EFL Teacher’s and Learners’ Perspectives Towards ATODJ: A Case of CMC and MALL

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated EFL teachers’ and students’ perspectives towards Audiotaped Oral Dialogue Journals (ATODJs), as a computer-mediated communication (CMC) and a Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) task. The data came from 202 entries of ATODJs, gathered from 15 female Iranian intermediate EFL learners. Teachers and students’ evaluations of the whole program comprised of the qualitative part of the research. The results revealed that the majority of the participants found ATODJs helpful. The strengths, weaknesses, and the challenges of ATODJs from the teacher’s and the participants’ viewpoints were discussed. Based on the results of the present study, it is highly recommended that EFL teachers and materials developers incorporate ATODJ tasks in the curriculum.

Key words: Audiotaped-Oral Dialogue Journal (ATODJ), Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), Curriculum, Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), Teachers

INTRODUCTION

Recently, the use of technology, i.e. computers and mobile phones, in L2 learning situations has increased to a significant level. Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) (Butler-Pascoe, 2011) or Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) (Egbert, Akasha, Huff, & Lee, 2011) engages L2 learners in communicative exchanges using computers. CMC offers adequate opportunities to students to pay more attention to linguistic forms and also provides a less stressful environment for L2 practice and production (Mackey & Gass, 2005). An extension of CALL (Brown, 2005) is Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL). MALL, developed to provide oral interaction for L2 learners, was proposed by Kukulska-Hulme and Shield (2008). Park (2011), in a review of the evolution of mobile learning, suggests that mobile devices are dynamic and pervasive devices that promise plenty of educational potential. The current study was conducted to find out EFL teachers’ and students’ perspectives towards a CMC and MALL task, which is, audio taped oral dialogue journals (ATODJs) (i.e. L2 learner’s recorded extemporaneous speech, Lazaraton, 2001).

Literature Review

Warschauer (1997) proposes the use of CMC as a powerful way to connect learners and facilitate interactive contexts for them to acquire, learn

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about, and learn through language. Schmidt (2007) notes that efforts have been made to design prescriptive methods for integrating interaction into the curriculum through the use of CMC. These CMC studies are grounded in Long’s Interaction Hypothesis (1996) and, according to Lee (2008), they have focused on how mutual comprehension is attained using various types of negotiation moves; in particular the negotiation of meaning and eliciting corrective feedback. Moreover, CMC may offer copious amounts of data for L2 learners; more so than face-to-face oral exchanges (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

The need for CMC might have arisen due to the lack of opportunity for meaningful interactions in ELT classrooms, as Long (1983) eloquently asserts. In an attempt to address this problem, a concern with the use of CMC, with the aim of facilitating learners’ interaction, has emerged (e.g. Mackey & Gass, 2005; Schmidt, 2007). According to Schmidt (2007), CMC helps to mitigate the aforementioned problem since it can be used to encourage the same types of interaction that are evident in face-to-face settings. Nevertheless, CMC is not yet a fully-fledged research area, and thus Schmidt (2007) suggests that further research is needed in order to clarify the nature of its contribution to language learning. Despite a general lack of research into the use of CMC in language learning, however, it is worthwhile to mention that various studies do address this topic (e.g. Butler-Pascoe, 2011; Darhower, 2002; Egbert, Akasha, Huff, & Lee, 2011; Garrett, 2009; Her- ring, 2010; Lee, 2009; Li, 2013; Perez, 2003; Peterson, 2009; Recuero, 2007; Spitzberg, 2006; Stockwell, 2011).

The literature on CMC has revealed it to be beneficial in many ways. Two main benefits of CMC will now be outlined. Firstly, CMC enhances motivation of EFL learners, as shown in studies by Butler-Pascoe (2011), Egbert, Akasha, Huff, and Lee (2011), Kim (2008), Perez (2003), Recuero (2007), and Spitzberg (2006). Secondly, CMC enhances fluency, as proposed by Setlock and Fussell (2010) and Spitzberg (2006). What is meant by fluency in EFL literature is how Kock (2008) defines it: “number of words conveyed per minute” (p. 15). Kock (2001) states that communication fluency has been found to be close to 100 words per minute face-to-face; however, it often drops to as little as six words per minute through e-mail, when what is being communicated is complex knowledge (Kock, 2001). Yet, no studies have been conducted to explore the weaknesses and strengths of ATODJs as CMC tasks.

ATODJs (Lazaraton, 2001) are tasks conducted by students when they speak extemporaneously about a topic, introduced by the teacher, whilst their voice is recorded. The teacher listens to the entry of each student’s recorded audio file at home and gives feedback in the form of a conference. Two terms which need to be explained here are entry and conference. Both Dantas-Whitney (2002) and Ho (2003) used the former to refer to the EFL learner’s recorded voice. To be consistent with the literature, the word entry is used in this paper. The latter, on the other hand, is a one-to-one interaction between a teacher and a student in which the teacher is able to direct feedback to the student’s specific needs (Brown, 2004).

Lazaraton (2001) also insists that teachers should be diligent in encouraging their students to speak extemporaneously and in explaining to them that the purpose and the focus of the activity is to work on unplanned speaking. She states that ATODJs emphasize fluency and meaningful negotiation as well as accuracy.

ATODJs are groundbreaking methods which utilize audiotapes (Allan, 1991; Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996), which encourage oral fluency, and which provide feedback on selected aspects of accuracy. They consist of students taping weekly entries and teachers responding to those entries. Responding to the entries of oral dialogue journals might, to some extent, be time-consuming for teachers, especially if the class size is large, but many teachers know the value of the attempt, according to Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (1996). Such teachers believe that individualized feedback on students’ oral production achieved through this means is
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