

Integrating Culture into CALL*

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Jung, Hee-Jung, 2009. Integrating culture into CALL. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*. 17(1). 115-134. The present study investigates the cultural elements and changes in computer-assisted language Learning (CALL) classrooms. With integrating technology into language classrooms, students experience other culture and learn the target language in various ways. Thus, this paper focuses on cultural aspects with technology integration. First, this paper addresses the relationship between culture and language learning. Then, four technological applications are chosen to discuss the learning environments including students' cultural experiences. This paper implies the roles of culture with intercultural dynamics for language learning in CALL classrooms.

Key Words: Computer assisted language learning (CALL), Cultural learning email, discussion forum, chat, web projects

1. Introduction

Generally, culture is defined as an "combined pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, languages, practices, beliefs, values, customs, manners of interacting, relationships and expected behaviors of a racial, ethnic, religious or social group; and the ability to deliver the above to descendents" (Goode, Sockalingam, Brown, & Jones, 2000, p.1). Peterson and Coltrane (2003) underline that language reflects culture itself as well as a part of how we define culture. Learning a language means that students should understand the culture that belongs to the language. Regarding this, students

* I am grateful to the three anonymous reviews for their invaluable comments, suggestions and criticisms which have paved the way for this paper.

have to be aware of the culturally proper manners to communicate with others (e.g., asking favors, addressing people, expressing thanks, and arguing with someone). In short, they should comprehend that, in order for successful communication, language use must be associated with culturally appropriate ways (Peterson & Coltrane, 2003).

Now, language learning classroom environment with technology is experiencing various changes in teaching and learning. At this point, we should think about how teachers integrate culture, which is inseparable from language instruction, into CALL classrooms. Earlier studies on CALL were mostly focused on the design and implementation aspects of technology itself, which were primarily descriptive, or framed within a product-oriented paradigm (Chapelle, 2001; Warschauer & Kern, 2000). However, recently, there has been a shift toward process-oriented research (e.g., Basharina, 2007; Jung, 2006; Yoon, 2008) and a focus on the contexts of computer use and evolving interaction. But, we should notice that not many studies are focused on cultural aspect. Some intercultural studies on CALL (e.g., Belz, 2001, 2003; Belz & Muller-Hartmann, 2003; Belz & Thorne, 2006; Kramsch & Thorne, 2002) investigate intercultural competence observed in the CALL classrooms. Besides, only a few research papers discussed elements and misunderstandings that might be obstacles for intercultural learning (e.g., O' Dowd, 2003, 2005; Thorne, 2006; Ware, 2005). Naturally, there is the increasing need to discuss about the cultural contexts and roles in CALL classrooms. Therefore, this paper seeks to refocus and discuss the cultural issues based on the previous research papers in the learning and teaching of culture using new technologies to respond effectively to the cultural challenge in CALL classrooms and provide some implications for teachers.

2. Culture and Language Learning

Linguistic competence alone is not enough for learners of a language to be competent in that language (Krasner, 1999). Obviously, intercultural competence, which is the ability of successful interaction with people from other cultures to understand their specific concepts in perception, thinking, feeling and acting, should be combined. It provokes that "students can truly acquire the language

when they have also learned the cultural contexts in which the language occurs" (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996, p. 27). In these regards, to make students aware of the cultural features in the target language, culture should be taught implicitly and explicitly, imbedded in the linguistic forms of the language.

Researchers realize that communication means a lot more than the combination of vocabulary and grammar. For example, Byram (1997), Kramsch (1993; 1998), and Pulverness (2003) explore the importance and possibilities of including cultural components into second and foreign language curriculum. Their findings emphasize that without combining with culture, teaching languages is inaccurate and incomplete. In other words, for students, learning languages seems senseless if they do not understand the people who speak the target language or the country in which the target language is spoken. Regarding this, McKay (2003) highlights that culture influences language teaching linguistically and pedagogically. In linguistic aspect, it affects the semantic, pragmatic, and discourse levels of the language. In pedagogical aspect, it modifies the choice of the language materials because cultural content of the language materials and the cultural basis of the teaching methodology are considered while deciding upon the language materials. Intercultural understanding reflects the idea that students should gain insight both into their own culture and the foreign culture, as well as be aware of the adjoining of cultures that often takes place in communication situations in the foreign language (Kramsch, 1993).

To reflect this trend, the culture is currently included as a curricula core in class designs and textbooks for learning second languages and foreign languages (Sysoyev & Donelson, 2002). However, language curriculum still focuses primarily on the mechanics of language skills and invests little time to the hand-on tasks of helping students' understanding of another culture, and particularly those aspects of culture that associate with attitudes and values because these dimensions of culture are basically abstract, elusive, and difficult to deal with (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet, 2001). Thus, we, as educators, should search for various ways in which this new level of understanding of cultures around the world might be attained.

3. Culture and Technology

As mentioned earlier, culture teaching is obviously not an easy task for foreign language teachers. During searching for appropriate approaches, language teachers have been attracted to technology for help in delivering cultural components. In various ways, CALL and culture are fundamentally connected because CALL is about language and language is inseparable with a culture (Cameron, 1998). Naturally, it is impossible to separate cultural issues from designing a CALL program.

Over the years, CALL experts have made efforts to explore the potential possibilities of computer technology in assisting in the teaching of culture and language. Along with the change of beliefs in how culture should be taught in language classrooms, the exploration of computer technology to teach cultural issues in the classrooms has also gone through several phases (Liaw, 2006). In the early stage, computer-assisted language teaching software was developed with the functions of teaching not only language but also culture. Unfortunately, the commercial CALL software design was based on many cultural inaccuracies and misrepresentations and thus was against the goal of providing students with culturally authentic CALL experiences (Shaughnessy, 2003). Namely, due to content and delivery isolation of software, students were presented with an ethnocentric view of the world (Liaw, 2006). As a result, students could only experience the view of only one cultural reference since the culturally standard software neglected various cultural differences regarding specific topics.

However, with the technological advancements, CALL has started to integrate the use of computer networks to reimburse for commercial software's incompetence to provide assistance in the authentic teaching of culture. In short, computer networks have connected to various passages (e.g., chat, boards, web-pages, email, and virtual reality) for interactivity and authenticity and for developing language learners' intercultural competence (Abrams, 2002; Kramsch, 1993; Straub, 1999). Also, online documents and textual materials has been developed to promote the cultural understanding of ESL/EFL learners (Liaw, 2006).

In the research of CALL, Basharina (2007) clarifies that "the exploration of intercultural misunderstandings in CALL often leads researchers to investigate

the complex interrelationship between structure (i.e., context and setting) and agency (i.e., situated activity and self)" (p. 83), given online interaction that is composed of at least two layers: off-line, sitting in front of the computer monitors in the cultural contexts; and online, through textual representations of selves in the situational contexts. It has been identified that misinterpretation in online environments is increased due to the characteristic of an online medium which depends on typing and networking speed, as well as a lack of paralinguistic and non-verbal cues (Basharina, 2007; Ferrara, Bruner & Whittlemore, 1991; Mantovani, 1996). Moreover, it has been argued that the unsuccessful online telecollaborations are caused by misunderstanding of broader socio-cultural contexts that are deeply connected to the verbal and non-verbal choices of students online.

Although many research studies showed that computer technology has used improperly and caused unexpected results in intercultural CALL classrooms, it is obvious that computer software, computer networks, online tools via different ways, play an active role in assisting students' language learning with computer technology's adaptability and advancement based on the cultural research. While integrating computers into typical lecturing to foster students' intercultural and language competence is still an evolving approach, it starts to demonstrate notable results such as consideration of other culture, increasing participation, and motivation (e.g., Jung 2006; Yoon, 2008) and certainly deserves further investigation (Liaw, 2006).

4. Technological Applications

4.1. E-mail

Over the past decade, e-mail has been used dramatically in all areas of social interaction: between friends, in workplace, and in schools. E-mail has become one of the essential and most frequently used means for students to counsel with teachers and replaces consequently, to a certain extent, the more traditional face-to-face office hours (Walther, 1994). It is a useful way for students to meet faculty who are not on campus every day and whose office hours may not fit

into students' schedules (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2005). For online classes, e-mail also could deliver materials and supplements as well as course management. Many general research studies (e.g., Collins, 1998; McKeage, 2001; Ronau & Stroble, 1999) have found that students respond favorably to using e-mail as an additional way to contact their teachers and indicate that e-mail may assist teacher-student communication and student learning.

In the intercultural research in e-mail, several studies found that the use of positive and negative politeness strategies is an important way to continue the communication both for sender and receiver (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman 1967). Similarly, Murphy and Levy's study (2006) investigates politeness strategies in intercultural email communication in Australian and Korean perspectives. The results show differences in politeness, both in expectations and use, between Australian and Korean academics. They found that considerations of politeness are very significant in email communication especially with people from other cultures. These include linguistic expressions (e.g., giving a full title for address and using formality in language) that encourage reliability between sender and receiver and also that show a courtesy and interest for the partners (Murphy & Levy, 2006). This study also indicates that people from different cultural backgrounds have different expectations in their email communication when they are addressed and greeted. As a result, they may feel awkward when their partner does not reflect their expectations. A level of discomfort may also be experienced by culturally different others when email is too personal and straightforward. Some cultures prefer indirect communication styles from unfamiliar receivers, especially for the speech act of requests (Ma, 1996).

The Australia-Brazil-Collaboration (A-B-C) project conducted by Levy (2007) used e-mail to facilitate an online culture learning experience between 24 English language teachers. After the initial e-mails, the participants encouraged to attempt a wide variety of mutual interests and topics such as geography, paralinguage and kinesics, food, transportation, employment, animals, music, sports, weather, movies, actors, and pop stars (Levy, 2007). consequently, the collected e-mail texts are viewed as a collection of cultural exchanges and a rich resource of cultural data becomes available for in-class group discussion. More importantly, the data from this study support the idea that, in email, there appears to be a contemporary bias across cultures towards brevity, informality

and directness (Baron 2001; Crystal 2001; Lan 2000).

Also, some email studies examine that the intercultural beliefs or values are challenged or contested which led to intercultural learning, in particular what cause some network exchanges to fail while others succeeded (e.g. O'Dowd, 2003, Ware & Kramersch, 2005). The O'Dowd investigates an e-mail exchange of ten students from Spain and the UK during 12 months (O'Dowd, 2003). She especially focused on a specific case where an e-mail exchange activity was failed because one of the participants showed nationalism forcefully in an introductory e-mail. The analysis of the data clearly delivers the fact that cultural allegiances affect deeply in e-mail exchange; in short, if these beliefs or values are challenged or contested, the discussion will be overheated and the intercultural e-mail exchange may not be continued (Levy, 2007). Ware and Kramersch (2005) also discuss the possible risks relating to a cross-cultural (mis)communication between learners of German in the United States and learners of English in Germany. They emphasize the risks factors (e.g., beliefs or values), which are considered as the main causes of the unsuccessful e-mail activity, can also lead to insights most difficult to attain by any other means through suitable preparation and discussion between teachers and students.

Additionally, a number of recent studies found that the contradictions may also take place because of the unbalanced combination of academic calendars, institutionalized classroom scripts, methods of learning accreditation, academic socialization and technological access (Belz, 2003; Belz & Muller-Hartmann, 2003; O'Dowd, 2005; Thorne, 2006). These studies highlight the importance of physical contexts consisting of mediating technical tools, academic structure, and policies in shaping an online interaction. Therefore, participants and teachers have to be arranged for different academic calendars and institutional policies as well as technical availability before starting the activity (Belz, 2003; Kramersch & Thorne, 2002; Ware, 2005).

4.2. Discussion Forum

Discussion forum is a web application for holding discussions and posting user-generated content. The forums are also commonly referred as web forums, message boards, discussion boards, (electronic) discussion groups, discussion

forums or bulletin boards. The terms "forum" and "board" refer to the entire community or to a specific sub-forum dealing with a distinct topic. Messages within these sub-forums are displayed either in chronological order or as threaded discussions.

This technological application can provide a unique opportunity for EFL/ESL students to use their own social and cultural practices to learn a target language. Through the discussion forum, students can explain their views based on their own culture and cultural practices and to share their opinions with their partners who speak the target language. Moreover, asynchronous technology such as discussion forum provides valuable experiences for deliberation and representation of cultural understandings because students can have the time to consider attributes of their own cultural environments and those of their partner, and the time to ponder on how best to reflect their own comprehension of the culture (Levy, 2007).

Liaw's project (2006) through discussion forum investigates EFL students' intercultural competence. The EFL students of this project read articles about their native culture, and e-forums were used for intercultural discussion. After reading a short story or articles, students expressed in their own words what they believe the story is about. This study used the students' summaries as a way of understanding students's interaction. The result of this study shows examples of the four types of intercultural competence: "(A) interest in knowing other people's way of life and introducing one's own culture to others, (B) ability to change perspective, (C) knowledge about one's own and others' culture for intercultural communication, and (D) knowledge about intercultural communication processes" (Liaw, 2006, p.57). By comparing the students' summaries in the forum, he found the influenced elements such as their own life experiences, ethnicity, social and economic background, attitudes and beliefs that reflect on why the students' choices are different to or similar to those of others and realize how they have constructed meanings of the story (Kramsch, 1993, 1998).

Also, the *Cultura* project developed by Furstenberg et al. (2001) is designed to develop the students' understanding of foreign cultural attitudes, concepts, beliefs, and ways of interacting and looking at the world. Their goal is to study the pedagogy with integrating technology, with particular emphasis on the ways

in which the discussion forum can be used to disclose those hidden features of a foreign culture. In the forum, the French and American students shared their perspectives with each other. This study insists that the discussion forums with reading and issues go much deeper than e-mail exchanges that often limit themselves to sharing information about each other's daily lives. Evidently, their data show that the bulk of the information take place at the social, political, and cultural level, which is at the root of cultural literacy (Levy, 2007). Additionally, allowing students to post and exchange documents and photos within forums, led them to develop another stage of exchange and comparison of cultural attitude.

Similarly, Kramsch and Thorne (2002) examine the presumption that computer-mediated communication helps students to understand their partners' regional situations of language use and to develop a global awareness for intercultural understanding. In their study of telecollaboration, French-American students quite often experience intercultural misunderstanding due to the limited background of the "different social and cultural conventions under which each party is operating" (p. 90) and "very little awareness that such an understanding is even necessary" (p. 98). Most of the French partners, for example, used factual, impersonal, unbiased type of writing. They extensively used analytical connectors such as "for example," "however," "moreover," as well as made nuanced corrections to what they believe that American misjudges about the situation in France. By contrast, the American students began this exchange with an informal, highly personal tone in order to share their daily lives because they considered this forum activity as a chance of mutual trust and friendship building. The researchers explain the misunderstanding as "a clash of cultural frames caused by the different reasoning of the two languages for each group of speakers and their different understanding of appropriate genres" (p. 94-95). In Kramsch and Thorne's interpretation, each group used the communicative style and tone they were familiar to their foreign language communicative tasks in telecommunication. Consequently, the educational implication drawn from their study is to prepare students to deal with diverse communicative genres and introduce clearly the goals of activities and brief cultural backgrounds of other participants to students.

4.3. Chat

Chat is generally known as the real-time conversation among computer users in a networked environment such as the Internet. It brings participants together at different locations to exchange information and discuss problem situations. After a user types a text message and presses the Enter key, the text immediately appears on the other users' computers, permitting typed conversations that are often only somewhat slower than normal conversation. In this way, users can take part in a discussion whenever they wish by computer or terminal. In this respect, this technological application has been attractive to language teachers and students who consider expressing themselves effectively and properly during oral conversation with native speakers as the final goal of language learning.

CALL researchers have compared chat and face-to-face discussion on various ways, including examination of the effectiveness of chat as a preparatory activity for face-to-face discussion by comparing the quantity and nature of linguistic output during one chat session as compared with face-to-face discussion. Payne and Ross (2005) summarize the findings from these studies as following: "(a) more language in a chatroom is produced than face-to-face settings (Abrams, 2003; Kern, 1995; Warschauer, 1996), (b) students are willing to use more complex language when chatting (Bohlke, 2003; Kern, 1995; Warschauer, 1996) including more correct usage of tense morphological markers (Salaberry, 2000); (c) more balanced participation among students is observed in a chatroom (Chun, 1994; Freiermuth, 2001); and (d) students show positive and active attitudes towards foreign language learning due to chatting (Beauvois, 1997; Chun, 1994; Kern, 1995; Warschauer, 1996)" (p. 35).

However, the crucial importance of cultural understanding for language learners when they try to derive meaning from each chatting context has been undervalued (Levy, 2007). Specifically, cultural differences between students in interpreting the context led to miscommunications during chatting as many examples of the research studies mentioned above. The chatting environment itself adds "another layer of complexity for participants in their efforts to draw meaning from the context" (Levy, 2007, p. 116). Understanding cultural hidden meanings in chatting is critical because students often use incomplete or

abbreviated sentences (Toyoda & Harrison, 2002). The communication difficulty usually arises from lack of cultural information driven by three different ways; (a)different interpretations of meaning, (b)the unique features of chat, such as the strictly linear and discrete ordering and presentation of turns, (c)the lack of non-verbal cues (e.g., eye-contact, facial expressions, body language) (Levy, 2007). Through chatting program, participants should understand their partners in a diminished or omitted context without the various hints and body languages from a face-to-face conversation that are instantly provided to gain the real meanings from the communication context. It is noticeable that students' approach to the Internet cultures is mainly ruled by their ability to handle the different ways of interaction that control in the digital environment. Assisting students to understand the contextual meaning with a fruitful cultural comprehension can be accomplished directly and indirectly through providing culture-rich-environments and technological support.

4.4. Web Projects

The project is a collaborative environment that relies on group discussions rather than one-on-one mentoring to achieve its goals. To explore questions and build knowledge together online, the web projects offer various experiences that results in mutual learning among students, educators, and technician. Generally, web projects has identified and built upon three types of discourse; design conversations, online dialog, and information exchanges. All use a common process of request-respond-reply to keep the conversations engaging for participants. Web based projects gives students the unique opportunity to watch their work and thoughts unfold. Time and distance as the merits of web projects provide the chance to step back, reflect, and respond.

Ware(2005) explored the elements of contributing to limited interactional involvement in a web-based project with two groups of participants: 12 advanced-level students of English in northeastern Germany and 9 advanced-level students of German in the southwestern United States. The study was examined three main contextual tensions; "(a) Different expectations and norms for telecollaboration, (b) Social and institutional factors that shape tensions, and (c) Individual differences in motivation and use of time"(Ware,

2005, p. 67). To address first and second tension, the study suggested specific and detailed class discussions with students. Teachers and students could discuss openly about published episodes of successful and unsuccessful communication through web-projects before starting the exchange to understand missed communication and help divert possible hidden tensions in their own communication. Also, this study recommended that discussion with their online peers should be encouraged. Turning to the third tension, some constraints often affect student motivation and time investment in telecollaboration(Ware, 2005). In other words, it is difficult for individuals to commit to a balanced time investment due to personal schedule or to escape from anxiety about grades, but students can be motivated to discuss openly these concerns with their classmates to overcome this tension.

Regarding the effectiveness of intercultural learning through web projects, Triandis (1994) found that participants experienced some changes as the followings; (a) expanding the range of explanations they provide for certain behaviors, (b) becoming less ethnocentric, (c) developing more precise expectations concerning proper behavior, (d) being better able to analyze new problematic intercultural factors. In short, cultural learning before and during web-projects increases cognitive competence which helps them open to another cultural group and thus lessen bias. Furthermore, this study underscores that simply knowing how the other cultural group thinks and lives does not affect emotions but liking depends on various enjoyable experiences that one has shared with the other group. Also, Triandis (1994) mentioned that intercultural learning with various ways does not change behavior either: It gives chances to know how one is supposed to behave, not to behave correctly.

Similarly, according to Cushner and Brislin's research (1996), students, who participate in the web project, have scored higher on a testing factor of intercultural sensitivity and acceptance of cultural relativity, as measured by the following statements: (a) It is important to consider people's feelings before making a decision; (b) There is usually more than one good way to get things done; (c) I may defend the viewpoint of others; (d) I think people are basically alike; (e) Certain prejudices I have hinder the way I interact with people (negatively scored). Their research highlights that various cultural learning through online activities improves the background connecting with intercultural

communication and adjustment. Hence, the students are more confident in unusual situations and are better able to reach their goals.

Shawback and Terhune (2002) designed a web-based course using online interactive exercises and films to study language and culture. They claimed that the various interactive functions (e.g. discussion, posting, multimedia) allowed students to actively explore the cultural side of the films and encourage students' confidence and motivation to study the language and culture. Also, the e-learning project conducted by Rogerson-Revell (2003) aims to investigate web technology to develop intercultural business and language skills for European managers in the construction industry. This study supports a combined method to language and cultural learning, describing how a "cultural syllabus" is designed to develop users' understanding of key aspects of European work culture and practices with their professional language skills. This study emphasizes the effectiveness of integrated approach of language skills and cultural practice in web-based projects. However, the findings of this study feature that excessive cultural information and compulsive acceptance through various web applications may increase intercultural anxiety and stress. Alternatively, curiosity may increase certainly if the international assignment is considered as essential to the individual's personal goals.

5. Conclusion

It is clear that "culture learning as well as language learning will derive from interaction that allows for action and reflection that encourage a 'dialogue' in the learner's mind between the broader generalization and individual instance" (Levy, 2007, p. 121). With the help of computer technology, students take a journey of discovery and reflection where their understanding of the behaviors, faith, perception, negotiation skill and the other culture is exchanged, discussed, negotiated, and even refined (Liaw, 2006). However, we should keep in our mind that people from different cultural backgrounds have different expectations in various communicative situations. Miscomprehension through online activities is often hard to change because the online learning environments are different in social and institutional dimensions. As a result, they may feel uncomfortable

when their partners do not follow their expectations. To modify this problem, students and teachers must negotiate different and cultural possible situations and misunderstandings of online discussions (Belz & Müller-Hartmann, 2003; Kramsch & Thorne, 2002). More importantly, it seems vital for language teachers to encourage group interdependence and critical self-reflection in relation to intercultural learning because on-going group reflection of the learning process/progress can help students to trace and evaluate outcomes (Fuchs, 2007).

Above all, language teachers should consider that the students' understanding of the target culture is accomplished through his/her own cultural background and knowledge. In other words, culture learning is not merely learning the target culture. It includes gaining insights into how the culture of the target language interacts with one's own cultural experience (Liaw, 2006). Therefore, teachers should prepare students to be familiar with their own culture. Then, by discussing the values, expectations, traditions, customs, and rituals, they are ready to reflect upon the values, expectations, and traditions of others with a higher degree of scholarly objectivity (Straub, 1999). Also, foreign language teachers should encourage students to reorganize their own complex culture in deeper level and provide them opportunities to develop skills to investigate cultural complexity and to boost cultural curiosity (Abrams, 2002). For example, by openly sharing students' essay and discussion, we can provide them opportunities to understand why their choices are different than or similar to those of others and realize how they should communicate. Moreover, teachers should be well aware that online settings are different learning environments. It is important to understand how culture is communicated through language and online contexts, and how to realize norms of interpretation and patterns of use. However, not much information is available for language teachers. Therefore, although there are many important matters in CALL, practical methods and guidelines for teachers to teach language and culture in CALL classrooms would be an interesting point of future investigation.

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Received: 30 December, 2008

Revised: 12 March, 2009

Accepted: 18 March, 2009