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Using Technology in the English Language Classroom

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Abstract

This paper examines the use of technology in the language classroom. It examines the role of the language class (specifically, the English class) and how this frames the use of technology to support its academic and communication roles.

1. Introduction

Technology in education is not a new concept. In the 1960s and 1970s, lessons were broadcast over the air; for language teaching, audio tapes and films were available and some universities (such as Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi) had sophisticated language laboratories where students could practise their spoken skills. However, for the most part these technologies were not used in school and university classrooms.

Today, the scenario is very different. Technology is not 'out there' but part of our daily lives in devices such as mobile phones, portable music devices, TV, and computers, and activities such as sending SMS messages, listening to music files and audio books, watching cable TV, and surfing the Internet. The drop in prices has brought technology within the reach of more people to the extent that it is cheaper for an institute to buy computers and software than to hire faculty. Today's students are comfortable using technology and, if they are not, they are expected to become computer-literate for the

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workplace. These changes have led to a push for incorporating technology in educational settings.

However, technology means different things to different people.

2. Technology *of* Education vs. Technology *in* Education

Technology can be used merely as a medium to transmit the prepared learning material. For instance, in many distance education programs, a digitized version of the printed material is sent to learners; another example is a video of the teacher's lecture (perhaps with students asking questions) that is either broadcast or stored for students who are in remote locations, at a different campus, or are working adults. These are examples of the technology *of* education that is used to optimize delivery.

In contrast, technology *in* education is used to meet and further curricular goals. Technology is used to enhance learning in ways that may not be possible through traditional methods such as printed matter (textbooks) and verbal explanations. For instance, simulations in economics and finance allow students to input numbers and examine the impact on other variables. Through graphics and animations, science students can visualize elements that static images cannot replicate. For an example, see Smart Class (<http://www.educomp.com/ContentDemo.aspx>) where the congruence of triangles is represented by manipulating two triangles. Technology may even impact the curriculum if it returns teaching/learning to ways that the classroom has abandoned. For example, textbooks were created to provide teachers and students with a set of materials that was limited, but the Internet is a window to authentic texts.

When we examine how technology is used in education, we find examples of multimedia lessons, learning objects, and simulations in content subjects, but a similar orientation seems to be missing in the field of language teaching. For example, a handbook on multimedia by Mayer (2005) discusses the design principles for several content areas, but there is only one chapter on using multimedia in language teaching (Reinking, 2005). Instead of examining the design of multimedia, the discussions revolve around the use and effects of word processors, communication tools, such as discussion threads, chat, and email, and research tools, such as the Internet and webquests.

3. The Goal of This Paper

This paper examines why and how such technologies are used in the language class. The 'why' comes from two formulations of the language class: the academic role of the language class and the social role of language. In terms of its academic role, the language class is now viewed as central to the academic endeavor; there is a realization that students need to 'learn to learn' and it is the language class that can address this need. In

terms of the social role of language, there has been a shift away from teaching isolated linguistic components to viewing language as being embedded in a social context defined by audience and purpose; as a result, the technology is used to foster communication and collaboration. The ‘how’ is addressed in Section 9, which describes how technology can be used in the language classroom to teach for academic and social purposes. The final section raises the issue of ‘multiliteracies’ arising from digital technology that may shape the future curriculum.

Given the number of languages taught and the diversity of educational settings in India, I have limited this discussion to the teaching of English and, further, to the English class in an ‘English-medium’ school or university where the textbooks are written in English and teaching may or may not be in English. In school, English is one of the subjects in the curriculum and at the university, students (other than students of English literature) are required to do a course in General English. Even within this limited domain, there is tremendous diversity in the student population, curriculum, access to language resources and technology, etc. However, this enables us to examine some core issues in depth.

4. The Academic Role of the Language Class

The school and university curriculum consist of several subjects, some of which, like chemistry or history, are primarily concerned with content. In these subjects, students have to learn a body of basic facts—the periodic table, equations, dates, etc. In contrast, English language is not a content subject (although English literature is). The difference can be seen in the textbooks—in the content areas, the topics are remarkably similar across countries even if the teaching approaches differ, whereas there is tremendous variation in the topics covered in an English language course. Some syllabi are anthologies of literary texts, others are skill-based, and some are a combination of the two.

5. English-as-Content Approach

Although there is no content in English, it is often treated as a content subject. This can be seen in two practices: the teaching of language items, such as grammar, vocabulary, and idioms, and using the textbook as a repository of information.

Teaching language items

In several schools, students are taught explicit grammatical categories and rules, such as conjunctions and voice, despite the fact that the NCERT syllabus states that grammar should not be taught and the CBSE examination merely tests grammatical awareness. Teachers supplement the textbook with grammar books and test student knowledge of grammatical categories and labels. Students are also told to memorize lists of isolated words to ‘increase their vocabulary’ and idioms ‘to make their essays more interesting’.

The situation remains the same in colleges and several language communication courses. Such activities provide teachers with material to fill up class time, and are analogous to teaching students the elements of the Periodic Table in chemistry.

This dissection of language leads to a fragmented view of the language system. For example, students are taught how to form modals but are not their functions. They know the rules for forming sentences with *would* and *should*, but do not know that *should* can be used for a request as in ‘Should I open the door?’ They can mechanically do a written exercise on completing tag questions, but when speaking they fall back on the ‘isn’t it?’ tag. When vocabulary is learned in isolation, students think that the words are interchangeable and are unaware of their collocations. As a result they produce sentences such as the following: “While exports have not shown any *vibrations*, there is a declining trend in Indian imports.” The writer thinks that *vibrations* and *fluctuations* are interchangeable words.

Teaching the textbook

Textbooks are a resource designed for two purposes: first, they hope to inculcate ‘the joy of reading’ in students and, second, they expose students to a range of text genres— narrative, descriptive, expository, and argumentative so that they understand the features of different genres. These texts are intended only as a starting point or exemplars that should be supplemented with similar texts so that students acquire the skills to read similar texts on their own.

Instead, teachers explain the content of the texts. For example, if the text is a narrative, the teacher describes the plot and characters, leaving students with no need or reason to read the text on their own. An expository text on *Fire (its benefits and dangers)* has the teacher explaining the benefits and dangers of fire. Instead of interacting with the text and developing their reading skills, students develop their skills of listening comprehension. More importantly, students do not develop the ability to read and understand an **unseen** passage and remain tied to a fixed set of texts.

At the university students who do not take up English Literature are required to do a course in English (called General English). The emphasis on content becomes more marked here, because the textbook is an anthology of literary texts and the examination requires students to memorize and recall facts. The college lecturer ends up explaining the content of each text and the literary devices used.

Through these practices, we see that English teachers (and curriculum designers) introduce content into the English class, even when the curriculum is explicitly designed to teach skills. One reason is the need to ‘fill up time’; teaching content provides teachers with tangible material and activities that can be ‘covered’ and tested. Another reason is

that teachers teach as they have been taught (Lortie, 1975). If teachers learned English through grammar and literary texts, they ignore the objectives of the syllabus and replicate these practices when they become teachers. Even when teachers understand the objectives of the curriculum and want to teach skills, they may not have adequate training and guidance in how to accomplish these goals.

With recent changes in the Indian economy and the growth of the service sector, components of spoken English have been added to the curriculum. This moves the English curriculum closer to a skills-based approach. This places pressure on teachers to move away from lecturing on content to helping students acquire language skills that are relevant.

6. English-as-Skills Approach

In the language-as-skills approach, the curriculum is explicitly designed to teach language skills and have students practise them. This approach is seen in syllabi, textbooks and programs for English as a second language in the US and the UK. This approach develops the four skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—at increasing levels of complexity. To take the example of writing, in primary school, students learn to write stories (for pedagogical reasons); however, in the secondary school students should be able to handle a variety of genres such as laboratory reports, short research papers, critiques, and reviews that follow different conventions in terms of language and structure (Swales, 1990).

In such an approach, how does the English teacher ‘fill up the time’? A version of this approach is seen in writing across the curriculum (WAC) in the US, where the English class supports the content subjects. Language proficiency is essential for academic success. In order to understand subjects in the curriculum, one needs to know the language in which the texts are written and the concepts conveyed. This involves the skills of listening to lectures, reading texts, and writing answers.

This appears to place English in a subordinate position as a handmaiden of the content subjects; however, if we recognize that language is necessary for understanding and writing in the other subjects and that content teachers do not have the expertise or time to teach their students, the English class becomes central to the educational endeavor.

Table 1 summarizes the different objectives of content classes and the language class.

Table 1. Objectives of Content Classes vs. Language Classes

Content Class	Language Class
Read and comprehend texts	Learn to read and comprehend texts

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Gather material for projects, texts	Learn to gather material for projects, texts
Write answers and texts	Learn to write answers and texts
Present research (oral presentation or thesis)	Learn to present research (oral presentation or thesis)

In short, while in the content subjects students are expected to perform activities that use language, in the language class they learn **how to** do these activities. In a sense, we have returned to the notion of English as a ‘library language’ (Kothari Commission, 1968), but with a wider scope given that the role of English in India has expanded considerably.

This offers a tremendous opportunity for the subject, English. First, it fills a gap in the curriculum, one that is increasingly being recognized as central to learning to learn and which many students lack; the Open University in the UK found that many of their students lacked the literacy skills required to deal with their academic subjects (Coffin et al., 2003; Lillis, 1999). Second, the texts and activities are not only authentic but also critical to academic success and later in the workplace.

To sum up, a re-examination of the English curriculum envisages a different role for English; it teaches skills that support other subjects in the curriculum; it equips students with the skills they need in the workplace; and, hence, student motivation increases because they see purpose and tangible changes in their learning.

7. Recognizing the Social Role of Language

Language teaching approaches have moved toward an emphasis on the social role of language. Earlier approaches such as the Structural Approach and the Cognitive Approach emphasized the linguistic and cognitive aspects in language learning, respectively. In the Structural Approach, language items are graded by grammatical and lexical difficulty, although grammatical terms are not taught. The Cognitive Approach grew out of studies in language acquisition, which showed that children do not merely imitate but actively generate and test hypotheses about the rules of language. In language teaching, students were taught strategies to cope with unfamiliar and novel material. Research studies (Oxford, 1980) identified the strategies used by good language learners and encouraged learners to use them. In the area of reading skills, where students are expected to comprehend unseen passages, students were taught to activate prior knowledge and examine text structure (Carrell, 1985; Meyer, 1976).

Recent approaches to language teaching have moved away from the linguistic and cognitive aspects of language to its social aspects. These are drawn from interactionist theories in child language acquisition (Vygotsky, 1978), sociolinguistics (Hymes, 1971) and systemic functional grammar (Halliday, 1994). The focus has shifted from

grammatical accuracy to achieving pragmatic purpose and, hence, the unit of study has widened from the sentence to stretches of discourse. A test might take the following form:

Example

Select the most appropriate question from the options below.

1. Ray: _____
Chris: How about 10:30?
 - a. What time should we meet?
 - b. What time does the store open?
 - c. What time does the train leave?
 - d. What is the time?

There is an emphasis on communication, whether spoken or written, and the functions of discourse that go beyond mere statements to include agreement, clarification, disagreement, support, etc. Audience and purpose have become important and, with this, studies have examined linguistic and structural differences in domains such as business communication and academic discourse (Hyland, 2004; Swales, 1990). We can see these changes in the CBSE textbooks for Classes 9 and 10, *Interact in English*, where students are encouraged to write reports, diary entries and dialogues to widen their exposure to different genres.

8. The Role of Technology

Technology cannot be a mere add-on in the language classroom because there is a strong link between teachers' assumptions about language teaching and how they use technology in the classroom (Kern and Warschauer, 2000; MacKinnon, n.d.). Put simply, if a teacher believes in teaching grammar, s/he will use the technology to teach grammar.

Different approaches involve different uses of the technology (Chapelle, 2009; Kern and Warschauer, 2000). In the Structural Approach where grammatical accuracy remains central, technology is used to help students understand grammar. Examples include video clips of scenarios that embed the target grammatical item, followed by an explanation (see Jenniferesl <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KWLZELf1Sk> for an example), and animation using timelines to show the differences among the tenses. Practice and testing follow the format below:

Example. Click on the correct form of the verb in the sentences below:


1. Sarah _____ up every morning.
 - a. wake
 - b. wakes

c. has woke

In the Cognitive Approach, technology employed high-end multimedia to create learning environments or ‘worlds’ that students traversed in order to accomplish a goal (see Schank, 1992 for goal-based scenarios). Figure 1 shows a simple goal-based scenario in finance where adult learners are assigned a specific task and can access resources, such as records and interviews to accomplish the task.

Figure 1. Screen shot of a Goal-based Scenario


NET INCOME HEDGING





Chris Pearson

We expect our Net Income this year to reach £9 million which at current spot rates is equivalent to \$14 million. We have committed this amount in USD to the Treasury but we cannot be sure that the £/\$ exchange rate will remain stable. Should we go in for a hedge?

You will have to solve Chris' problem at the end of this session.

 Start here. Gary Barton will define hedge instruments and describe how they work.
[Telephone](#)

 Your second stop lists the four important guidelines for Net Income Hedging.
[Guidelines](#)

 The final step. The four worksheets will display how Net Income Hedge is computed.
[Records](#)

Such high-end multimedia was rarely used in language teaching. Some versions used the game format in which learners accumulate points by solving language tasks; however, these tasks remained variations of grammar exercises.

In approaches that emphasize the academic and social role of language, the technology needs to support research and interaction. The available technology already provides this through the Internet, email, chat, and videoconferencing that provide access to other texts and participants. This is a fundamentally different view of the purpose of technology; technology is no longer a tool to create an alternative environment—it **is** the environment.

9. Using Technology in the Language Class

As we said earlier, teachers' assumptions about language teaching and learning shape how the technology will be used. The multimedia approach to technology may in fact reinforce the central role of the teacher: it is the teacher who controls the display of the material, while students merely watch the display and do not interact with the **technology**. (After a 2-day workshop in Amritsar on using interactive multimedia in kindergarten, teachers said they would click on the screen while children watched the display.) Instead

of reifying standard practice, we need to examine how the tools can help us achieve the goals of language proficiency by altering the teaching-learning process.

The available technology tools permit two transformations. First, the focus shifts from the teacher to the student; although the teacher decides and controls the activities, students have to be actively involved in the learning process. Second, the focus shifts from absorbing and memorizing information to interpreting and creating new material, which are the key elements of language in use.

In its new and broader role of supporting the educational endeavor, the language classroom can draw on tools that are currently available, without resorting to complicated software, hardware or third-party vendors. The teacher requires a computer with a word-processing program (such as Microsoft Word); if this computer is connected to a projector, students can see material projected on a screen. One step above this, students have access to computers in the classroom; this works best if groups of three students share a computer so that they can collaborate. Ideally, the computers should have access to the Internet to gather information and allow them to collaborate with one another and the outside world.

The software does not have to be sophisticated. When several computers are linked to one another or to the Internet, software programs allow users to speak (through Skype and webcam) or write (through email, chat, and discussion forums) with one another. To manage the tools better, they are sometimes integrated in a single system, called a Learning Management System (LMS) such as Nicenet, Blackboard, or Moodle, that allow the teacher to consolidate assignments, set topics and timings, and monitor student responses.

Below I have outlined some suggestions on how this can be done in the four skill areas, namely, listening/speaking, reading, and writing.

9.1. Listening and Speaking

The communicative approach tries to promote authentic communication. For example, students write dialogues to learn the techniques of turn-taking, negotiation, politeness, etc. Printed textbooks can only approximate spoken discourse and an authentic audience, but the communication tools in the new technologies provide opportunities to introduce authentic communication into the classroom. These collaboration tools can support the objectives of a language program, such as authentic communication and collaboration.

At a basic level, the technology allows us to store and access audio files. Before the advent of computers, the language laboratory was used to teach pronunciation and dialogues, and to show films. The content of this material has not changed, but it is more

accessible to students and teachers. Further, such files can be found on the Internet and used to teach units such as pronunciation and dialogues.

Such files can also be easily created by teachers for teaching and by students for projects. Audio files, for example, merely need a microphone and speakers, both of which are built into new computers. Movies are a little more difficult; they can be recorded on digital cameras, loaded on a computer and edited using special software (this is an in-built feature in the Mac Book). Students can collaborate on mini-projects to create 2-minute audio or video clips, such as short conversations or interviews; here, the advantage is that students practice using language in a project that interests them.

One component of authentic communication is interacting with unfamiliar people in a distant location; examples are telephone conversations with officials and videoconferences with a team that allow people to interact in real time. Here, we need technology that can transmit voice (and visuals, if possible) in both directions. (This is similar to the ‘human network’ proposed by a company like Cisco.)

Software such as Skype and hardware such as a webcam can connect computers at distant locations, allowing participants to interact. The constraint here is that this has to occur in real time, for which adequate infrastructure (in terms of electricity and connectivity) is required.

9.2. Technology in Reading

Textbooks were created to provide teachers and students with texts and exercises for teaching and learning. With the advent of the Internet, students and teachers have access to vast resources, some of it more current than what a textbook can offer. Although teachers are wary of allowing students to use the Internet fearing that students will plagiarize, the Internet provides new opportunities. We will examine these opportunities before addressing the plagiarism issue.

The Internet throws up an interesting challenge. Since material on the Internet is not reviewed for factual accuracy, the quality of the information is uneven. This provides an opportunity to teach students to evaluate information from different texts. Asking students to find the answer to a simple question (such as “How many official languages does India recognize?”) will throw up multiple answers; from here, one can proceed to showing students how to evaluate sources, not to depend on secondary sources, and to go to the primary sources. This teaches the skills of critical reading.

The Internet also offers an opportunity for extensive reading. Instead of the limited universe in the textbook, students can look up additional information by following their

interests or explore alternative views. This, as we will see in the section below, feeds into a research culture that is not limited to a set of ‘facts’ in a textbook.

The main objection that teachers have to the use of the Internet is that students will not write their own essays but will merely copy-and-paste material that they find on the Internet. As with any tool, the Internet can be abused. It is easy to detect material that has been copied off the Internet because it does not match the student’s linguistic ability. If you have any doubts, type a few words from the student text into a search engine such as Google and the original text will pop up.

9.3. Technology in Writing

Using the computer

Word processing programs, such as Microsoft Word and LaTeX, have altered the way we write. It is easier to press keys than to form letters by hand; we can delete, insert and move text allowing us to reorganize information; when programs are bundled with linguistic tools, spelling and grammar are automatically checked; and the final output is neat and legible.

If this is what we use in real-life tasks, how much access to computers should we allow students? If your goal in the early stages is to get students to learn how to form letters, the computer should obviously not be used. However, the skills involved in writing are highly complex. In writing, attention has to be paid both to higher-level skills of planning and organization as well as lower-level aspects, such as spelling and punctuation (Flower and Hayes, 1981). Student writers find it difficult to coordinate these complex skills and the problem is further compounded if their language proficiency is weak. Composing on the computer appears to help lower-ability students (Dalton and Hannafin, 1987) and ESL writers (Pennington, 1993), because computers support some of the processes in writing, such as forming letters and checking spelling, leaving the student free to generate and expand their ideas.

In a project in Singapore with school students (for details, see Gupta, Hvidfeldt and Saravanan, 1995), we found that the computer helped weaker students compose longer and better organized texts. There were several reasons for this; first, their handwriting was so illegible that they could not read what they wrote by hand, whereas they could review their output on the computer screen. Second, once they had a draft, they would go back and elaborate on specific points in their essay. Third, students had passive vocabulary that they were unable to tap when writing by hand. On the computer, some of them used the spelling checker to generate words; they typed in a few letters of the word and then selected the correct word from the alternatives provided (Gupta, 1998). Thus, the computer seems to bring out student capabilities better than a handwritten text can.

Computers also allow teachers to show students how to compose and edit their essays. To do this, the teacher's computer has to be connected to an overhead projector so that the entire class can see the computer screen. While students write their essays, I usually compose an essay on the same topic, so that students can see the writing process. To help them with editing, the teacher can display one student essay and ask the class how to improve it. The suggested changes can be typed in and students can see the effects of the changes immediately instead of having to visualize them.

Some teachers feel that students should write everything by hand and mark them for neatness and accuracy. However, these are merely the mechanics of writing that the computer can perform flawlessly. If the purpose is to present an argument, the computer cannot do that and so we raise the bar for student essays.

Using the Internet

Turning to writing, we need to re-examine our objectives in teaching writing. Essay writing is a strange beast. It is only in the composition class that students are required to write an essay on a general topic (such as *Clouds*) within a specified time (20 minutes to 3 hours), drawing on their memories for ideas.

Such an exercise is not found either in the content subjects or in real life where factual accuracy is valued. In the content areas, students display their knowledge of the content and so they are graded on content. In real life, one is expected to refer to published material, facts, etc. and cannot merely provide an opinion piece. In fact, the traditional English composition does not prepare students for the kinds of writing that they would do outside the composition class.

If we are to prepare students to deal with real writing tasks, the Internet becomes a valuable resource. Students can find information on the Internet, but the sheer volume and diversity forces students to evaluate and synthesize information from different sources. This teaches students the skills of critical reading and synthesizing information from different sources through paraphrasing and summarizing. It pushes students toward research skills that go beyond mere information retrieval as it includes referencing the sources.

Using Collaborative Tools

Today, several collaboration and communication tools are available to teachers and students; these include discussion forums, email, and chat. Of these, the most popular in education is the discussion forum, which we illustrate below.

Suppose you have assigned students an essay on the topic of recycling waste. An essay requires ideas and content that you could extract during class and organize using the blackboard. The same exercise can be done through technology by using the discussion forum on an LMS set up by the IT department of the college/university. In this forum, you start a topic, *Recycling Waste*, ask students to write in with their ideas, and close the discussion after a specified period (such as two days). Students are expected to not only send in their own ideas but also react to other students' ideas. When a certain amount of information and ideas has been sent in, the discussion is closed.

The discussion forum offers two advantages over in-class discussions: access to information and time for reflection. Instead of speaking off the tops of their heads in class, students can access information on the Internet and provide thoughtful ideas that are expressed clearly in writing (since they become part of a written record); this improves both the quality of the ideas and their writing. (One professor of architecture found that when he used Chat for a seminar, student responses were more fact-based; students tended to check their facts on the Internet instead of merely hazarding a guess or giving their opinion.)

This additional time also helps weak or shy students who are intimidated about speaking up in class. The discussion forum also requires students to respond to others; they cannot merely put their opinions on the forum but have to react to what others suggest. This requires students to carefully read what others say and write an objective and polite critique that draws on language functions such as supporting or disagreeing politely. They also have to learn to persuade their peers of their point of view and defend their position. When the discussion is closed, students have a written record of the ideas, which results in a richer and more nuanced paper.

Email and Chat can be used for the same purpose as a discussion forum, but they have certain disadvantages. In email, students tend to write their own piece and not read what others have written. Chat has a different problem; it is synchronous or real-time, i.e., everyone has to be logged in at the same time to take part, which may be difficult to organize. But in the absence of a Learning Management System, they can help to improve students' written communication skills.

These technology tools help us achieve language objectives that printed textbooks could only mimic. Language is for communication and these tools emphasize the skills of communication. However, there are two caveats. First, it places a burden on the teacher. Brainstorming in class takes 15 minutes; on a discussion forum, this is spread over several days. Teaching an online course is exhausting for the teacher, who is on call for most of the semester. Second, the tools should be used when appropriate; sending an email message to a classmate who is sitting next to you is artificial and defeats the purpose of the technology.

Many teachers resist using technology in the classroom because it requires a certain comfort level with using the tools and they are afraid of showing their ignorance in front of the students. The solution is to admit that students know the technology far better than we do and hand the tasks over to them as projects. For example, students can work in groups to create dialogues and short films to teach language. This has several advantages; since students are better at the technology than we are, the product is better. Second, the assignment has a tangible product, is interesting for students and, if it is done in groups, provides support for learning. Third, it meets the goals of language teaching; the activity uses language although it is embedded in a real world task. Finally, teachers can actually learn from their students how to use the technology.

10. The Way Ahead

The section above described how to use technology to further the aims of the language classroom as it stands today. However, it sidesteps one issue: the very nature of the language and texts that we use. The current focus is on the printed book, but technology has increased the importance and availability of multimodal texts.

Digital technology has had profound effects on the way we access, read, store and communicate information. The dominance of the printed book in Western societies is being replaced; first, the mode of representation is moving from words to images and, second, the medium is shifting from the book to the screen (Kress, 2005; cf. Prior, 2005), where information comes through both the visual and audio channels (Kress, 2000). In digital media, information is structured differently. For example, in PowerPoint the hierarchical structure of a text becomes flattened (Farkas, 2009), and information can get distorted (Tufte, 2003). Kress (2005) compares a college prospectus in its printed form and as a website; in the website, image and text are equally important, while hyperlinks offer multiple entry points that encourage a non-linear style of reading.

New technologies also affect language. Teachers complain that students use SMS shorthand in their formal essays. This is to be expected; with the advent of telephones, we got spoken interaction that was not face-to-face and so a specific structure developed to cope with this “secondary orality” (Ong, 1982). As a result, telephone conversations have structured beginnings to identify the speaker that are missing in face-to-face conversation (Schegloff, 1979).

The new technologies have given us access to ‘multiliteracies’ (The New London Group, 1996) that require readings of visuals, web pages, etc. We need to recognize this for two reasons; one, they are here to stay and if we ignore them, our material is limited and even out-of-date. Second, since our students are comfortable using these tools, we risk alienating them if we do not incorporate their features in the language classroom.

This paper examined the use of technology in the language classroom. In the classrooms that we wish to design, learners should be equipped with the tools for their own learning, while the teacher guides and provides support. The existing technology tools, such as the communication tools and the Internet, support and extend student opportunities and access to academic and authentic language skills. At the same time, we need to acknowledge ‘multiliteracies’ and incorporate them in our language classes.

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Colophon:

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