Chapter VIII


Silvia Gstrein, Research Studios Austria, Austria

Theo Hug, University of Innsbruck, Austria

Abstract

Time pressure and lack of motivation are often seen as obstructive factors in second-language (L2) learning. In fact, L2 learning is much more of an ongoing process than just taking a course. In response, a new approach to learning has been developed, called integrated micro learning (IML), based on a patent-pending technology that allows integrating language learning into a learner’s daily routine with the help of electronic devices. It thus helps to envisage a new mode of information technology-assisted L2 learning as part of vocational and educational training. In this chapter, we introduce the concept of IML in general and with regard to L2 learning in particular. We also report on the first prototypical representation as well as the first experience.
Introduction

In the last couple of years the broadening of the scope of technological feasibility has entailed the assimilation of computers and computer-based technology into every aspect of our lives. Recent advances in microprocessor, communication and sensor/actuator technologies envision a whole new era of telecommunication, in many papers referred to as “ubiquitous computing.” Researchers in this field strongly believe that in the near future, appliances and objects of everyday use (personal digital assistants, smartphones, active badges and wearable computers, to name a few) will deliver services adapted to the person, the time, the place — in other words, the context — of their use.

In such contexts, the electronic device recedes more and more into the background and the individual human being is brought to the forefront. Wireless “small intelligent objects” replace the “static” wired computer of the past and constitute a setting of ubiquitous access to information processing units. The appearance of computing devices will become invisible, networked, spontaneously responsive and inherent in everyday environments with “hidden” services (Ferscha, 2004).

The main aim of “ubiquitous computing” lies in designing, drafting and developing systems of information technology (IT) that support the individual in mastering daily routines and offer alternative ways to solve posed problems. The challenge is to assign extra functionality to gadgets of everyday use and at the same time make them “sensitive” enough to react to certain context-based situations autonomously, intelligently and — above of all — invisibly. Among others, pilot projects are being developed in terms of “smart homes” (e.g., intelligent fridges and heating systems), intelligent offices and learning environments.

In the following sections, we focus on a new approach to learning with the help of electronic devices. While concepts of “ubiquitous computing” will be taken into consideration in future e-learning projects, our approach makes use of ongoing processes of medialization. Along with media changes, life worlds are changing, as well as media cultures, socio-economic spheres and knowledge dynamics. In this context, new forms of learning are being developed. As a future-oriented example, a method to seamlessly embed learning activities into an individual’s everyday life and work will be put forth. IML is an effective realization of blending daily life and IT for learning purposes, foreshadowing “ubiquitous learning,” so to speak.

This new method has been developed to combine the learning process with the use of electronic devices (e.g., personal computer/PC or mobile phone), thus integrating bits and pieces of learning into our daily lives. IML works by integrating small learning tasks into the initial processes of any electronic device or digital application, thus harnessing both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

Background

Most recent figures (CEDEFOP, 2003; Eurobarometer, 2001) emphasize an eagerness to learn among a broad range of individuals for private or professional advancement.
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