

Using 'Txing' to Teach Native Languages

BY IGNÁCIO AGUADED GÓMEZ, SANDRA CORTES MOREIRA / JUNE 2009

Text messaging (commonly known as txting) has become a preferred form of communication among young people worldwide. More than a fashion accessory, texting from mobile devices is fast becoming a Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) form of expression, albeit one often accused of introducing dramatic changes to every language it touches. Even though we find signs of spelling and grammatical inventions in the text messages of young users—such as abbreviations, quick sentences, questionable punctuation—this practice will not affect the structure of a language, since languages (as products of conventions, accepted and transformed at the same rhythm as societies and mentalities that propel them) progress and modify themselves constantly, without being destroyed in the process.

A study conducted at the Secondary School of Silves, in Portugal, was designed to understand how new media such as SMS, chats, and instant messaging might affect the correct usage of maternal (native) languages. It takes into consideration the idea of valuing student experiences (as *txting* users) in the teaching and learning process of languages. It brings their daily practices and personal "libraries of knowledge" to the classroom as a valid way of gathering motivation and promoting a better adaptation of teaching methodologies to each student's learning rhythm.

In fact, learning through things close to us is an idea common to many researchers, mainly among those connected to the constructivist theories of education. Jean Piaget, the noted Swiss psychologist, talked about a continuous process of assimilation and accommodation that led children to different development stages, until they reached fully complex knowledge about a particular situation or event ("gestalt"). Lev Vygotsky talked about the influence of social interaction in the learning process, and Jerome Bruner believed that better comprehension was built on a student's past and present understanding of facts, resulting from a process where students should be stimulated to search for solutions, to explore subjects beyond those presented by the teachers, and valuing ideas such as "intuition" and "analysis."

Situated learning (developed by authors like Jean Lave, Etienne Wenger, John H. Schumann and William J. Clancey), and more specifically, the situated action theory (proposed by Henrik Artman and Yvonne Wærn) gives relevant framing to justify the use of texting in classes and in the teaching and learning of native idioms, since this use implicates the clear perception that the world, relationships, and, consequently, identities are permanently changing—implicating each one of us in that process. Learning, after all, is the result of belonging to a certain place (noted by Barbara Duncan and Kevin M. Leander) as well as interacting and communication.

The program at the Secondary School of Silves was designed to engage these learning principles. In exploring how new media affects the correct use of maternal languages in young users, we learned that students understand the flexibility of languages and appreciate the varied usage of words in the Portuguese language. For example, in the 19th century the word now spelled "*farmácia*" (for pharmacy or chemistry) was written "*pharmácia*."

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The study showed that students (between 15-21 years old) who had difficulty learning their native language had a greater tendency to integrate texting-type communications ("lingo," as it were) at inappropriate times or in inappropriate settings, such as within exams or school reports. The study also revealed poor mastery of aesthetic and grammatical features of Portuguese, as well as a meaningful lack of creativity in their use of texting practice. This incorrect language usage adds to a student's confusion and communication problems as well as impedes the learning process. "Txting" is also an influencing factor in social development as it helps integrate young people among their peers.

This Silves program offered a new dimension to the relationship between teachers and students, enhanced critical judgment, and helped analyze student competence. The results can also help build potential individualized tools and strategies for coping with different learning situations, whether related to texting or not.

In terms of literacy, we found two major benefits to a strong language foundation. First, knowing how to use the language, students can better understand the meaning of words and this ensures a better comprehension of messages—the necessary basis to be a media-literate person today. Second, analyzing the specific characteristics of texting and thinking about CMC provides young users with the tools to make better use of those new technologies. It promotes better abilities in students and teachers for identifying, accessing, and analyzing, as well as interpreting, evaluating, and communicating competently using media. Therefore, they will become media literate; so to say, people "able to exercise informed choices; understand the nature of content and services; able to take advantage of the full range of opportunities offered by new communications technologies; and better able to protect themselves and their families from harmful or offensive materials."

Students will be engaged and competent citizens in a society already demanding them to be media literate as a result of the media convergence; that is, the merging of electronic media (mass communication) and digital media (multimedia communication). This media literacy includes the command of previous forms of literacy: reading and writing (from understanding to creative skills), audiovisual, digital, and the new skills required in a climate of media convergence.

Teachers and students should be able, both now and in the future, to carry on the message of media education proposed by UNESCO, the Council of Europe, and the European Commission.

About the Authors

Ignacio Agueda Gómez is vice chancellor of the University of Huelva, Spain. He is a professor in the department of education and is a leader in the fields of technology and innovation. He chairs Group Comunicar, in Andalusia, and is the manager of its magazine *Comunicar*. He has participated in many educational/investigation activities in the didactic use of mass media, and he has been the organizer and chairman of several scientific committees for international academic events.

Sandra Cortes Moreira is a Ph.D. candidate in multicultural education at the University of Huelva, Spain. She is also involved with the Center of Investigation for the Arts and Communication of the Superior School of Communication, Lisbon, and the University of Algarve, Portugal, where she is currently a part of the EUROMEDUC project. As a former secondary high school teacher and journalist, she has

collaborated on several different media educational programs.

Comments

Sun, 01 Aug 2010

Post by Treasad

I agree that bloggging is a great informal structure for learning and accessing information quickly. However, have you tried searching for specific help or information? Whilst individual blogs may be well structured, how we are presented with the vast array of blogs certainly isn't. I would like to find a way to access information in a more streamlined manner instead of spending hours sifting through things and sometimes getting lucky!

Wed, 05 May 2010

Post by Facebook Marketing /Promotions

Great Sharing info on online marketing & promotion? It was interesting. You seem very knowledgeable in your field.

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