

Strategic Learner Training for the Merge of Language Learning and Crowdsourcing

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Abstract

There is a need for learner training on how to use digital tools and materials for effective learning languages. Numerous studies indicate that learners require encouragement and support to be autonomous and efficient in the use of ICT in language learning. Developing strategy training courses for both learners and teachers, as both need to be convinced that their digital activity is beneficial for developing their language skills and knowledge. Strategy training helps to prevent anxiety and ineffective use of technology. Basing on the research in language learning strategies and digital learning strategies the article suggests some language learning strategies with the use of crowdsourcing.

Keywords: Language learning strategies, Digital learning strategies, Learner training, Crowdsourcing

1. Introduction

Assuming that for effective use of any tools and procedures requires learner training the text presents an approach to identification of learning strategies in a specific collaborative digital environment, in which crowdsourcing is implemented. Even digital natives are not able to use online tools proficiently and to their best advantage for the purpose of learning (Jeffrey et al., 2011; Thorne, 2003). Technologies “can only be effective if they are in the hands of students who know what to do with them” (Figura, Jarvis, 2007: 457) and that effective use of technologies requires learners to possess certain skills, strategies and attitudes (Hubbard, 2004). The results of the research on the use of language learning strategies and the digital learning strategies among young adult learners of English (Gajek, Michońska-Stadnik, 2017) demonstrate the role of the teacher in the process of developing strategic approach to language learning. Although students may intuitively develop their own strategies when they use a new tool, they do it more effectively if they are aware and trained in the strategic use of tools. For example, they use mobile phones in-campus and outside in very different ways but in the same categories (Gajek, 2016). In distance learning online, the more strategies students know the more autonomous they are in developing their own learning strategies (White, 1995: 44; 2003: 141). There are also many studies which show that teacher training for online learning environments is necessary to enhance the effectiveness of online learning (Ernest et al. 2013; Guichon, 2009; Hampel, Stickler 2005; Wang et al. 2010). Thus, learner training introduced by language teachers will make crowdsourcing more familiar and effective to students.

2. Language Learning Strategies

Language learning strategies (LLS) have been discussed since Joan Rubin (1975) noticed actions of behaviours which good learners perform to achieve a success in learning. Then Stern (1975), Naiman, Fröhlich, Stern and Todesco (1996) characterized the good learner’s activities in more detail. Later the interest in language learning strategies grew (Bialystok, 1978; O’Malley et al., 1985; Wenden, 1986; Rubin, 1987; Oxford, 1989; O’Malley and Chamot, 1990, Oxford, 1990; Michońska-Stadnik, 1996). The taxonomies become more and more extended.

In the most widely known taxonomy (Oxford, 1990) strategies are divided into Direct strategies and Indirect Strategies. Direct strategies cover Memory strategies, Cognitive strategies and Compensation strategies. While indirect strategies cover Metacognitive strategies, Affective strategies and Social strategies.

Researchers emphasise the role of strategy training in the context of individual learner variables (Oxford, Scarcella, 1994). Then, the interest in strategies decreased slightly. However, some new insights were introduced in the extended S2R Model which involves the role of learners’ culture (Oxford 2011) which revitalize the interest in strategies and strategy training. Finally, Griffiths (2013:15) concludes “Language learning strategies are activities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own language learning”.

3. Digital Learning Strategies

Although LLS have become a core in teacher training courses, their use in a digital environment is not so well-known. Joan Rubin (1988, 1996) was an author of a popular digital video disk for language learning. This technology got outdated soon, and the strategic approach it had introduced was abandoned. Although many researchers (Wenden, 1986; O’Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Shorrocks, 1991; Ellis, 1994; Mitchell and Myles, 1998) emphasized the need for the use of strategies out-of-class, the language teachers in the eighties and nineties of the previous century rarely recognized digital environment as a place where strategies could be utilized. But research on LLS in CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) has continued (Chapelle and Mizuno, 1989; Hagen, 1994; Harris, 2003; Hauck and Hampel, 2008; Huang, Chern and Lin, 2009; Li, 2009; Pujolá, 2002; Ulitsky, 2000; Chapelle, 2000). Recent approaches discuss the role of strategies embedded in the digital tools (Ulitsky, 2000), strategic creativity of learners (Yoon and Jo, 2014) as well as the influence of context on learners’ behaviour (Huang and Sheng Yi, 2016). The application of strategies in using online dictionaries and corpus based learning is widely investigated (Charles, 2007; Gaskell and Cobb, 2004; Gilmore, 2009; Kennedy and Miceli, 2010; Lee and Chen, 2009; Lee and Swales, 2006; O’Sullivan and Chambers, 2006; Sun, 2007; Yoon, 2008; Yoon and Hirvela, 2004).

Also the selection of digital tools available for the learners in the light of their strategic use has been discussed (Kukulska-Hulme, 2009; Bekleyen and Yilmaz, 2012, Gajek and Michońska-Stadnik, 2017).

4. Learner Strategic Training for Crowdsourcing

As the studies presented above justify the need for learner strategy training both for language learning and for innovative approaches to the use of technology for pedagogical purposes. There is also a need for learner training for combining crowdsourcing and language learning.

4.1 Goals of Learner Training for Crowdsourcing

The generic goals of learner training for crowdsourcing can be grouped into three areas. The first area is general and covers entrepreneurial and ethical aspects of crowdsourcing that is goal 1 and 2.

- Goal 1. Entrepreneurial

The users need to understand the role of crowdsourcing in business and in education. Thus, they need to be aware of benefits but also risks for contributors. This goal involves, e.g. time management, awareness of various incentives participants may get from crowdsourcing activities.

- Goal 2. Ethical

Protecting personal data is one of the key issues in crowdsourcing. The learners need to utilise their general knowledge about the cybersafety such as protecting personal data, uploading images and video towards specific crowdsourcing-related ethical issues depending on the activity they participate, e.g. a game, etc. or type of interactions among users e.g. peer assessment, collaborative projects.

Learner training addresses the issue of critical thinking and cautiousness at any stage of contribution in crowdsourcing activities.

The second area is technology specific and it depends on the functionalities of a single application as even a so called digital natives (Prensky 2001) may not use a device of software effectively (Jeffrey et al. 2011, Thorne 2003). Thus, Goal 3 is strongly related to the management of learning and learning strategies embedded in the software used for crowdsourcing activities.

- Goal 3. Technological

As each resource requires its own operational actions, learners need to be acquainted with the specific functionalities.

The third area of goals refers strictly to crowdsourcing for language learning. Thus, Goal 4 relates to educational issues.

- Goal 4. Educational

This goal falls into three specific subcategories which are worth considering by both teachers and learners.

- Goal 4.1 Pedagogical

It refers to the pedagogical instructional design interrelated with technological solutions. The instructional approaches comprise: Collaborative projects, supplemental instruction, using and creating Open Educational Resources (OER) or public content, assessment based on problem solving and peer assessment, and various educational games (Anderson 2011: 583, cf. Zdravkova 2018).

Awareness and implementation of pedagogical underpinnings of activities in class is to a great extent teachers' concern but learners should be also aware of how they learn.

- Goal 4.2 Learner oriented

This goal strictly refers to the selection and use of individual learning strategies. The gains of a user differ from the gains of a creator the materials. Awareness of educational incentives for a user may motivate them to sustain and continue learning.

Ability to act as a developer of resources offer other incentives and also contributes to learning. In the process of creating materials for educational purposes the issue of quality of the crowdsourced content requires constant monitoring and evaluation by the author and by other stakeholders. It could be approached in various ways either via experts' evaluation or via developing a sequence of evaluative processes or via negotiations of the content among the crowd.

- Goal 4.3 Quality assurance

Either the users need to be trained how to evaluate critically the materials they use or produce, which in the case of learners at low level of proficiency or very young might be difficult. Or there is a body of evaluators who monitor and evaluate entries introduced by the crowd. The latter approach requires a well-set quality control procedures and/or extra voluntary work by contributors.

4.2 Strategies for Combining Crowdsourcing and Language Learning

An important part of learner training refers to taking the language learner perspective of the goals. This makes the idea of combining crowdsourcing and language learning meaningful to learners. The statements which start with «I» or can do approach are widely used in educational documents such as Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford, 1990), TESOL Technology Standards (Healey et al. 2011), Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR). They help learners to better understand their position, attitude, level of competences. This approach also helps learners to learn from answering questions and reflecting upon them. The exemplary questions within each goal may be the following:

- Goal 1

1. While entering a crowdsourcing application I am aware of my goals.
2. I find time for crowdsourcing activities.
3. I am able to assess how I benefit from the activities.
4. I am able to justify my choice of the resources comparing them with other learning resources.

- Goal 2

5. I am aware of the safety conditions provided by the crowdsourcing portal.
6. I know the purpose of sharing my data with the owners of the resource.
7. I know how to protect my own safety while I participate in the crowdsourcing activity.
8. I respect other participants' rights.
9. I can monitor ethical issues in the progress of activities.
10. I know when to stop the activity if I have doubts about ethical issues.
11. I know how to end an activity without doing any harm to others.

- Goal 3
12. I can use the functionalities of the resource.
 13. I can follow the rules of a game.
 14. I am able to find technical resources which respond to my goals.
 15. I can assess the effectiveness of the technical functionalities for learning.
 16. I search for the best technical resources with the growth of my linguistic level.
 - Goal 4.1
 17. I can collaborate with others for learning purposes.
 18. I know what Open Educational Resources (OER) are.
 19. I can identify resources stored under the Creative Commons licenses.
 20. I take responsibility of my opinions while assessing others.
 21. I can give feedback to my collaborators.
 22. I can estimate learning benefits of games.
 - Goal 4.2
 23. I can monitor my linguistic progress while using crowdsourcing.
 24. I can contribute to the development of the resources I am using.
 25. I can select resources to develop a specific linguistic content.
 26. I can select resources to develop linguistic skills I need.
 27. I know how to share resources which I produce while learning.
 - Goal 4.3
 28. I can critically assess the quality of resources.
 29. I know how to check quality of the resource with the use of other resources.
 30. I know when and how to get help from others.

The suggested list of statements may help learners to acquire strategies, which they may use independently while learning the language with the use crowdsourcing. The strategy training presented above can be implemented as part of language strategy training and digital literacy training. Teachers' role is essential for making this happen.

5. Conclusions

The analysis attempts to mediate crowdsourcing as a big cultural trend to the language teachers and learners. The adaptation of ideas to the learning environment they work, to their needs and making crowdsourcing meaningful to learners promotes the use of it for language learning purposes. It may also increase the effectiveness of learning, awareness of ethical issues and critical thinking among learners. Further work may be focused on integration the language learning strategies with crowdsourcing techniques. To attract language teachers attention worksheets and detailed lesson plans should be prepared.

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