Using translation tools to solve emergent comprehension problems in English computer-assisted project work: A multimodal analysis.

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Abstract

In the process of documenting and examining the learning affordances of digital technologies in the English language classroom of upper-secondary Swedish schools during the period 2008-2012, it has emerged that there has been a marked increase in the use of translation tools such as Google Translate, alongside the occasional use of online dictionaries. Using video recordings of computer-assisted English project work, this paper aims to examine both the trajectories and potential affordances of these tools for learning-in-action (Firth and Wagner 2007, Pekarek Doehler 2010).

Drawing on the steadily expanding body of micro-interactional studies in the field of second language learning (cf. special issues of Modern Language Journal (2004) 88.4 & International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching (2009) 47.1, Seedhouse et al. 2010), a number studies have been appearing which include the use of computers in the learning process (e.g. Čekaitė 2009, Dooley 2011, Musk 2011 & Örnberg Berglund 2009). In this vein, and more specifically in the context of English project work (Musk in press), the spotlight was previously on how some pupils exercised their language preferences at the interface with Google to avoid reading densely written text in English. Here the focus shifts to examining the trajectories of how pupils successfully (and unsuccessfully) use different translation tools to solve emergent comprehension problems of words or phrases in the process of reading both instructions and informative texts in English. The pupils’ problems along with their situated collaborative solutions are scrutinised using conversation analysis with close reference to multimodal aspects of interaction (talk, gesture, gaze, manipulation of artefacts such as the computer, etc.).

References

Musk, N. (in press). Doing avoiding the target language with the help of Google: Managing language choices in gathering information for EFL project work. TESOL Quarterly.