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Appropriation éducationnelle de l'outil-blog dans la pédagogie de projet

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Keywords

appropriation, affordance, blog, Computer Assisted Language Learning, CALL, digital tool, English as a Foreign Language, EFL

Mots-clés

appropriation, affordance, anglais langue étrangère, apprentissage des langues assisté par ordinateur, ALAO, blog, outil numérique

Abstract

This case study focuses on the appropriation of blogs by first year undergraduate students specialising in the English language and introduced to the profession of teaching English as a foreign language in primary school. As part of a project evaluated in the second semester, participants of this study were expected to use group blogs as reflective diaries. For the purposes of this study, we are interested in observing how participants appropriate blogs within their given setting. Qualitative analysis of collated data suggests that educational affordances of the blog-tool perceived by participants leads to different degrees of appropriation of the tool. Blogs are appropriated as electronic logbooks and as platforms for disseminating information. It has been furthermore found that the ways in which students perceive the task undergo change with the appropriation of a digital tool.

Résumé

Cette étude de cas porte sur l'appropriation des blogs par des étudiants en première année de licence inscrits au module « méthodologies de l'enseignement appliquées à l'anglais ». Dans le cadre d'un projet semestriel, les participants ont été amenés à utiliser des blogs comme journaux de réflexion. Nous nous sommes intéressée aux différentes manières dont les participants se sont approprié les blogs. L'analyse qualitative des données recueillies montre que les participants perçoivent et interprètent les affordances éducationnelles des blogs qui déterminent différents degrés d'appropriation. Les participants se sont approprié l'utilisation des blogs comme carnets de bord et comme plateformes de partage d'informations. De surcroît, l'analyse des données recueillies suggère que la façon dont les apprenants perçoivent la tâche change lors de l'appropriation des outils numériques.

Educational appropriation of the blog-tool in project-based learning

Introduction

Language acquisition and teacher training are two areas of study that have received much attention in Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) (Grosbois 2012, 2014; Hoven 2007; Hubbard 2008; Raby 2009; Whyte 2011). In recent years, with the advent of Internet-based tools and applications, users have begun to assume a much more participatory role in the production of authentic material. This material may not always be created for educational purposes, but can nonetheless be of effective use in a language class.

The learning and teaching of English as a second or a foreign language (ESL, EFL) is witnessing the emergence of new perspectives in the field of education in France, with teachers being encouraged to integrate Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) tools in their pedagogical approaches¹. Nationalised teacher-training programs offer initial and further training sessions that demonstrate the integration of ICT competences in pedagogical practices. With paradigms and structures that form the basis for such programs comes the responsibility of researchers to document the dynamics that allow the co-construction of knowledge through digital means.

The prime objective of this study is to explore and analyse how collaborative tools like blogs are appropriated by groups of participants in a project assigned to them.

Educators and researchers alike have reported a number of benefits for students using a weblog, or simply put, a blog. Writing a blog post provides an opportunity for self-expression, whereas reading a blog enables social connection and interaction (Deng & Yuen 2011). Minocha (2009) reports the development of collaborative skills when “networked communities” are formed through group reflective blogs, and by giving and receiving peer feedback through blog comments. Blogs also help develop a set of self-directed learning skills, which allow students to select and pursue their own learning goals and undertake critical evaluation of their learning stages (Robertson 2011). They thus have the potential to promote learner autonomy (Mynard 2007) and can be considered as a medium for reflecting on learning (Murray, Hourigan & Jeanneau 2007).

¹ <<http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid208/l-utilisation-des-technologies-de-l-information-et-de-la-communication.html>>

Though the benefits of blogs for students seem to have been at the crux of studies conducted in CALL, few reports seem to document the actual ways in which students themselves perceive the uses of blogs within a given setting. How best can we, as researchers, scientifically take into account this appropriation of blogs in an educational setting?

This paper will be divided into six sections. A few key concepts will initially be discussed with the intention of laying a theoretical foundation for this study. Next, a description of its didactic and pedagogical background will be provided in order to allow the reader to contextualise the study in its original setting. The third section will principally deal with the methodology used; the fourth will describe how data was collected and analysed. The fifth section will illustrate the results of this study, which will be discussed in the sixth section of this paper.

1. Theoretical framework

1.1. Towards an understanding of appropriation

The concept of ‘appropriation’ is much richer than expected and has been studied by researchers of various areas of expertise.

From a constructivist perspective, appropriation is “the process of constructing knowledge from social and cultural sources, mediated by individuals’ idiosyncratically structured knowledge” (Billett 1998). This definition implies an individualized construction of knowledge that transforms both the user and the object in the process. From an activity theory point of view, “appropriation refers to the process through which a person adopts the pedagogical tools available for use in particular social environments [...] and through this process internalizes ways of thinking endemic to specific cultural practices” (Grossman, Smagorinsky & Valencia 1999).

This concept has also been an object of investigation in the field of didactics of EFL in France since the past decade. Studied within a sociological (or sociology of uses) framework, appropriation has been understood as the adoption or rejection of an object (a tool, or an educational setting) that is principally determined by the ways in which an individual user makes use of the object (Guichon 2004). Moreover, this adoption or rejection of an object takes the personal and social identity of the subject into account (Jouët 2000).

All the aforementioned studies converge at two common points; first that appropriation needs to be studied as a process and not as something acquired at a certain moment in time; and second, that this process involves a certain degree of internalization, of making the object a part of one’s practice, of “taking ownership of something that may not previously have belonged to that person” (Simoes & Gouveia 2011).

Appropriation also depends on a number of variables. A previous study has dealt with the user’s interpretation of the attributes he perceives of the tool used

(Kalyaniwala-Thapliyal 2013). For the purposes of this study, interpretation will be understood as “the user’s sensemaking of an artefact’s purpose of use. One way to approach the nature of an interpretation process is to think of how a user perceives the resources for action that are necessary in the achievement of a goal” (Salovaara 2008: 213). Interpreting an ‘artefact’s purpose of use’ would by itself depend on the need of the user, as also the (social or educational) context in which the user acts (K. Thapliyal 2013).

In order to better conceptualize these ideas for the present study, the two concepts of artefact and affordance will be briefly examined.

1.2. Extending the understanding of appropriation: artefact and affordance as key concepts

A number of educational researchers in France (Raby, Baille, Bressoux & Chapelle 2003; Raby 2005; Rivens Mompean & Guichon 2013) consider Rabardel’s (1995) theory of the instrument as apt for discussing the process of appropriation. Rabardel (1995: 49) uses the term ‘artefact’² to define the neutrality of a human-created object. It can be used to elaborate an activity, but does not, in its present state, take into account the relationship a user can have with an object. When an artefact is appropriated by the user, it becomes an ‘instrument’ i.e. a tool within an activity; a process Rabardel calls “instrumental genesis”. This concept “encompasses both the evolution of artefacts as the user’s activity unfolds, and the building of utilization schemes, both of which participate in the emergence and development of an instrument” (Rabardel 1995, as quoted in Rivens Mompean *et al.* 2013).

Before studying the manners in which an artefact can be instrumentalised by its users, the object artefact itself needs to undergo scrutiny with respect to its functions or ‘affordances’.

Affordances are defined as “the perceived and actual properties of the thing, primarily those fundamental properties that determine just how the thing could possibly be used” (Norman 1998: 9). Norman thus differentiates between ‘perceived’ and ‘real’ affordances of an artefact. While perceived affordances could refer to an action that a user perceives as possible, real affordances are viewed as any action possible to manipulate an artefact. Perceived affordances would thus also entail the context, goals, and past experiences of the user.

Like Mangenot (2013), we believe that studying the theory of affordances allows the researcher to focus on the dynamics between the tool, the user, and the context³. Focusing on the educational affordances of an artefact will be useful in

² Original quotation from Rabardel (1995: 49) “*la notion d'artefact désigne [...] toute chose [matérielle ou non] ayant subi une transformation, même minime, d'origine humaine, [...] susceptible d'un usage [et] élaborée pour s'inscrire dans des activités finalisées.*”

³ Original quotation from Mangenot (2013: 24): “*Or ce qui est intéressant dans la notion*

understanding how it is instrumentalised for the purposes of learning and acquiring English. Other studies have also sought to provide a framework for the educational affordances of blogs, but have focused on self-expression, self-reflection, social interaction, reflective dialogue (Deng *et al.* 2011) and self-directed learning (Robertson 2011).

2. Context of the study

The main project which participants of this study took part in was named ‘Digi-Tales in English’. Although the project is introduced in this section, the finer, more subtle details are not provided. For the purposes of this paper, emphasis will be placed on one part of the project, i.e. reflective diaries that were written as group blogs.

2.1. ‘Digi-Tales in English’: a collaborative project

Very few French universities offer an elective that introduces undergraduate students to the profession of teaching ESL/EFL in primary schools. At the University of Stendhal-Grenoble 3, we have been offering such a module for a number of years and have called it “Applied methodologies for Teaching English”. The principal objective of this course is to learn about, and by extension, apply various pedagogical methodologies of introducing EFL to children in primary schools. A second objective lies in teaching students to improve their English language skills, which have not yet been mastered (cf. figure 1). Though not insignificant in any way, this second objective entails an implicit approach to language learning, whereby students are encouraged to develop self-directed learning skills.

In order to achieve these objectives, in the second semester of the course, students are solicited to create pedagogical resources that would help them acquire practical experience and simultaneously work upon their language skills. In 2011-2012, a new aspect was added to the course that involved the integration of technology that would, on the one hand, help students track their own acquisition of the English language, and on the other hand, acquaint them with the pedagogical possibilities of using technology for educational purposes.

Consequently, in the second semester of this course, students were asked to create digital stories that could be used as teaching resources. The project ‘Digi-Tales in English’ was born one year later, i.e. in 2012-2013. In the second semester (January-April 2013), students were instructed to collaborate in groups of three and four (N=8 groups) and create digital stories that would be accompanied by teaching material that

[affordance] au sens premier, c'est qu'elle pointe le caractère dynamique de la relation outil / utilisateur / contexte : d'une part seules certaines caractéristiques sont perçues (« affordances perçues » versus « affordances cachées »), d'autre part l'utilisateur peut parfois entreprendre des actions non mises en avant par le concepteur (Gaver [1991] parle alors de « fausses affordances », ce qui rejoint le détournement ou la catachrèse chez Rabardel 2005)».

could be tested in real-time at primary schools in France. Students had two in-class contact hours per week but were expected to put in additional hours of work on a regular basis. Although conducted at a local level, this project demanded a certain degree of student involvement as it entailed collaboration with seven primary schools.

2.2. Reflective diaries leading to a reflective essay

During the entire project, each group was asked to collaboratively maintain a reflective diary in the form of a blog⁴ (N=8 blogs) that would enable them to reflect on their task of creating stories and on their on-going acquisition of the English language.

The previous year's experience (in 2012) had reported a lack of engagement in blogging and providing peer feedback. Inspired by a study conducted at The Open University, UK (Lamy 2001), we decided to ascertain for ourselves whether encouraging blogging in groups would translate into more student involvement.

At the end of the course, each group was expected to submit a two-page essay that would synthesise participants' reflections from their systematic weekly or fortnightly contributions on blogs.

3. Research design

3.1. Task design

The writing task on blogs needed to take certain affordances of the tool into consideration. As the participants were expected to participate in weekly face-to-face interaction, the blog affordances that the teacher and task designer focused on were self-expression (Deng *et al* 2011) and reflection (Minocha 2009; Murray *et al* 2007). The task itself was named 'Reflective diary-blog' to emphasise its primary purpose. At the outset of the project, participants were given printed instructions about what this task was to entail. It was also suggested, though not as a mandatory part of the task, that participants read and comment on the diary-blogs of their peers.

No ground rules were set in concrete about the required weekly content on the blog or on prescribed working methods. Although the group blogs had been explicitly created in order to reflect on pedagogy, students were given the liberty to decide the nature of their blog posts and their exchanges. It was however strongly recommended that the content shared be 'educational' in nature, i.e. have something to do with either the teaching or learning of English.

A part of the handout distributed to the participants in the introductory lesson of the course is given below. It should be noted that the consistent use of 'you' in the following note instead of 'your group' was to add a personal touch to the handout. It was not used to suggest that individual blog posts were expected from the

⁴ Though Blogger (<www.blogger.com>) was suggested, students were free to choose the blog-publishing service that appealed to them.

participants. Blog topics and content were meant to be decided upon collaboratively.

Figure 1. A note on the reflective diary-blog

You will maintain a weekly diary on a blog of your choice with the help of your team-members. In this diary, you will reflect on the process of creating a story for children. You could –

- Read and reflect in groups on an article I've uploaded on Edmodo (minimum 3 articles over the semester);
- Reflect on something new you have learnt during the week;
- Reflect on an aspect that you liked / didn't like working on;
- Reflect on difficulties you were / are faced with, and how they are / were overcome (linguistic, technological, pedagogical);
- List words / phrases on a regular basis that you have learnt in the class or due to your project, pronunciation of words you have had to look at and re-learn. Think of how you learned these words or improved your pronunciation.

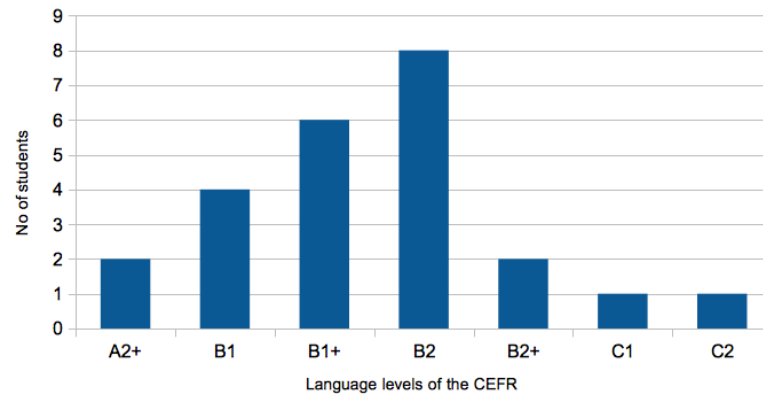
Feel free to read other students' diaries-blogs and comment on them.

In addition, cognitive aid provided to the participants was in the form of a table (cf. annexe 1), which was expected to guide them to overcome their initial worries of what to write on the blog.

3.2. Participants of the study

The participants were 26 first year undergraduate students, specialising in English (Language, Literature and Foreign Civilizations, *LLCE*), which means that the working language for most of their university classes is supposed to be English. Placement tests conducted at the beginning of the undergraduate program shed light on the heterogeneous nature of a group of students with varied levels of language competencies. The levels A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2 are based on the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR).

On processing the placement tests, the university team in charge of allotting students to classes found that the students had extremely disparate competency levels for different skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking). It was thus decided to calculate an average level-grade per student that would vary from A2+ to C2. The levels presented in the chart below (Figure 2) were the average levels achieved by students following the optional module on teaching methodologies. Two students out of 26 were at a level A2+ at the beginning of the year while the majority of the class had an intermediate level of language competence ranging from B1 to B2. The only student who was at a level C2 was a native speaker from England, who chose to attend the course as it promised to offer more than just language training.

Figure 2. Breakdown of participant level competencies

In order to address the issue of disparate language levels, first-year students who are found to be below a B2 level are expected to take additional support classes provided by the university to be at par with the rest of the students.

3.3. Ethical considerations

Owing to the fact that this study would focus on human participation, it was considered necessary to get participant consent. The participants, who were all over the age of majority, were clearly informed of the study, of its objectives, and of how data would be collected. The consent sheet that they signed was written in French to allow no place for ambiguity. The sheet mentioned that the observations of the study would not in any way be used against the participants during assessment and that they would not be penalised for it.

As specified to the participants, their anonymity has been given top priority and respected as far as possible. In the written transcripts of the focus groups and interview, names are replaced by pseudonyms to render the identification of participants impossible. It is for this reason that blog addresses have not been provided and have been referred to in this paper as blog 1, blog 2, etc.

4. Data collection and analysis

4.1. Types of data collection

Van der Maren (2003) distinguishes between three main types of collected data, which Develotte, Mangenot & Zourou (2005: 232) have translated as invoked data, raised data and produced data. Table 1 summarises the data that was used for this study. Invoked data (or field data) is the result of ethnographic notes taken down each week by the observing researcher as well as instructions given by the teacher.

Raised data is data that is collected for the purposes of research, which in this study consists of questionnaires that were distributed and focus groups conducted at the end of the project. While the questionnaires were to be individually filled out, focus groups provided more insight on factors pertaining to the group work. Seven out of eight groups took part in the focus groups (40 min-1hr) and one participant from the eighth group turned up for an interview (1hr).

Produced data is derived from the learning context, which in this study were blog posts and comments left on them.

Table 1. Three types of data collection

Invoked or field data	Teacher’s instructions and ethnographic notes
Raised data	Questionnaires, focus groups, and one interview
Produced data	Data collected from blogs

An online survey was administered to the participants at the completion of the project via *Google Forms* (a function within Google docs, now known as Google Drive). The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part contained 2 questions on participant expectation prior to the commencement of the project. The second part included a total of 21 questions (1 open-ended question and 20 multiple-choice questions with the possibility of adding information to their answers). The questions were based on participants’ personal and perceived experiences during the working of the project that looked at aspects like collaboration, techno-pragmatic competencies, linguistic competencies and pedagogical / professional competencies. The third part contained 14 questions: 3 multiple choice questions on pedagogical accompaniment and 11 questions (4 open-ended questions, 7 multiple choice questions) on their appreciation of the project. Such a detailed questionnaire was prepared in order to pinpoint the participants’ initial reactions, interpretations of how they sensed “an artefact’s purpose of use” (Salovaara 2008: 213) and attitudes towards the project. The objective answers received from these questionnaires were also used as a starting point for the focus groups and the interview.

Next, field and produced data were collated in order to get a clearer picture. For this purpose, blogs written by the participants were first downloaded for offline use. While downloading the blogs, it was found that one group out of eight had chosen to delete its blog at the end of the course, although consent for research had been previously granted to the researcher. However, considering that ethnographic notes had been taken down regularly after class hours during the module, it has been possible to draw evidence from the notes to substantiate the data.

Once all the data had been compiled, it was made anonymous and documented. Blog posts were coded depending on the types of content used. On summarising codes, it was found possible to create a typology of affordances perceived by the participants. The focus groups and interview were transcribed and translated into

English. Fragments where speakers referred to blogs were segmented and then annotated. The complete data was finally analysed through the triangulated data method that “allows one to enlighten the study of research through different angles” (Guay & Prud’Homme 2011: 204-205). This has helped in ascertaining blog appropriation.

4.2. Affordances of the blog-tool

A total of 82 blog posts written over a period of four months were qualitatively analysed using a matrix that reflected the types of participant blog use. A global overview of the ways in which participants used blogs has been summarised (cf. annexe 2).

For every tool introduced in a project, blog use by participants was initially determined by the task itself. By comparing actual blog use to the instructions given by the teacher, a distinction has been made between the uses pre-determined by the task designer and suggested by the teacher and the affordances perceived by the participants themselves (table 2).

Table 2. Types of blog use by participants

Possible uses suggested by teacher	Affordances perceived by the participants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduce the group - Note impressions and opinions - Comment and reflect on team collaboration - Comment and reflect on difficulties - Make a list of new vocabulary - Provide feedback to peer groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report classwork - Report group work - Share information with peer groups - Leave informal messages for group members

Using the above categories, educational affordances perceived by the participants were analysed a second time in a more detailed way. A more itemised coding showed that perceived affordances led to blog appropriation at various levels. The following section will summarise the findings.

5. Educational appropriation of blogs

5.1. Electronic logbook for recording classwork

The analysis of invoked and produced data revealed that most groups used their blogs to keep a systematic record of what had been taught in class. They wrote reports of class activities that they had been involved in. This kind of reporting has been divided into three categories.

5.1.1. Category 1: Reports of classwork through summaries

This category represents blog posts in which participants summarised classroom learning, often in the form of points.

Excerpt 1: Pr5 (blog 2)

[February 10, 2013]

What is a good story?

We saw in class, last Monday, the characteristics of a good story.

- Illustrations
- Humorous (not something which is too serious)
- Simple story line (don't forget that children can't be concentrated too long)...

5.1.2. Category 2: Reports of classwork with added comment

This category represents blog posts in which participants added a short comment about what they had learnt in class.

Excerpt 2: Pr13 (blog 4)

[March 12, 2013]

A former English teacher went in our class in order to explain us the software *GIMP* which is a photo editing software. It was very interesting because with her explanations, I understood many things which were useful for our final video.

5.1.3. Category 3: Reports of classwork through summaries and with added opinion

This category combines the above-mentioned two categories. Participants not only summarised classroom learning, but also added a personal comment about what they had learnt, how they felt during the activity they had been a part of, or how they anticipated a future activity.

Excerpt 3: Pr15 (blog 5)

[March 10, 2013]

During last Monday, we discovered 2 new websites :

--> *Wordle.net* : The point is to write a number of words you want to use, and then to arrange them in different ways (color, font, size). You also have a random button if you do not have ideas. I found this website cool and funny, but I would not use it. I have Photoshop and I learnt to use it for several years, I can do what offers this website on my own. But, for beginners, I found it truly cool.

--> *Voicethread* : The point is to put our finished pictures on a "file", and to record our voice telling the story on each slide. There are several ways to do it. You can record your voice alone, draw or write on the slide, record with you webcam, etc...

I never used a tool like this one, and I am looking forward to it, even if I really hate my voice when I listen to it, but Pr16 said the same about hers, so I was relieved in a way. It was funny to speak about it.

5.2. Electronic logbook for recording group work

A second affordance perceived by participants was that of using blogs as logbooks for group work.

5.2.1. Category 1: Reports about task division

Some participants reported on how tasks were divided i.e. noted down which team member would do or had worked on which part of the project. This type of note taking should have led to more critical, reflective activity but, as we see in the excerpt below, this was not the case for all the groups.

Excerpt 4: Pr11 (blog 3)

[April 12, 2013]

Today we divided our work up and gave each person a job to be completed by the following week. My job is to draw the pictures. We have also decided that we shall meet up in the library on Friday to put all of the pictures onto the computer so that Pr9 can then colour them. We will then do the voice recording of our story. Pr10 knows how to use the program we are going to use to do this, so she shall take charge of that. I will do the narration of the story.

5.2.2. Category 2: Reports about complete and incomplete subtasks

Some participants made notes of the subtasks that had been accomplished as a group and those that they had yet to work on.

Excerpt 5: Pr13 (blog 4)

[March 16, 2013]

What we have done!

- Finish the story : DONE ! :)

- Finish the drawings : QUITE DONE.... :/

- Editing the video : NOT DONE AT ALL ! :’(

We have almost finish our drawings but we met many problems...

5.2.3. Category 3: General comments about group work

This category represents blog posts in which participants made general comments on how they worked as a group and how they perceived their work together.

Excerpt 6: Pr15 (blog 5)

[March 10, 2013]

To continue about our group, I think we begin to understand each other, little by little, and to discover good points. That Monday was pleasant. We were laughing, sharing a lot, and working on our project at the same time.

Being honest, I think now we understand how to work with each other, and the next monday will surely bring something good and interesting.

5.3. Dissemination of information

Finally, participants perceived their group blogs as a platform for sharing three categories of information.

5.3.1. Category 1: Information of an informal nature

This category represents blog posts in which participants consciously provided bits of information about themselves through their blog posts. These pieces of information were sometimes related to classwork (excerpt 7) and sometimes not (excerpt 8).

Excerpt 7: Pr16 (blog 5)

[February 17, 2013]

I had a headache. It was a really terrible headache that I had, which stuck me to my bed for about one week. However, I am back, full of energy, motivation and excited by our project, which is in fact growing though little by little.

Excerpt 8: Pr6 (blog 2)

[April 6, 2013]

My mood:

[An embedded animated video "I am happy - Gorillaz"]

because today it's my birthday hahaha

5.3.2. Category 2: Information pertaining to language and pedagogy

Some participants shared information that they thought could be of benefit to their classmates. Pr6 found a website that could be used to improve pronunciation (excerpt 9) while Pr5 mentioned the release of a special issue of a French magazine on the teaching profession (excerpt 10).

Excerpt 9: Pr6 (blog 2)

[February 17, 2013]

I did some searches on Google ! There are many websites which propose to improve my english ! One of them is howjsay.com !(<http://www.howjsay.com/>) I have only to write the words and I get the pronunciation ! You say magic ?

Excerpt 10: Pr5 (blog 2)

[March 1, 2013]

I have at home a magazine "Le nouvel observateur: être enseignant aujourd'hui" (it's a special issue)

I read an article about teaching with technologies and it was very interessant.

If you want me to bring the article, telle me and I'll do :)

Pr14 shared information pertaining to her own learning of the English language. She claimed to have learned the word 'knit' during her classroom discussions. Moreover, the extract below suggests that she seems to have realised that she was making a mistake ('correct sentences make') but instead of deleting the incorrect portion, chose to scratch it out and continue writing.

Excerpt 11: Pr14 (blog 4)

[March 3, 2013]

Being forced to speak English for 2 hours, I learnt some vocabulary like knit ! I realized that I'm doing lot of efforts to ~~correct sentences make~~ make correct sentences ! But it is a good way to progress in English.

5.3.3. Category 3: Information pertaining to task

The deleted blog (blog 8) shared one piece of information related to their main task of creating stories for primary school students.

All the participants had been forewarned of the consequences of using copyright protected content in their stories. As a result, all the stories made use of authentic content, created from scratch. On noticing that only two groups out of 8 had used music in the background to tell their story, Pr24 (blog 8) dedicated a blog entry to the significance of background sound for telling a story digitally. She then shared the name of a website that provides access to sound effects on a royalty-free basis.

This blog post resulted in convincing the members of blog 6⁵ to add a musical element to their group story.

6. Discussion

Owing to the limited framework of this paper and the objective of this study, focus has been on the ways in which participants themselves perceived the uses of blogs, rather than on the ways in which the designer-teacher meant for them to be used. Blog appropriation has thus been noted at various levels that offer insight on factors contributing to learning.

6.1. Blog as a tool for cooperative learning

As analysis indicated, seven out of eight groups wrote their blog posts individually and posted them on their group blogs, weaving together a patchwork of various constructs. Some wrote under their own names, offering their articles as representative for their group (blogs 1 and 2), while others (blogs 3 and 5) repeated information, without reading what their own group members had shared in earlier posts.

One group (blog 7) started out writing their blog collaboratively under a single name, merging their virtual identities into one. However, after writing only one blog post collaboratively, they chose to dismantle their shared authorship and write under their own names, as if they were now confident enough to assume individual authorship.

Different types of collective activity can thus be observed in this virtual environment. Mangenot & Dejean-Thircuir (2009) distinguish between four types of collective activity in distance learning: mutualisation, discussion, collaboration and cooperation. The first two types imply a greater degree of shared understanding and knowledge, whereas collaboration and cooperation are two modes that allow learners to work in groups. While collaboration entails the collective achievement of a task, learners involved in cooperative activity find themselves working individually at times or sharing sub-tasks in a CALL environment, yet contributing to a whole.

As observed in our study, groups of learners were often engaged in mutualising thoughts and resources as they had intermittent access to views of their team members. This is principally characteristic of cooperative rather than collaborative work (as against the expectation of the teacher-designer).

Focus groups also revealed that this type of cooperative activity led to the observation of a certain degree of passivity by some participants. Pr3 (blog 1) who was not very keen on writing the blog from the beginning of the project expressed

⁵ An extract from the focus group: “C’était, je crois que c’était sur le blog de Pr24, c’était ben le site pour les sons en fait. Je crois que, il me semble qu’on avait parlé sur son blog et j’ai lu son article et je me suis dit, tiens les sons c’est pas une mauvaise idée, et du coup, je me suis dit bon, on peut le faire nous mêmes” (Pr18, blog 6).

relief that her co-writers thoroughly enjoyed the ‘writing’ part of the blog. Thus although blog-writing was a compulsory task set by the teacher, some learners seem to have perceived it as optional, by taking a back seat and allowing their more enthusiastic partners to take over the writing.

For Pr13 (blog 4), the sharing of writing space was confusing at the beginning. She would wait for each of her partners to take the initiative before writing consecutive posts so as not to be seen as the only active blogger of her group. As time went by, she stopped waiting for the others to respond and appropriated the blog tool for herself (cf. 6.2). Thus, learners seem to have changed the way in which they perceived the task and finally used the blog by choosing to engage in cooperative rather than collaborative work.

6.2. Interpretation of the blog as instrument and task

As mentioned earlier in the theoretical framework of this paper, one of the variables that the appropriation of a digital tool depends upon is the user’s interpretation of the tool (Salovaara 2008). Although an analysis of blog content demonstrates that the tool was used by most participants in similar ways, focus groups and the interview reveal that participants interpreted the blog in different ways. To some participants it was an instrument, while to others it was a task. It is interesting to note that participants who perceived blogs as instruments viewed them positively, as ‘something useful’ (Pr2) and ‘an aid to accomplishing the project’ (Pr13), whereas those who considered them as writing tasks, quickly wrote them off as ‘chore’ (Pr9) and ‘too much work’ (Pr20).

Blog use seems to have been defined by the transition of one’s perception of the blog from task to instrument. In the focus group, Pr13 (blog 4) revealed that although not initially keen on the ‘task’ of writing on the blog, as time passed by, she appropriated the blog to her own satisfaction (“I would use emoticons and things like that”). With this appropriation, the blog began to be perceived as an instrument that was used to ‘serve’ her ends: “That way, I began to do a *bilan*. I would see what was left to be done. It was an aid, yes I think it was an aid.”

What was considered “an aid” to accomplishing the project ended up by revealing how the task progressed over time. As Pr13 gradually appropriated the blog as an instrument, she allowed herself to be designated as the representative of her group. Towards the end of the project, she notes four weeks of activity of the story-making process and the difficulties faced during the period (cf. annexe 3). The subject lines of the posts offer a clear indication of this progression.

The dual perception of the blog as an instrument and as a task thus seems to have had a direct effect on blog use.

7. Conclusion

The present study examines the appropriation of a digital tool by groups of learners in a CALL environment. Certain educational ergonomists (Raby 2005) have argued that in order to comprehend learners' appropriation of a CALL environment, "the finest details of a subject's activity [that] are influenced by sociological, cultural, organizational factors" (Raby, Braille, Bressoux & Chapelle 2003: 4) need to be recorded.

Our study has tried to demonstrate that, in addition to these factors, the ways in which learner-users perceive affordances of the tool in-use need to be recorded as well. We reiterate, affordances are not the physical features of a tool, nor are they simply the possibilities, which a mediated environment offers. They are generated as a result of an interaction or a spontaneous relationship between the user and the artefact.

This study also demonstrates that when a digital tool like a blog is appropriated by groups of students, even though not all participants are conscious of their learning processes, they get involved in a semi-formal community of learning (however limited in practice and growth). Some of the practices are reading peer blogs, gauging the progression of other group stories, interacting on blog space with group members and other peers, and sharing content and information. Moreover, when a common goal (writing a blog) and a set of problems (logistics) are shared, the prior cultural baggage, knowledge and expertise of each participant contribute to the achievement of the common goal.

We agree with Raby's (2007) differentiation between 'task' and 'activity', i.e. the difference between the expected and the reality of a pedagogical situation. A confrontation of the two results in a process called regulation (Aguerre 2011). When an activity is significantly different from the resulted task, the designer-researcher is expected to redefine the task, a process "even more important, because the task design is distributed among the teachers, the material designers, and the students themselves, who are not just simple performers of an expected or prescribed task" (Raby 2007: 66). Similarly, when a digital tool is perceived differently from what is expected, the CALL environment needs to undergo a change (Bertin, Gravé, Narcy-Combes 2010).

As our study is an exploratory investigation, it is limited in nature. Being the first of its kind, it is unable to take advantage of any precedent to model itself upon. Therefore, the result is the collation of a vast amount of data followed by qualitative analysis of a process that is principally data-driven.

Further and more microscopic studies need to be undertaken in order to study the regulation of tasks and digital tools, allowing the researcher to redefine 'task' in a more informed manner. Further, existing data of this study needs to be analysed more minutely in order to modelise the forms of the appropriation, which will be the object of our future research.

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Annexes

Annexe 1. Our Weekly Reflexive Diary

Names: _____

Date: _____

	What have you learnt? Specify. Is what you have learnt useful? In what way?	Difficulties you are faced with?	Overcoming difficulties
Language (Vocab, grammar, pronunciation...)			
Pedagogy (Aspects of teaching)			
Technology			
Collaboration (*)			

(*) Explain here how you are dividing your tasks each week? Who does what? Who helps whom? How much work are you managing to do in class and how much do you do at home?

Annexe 2. An overview of the uses of blogs

Blog no.	Total no of blog posts	No of blog posts per month	Uses of blogs
1	18	Apr – 7 Mar – 6 Feb – 4 Jan – 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide feedback for story 7 (blog 7) - Report group work: provide link to title page of story using Wordle, show final result of story character Kitty using Gimp, Provide story script slide by slide - Note impressions post-project, team collaboration - Note division of tasks - Report and summarise classwork - Reflect on classwork - Comment on difficulties, tools used, vocabulary - Introduce the group
2	16	Apr – 4 Mar – 7 Feb – 4 Jan – 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide feedback for story 1 (blog 1) - Comment on problems with story conceptualisation, technology, tools - Note impressions post project - Note division of tasks and tasks to do - Report group work, show final result with Wordle, summarise story - Report technical difficulties - Summarise classwork - Reflect on language difficulties, pedagogical activities - Share information: special issue of <i>Nouvel Observateur</i> - Introduce the group
3	13	Apr – 7 Mar – 3 Feb – 2 Jan – 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide feedback for story 2 (blog 2) - Report class activities, advice given for their story, personal comment on class - Note division of tasks - Note impressions and thoughts on the work given - Comment on collaboration - Introduce the group
4	12	Mar – 8 Feb – 3 Jan – 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Summarise classwork - List tasks to be done - Report group work: provide hyperlink to story, picture examples of story characters, story script slide by slide, revised summary of story - Report classwork - List momentary difficulties - Comment on difficulties, team work - Introduce the group
5	9	Apr – 2 Mar – 2 Feb – 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report class work, summarise use of tools, comment - Inform each other about absences - Note on team collaboration - Introduce the group
6	7	Apr – 1 Mar – 4 Feb – 1 Jan – 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feedback for story 3 (blog 3) - Note tasks done and those to be done - Comment on topics related to technology, collaboration - Note task division - Introduce the group

7	7	Apr – 2 Mar – 2 Feb – 3	- Feedback for story 3 (blog 3) - Report classwork, summarise classwork - Comment on team collaboration and task division, tasks to be done - List language difficulties
8	blog deleted	blog deleted	- Summarise classwork - Share information: tutorial on how to save Audacity files to an mp3 format, name of website providing royalty-free sounds

Annexe 3. Traces of progression on blog 4

Post published on	Subject line of the post	Story making process: sample evidence from posts [sic.]
Saturday, 2 March 2013	Week 5, Monday 18th February 2013	“Our group got a CM1-CM2 class from Toulouse... For this Monday, we had to start writing our story but we had rules to respect...(summary of the story)... After this, we had to work on worksheets”
Sunday, 10 March 2013	Week 6, Monday 4th March 2013	“During the first part of the course, we talked about our story... Then... we saw 2 websites which are going to help us to build the structure of our story (drawings, paints, photos ...)...Now that we have seen all these applications, we just have to work !”
Tuesday, 12 March 2013	Week 7, Monday 11th March 2013	“This Monday... half an hour before the end of class, we met a HUUUUUUUGGE problem ! Our story was too long... so we had to take a short cut to our story... But finally, we did it ! We managed to finish the story but we have to finish the drawings and start editing the video, which is not that simple ! And for next week we have to finish all our work and we will project our video to the class.”
Thursday, 14 March 2013	<i>Our final story, at last ! :D</i>	“Here is our story finally over ! ... Page 1 Hello ! My name is Mary ! I have no family and I live in an orphanage...” [<i>script</i>]
Saturday, 16 March 2013	What we have done!	“-Finish the story : DONE ! :) -Finish the drawings : QUITE DONE.... :/ -Editing the video : NOT DONE AT ALL ! :(We have almost finish our drawings but we met many problems ... Now we have to finish editing the video !!!!!”
Sunday, 17 March 2013	We have finish to edit our story, at last ! :D	“Here it is !” [<i>hyperlink to the story</i>]
Post published on	Subject line of the post	Story making process: sample evidence from posts [sic.]
Saturday, 2 March 2013	Week 5, Monday 18th February 2013	“Our group got a CM1-CM2 class from Toulouse... For this Monday, we had to start writing our story but we had rules to respect...(summary of the story)... After this, we had to work on worksheets”

Sunday, 10 March 2013	Week 6, Monday 4th March 2013	“During the first part of the course, we talked about our story... Then... we saw 2 websites which are going to help us to build the structure of our story (drawings, paints, photos...)... Now that we have seen all these applications, we just have to work !”
Tuesday, 12 March 2013	Week 7, Monday 11th March 2013	“This Monday... half an hour before the end of class, we met a HUUUUUUUGGE problem! Our story was too long... so we had to take a short cut to our story... But finally, we did it! We managed to finish the story but we have to finish the drawings and start editing the video, which is not that simple! And for next week we have to finish all our work and we will project our video to the class.”
Thursday, 14 March 2013	<i>Our final story, at last ! :D</i>	“Here is our story finally over!... Page 1 Hello! My name is Mary! I have no family and I live in an orphanage...” [<i>script</i>]
Saturday, 16 March 2013	What we have done!	“-Finish the story : DONE ! :) -Finish the drawings : QUITE DONE.... :/ -Editing the video : NOT DONE AT ALL ! :(We have almost finish our drawings but we met many problems ... Now we have to finish editing the video !!!!!”
Sunday, 17 March 2013	We have finish to edit our story, at last! :D	“Here it is!” [<i>hyperlink to the story</i>]

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