COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES FOR TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

V.V.GUBKINA
Senior lecturer
National Mining University

Most educational visions for the next decades recognize the need for carrying out the changes in education due to the driving force of information technology which generates the great transformation of economic, political and social life in recent years. Language teaching education is obviously entering a new and largely uncharted phase and we would seem to be at a crossroad. This situation could be identified as a sociocognitive phase where in contrast to previous phases students interact with each other and the world via the computer. Consequently, students have to develop new skills to use advanced technologies effectively in the information-based society.

Foreign language teachers have always been ahead in integrating information technologies in foreign language instruction and learning, observing the advantages of these technologies even without research database to confirm their ideas. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) plays an increasingly significant role in teaching foreign languages. It is probably the single computer application having made the greatest impact on language teaching. For the first time language learners can communicate directly, inexpensively and conveniently with other learners or speakers of the target language from any place. Computer-mediated communication allows users to share not only brief messages, but also lengthy (formatted or unformatted) documents – thus facilitating collaborative writing and also graphics, sounds and video.

For foreign language environments, in particular, the incorporation of network-based computer-mediated communication seems a significant addition to the long-established practices of using pens and watching news clips and films. Moreover, the opportunity for interpersonal interaction afforded by CMC can take place between people for whom the language serves as an additional language as well as between learners and those for whom it is a primary language.

Its use is supported by a number of studies which stress out the importance of providing negotiations of meaning and computer-based interaction in the course of second language acquisition. Task-based activities and situated cognition allow students to obtain knowledge in the meaningful contexts for specific purposes.

It is known that task-based instruction grew out of communicative language teaching that makes use of real-life situations and promote communication. This type of teaching emerged in the 1970s as a reaction to grammar-translation and audio-lingual approaches. The main principle of communicative language teaching is based on the idea that language learning should be driven by communicative ends and through exposure to authentic and purposeful uses of language led to content-based instruction, an approach to language teaching that utilizes foreign language texts (oral

and written) to illustrate the purposeful use of the target language and teach the content of another discipline.

Task-based instruction focuses on purposeful language use through the utilization of content-driven tasks within a communicative context. Students apply whatever target language resources they have in order to solve a problem, play a game or share and compare experience. A task-based approach sees the learning process as one of learning through doing and by primarily engaging in meaning that the learner's system is encouraged to develop.

Task-based instruction interfaces well with the implementation of national standards for foreign language teaching. The use of Internet and other wireless technologies facilitate the integration of the five C's (Communication [interpretative, presentational and interpersonal modes], Culture [perspectives, practices and products], Comparisons, Connections and Communities) in various tasks. Matching the task to the particular educational situation is probably the most challenging barrier to implementation.

The teacher must apply his or her understanding of individual students, the curricular goal of the task and the technology available to accomplish the task to tailor the activity to the academic setting but university students could be probably granted the freedom but within clearly defined guidelines. If creative communicative interactions in educational environment can be made more realistic and meaningful through the use of information gap and jigsaw activities, the students will become more fully engaged in the process of learning.

It is not sufficient to equip learners with creative and democratic representational resources and expect that as a result student's control over the learning process increases. Rather than continuing with the more instructive approach used in many educational institutions we have to promote the kind of literacy required to use the new democratic learning spaces to their best effect, empowering learners to chose the appropriate language for what they need to create or express, to enable students to communicate in the language of the twenty-first century. Only then learners can construct their own knowledge, become authors and disseminate their own production.

Computer mediated communication can help students in this re-sourcing of resources allowing them to act as conventors and transformers of the representational resources available to them. This has significant implications for the way we teach and affects such areas as task design, assessment and tutor training.

As we are witnessing the third wave of computing, mobile, wearable and pervasive technologies offer communication environments including audio, video and 3D graphics allowing users and thus also language students to integrate CMC into the flow of their everyday activities. It therefore becomes increasingly important to use virtual learning spaces in a way that gives students control of meaning-making and enables them to cope successfully with the challenge of their communication and interaction being doubly mediated both by the foreign language and the learning context.