INTRODUCTION

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), with particular reference to linguistics and Literacy and how the technologies that drive this exciting area of research can be applied for natural language education, is a fast changing discipline. About every month a new technology is introduced by one company or the other that has the potential to impact the discipline in profound ways. So much so that it is hard for a research academic to pretend that at any one moment in time one can capture a representative snap-shot of the discipline that can stand the test of time. New technologies - new media, new issues - new themes are constantly emerging, and it is fitting to emphasize these new technologies and new themes in the final chapter of the book.

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In previous chapters, I focused mostly on what may be termed text-based Computer-Mediated Communication, which may be defined as interaction and transfer of information through the medium of the computer and related digital devices mainly in the written word. We have seen this in extensive discussions and case studies involving email, SMS, and MSN, among others.

One emerging trend, however, is that even within text-based computer mediated communication there was always a tendency to incorporate images and sound, as can be seen in the icons and smileys of Email and SMS, an important aspect of what has come to be known as visual language or visual communication (Horn 1999).

More radically, however, a new theme has emerged from this gradual incorporation of images in text-based CMC: video-based CMC. Video-based Computer-Mediated Communication may be defined as interaction and transfer of information through the medium of the computer and related digital devices mainly in the form of dynamic image streams. This is an even more revolutionary dynamic than the use of still pictures, clip art, images, and icons that has been described in visual language and visual communication studies. Of course, Video CMC still contains the written word, but the written word is mainly meant to just express talk around the main issue, the Video event. Young users of the internet have radically moved away from communication through the written word to communication in the medium of video clips and voice-image interactions through video-based media such as Facebook, YouTube, video games, and Skype. Social networking tools and sites such as YouTube, Facebook, and MySpace are all built with substantial use of video-based CMC.

It is this emerging paradigm shift from text-based to video-based CMC that this last chapter addresses. I do this by focusing on detailed case studies of three of these emerging media. First, I focus on Facebook, which is mid-way between text-based CMC and video-based CMC. Next, I move on to YouTube. YouTube has become the most famous video-based CMC medium and I do a brief discussion of this medium. I then look at Massively Multiplayer Online (MMO) gaming, which is an even more extreme video-based CMC that involves a lot of interaction in the form of competitive video-game contests. After discussing these major media which all incorporate the new theme of video-based CMC, the next part of the chapter is devoted to brief discussions of a miscellany of new video-based CMC media that are just too new to do any extensive surveys on because, even as we read this book, new media are constantly being introduced. Finally, I conclude the chapter – and the book - by summarizing and tying together the emerging themes and media discussed, with a speculation on what the future of linguistics- and literacy-based CMC will look like and how we can expect to harness this paradigm shift from text-based CMC to video-based CMC in the area of education, particularly natural language learning.
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