ABSTRACT

The recent developments in educational technologies have given opportunity to the use of various Internet-based resources, apps and Interactive Multimedia Software. This variety has provided freedom for foreign language learners to reach multiple sources of technology. The immersive nature of 3-D virtual learning environments such as the Second Life may provide many new opportunities for authentic communication, cooperative creation of content, and multiple modes of information processing in the context of foreign language learning. This chapter will discuss how these new technologies can be used in language classrooms to improve students’ listening skill which is important for effective communication. In the digital age, new technologies are repositioning listening as an important ‘new’ literacy where new resources can be used to provide a better learning-teaching context. Today’s young people known as “digital natives” are born into a digital world, and they spend hours in front of their digital devices.

BACKGROUND

Until the digital age, written language was very important because printed books and printed documents were permanent, transportable, viewable and recordable whereas this was not possible with oral language. With new technologies, it is now possible to capture, record and transform oral language, which was previously impossible. In communication, listening entails complex interpretive processes. Successful listening entails neurological, linguistic, semantic, cognitive, social and pragmatic processes.

In the new media age, new technologies are repositioning listening as an important ‘new’ literacy. Today’s young people, “who are digitally-fluent and competitive” (Türel, 2014, p. 178), and thus known as “digital natives” (Türel, 2013, p. 483; Duncan-Howell, 2012; Prensky, 2001), have never known a world without computers, digital media, or the Internet, and spend many hours daily using technology.
Using 3-D Virtual Learning Environments to Improve Listening Skill

Based-media. Technology can be used to improve students' basic language skills. Listening skills are important for effective communication; it is essential to give students opportunities to develop and improve their listening skills not only in the classroom but outside the classroom as well. By using Internet-based resources, students can study independently, choosing from a wide range of different resources that are available. Learners can use information and communication technology (ICT) in developing and improving their language skills, in particular their listening comprehension.

There are thousands of web tools, applications and Internet-based resources for listening skills such as audio books, podcasts, vidcasts and virtual learning environments (VLEs). Some popular applications are Voxopop, Podomatic, Dvolver Moviemaker, Auditory Workout, Comprehension TherAppy, etc.

3-D Virtual Learning Environments

Livingstone, Kemp and Edgar (2008, p. 141) believe that “advances in the capabilities and spread of technology have fed a recent boom in interest in massively multi-user three-dimensional (3-D) virtual worlds for entertainment, and this in turn has led to a surge of interest in their educational applications.” Multi-user virtual environments (MUVEs) are immersive virtual worlds (IWV) that have been turned into 3-D virtual learning environments (VLEs). Kluge and Riley (2008) define these VLEs as “multi-user virtual environments (MUVE) or Metaverse” (p. 128). Like VLEs, the 3-D VLEs could be an application of computer assisted language learning (CALL).

There are many 3-D VLEs on the web, some of them are as follows:

- OpenSim (http://www.opensimulator.org): OpenSimulator is an open source multi-platform, multi-user 3-D application server.
- There (http://www.there.com/): is a social virtual world where people go to spend time with friends, meet new ones, and have fun in 3-D environments.
- Olive (https://www.leidos.com/products/simulation/olive) is a software platform that enables customers to deploy their own persistent and secure (3-D) virtual worlds.
- Twinity (http://www.twinity.com/en): is an online, immersive and connected virtual environment that complements and amplifies the interests of the youth demographic.
- Entropia Universe (http://www.entropiauniverse.com/): is an advanced 3-D online virtual environment with a developed planetary system and one universal Real Cash Economy system.
- Open Wonderland (http://openwonderland.org/): is a 100% Java open source toolkit for creating collaborative 3-D virtual worlds.
- Active Worlds (http://www.activeworlds.com/): offers a comprehensive platform for efficiently delivering real-time interactive 3-D content over the web.

Virtual worlds are online computer-generated 3 dimensional environments where people can interact for gaming (entertainment) and for non-gaming purposes. These (non-gaming) realistic virtual worlds can be effective, real-life communication, business, education and social tools. Cornelissen and Rettberg (2008) state that the World of Warcraft game, which is a massively multiplayer online game with over 10 million subscribers, is the most prominent example of online games (2008, p.1). According to Warburton (2009, p. 414), the most popular 3-D multi-user virtual environment is Second Life. According to the statistics of Shepherd (2015) more than 41 million people have opened accounts and joined this virtual world since the inception of Second Life. Second Life is an Internet-based collaboration context.