the best ways to work together on the particular subject as a group. This tool enables a creation of the social web-page, where learner can add value to the discussion about the topic in question. Wikis are we sites that enable users to add content, edit and delete. Learning through Wikis is different as they support both student and teacher learning. One of the most famous examples of wiki is a Wikipedia, a network dictionary, which can be updated by any internet user. In Wiki pages editing of pictures and texts, tables, lists, links, archiving, formatting, spelling check and emoticons can be used (Horzum, 2010).

In the language learning Wikipedia can be used very effectively in developing the reading skills and as a source of information in the project preparation in the language learning. In order to develop the writing skills another wiki-resources are more appropriate to use. For example, Pbworks, a web-site, which enables a development of closed wiki-space for a group of learners, where they can work together on joint projects, overview each other's opinion, discuss, and support each other. The prevailing principle in this kind of environment is -the best way to learn something, is to teach others. Podcasts are very useful in developing speaking and listening skills. They are used in order to create and distribute audio and video programs in the Internet. Unlike with the general TV and radio, podcasts can be downloaded and watched at any convenient for the learner time and place. Podcasts can be of any length, starting from several minutes till several hours, authentic, and also created for educational purposes. English learners might find directories of podcasts on the following web-page: www.podomatic.com. Video Sharing Sites such as YouTube, Howcast, Hotmail Videos, TeacherTube, Vimeo, Dailymotion, BBC Learning English Videos help teachers and students in learning and teaching foreign languages. It is possible to find educational information in almost every topic and videos increase student motivation in class. Moreover, they help students to absorb what they learn in the books (Istifci & Girginer, 2011). YouTube is a very interesting Web 2.0 tool. It is one of the most popular social services, which is equally popular among all internet users, regardless of their age, gender, social or mental differences. YouTube can be considered as a²⁰³ broadest library of video-material, where registered users can not only watch them, but also download and make comments.

Blogs or Weblogs are web sites that people can write what they want and how they want without having technical information. Readers can also make comments that are important dynamics of blogs so there is interaction between the writer and the readers of the blog. Blogs are personal web-sites in the form of a diary or a journal. They can be devoted to a particular topic, or may include notes about different subjects. Blogs are tools that can be used in two purposes in language learning. On one hand, blog is a great tool to develop the writing and reading skills. But, on the other hand, blogs are used very effectively by teachers and facilitators in order to give learners advices and share experiences. Social networks are the most important tools of Web 2.0. They almost eliminated the barrier between formal and informal communication between users. According to the modern approach to learning, a learner is a center of the learning process, and everything rest, including teacher, should support him/her in achieving the learning goal. Social networks offer very good environment to take this principle into life. In the world, which is populated with only the friends, who are there to support, help, collaborate and provide with needed information on time, the learners feel free to ask, discuss and reflect without fair to be misunderstood or punished. There are no assignments, no supervisors at all - just collaborators and friends. This sense of unity made social networks very powerful. Nowadays, they have substantial impact on the peoples' minds; there even is a big problem of social network addicted people. One of the most important social network tools, Facebook is being used by millions of people in the World and has become an inevitable part of their life. Facebook is a social network that provides communication and information exchange. People who have Internet connection in every part of the world communicate and interact among themselves via this social tool. In other words, people compose virtual social lives for themselves.

Nowadays, Facebook is used for educational purposes and there have been studies concerning the educational use of Facebook. These studies are generally about teacher-teacher, teacher-student or student-student interactions. Facebook also provides a lot of opportunities for instructors. Some major opportunities are reaching the students, feeling empathy with students, integrating with their feelings and understanding them. Facebook is known as flexible and user-friendly for people who have different personalities. Furthermore, it is more economical and private than other communication tools to communicate and interact via the Internet. Facebook is used by millions of people and becomes an inevitable part of their lives. In a study carried out by Selwyn (2007), it has been found out that one of the educational topics of Facebook is practice and sharing of academic information. Providing effective motivation especially for the youth and being effective for the changing roles and relations of teachers and students by using computers and the Internet in foreign language teaching, it becomes inevitable for the students and teachers to use Facebook (Istifci ve Girginer, 2011). Students' passing most of their time in Facebook has got the attention of foreign language teachers and language learning via Facebook has started to be supported. Facebook is used for sharing resource books, announcements, group works, applications and lessons. Teachers and students can send the lesson materials, addresses of web sites and videos, share student presentations, homework and other materials by having links via google. Using Facebook for educational purposes, teachers and students fulfill the basic functions as: Learning through collaborative learning, carry on research, questioning, improving discussion skills, supporting critical thinking skills, improving problem solving skills, sharing teaching and learning materials (video files, voice files, pictures, charts, presentation, websites that include database and other types of documents), sharing daily news and events by associating them with lessons, following some groups or people, participating discussions related to lessons.

Twitter is another social network tool that provides communication every time and everywhere. It is always updated and advantageous for the users. Users can help each

other, solve the problems fast and access the sites easily. It can also be used in language education. Teachers and students can communicate with the experts and gain information. The implementation of the new web tools and new learning/teaching model is the most important task of teachers' professional development. The new challenge of developing world outside the school is that the pupils/students are using new communication, content creation and collaboration models and methods in their free time. The implementation process should start with small steps. The teacher needs to find one task or process in her own daily learning plan. The guideline for teacher's trainer is to develop training so that the teacher can use the learned skill next day in his or her own school. This is quite challenging because every school has different infrastructure, staff and habits. That's why the training always needs to have an element of personal project planning for the participants (Launoskorpi, 2011).

II. SOCIAL, ECONOMICAL TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGES AND DEVELOPMENTS FOR LLL IN ICT

Major changes in the social and economical conditions in Europe and worldwide force new needs and trends upon the technology. The main challenge for "the knowledge society of the future" is to ensure that each member of the society has the opportunity of continuous professional development, frequent retraining and obtaining of new competences, mastering new information technologies (IT), Life Long Learning (LLL), and so on. Within the educational sector a number of continuous efforts are taking place to stimulate the use of ICT in all sectors at all levels of education. E-Learning has introduced new approaches of instructional delivery where the roles of teacher and student have significantly changed.

III. WHAT IS META COMMUNICATION AND WHAT IS ITS FUNCTION FOR THE VIRTUAL WORLD?

Communication requires that all parties have a space of communicative commonality. There are auditory means, such as speech, song, and tone of voice, and there are nonverbal means, such as body language, sign language, paralanguage, touch, eye contact, as well as writing. Communication is thus a process by which meaning is assigned and conveyed in an attempt to create a shared understanding. This process requires a vast repertoire of skills in intra and interpersonal processing, listening, observing, speaking, questioning, analyzing, and evaluating. It is through communication that collaboration and cooperation occurs. Over time, technology has progressed and has created new forms and ideas about communication. These technological advances revolutionized the processes of communication. "Meta Communication" is the process between message designers when they are talking about the learning process, as distinguished from their articulation of the "substantive" learning, itself. The hope is to increase the focus on the substantive knowledge and understanding being developed, by providing a separate channel for the support communication, and to do it in an easy, focused, and context aware manner (McLean, R. S. (1999).

Reported examples of meta communication largely refer to particular utterances of the primary communication, often intertwined with the primary content of communication. Tanskanen, (2007) poses a number of examples where particular asynchronous textual utterances can even refer to themselves retrospectively, in the middle of the message, or prospectively. Yetim (2006), building upon Päivärinta (2001) and Ulrich (2001), discusses meta communication as a means for discursive-ethical reflection on and elaboration of genres of (primary) communication. A genre of communication is a recurring communicative action within a community, which has a more or less²⁰⁵ shared purpose and form (Yates and Orlikowski, 1992). Reported examples of meta communication largely refer to particular utterances of the primary communication,

often intertwined with the primary content of communication. Tanskanen (2007) poses a number of examples where particular asynchronous textual utterances can even refer to themselves retrospectively, in the middle of the message, or prospectively.

Meta communication can refer also to the communication context in general, beyond particular primary utterances or genres. Hoppenbrouwers & Weigand (2000) give an example where norms for using e-mail in general as a medium were discussed. The idea of relational meta communication (Wilmot, 1980) seems also to refer to the communication context and stakeholder relationships beyond particular utterances or genres. Verbal communication is supported by a raft of non-verbal signs and cues that reinforce what we are saying or clear up any ambiguities. For example, we may cross our arms when we feel threatened by what somebody else is saying, or we nod our heads when we agree with what s/he is saying. Nonverbal behaviors, whether they involve the hands, the eyes, or the muscle tone of the body, usually occur in packages or clusters in which the various verbal and non-verbal behaviors reinforce each other. Like verbal communication, nonverbal communication exists in a context, and that context determines to a large extent the meanings of any nonverbal behaviors. The same nonverbal behavior may have a totally different meaning when it occurs in another context. It is also important to mention culture in teaching meta-communication as the nonverbal behaviors are generally culture specific. Although nonverbal communication gives clues to what speakers are thinking about or enhances what they are saying, cultural differences may also interfere with understanding a message (Pennycook, 1985). The rules are brought to our attention only in formal discussions of nonverbal communication, such as this one, or when rules are violated and the violations are called to our attention – either directly by some tactless snob or indirectly through the examples of others. While linguists are attempting to formulate the rules for verbal messages, nonverbal researchers are attempting to formulate the rules for nonverbal messages-rules that native communicators know and use every day, but cannot necessarily verbalize. It must be mentioned that nonverbal behavior is highly believable. For some reasons we are quick to believe nonverbal behaviors even when these behaviors contradict verbal messages. Nonverbal reports on research demonstrating that compared to verbal cues, nonverbal cues are four times as effective in their impact on interpersonal impressions and ten times more important in expressing confidence. From a different perspective, Albert Mehrabian (1976) argues that the total impact of a message is a function of the following formula: total impact = 7% verbal + 38% + 55% facial. This formula gives very little influence to verbal messages. Only one third of the impact is vocal (that is, paralanguage elements such as rate, pitch, and rhythm) and over one half of the message is communicated by the face. (Paralanguage-the vocal, but nonverbal dimension of speech that can convey information, especially about a speaker's attitude). The formula, developed by Mehrabian and his colleagues from their studies on the emotional impact of messages, is not applicable to all messages. It is applicable only to the expression of feelings. Although it is interesting to speculate on what percentage of message impact is due to nonverbal elements in other kinds of messages, there is no valid and reliable answer at this time.

Emblems are nonverbal behaviors that translate words or phrases rather directly. Emblems include the nonverbal signs for OK, peace, come here, go away, who me?, be quiet, I'm warning you, I'm tired, it's cold. Emblems are nonverbal substitutes for specific verbal words or phrases and are probably learned in essentially the same way as are specific words and phrases, without conscious awareness or explicit teaching and largely through imitation. Although emblems seem rather natural to us and almost inherently meaningful, they are as arbitrary as any word in any language. Consequently, our present culture's emblems are not necessarily the same as our culture's emblems of 300 years ago or the same as the emblems of other cultures.²⁰⁶ The OK sign may mean "nothing" or "zero" in France, "money" in Japan, and something sexual in certain Latin American cultures. Just as the English language is spreading

throughout the world, so is English nonverbal language. The meaning of the thumb and index finger forming a circle meaning "OK" is spreading just as fast as English technical and scientific terms. Emblems are often used to supplement the verbal message or as a kind of reinforcement. At times they are used in place of verbalization, when there is a considerable distance between the individuals and shouting would be inappropriate or when we wish to communicate something behind someone's back. Illustrators are nonverbal behaviors that accompany and literally illustrate the verbal messages. Illustrators make our communications more vivid and more forceful and help to maintain the attention of the listener. They also help to clarify and make more intense our verbal messages. In saying "Let's go up", for example, there will be movements of the head and perhaps hands going in an upward direction. In describing a circle or a square, you are more than likely going to make circular or square movements with your hands. (Veliyeva, from <http://yazikiliteratura.narod.ru/lin74.htm> retrieved on 20.08.2011) Thus, there can be misunderstandings in communication. It is essential to remember that the meta-communication which accompanies any message is very powerful. The receiver will use these clues to help them to interpret what you mean, but more importantly they will often take the meaning from the meta-communication rather than from the words themselves, particularly when what you are saying conflicts with what you are doing. Hence, understanding or interpreting nonverbal messages accurately is especially important for second/foreign language (L2) learners whose comprehension skill is more limited. Since meta-communication is creating meanings to solve relationships of body language (Demiray, 2009), listening and speaking teachers may also concentrate on exposing students to the samples of body language, gesture, facial expressions, posture, eye-gaze and interpersonal distance by showing authentic videos of real life use.

IV. CONCLUSION

In today's world language learners make use of Internet and Social Networking Sites in their learning. These sites such as Facebook, Wikipedia, Video Sharing Sites, Blogs are valuable in providing language teachers authentic materials to teach metacommunicational elements to the learners who are more open to share their life, work and educational experiences. Young learners are keen on interacting through social media and they use critical thinking more. Thus, they may be exposed to meta communicational use of language in the class. They must aware of the fact that English is a language that is used all over the world and there are a lot of varieties of English. They should know that English today is not just British or American English, it is used as Lingua Franca by a lot of countries.

Teachers may also make use of technology in and out of class to support learners' critical thinking abilities. They may show learners authentic videos of people from different parts of the world to show how people communicate by using meta communicational elements. Teachers who want to establish good relations with their students may use Social Networking Sites to communicate with them and foster their relationships with the students.

E-learning technology by using metacommunicational actors also enhances collaborative learning. Students may create class blogs and help each other, or they may communicate with students from different parts of the world. By this way, they gain an awareness of the use of English by different cultures and nations. If students are motivated well in using e-learning technology for learning English, they will use Social Networking Sites more for learning English and they will be exposed to authentic use of language by learners in different parts of the world. Hence, they will be aware of meta communicational aspects of English.

To conclude, it can be said that curriculum developers and course book writers of English may revise their materials according to recent developments in technology,

learners' needs and meta communicational elements in using English. They should include instances of authentic language use by different learners of English whether they use English as ESL, EFL or ELF.

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