Technological Tool-Use as an Online Learner Strategy in a Synchronous Speaking Task

Authors : J. Knight, E. Barberà

Abstract : Language learning strategies have been defined as thoughts and actions, consciously chosen and operationalized by language learners, to help them in carrying out a multiplicity of tasks from the very outset of learning to the most advanced levels of target language performance. While research in the field of Second Language Acquisition has focused on 'good' language learners, the effectiveness of strategy-use and orchestration by effective learners in face-to-face classrooms much less research has attended to learner strategies in online contexts, particular strategies in relation to technological tool use which can be part of a task design. In addition, much research on learner strategies and strategy use has been explored focusing on cognitive, attitudinal and metacognitive behaviour with less research focusing on the social aspect of strategies. This study focuses on how learners mediate with a technological tool designed to support synchronous spoken interaction and how this shape their spoken interaction in the opening of their talk. A case study approach is used incorporating notions from communities of practice theory to analyse and understand learner strategies of dyads carrying out a role play task. The study employs analysis of transcripts of spoken interaction in the openings of the talk along with log files of tool use. The study draws on results of previous studies pertaining to the same tool as a form of triangulation. Findings show how learners gain pre-task planning time through technological tool control. The strategies involving learners' choices to enter and exit the tool shape their spoken interaction qualitatively, with some cases demonstrating long silences whilst others appearing to start the pedagogical task immediately. Who/what learners orientate to in the openings of the talk: an audience (i.e. the teacher), each other and/or screen-based signifiers in the opening moments of the talk also becomes a focus. The study highlights how tool use as a social practice should be considered a learning strategy in online contexts whereby different usages may be understood in the light of the more usual asynchronous social practices of the online community. The teachers' role in the community is also problematised as the evaluator of the practices of that community. Results are pertinent for task design for synchronous speaking tasks. The use of community of practice theory supports an understanding of strategy use that involves both metacognition alongside social context revealing how tool-use strategies may need to be orally (socially) negotiated by learners and may also differ from an online language community.

Keywords : learner strategy, tool use, community of practice, speaking task
Conference Title : ICLSLL 2018 : International Conference on Learner Strategies in Language Learning
Conference Location : Paris, France
Conference Dates : March 15-16, 2018