

# Revolutionising Language Teaching and Learning via Digital Media Innovations



Noble Po Kan Lo

**Abstract** By analysing reading and writing in a specific context online, we can better understand evolving social and teaching practices. For instance, various online platforms, such as The Open University of Hong Kong’s OLE and The Hong Kong Polytechnic University’s Moodle, and Facebook, have been gradually incorporated into teaching and learning. “The medium, or process, of our time—electric technology—is reshaping and restructuring patterns of social interdependence and every aspect of our personal life” (McLuhan, 1967, p. 8). The technology-related transformation is embedded in broader social changes, influencing people’s language and communicative practices. The domestication of technology (Berker et al., 2005) reveals that people are digitally transformed in their everyday lives. Teenagers are considered as “digital natives” who are specifically adept at using innovative technological devices whilst older people, or “digital immigrants,” have to become familiar with new technologies (Prensky, 2001). Nevertheless, it is of great significance not to stereotype a generation of people via this division because technology expands the variety of knowledge and experience in teenagers and the elderly alike (Bennett et al., 2008; Hargittai, 2010). In this global era, research on new media has followed a wider range of how language and literacy practices can transform educational practices. As Barton (2009) notes, “...by examining the changing role of texts we uncover the central tensions of contemporary change: new literacy practices offer exciting possibilities in terms of access to knowledge, creativity and personal power” (p. 39). This paper, therefore, aims to examine how language teaching and learning can be changed through innovative digital media, particularly in relation to educational settings. In doing so, it is found that computer-mediated discourses can be highly effective in promoting literacy via online language learning spaces.

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## 1 A New Era of Telecollaboration

Online language learning sites provide innovative opportunities to use the Internet to learn new languages, thus exploiting the advantages offered by the digital medium. Allen and Seaman (2013) note that a third of all students in higher education in the US are taking at least one online course. The opportunities for finding resources online to learn a target language may affect students' perceptions in that they believe that they no longer need to travel abroad to practise the foreign language and learn about culture. For these students, the Internet brings it to their own home (Kern, 2014). However, the interactivity mediated by technology is quite different from face-to-face encounters (Develotte, Kern, & Lamy, 2011). Communication technologies, in fact, transform temporal and spatial relations. Educators also need to consider that the traditional distinction of the forms and functions of speech and writing may overlap in online environments. Similarly, the Internet allows language learners to come into contact with native speakers of different varieties, as well as second language speakers who may not have standard norms of language use. Another issue is that materials available online do not have the desirable cultural authenticity for language learners. For these reasons, Kern (2014) compares the Internet to Plato's *pharmakon*: it presents both promise and challenges for language learners.

With this shift in opportunities to utilise digital learning spaces and communications technologies to revolutionise language learning, as well as the challenges it presents, it is necessary to thoroughly explore the concept of telecollaboration. This paper, therefore, aims to examine how language teaching and learning can be made efficient and effective via digital media innovations. It is important to explore educational settings in this respect in order to facilitate the assessment of the thesis that computer media discourses can promote literacy via online language learning spaces, with multiple platforms being capable of providing telecollaborative spaces that are conducive to providing new and innovative learning opportunities.

## 2 Strengths and Challenges for Digital Media for Language Teaching

There are numerous learning and pedagogical theories that underpin the desire to embrace innovative digital media within education, some of which offer broad theoretical insights into online learning opportunities whereas others are specific to language teaching. Formal education has long held the aim of accumulating objective knowledge, specifically knowledge imparted by a teacher via institutional and structural frameworks (Bower, 2017; Gulati, 2004), but new digital paradigms challenge traditional systems by providing new pedagogical options and frameworks. Community language pedagogy is still preferable where teaching is specifically based on audio-lingual methods (Ellis, 2012). Indeed, e-learning pedagogical techniques

and tools have been found to effectively enhance students' learning capabilities. A study by Mehanna (2016) found that effective e-learning practices were broadly dependent on learning frameworks that promoted direct and indirect interaction, including the practice of providing feedback as per face-to-face interaction. In fact, the study contends that e-learning should utilise techniques and methods of teaching online that are effective offline to maximise the success of strategies for teaching languages (Mehanna, 2016). Mehanna's logic makes sense and draws attention to shifts in teaching practices rather than wholesale movements away from what has gone before. Best practice still applies to methods of teaching regardless of the system of delivery. This premise will form the basis of the analysis here.

In addition to the application of a coherent pedagogical theoretical framework, it is necessary to acknowledge the strengths and challenges that utilising digital media for language teaching presents. Firstly, it is important to note that video conferencing is currently used by many language teachers. Video conferencing allows teachers to develop long distance collaborations with two or more classrooms in different countries. Guth and Helm (2010) refer to this as telecollaboration. In these internal partnerships, there is typically an emphasis on culture in language learning and use. Even though some studies have shown the potential benefits of telecollaboration, others, such as Ware (2005), have noted that the intercultural contact given in these telecollaborations does not necessarily mean that students gain any cultural understanding. Video conferencing adds voice, gesture, gaze, and movement in a way that provides communication practice with speakers at a distance. That is, it is the closest approximation to a conversation face to face.

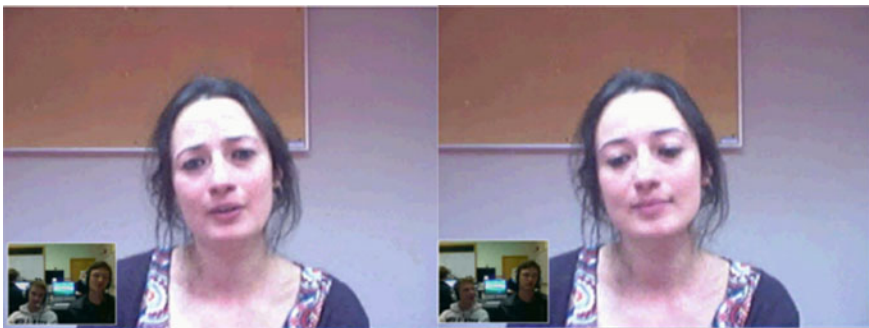
In Kern's (2014) recent study, students in an intermediate-level French section at Berkeley had a weekly video conferencing exchange with students, who were acting as tutors, in Lyon. For this program, MSN Messenger, Skype, and VISU were used. With the first two platforms, the students worked in pairs. VISU allowed students to work individually with their own computer. In this study, student interactions were occasionally recorded. Students also kept journals and were interviewed after the video conferencing sessions finished. Students also completed written evaluations and questionnaires on their online experiences. Most of the students responded positively to the incorporation of video conferencing exchanges, noting an enhanced ability to deal with communicative pressure, a boost in self-confidence, and a higher motivation to study or work abroad. In their interviews, students noted that they regarded these interactions as authentic, engaging, and as a positive addition to classes.

Kern (2014) notes that there are issues with the mediational features of video conferencing that must be taken into account when evaluating the medium. While video conferencing gives the appearance of immediacy, it is filtered by hardware and software. For instance, the webcam is a fixed part of the computer, and it is not easily repositioned. This means that participants have to stay in a position to be visible to their partners. Similarly, if there is a group of two working together, they have to sit close to each other. Hence, Kern (2014) notes that the webcam may introduce ambiguity of interpretation of physical proximity and exaggeration of the effects of physical movement as in Fig. 1.

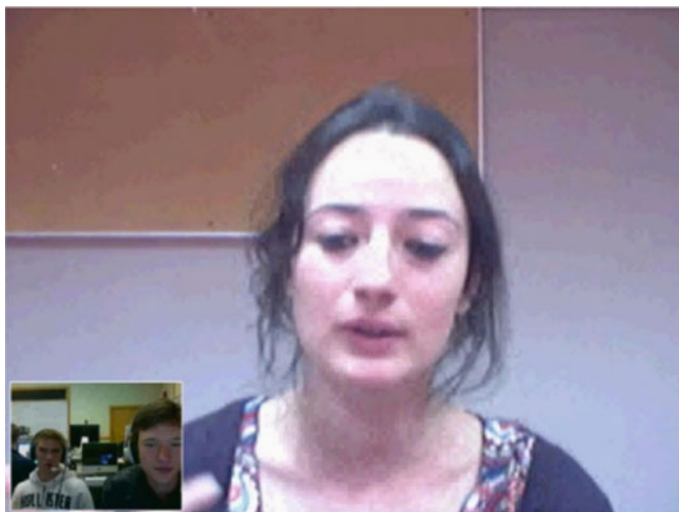


**Fig. 1** Shifts in position are exaggerated by the webcam

Figure 1 shows how a short-range view may create a sense of immediacy and intimacy. On the other hand, a distance of three feet may appear as one that is distant. Parkinson and Lea (2011) argue that video conferencing can produce less intimacy than other types of communication because participants may look to increase the emotional relevance of the conversation. This appears to be in contrast with other conversations where intimate visual contact tends to result in speaking about less personal topics in order to create social distance between speakers. Another issue with webcams is that they can create a false illusion of contact. For example, a technical issue may mean that a group believes that there is contact, but one cannot hear or see the others. Kern (2014) also notes that the fixed position of the webcam makes it impossible for any real eye contact. When speakers look at each other, it appears as if they are looking down. If one wants to give the impression to look into someone’s eyes, they have to look directly to the camera but then cannot see the other party. For instance, Fig. 2 shows a French tutor who looks at the camera while asking a question, but then she is looking at the students when they are answering (Kern, 2014).



**Fig. 2** Looking at the webcam (left) and looking at interlocutors (right)



**Fig. 3** A gesture obscured by the inset self-monitor window at bottom left

Further, webcams also mediate gestures. In Kern's (2014) study, not all the gestures were captured by the webcam. These gestures become invisible to online partners, hence they cannot be used to monitor meanings or manage turn-taking. Similarly, a gesture may be blocked by monitor windows as in Fig. 3 (Kern, 2014), and thus video conversing is a skill that develops over time.

As video conferencing limits the vision of gestures and body language, speakers tend to compensate by increasing their facial expressiveness. Grahe and Bernieri (1999) note that this exaggeration is a wish to create liveliness and enhance rapport. An example of such increased facial expressivity is found in Fig. 4 (Kern, 2014).

Kern (2014) also notes that a webcam may also result in speakers projecting images of themselves that they do not wish to. For instance, a student reported straining to listen in a conversation and not looking very friendly before forcing a smile on her face. A further distancing effect can arise from garbled speech when using Skype, as well as the use of headphones and microphone. In Kern's (2014) study, students commented on the self-consciousness they felt as soon as they put on a set of headphones, a feeling that was exacerbated by students seeing themselves on the computer screen.

Despite the shortcomings, technological mediation is beneficial as it offers a way to analyse, discuss, and learn from any possible misunderstandings produced during an interaction. The recording of these interactions gives the students an opportunity to evaluate their own performance (Guth & Helm, 2012). That is, students can perceive details, and pay special attention to the moments when there may be a misunderstanding. In other words, revising these online conversations is comparable to revising an essay: the student can self-assess and think about alternative ways to use language and thereby improve their language use.



**Fig. 4** Animated facial expressivity online

### **3 An Authentic Learning Environment: Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL)**

MALL allows students to learn at any place, any time and, as such, the technology has been incorporated in a variety of devices, including mobile phones and tablets. This allows students from anywhere in the world to download and use apps, including students from Hong Kong. However, it appears that MALL studies do not dominate the attention of second language pedagogy (Burston, 2014, 2015). In fact, there does not seem to be any large-scale implementation to date. There have been some attempts that remain marginal to the curriculum or are restricted to the use of voluntary complementary materials. The first attempt to use MALL was based on the use of PDA word processing programs. These were designed to improve the L1 English writing skills of Canadian secondary school students (Callan, 1994). Only recently, mobile devices have been used to support the reading and writing of L1 Chinese in Taiwan and Singapore (Wong, Song, Chai, & Ying Zhan, 2011). The application of MALL to second languages began later, prompted by the popularity of pocket bilingual dictionaries amongst Japanese students (Weschler & Pitts, 2000). The high rate of mobile phone ownership among Japanese students sparked an interest in the use of text messaging for L2 English vocabulary acquisition (Thornton & Houser, 2002). Burston (2014, 2015) notes that device usage dominates out-of-class applications with over 90%

share of all MALL implementations. It appears that only about 20 MALL implementations have focused on the in-class usage of mobile devices. Thornton and Houser (2003) provided an early application where students could confirm comprehension in L2 lessons. However, most in-class use of mobile devices have been introduced as inexpensive alternatives to a computer lab installation for vocabulary and grammar learning (Begum, 2011), discussion activities (Brown, Castellano, Hughes, & Worth, 2012), reading (Chang & Hsu, 2011), listening practice (Oberg & Daniels, 2012), and video production (Brown, 2012). They have also been used to monitor pronunciation and note-taking in L2 English classrooms (Baleghizadeh & Oladrostam, 2010; Ghorbandordinejad, Aghasafi, Farjadnasab, & Hardani, 2010).

In comparison to desktop use, MALL offers features of portability, social connectivity, context sensitivity, and individuality (Chinnery, 2006). That is, mobile devices give the chance to make learning movable, real time, collaborative, and seamless (Wong & Looi, 2011). This is due to the fact that mobile devices are relatively small and lightweight, meaning they can be easily carried. Further, Wood, Jackson, Hart, Plester, and Wilde (2011) used the portability feature of mobile phones and text messaging so students could use it after school hours to improve their English reading, spelling, and phonological awareness. Similarly, mobile devices allow students to share information, collaborate, and communicate with ease. These characteristics allow students to enhance the efficiency of group learning as well as improve the quality of interaction (Lan, Sung, & Chang, 2007). For instance, Zurita and Nussbaum (2004) developed a learning environment based on wireless interconnected devices to allow children to learn Spanish syllables through collaborative dialogues.

In addition, mobile devices have the necessary functions to offer students more flexibility and accessibility to record and deliver learning experiences. Sandberg, Maris, and De Geus (2011) highlight the portability and context-sensitivity features of mobile devices. These characteristics may help elementary-school learners with their English reading and writing skills at various settings. A further advantage of mobile devices is their individuality. That is, they can be customised and personalised for individual use depending on learning needs, styles, and interests. Hence, a language teacher may design learning materials taking the users' learning behaviour into account, so learning activities designed for mobile devices can be tailored to meet the students' learning needs as well as pace. Therefore, students are not only receiving authentic learning materials, but they are also empowered in their learning. Mobile devices also allow learners to receive individualised feedback, which enhances learning. Teachers may also use mobile devices to monitor and regulate learners' learning process. As an example, Chang, Lan, Chang, and Sung (2010) conducted a study using a mobile-device-assisted Chinese reading system that allowed students to share their thoughts. This allowed students to have supported discussions in a cooperative learning environment.

Steel (2012) reviewed the perspectives of language students when using mobile apps. The student data revealed that students appreciated the flexibility and convenience of using apps. This allowed them to meet their personal learning needs as and when it suited their lifestyles. Students also noted that using apps was efficient as they could spend short periods of time learning as and when they had the chance.



Similarly, students could use the app without a lot of forethought and preparation. As students often carry a mobile device, they are more likely to have immediate access to their apps. This portability extended to workplaces, which enabled students to revise and review their in-class learning in that environment as well. Overall, Steel (2012) reports that students found mobile apps “easy-to-use and understand” and “accessible anywhere anytime” (p. 309). A further advantage mentioned by students is that apps are either free or of low cost. Moreover, they tend to have various resources, including a dictionary, textbook type exercises, flash cards, audio, and so on. The fact that there is a continuous development of new apps was also viewed positively by students. The potential of using mobile apps is increasing as most students own a mobile phone and realise that it allows them to learn and achieve learning tasks quickly, easily, spontaneously, and habitually.

#### 4 Application of MALL

Alvarado, Cohelo, and Dougherty (2016) highlight three apps that may be used in an English classroom, and that this part will review Kahoot, EdPuzzle, and AudioBoom. These three platforms have been specifically chosen for this study because they offer tools that are purposely designed for education and therefore give students the opportunity to work on various language skills on their own as well as with others. Further, they are also suitable for all levels of English and may be easily adapted to individual learning styles, thus offering enhanced accessibility. First of all, Kahoot (<https://kahoot.it/>) is an interactive game that may be used generally for any subject in any school. Kahoot games are a collection of questions on a range of topics. These quizzes may be created by teachers as well as by the students. The advantage of this app is that there is no limit on the number of players that can participate in any given game. Users play the game in real time by using a code provided by the quiz designer. The types of questions that can be created include multiple choice, true or false, and sentence completion. Players can review their scores and their scoreboard place whilst playing the game, a characteristic that Alvarado et al. (2016) argue can be very motivating. The authors mainly use the quizzes to review the students’ knowledge before a test or examination. The main use would be then to review concepts, as well as vocabulary and grammar topics. Figure 5 is a screenshot of possible Kahoot activities (Alvarado et al., 2016).

In Alvarado et al. (2016), the Kahoot quiz was played with higher education students in a foundation program mainly to review vocabulary. The questions presented to the students were simple, and the pictures had a key role in the quizzes. The authors suggested that lower level English students would require a higher use of visual aid in order to give them confidence and motivation to win the game. The students could then see which questions had been more difficult for them by observing their mistakes in the results (Fig. 6). The data allowed students to receive information on the areas where they needed to improve. This not only highlights the strengths of the app, but it also acknowledges its challenges. Specifically, it draws attention to the

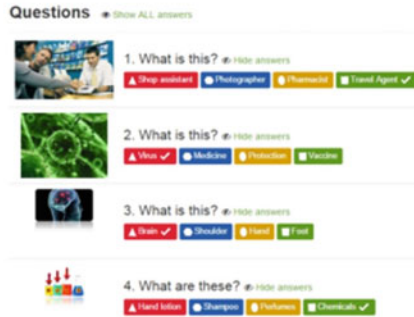


Level: Beginner (A1–CEFR)

Topic and skill focus: Vocabulary–Science

Screenshot and link

Kahoot Quiz Page



Link to quiz: <https://play.kahoot.it/#/k/c4453e8b-0695-4072-8243-dc22eb0e5434>

Fig. 5 Kahoot activities used in the classroom

STUDENT	CORRECT ANSWERS	INCORRECT ANSWERS	SCORE	Which one is correct?
Student A	11	1	8869	They watch films.
Student B	10	2	8034	They watch films.
Student C	9	3	8284	They watch films.
Student D	9	3	6983	They watch films.
Student E	9	3	6883	They watch films.
Student F	7	5	5366	They play computer
Student G	6	6	5167	He watches movies
Student H	6	5	5117	They play computer
Student I	6	6	5067	They watch films.
Student J	6	6	5034	They watch films.

Fig. 6 Students’ view of their errors (Alvarado et al., 2016, p. 48)

disparate levels that individuals are working at but can undermine self-confidence. Further, there is no direct interaction with teachers face to face, meaning that it is impossible to determine whether students are learning effectively or correctly.

EdPuzzle is an app that teachers may use to turn a video into an engaging and interactive lesson. A teacher may choose a video from any online platform (e.g., YouTube, National Geographic, etc.) and customise it using the tools of the EdPuzzle app. In this way, videos may be edited, cropped, voice-overs can be added, and breaks can be introduced for students to respond to questions. This allows teachers to turn any video into an effective and engaging tool. These videos may be embedded on

other sites such as Blackboard and Moodle in the form of quizzes, or they can be used in specific classes. They can even be sent to individual students. Teachers may track the progress of students as EdPuzzle allows for this. Students may access any EdPuzzle assigned to them in their EdPuzzle account from either their home or the classroom.

As with Kahoot, EdPuzzle is appropriate for all age groups and varieties of levels. Teachers may share their videos with other educators through different platforms, including Facebook and YouTube. An educator only needs to choose an appropriate video for the age group and level of the students, then the students may access these videos on a digital device. The app is suitable to integrate reading, writing, and listening skills. The flexibility of the app suits a variety of individual learning styles, and as such, Alvarado et al. (2016) argue that the app motivates the students as they assume the responsibility for learning and can work independently. Figure 7 shows a set of screenshots of the app.

Alvarado et al. (2016) used this particular app so students could reflect on the speaker’s performance. Other videos may be used to practise listening skills through the use of authentic materials or teach vocabulary in a fun manner. The videos, as previously noted, may include quizzes that are automatically graded by EdPuzzle, and the results are given directly to the students. However, again, this does not facilitate

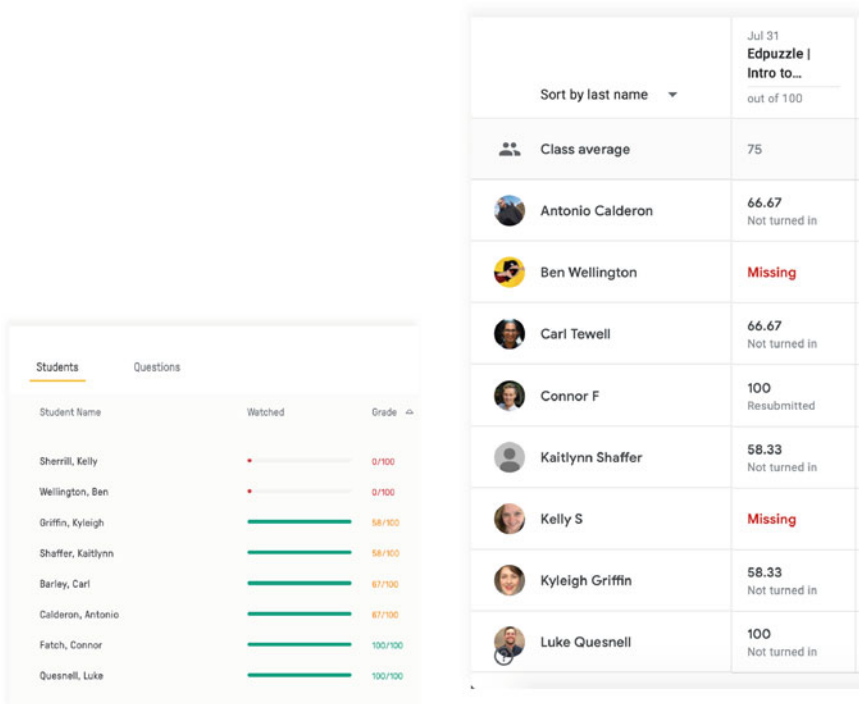


Fig. 7 Screenshots of EdPuzzle

face-to-face interaction between teachers and students. Further, it is not possible to provide personalised feedback when the app itself marks the quiz. These are both issues that are problematic in the context of developing new language skills.

Alvarado et al. (2016) also mention the app AudioBoom, a voice-based audio podcast and social sharing platform. This app allows users to record, listen to, and publish an unlimited number of podcasts or audio files. It can also be used to purchase audiobooks or follow podcasts from other broadcasters, such as BBC, NFL, and other similar providers. The app also allows users to share and embed content in other websites or social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google+. This means that this platform is dynamic, interactive and, according to Alvarado et al. (2016), fun. AudioBoom is also suitable for all age groups, though it is only recommended for intermediate or advanced language levels. The main skills that may be practised in this app are listening and speaking, as well as interpersonal communication skills. Figure 8 shows a screenshot of AudioBoom (Alvarado et al., 2016).

Figure 8 shows an example of a scripted dialogue recorded by two students. Similarly, students may record podcasts of an image they have been shown or recall information on a piece of news. This offers a more practical experience of learning languages but still does not provide a means of learning directly from a teacher in a face-to-face capacity. It is pragmatic but reflects upon the absence of learning tools that pay attention to the special requirements needed to effectively learn languages.

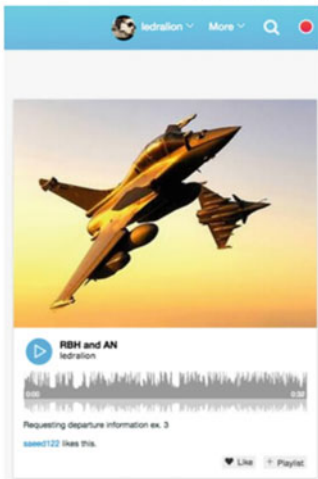
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**Level:** Elementary (A2–CEFR)

**Topic and skill focus:** Aviation English–  
Dialogue practice (Speaking)

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**Screenshots and links to samples**



<https://audioboom.com/boos/2392298-rbh-and-an>

**Fig. 8** AudioBoom activities used in the classroom

AudioBoom, EdPuzzle, and Kahoot are only three examples of the variety of mobile apps in the market that complement students' classroom activities. These apps allow learners to develop language skills using authentic, culturally familiar tools that may be accessed anytime anywhere (Jackson, 2015). Apps like these may be used to incorporate and develop language skills in a practical and fun way. By using these apps, students take responsibility for their own learning and consequently develop learner autonomy and the capacity to work independently.

## 5 Online Gaming as a Learning Environment

Chik (2014) notes that in Hong Kong, Mainland China, and Taiwan, many use commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) games to learn a second language. In fact, research points out that there has been an increasing interest on learning through digital games (Reinders, 2012). On the other hand, schools in East Asia tend to view digital gaming as addictive and non-educational (Gentile et al., 2011). This means that L2 digital gaming tends to take place in out-of-school environments as opposed to the games described in the previous section. However, there are some studies of Hong Kong Chinese gamers which note that self-directed L2 learning was done primarily for pleasure (Chik, 2012). These gamers argued that playing games and navigating through them was a motivation to learn an L2. Most of these gamers also used online communities to support one another. This meant that L2 gamers developed autonomy in L2 learning precisely when playing games in an L2. This made them gain confidence and even shared contributions in the L2 in game walkthroughs, or strategy guides, to gaming communities.

In a further study, Thorne (2008) looked into the game World of Warcraft (WoW), which contains an in-game chat. The author observed exchanges between gamers in an American university and a Ukrainian university. These exchanges exemplified collaborative gameplay and were used by Thorne to illustrate naturally occurring L2 learning episodes. Thorne (2008) noted that in task-based role-playing games, gamers needed to use an L2 to interact in multilingual online game worlds. Thorne's analysis showed that gamers reached a linguistic middle ground by affirming their passion for WoW at first. The gamers then took turns in being learners and teachers for language exchange between Russian and English. The conclusions of Thorne's research show that native speakers of different languages may achieve natural and autonomous learning moments within the multilingual WoW game world. Similarly, Rama et al. (2012) highlight that games like WoW offer safe learning environments. These games even facilitate interactions to develop communicative competence. In their study, the authors showed that gaming expertise could compensate for the lack of L2 ability in cooperative gameplay. As one of the gamers in the study was lending their gaming expertise, they gained language support from the gaming community. Rama et al. (2012) express concerns over the unstructured L2 learning progress of gaming. However, the fact that gaming presents users with authentic L2 interactions

counterbalances this, and any disadvantages could be overcome with the use of a dictionary or translation add-ons.

It is obvious that gamers actively organise their L2 gaming and learning practices (Reinhardt, 2019). According to Chik (2014), this organisation is related to learner autonomy. Aside from their own learner autonomy, which in turn increases motivation (Ushioda, 2007), gamers are also likely to be part of a learning community with the game they are playing. Murray and Fujishima (2013) note that this learning community may offer learners the necessary environment to act and interact so as to increase their own autonomy. In particular, Murray and Fujishima (2013) define a learning community as “consist[ing] of individuals who come together to accomplish a specific end or goal” (p. 70). In digital gaming and L2 learning, the concepts of autonomy and community are relevant in two aspects. First of all, gamers regularly take independent decisions on gaming choices; and secondly, the use of game-external websites and other group resources is integral to the gaming experience (Thorne, Fischer, & Lu, 2012). Thus, as digital gaming is a community-based activity, gamers are autonomous learners involved in a wider community.

Chik (2014) explored how gaming out-of-class can change from being incidental learning to a kind of intentional learning. Gamers typically play out-of-class, thus L2 learning is generally informal. Hulstijn (2008) notes that everyday activities may be a way of intentional learning when there is an explicit intention of learning and learners use a set of learning strategies. However, in Chik’s (2014) study, some gamers noted that gaming was the primary motive for L2 learning. In this case, these learners rendered L2 learning as incidental. For instance, a gamer noted, “I usually skip looking up new words and continue playing the game, you can’t keep stopping to use the dictionary...that’s just insane” (Chik, 2014, p. 91). On the other hand, other participants of the study said that they “...jotted down words quickly and then looked them up later.” That is, certain participants noted the importance of learning new vocabulary as essential knowledge. In the study, Chik (2014) also noted that there were examples of gamers who specifically used games in order to learn a second language. Chik (2014) added that research on L2 gaming has shown L2 learning can arise both from textual and social interactions within the gaming environments, as well as from the instructional and advisory roles taken up by gamers. Typically, gamers first learn to play by following oral instructions from their immediate social circle. Then they go online to read written instructions from communities with similar interests. In effect, gamers create community pedagogical resources, and act as language advisers, teachers, and translators for those with similar interests.

This collaboration, according to Chik (2014), allows learners the opportunity to take on an instructional role: they can assist other game players in a variety of different media. Some will help other gamers within the same game whereas others will help them on a discussion board or wiki. This instructional role results in a community that Gee (2005) defines as an affinity space. This affinity space exists because of a common shared interest between gamers. There are no set boundaries, and affiliation does not depend on formal qualifications. Anyone can gain acceptance in the space, where all users will be valued because of their knowledge and experience

of the game. Other gamers will offer encouraging feedback so players can follow instructions and make sure that they complete tasks in the designed order and with meaningful progression. Many authors have emphasised the great role that games may have on an increased motivation to learn a language. Most note that gaming offers fun and entertainment, as well as establish relationships with other people who play the same games. Wang, Khoo, Liu, and Divaharan (2008) add that gamers are motivated to play games and learn an L2 because they are immersed in a fun virtual fantasy world and the game marks clear achievements.

## **6 Conclusion: Language Learning in Online Spaces as an Extension of Real-Life Dialogue**

The primary use of social media for the creation of an academic discourse community is to facilitate a different kind of student–tutor relationship based on reduced social distance. The use of online platforms follows easily from the perception of a real-life community and provides room for an extension of real-life dialogues. After all the case studies, a key characteristic of the online interactions observed was the use of language varieties common to a range of computer-mediated communication. Although it is true that these forms of language sit uneasily with the notion of the “legitimate” academic language (Bourdieu, 1992) expected of undergraduates’ coursework, there was no evidence in this study to support the fear that the computer-mediated discourse (CMD) literacies of undergraduates would undermine their ability to produce coursework in acceptable academic English when required. It would be a crude conclusion that students are unable to switch styles according to different situations. On the contrary, it is time CMD as a product of new age technology could be manipulated even better to serve its real strength in the area of language learning in online spaces.

The analysis here points to the need to utilise a hybrid model for language teaching, specifically one that incorporates a range of communicative tools that tap into the individual strengths of the learner and that facilitates face-to-face discourse. This would provide tailored solutions to learning and also facilitate interaction that has a practical appeal in that telecollaboration still establishes a connection between teacher and student. Although the three platforms explored have their individual strengths and are all accessible, the construction of new platforms that are tailored to language teaching would, therefore, be more appropriate and effective as more language courses become accessible via digital media. Ultimately, these recommendations tap into the final conclusions drawn, specifically that computer-mediated discourses can be highly effective in promoting literacy via online language learning spaces.

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