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**USING COMPUTER ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING FOR
IMPROVING LEARNER'S
SOCIO-LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE**

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Abstract

This research is in the language teaching area and basically concerned with improving learner's Socio-Linguistic Competence through the use of computers and Internet which is commonly known as Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). Socio- Linguistic competence usually means the knowledge and ability to use appropriate language skills in a given social context. Using well-structured and appropriate language in the right social context has always been a problem for second language learners and especially for English learners in Pakistan. One of the basic reasons is that they are unable to interpret the sentence in the target language properly which is most of the time misleading. The best way to overcome this problem is to provide learners with natural and real life like platform that will help them to acquire the language in a natural way. The best way to do that is to incorporate technology in language classroom such as Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) that uses authentic learning materials through

webtools, movies, digital reading materials such as books, magazines, dictionaries etc. and social media network that provide natural learning environment that is long lasting. Many language teachers in Pakistan have started using computers and internet in their classroom in order to make class interesting and motivating for them but it is very rare that the teachers use computers and online activities for the purpose of improving language generally and specifically how to use appropriate language in a given social context. Based on the data collected through research tools i.e. questionnaires, interviews and observation sheet, the present research will prove that different webtools and activities designed in CALL classroom will help learners to not only understand the target language culture but also use language that is appropriate to that culture.

1. Introduction

Although Communicative competence has been a part of Language Teaching for two decades and a lot of work has been done on it but unfortunately it has not become a part of English Language classes in Pakistani schools, colleges or even universities. Widdowson defines competence i.e. communicative competence in terms of linguistics and Socio-Linguistics conventions. (Widdowson, 1983) Hymes believed that knowing the language correctly is not enough, instead one should know how to use it appropriately. He believes that the principal aim of communicative competence is speech communication and the interaction between language and culture. (Hymes, 1972) According to Noam Chomsky, it is the knowledge and the ability to use appropriate language skills in social context.

One of the basic components of communicative competence, sociolinguistic competence is the ability to communicate appropriately by using the right words, expressions, and attitude towards a specific topic, setting, and relationship. (Ritchie, 2011) Many English learners can do well in class but don't necessarily have sociolinguistic competence. There are many ways in which teachers can promote the development of sociolinguistic competence in the students such as using CALL activities and webtools in language classroom that enables long term learning. (Mizne, 1997)

The critical role that computers play in English language teaching and learning is best understood in terms of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). Computer-assisted language learning involves applying the principles of computer-assisted learning to language learning context. (Uzma, 2010) Vygotsky's work clarifies the mediating role of any tool or technology at the level of human activity reshaping how we communicate and even think (Vygotsky, 1962). Ong, who has studied the relationship between the orality and literacy, similarly noted the relationship between technology and human consciousness, especially with technologies of the word. (Ong, 1982)

2. Literature Review

2.1. Communicative Competence

Communicative competence is a combination of two words which can be interpreted as "competence to communicate" (Bagaric & Djigunovic, 2007). Now if we talk about competence, it has remained a highly controversial subject in the field of general and applied linguistics. Chomsky differentiates competence and performance in his book, "Aspects of the theory of syntax" by the fact that the first one is the monolingual speaker listener's knowledge of the language and performance is the actual use of language in real situations (Chomsky, 1965). Savignon (1972) opposed the idea of Chomsky regarding the concept of Performance and

Competence(Savignon, 1972). He was more inclined to the concept of (Hymes, 1972 , pp. 269-293), who defined communicative competence as not just related to the inherent grammatical competence but also as an ability to exercise grammatical competence in abundant of communicative situations. In order to achieve superior level of speaking ability one must be able to speak about abstract topics and speak appropriately in a wide variety of settings with minimum errors which leads to acquiring socio-linguistic competence. (Torres-Gordillo JJ, 2020)

2.2 Socio-linguistic Competence in Language Classroom

In this globalized world, for a learner to become a proficient speaker, he or she must be capable to talk on any subject in any given situation or context ranging from talks on dinner table to a speech at the public event etc. But even after learning a foreign language for years, learners still have difficulty in expressing in that language appropriately to the native speakers. Reasons for failure in communicating in the foreign language can include, pronunciation, lack of knowledge about using idiomatic expressions and slangs and learner differences in order to acquire native like speech etc.Sociolinguistics is a word used to describe the study of the appropriateness of language in different contexts. (Bagmanova, voronina, & Shakirova, 2020)One of the factors that makes sociolinguistic competence so hard to acquire is the large amount of variance in cultural rules of speaking; in other words, what is appropriate to say in one culture may be completely inappropriate in another culture, even though the situation in which it is said is the same. The learner is often unaware of these differences, and uses the rules of speaking of his or her native culture when communicating in the foreign language. This is where blended online learning and CALL come in to help learners improve their socio-linguistic competence.(Mizne, 1997)

2.3. Blended E-Learning and Socio-Linguistic Competence

Computer Assisted Language Learning has paved a way for so many internet based web sites and web tools to enter language classrooms. The best way to find out whether the learners are learning from online language activities is to make them speak. Learners enjoy speaking in front of the computers using websites and tools more than speaking in front of the teacher and other learners because they are more relaxed and less hesitant to speak when they sit in front of the computer.(Abrams, 2006)

Blended E-learning is way to make students to get involved in online conversations with the teachers and other language learners through different websites and different platforms such skype, and google hangout etc.

According to Lawn and Lawn (2015), the students enjoy speaking online in blended E-learning environment. Although the students faced problems such as the loss of internet connections (Skype), finding a personal teacher trainer and waiting for the teacher depending on the availability of the teacher, however there were more positive remarks such as increase motivation, more learning, development of the confidence, sense of making progress of being able to communicate etc. The overall results were also good and it was noted that students studying English through online blended-E learning environment had higher grades than the students following books and courses.(Lawn & Lawn, 2015)

Blended E-learning together when integrated with other websites and web tools such as soundcloud.com and voicethread.com; it makes speaking skills more interesting than the actual traditional classroom. The students can be asked to start by introducing themselves to conversing into complicating contexts depending on the level of the students. Also through soundcloud.com

the students can interact with other language learners from throughout the world.(Kintu, Zhu, & Kagambe , 2017)

E-learning has led to the development of different tools for teaching different languages other than English. Through the use of CALL there has been a shift from teacher centered learning to student centered learning. Many language teachers are working day and night to make new tools so as to meet the needs of the language students. For a long time most of the CALL tools developed concentrated more on drill and practice based techniques for teaching a language. With the advent of better technology these CALL tools have been replaced with the newer and better tools which aid the learner by providing help with grammar, style, verb conjugation and the use of target language which is the key to mastering any language. (Tiwari, Khandelwal, & Roy, 2008)

They have given some advantages of CALL that can help to build tools for teaching language skills.

2.4 Web 2.0 Tools and Socio-linguistic Competence

“Web 2.0 refers to a perceived second generation of web development and design that facilitates communication, secure information sharing, interoperability and collaboration on the internet. Web 2.0 has led to the development and evolution of web based communities, hosted services and applications such as social media networking sites, video sharing sites, wikis, blogs, mashup and folksonomies.” (Wang & Vasquez, 2012, p. 413)

Now internet is no longer conserved as the repository of information but as the hub of collaboration and interaction. Social media networks such Facebook, twitter, google plus, linked In and google classroom, google meet etc. have made language learning more easy. Students are exposed to language 24 hours. They are reading to statuses, that include texts, articles, listening to videos and audios, writing their own statuses and even chatting speaking with friends using the native or target language. If guided by the teacher and through some motivation the students can use target langue on these social media networks to improve that can help them to motivate own target language.

One of the web 2.0 tools mentioned above, Voicethread is the most exciting and helpful tool for the language learners. It integrates a maximum of three language skills such listening, speaking and writing and should be used in language classroom. Similarly blogs, wikis and podcasting are the most widely spread web 2.0 tools used in language classes these days.

Podcasting although has not been widely researched on, but it is the best source of improving listening skills (O' Bryan & Hegelheimer, 2007) and for the improvement of the pronunciation and oral skills (Travis & Joseph, 2009).

According to (Wang & Vasquez, 2012, pp. 412-413) blogs and wikis are the most researched because variety of topics and material is easily accessible on these websites. The use of blogging for EFL class is really helpful in improving writing skills. (Campbell, 2003), development in the students' own voice and identity (Bloch, 2007), peer feedback and review (Liou & Peng, 2009). Similarly the use of Wikis has also improved the reading and writing skills of the learners. It increases motivation in students (Chen, 2009) fosters literacy (Choi, 2009) and improves writing skills (Kessler, 2009)

The use of web 2.0 tools in L2 learning was the start of integrated CALL. Integrated CALL is the best way of improving students' socio-linguistic competence by using web 2.0 tools. World language teachers work through day and night to make the students use authentic material and to communicate in the target language using the web tools that make them global citizens. Students attain an understanding of the knowledge of the language globally. Web 2.0 tools provide a platform for the students to improve their socio-linguistic competence by improving all language skills through integrated CALL.(Abrams, 2006)

2.5 Statement of the problem

Although the activities like role play, interviews, debates and plays etc in traditional language classrooms try to give the students the real life like situations in which they practice uses different phrases and sentences according to the context but most of these role plays and debates are written and memorized in the target language not spoken naturally. Such artificial and canned sentences don't really contribute in improving socio-linguistic competence in the learners because authentic and real life like situations and contexts cannot be created in a classroom.(Bazina, 2010)On the other hand learners can be made to use all sorts of abstract sentences and ideas appropriately according to the context with the help of the technology by showing the students the target language culture visually, interacting with the native speakers through internet,by listening to authentic dialogue and then responding to it and by using web 2.0 tools that take learners close to social life and learn about responding appropriately in different social contexts etc. CALL is the most authentic and useful source to carry out all these activities and improve socio-linguistic competence.(Abrams, 2006).

2.6 Research questions

1. Whether or not CALL is effective in developing Socio-Linguistic competence among language learners at NUML?
2. What are the different webtools and websites that help in developing Socio-Linguistic competence in CALL classroom?

2.7 Significance of the study

Using technology in education sector has become a trend all over the world and many language instructors are also introducing technological aids such as multimedia and computers in language classroom to language learning more authentic and long lasting and to make classroom environment interesting and motivating. Practicing CALL through different websites, web tools, movies, social media etc help students to come across authentic reading materials like newspapers, novels, short stories and listening materials that gives an insight to the native society and hence helps them to comprehend the context and guide them to speak in any particular context or situation.

In future this research will help the CALL teachers to be more focused in using specific web tools that include integrated language skills that and provide opportunity for learners to interact with target language and culture that will help students to become proficient and confident in using the target language and unconsciously improve socio-linguistic competence.

3. Research Methodology

This research follows mixed methods approach that includes both qualitative and quantitative research designs because the data collected has been analyzed both descriptively and graphically.

3.1 Research Method: An evaluative research method has been used as research method which includes different evaluative tools such as questionnaires, interviews and observation sheet in order to collect data.

a. Test-Based questionnaires: Test based questionnaires were taken at the end of the CALL lessons and the purpose behind these questionnaires was to gather data about the effectiveness of the research and also in order to test that learning ability of the learners. The questions consisted of multiple choice questions, closed or open ended questions depending on the task.

b. Interviews: Unstructured interviews were taken from 5 CALL teachers to get an insight into CALL classroom and language learning environment.

c. Observation sheet:

Observation sheet was used in order to find out how different activities and webtools helped in improving learners' language skills and ability to interact with other language learners not only grammatically but also appropriately.

Finally, the collected data was analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively to get a clear picture

3.2 Population and Sample: Students of English department at National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad were selected as population for this research and 50 students, 25 from each class were selected from ELT 3rd semester in English department at NUML

3.3 Theoretical Framework

This research is theoretically based on the communicative competence model of CEFR (Common European Forum for Reference) which includes following three components.

1. Linguistic Competence
2. Socio Linguistic Competence
3. Pragmatic Competence

According to CEFR Sociolinguistics is a word used to describe the study of the appropriateness of language in different contexts. In other words, sociolinguistics is the study of how situational factors such as the cultural context and setting of a speech event affect the choice of what should be said.

4. Data Collection and Data Analysis

The data was collected through test based questionnaires from 50 students at the end of the week in CALL classroom, observation sheets were filled after observing 8 classes of both morning and evening shifts in order to observe the activities used to improve socio-cultural interaction with the target language via different webtools and websites. Furthermore Interviews were also taken from 5 CALL teachers regarding CALL activities for improving socio-linguistic competence.

4.1 Findings of Observation sheet.

A. Sociolinguistic competence

1. Introduction of a separate website that covers socio linguistic competence

Researcher has observed 100% positive results in this area as students were enjoying while using computers in terms of online websites and web tools for improving language skills which ultimately will improve communicative competence.

2. The students get to watch a video clip and then they have to answer questions in the end.

Researcher observed that in initial classes students were taking more time in watching one video clip and they had to repeat it two three times but later on they took less time in the watching the video clips and answered the questions quickly. Out of 8 classes, in six classes researcher has observed this change in the students that they completed the entire activities very quickly and took less time.

3. The students have to write down the answers to some of the questions that how the people greeted each other, how they introduced each other, were they polite or not etc.

Initially researcher has observed very interesting answers students gave regarding on how people greeted each other, how they introduced each other and that most of them were polite and used polite language. All the students had same kind of answers and students had observed many scenes in which people greeted and used polite sentences.

4. In the end students are asked to greet each other using polite language. The speech was recorded using video recorder

Researcher had observed all the students were enthusiastic about using the polite sentences and then recording it. Some of the students got in pairs and started talking to each other using polite language while recording the speech. In both the classes it was observed that students were comfortable and engaged in the activity.

4.2 Findings of Questionnaire.

Test-based questionnaire was also used to collect data from 25 students in order to make the results more genuine and reliable. The intention was to know about their point of views, perceptions and opinions about the improvement in socio-linguistic competence.

A. Socio-linguistic competence

Q 1. Do you think that by practicing language through CALL you can respond to a question or give your feedback about an action or behavior according the situation?

Researcher has also observed in the classroom that students became aware of the use cultural and traditional norms used and followed in the society of the target language. The students were learning at a quick pace and they knew how to respond to a question and when to use polite language and how to use it even if the other persons tone is rude. The question was asked by the students to make results more authentic. Results showed that 90% of the students learned how to behave according to the situation.

Q 2. In your opinion has CALL helped you to learn the following?

a. How to greet your class fellows?

It was observed by the researcher that learning through websites is not only useful but also interesting. The texts, topics, tasks and activities provided by the online applications and websites were authentic and related to the real situations. Results showed that 100 % of the students agreed that they knew how to greet their class fellows and how to use polite language while greeting.

b. How to take permission from the teacher to come in or leave the class?

While considering students response about taking permission researcher again found 100% result towards it. All of the students were asked to record their speech about how taking permission from the teacher to come in and leave the class and all the students were able to do that with less grammatical mistakes and good pronunciation. Some of the students who are from the Northern areas had problem with pronunciation but the rest had improved a lot.

c. How to explain that why you are late?

The students improved a lot in a way that how to respond according to the situation. The students were given 5 situations in which they had to explain why they were late and their answers had to be different. Majority of the students were able to give appropriate answers and respond according to the situation. Maximum students were satisfied and became motivated while answering the questions.

Q 3. Do you think that now you can understand the English society through reading online stories and novels and through watching realistic movies?

Many of the students were of the view that they could understand the English speaking society by watching English movies and reading novels, Because of the shortage of time less novels were taught through CALL and the students were of the view that more reading texts along with the movies should be introduced. Nevertheless they understood the norms, greeting tradition and leave taking permission which proves that they have learned.

Q 4. Do you feel surprise at the polite way of English people talking in a conversation?

In the start the students were really surprised and shocked at the way the native speaker's use of polite language in their sentences. They were also surprised at how frequently they used polite language in their speech, when in the house or outside in the street, whether in the office or in train or bus, whether telling direction to others or asking for directions from others etc. Majority of the students said yes they were surprised.

Q 5. When in a fight with someone, do you think you can use polite sentences instead of rude sentences?

60 % of the students' answers were positive and they said they can use polite language and 25% of the students said no but they were of the opinion that they might be able to use it with practice. The rest of the students said to some extent and that they also needed more practice.

Q 6. What are the different situations when English speakers bless each other?

After watching the videos and reading passages, they were able to enlist the different situations where English speakers bless each other such as when people sneeze, when they help others and when they buy something from the shop etc.

4.3 Findings on Interview

The researcher interviewed five CALL teachers at National University of Modern Languages, H-9 Islamabad. Interview contained 8 questions, all related to the use of CALL in the language classroom, learning grammar, pronunciation, culture of the target society, communication and interaction with language learners globally and improving speaking skills etc that can help in improving Communicative Competence. The interview questions will be analyzed descriptively one by one.

Q 1. In your opinion can CALL help in learning four language skills through the use of websites and web tools?

Although every teacher did not use web tools, but they were using websites for teaching listening skills, reading skills and writing skills. 3 out of 5 teachers were trying their best to make sure that students speak on skype and using different apps on mobile with their friends and native speakers of English language. Overall the teachers agreed on the using websites and web tools for teaching and improving four language skills.

Q 2. Does CALL use authentic material for language learning in the classroom?

No one had any doubt on this that whether CALL uses authentic material in the classroom or not. They were all of the view that whatever material they come across whether listening to an audio or watching a video or reading a text, the material is authentic and represents the society for which it is made or written.

Q 3. Do you think by using websites for grammar and phonetics, and by practicing on them, the students can learn grammatical rules and pronunciation?

Usually teaching grammar and phonetics is very boring and most of the time having same kind of exercises makes it monotonous. As a result there is no motivation for the students to learn grammar or even pronunciation. 2 teachers said that integrating usual class lecture with the websites that offer very interesting exercises and pronunciation exercises can make classroom very interesting and motivating. The other teachers also agreed on using websites for phonetics because sometimes it has songs or poems which remove the boredom of the class. For grammar, they gave websites exercises as homework but practice is still there.

Q 4. In your opinion watching movies and reading stories/texts online can help the students understand the culture of the target society?

All the teachers were of the opinion that watching movies can influence vocabulary and listening skills in an unconscious manner and unconscious learning is always long lasting. Some teachers did mention that reading a story or novel while sitting in front of the computer for hours is a bit tiring but they also agreed that at least one sits straight as compared to lying in the bed and then studying which is actually harmful for the eyes. Everyone agreed that reading a novel or watching a movie in the target language helps in learning the culture of the society but in an unconscious way.

Q 5. Do you think online reading exercises when integrated with listening or writing exercises can develop critical thinking?

All the teachers had different views about it. 3 of the teachers said that it depends on the reading passage. If the text contains a lot of literary figures of speech and the use of proverbs and phrases, it instigates the students to think and to find out the meaning of the phrases and proverbs

and why they are used. 2 other teachers said that when reading texts are integrated with the listening audio or video clips, the underlying meaning becomes easy to understand.

Q6. Can online chatrooms twitter and other social media networks help in communicating with native speakers and language learners from all over the world?

It takes time to convince the students that social media network should be used for the learning a language apart from using it just for chatting to discuss family or personal issues while chatting. Teachers are of the opinion that if the students start uploading statuses in English language only, even that can help in improving their language and vocabulary. No doubt one can improve speaking skills only by speaking in the foreign language so all the teachers agree that communicating on social media and chat rooms in the target language can help in improving the language as well.

Q7. How MALL (mobile assisted language learning) helps in learning a language?

The new trend is using emails, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram on smart phones and androids. Besides these, the mobile apps are really helpful in improving language. 2 of the teachers used WhatsApp for speaking skills in classroom. Similarly one another teacher played a game on it for improving vocabulary. Similarly viber is a good way of communicating with the native speakers through speech. Instagram on the hand is concerned with uploading photos and then commenting on it. It's a good way of using it for improving vocabulary and writing skills.

Q8. Do you think WhatsApp and Viber can help learners improve speaking skills apart from skype and google hangout?

All the teachers agreed on the use of skype and google hangout on improving speaking skills but they also said that because of the network issues in Pakistan, these two platforms are becoming less popular and it needs a special setting and environment arrangement to talk to someone through these mediums. But as far as the apps are concerned, there's no need of a special place or environment rather one can talk then and there without any voice or network problem.

5. Summary of the findings

It was observed after a detailed data collection with help of three tools i.e. questionnaire, observation sheet and interviews that most of the students were satisfied with learning language activities used in CALL classrooms. Not only they enjoyed learning a language but improved their language skills. Through CALL they got an opportunity to exploit their skills directly and interact and communicate globally with target language speakers which otherwise they had less exposure to in traditional classrooms. Speaking on different topics on webtools, like soundcloud, really helped the learners to use language appropriately according the context keeping in view the cultural values and norms.

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