

Language Acts and Worldmaking
Has the digital world revolutionised language pedagogy?
King's College London, 21 March 2018
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Notes

I am a link between research and trends in technology and the practitioners, the teachers, the users of learning technology.

My experience comes from

1. working with language teachers for more than 15 years but also from
2. being a (former and current) student of languages (both with traditional and 'tech' methods)
3. teaching experience when doing a CELTA, = and English teaching, course

This gives me several perspectives on the use of technology in language teaching / learning.

I would like to pick out a few key words / concepts from **Miriam's** talk: **multimodality, digital literacies, Language teaching has to work with and without technology.**

Naturally, as a Learning Technologist, I advise on and train **multimodal** means of teaching foreign languages, although until now rather intuitively.

When training them, I advise teachers in some areas of **digital literacy** (e.g. copyright, HTML...), it kind of comes with the territory; it is not my aim, though, to cover as much digital literacy as possible.

My purpose is to advise teachers on creating material, study content, for students.

Pro technology

I also link two contrasting views within myself: one embraces technology in teaching for its multimodality that makes it so much more colourful, its increased effectiveness and independence; video, music, apps, learning networks, speech recognition, Tandem Apps.... etc. is just more appealing than just a text book.

Contra technology

On the other side, with all the ubiquity of technology, the many websites and apps and the mother of all language learning apps: Duolingo, I am **not** aware that the general level of foreign language competence has risen. I know of individual examples where someone has learned or improved considerably by using digital material but this is not the general picture I get.

Basic model

How do I negotiate the two sides within me? I have a basic model working / hypothesis for successful learning: providing manageable chunks of some learning content and a 'before' and 'after' test. In other words:

- A structured trajectory
- Content
- Tangible progression

This is not really terribly original, this is how I and my generation learned, working through a pretty mono-modal textbook and little inspired classroom activities. I did learn, we all did, it was just often boring and hard-going. MOOCS (Massive Open Online Courses) follow the same model, just with digital content.

I argue to keep the model but change the content to something multimodal and more effective.

Role of teacher

The Internet is fertile chaos, it is the teacher who selects and provides a path through this, who 'cultivates in the jungle', he is **Antonio's** map designer, Sherpa.. the Guide on the Side)*. I actually think that Antonio makes a very similar point.

BTW multimodal doesn't mean that learning is fast and easy and never boring!

This approach is also a response to one of Miriam's quotes (Brown, 2017), that we "will fail to serve future generations if our definition of digital literacies does not help to produce a sense of agency **both with and without new technologies**. Language teaching has to work with and without technology. My basic model works in both situations.

It also means that any teacher can start small by adding digital material to their existing content and gradually replace and build new content.

Some background

My assumptions were confirmed by an essay I came across some years ago (Trapping Our Kids in the Past? Are schools preparing learners for the 21st century? by Nicola King). It discusses the use of technology for the current student generation. This essay debunks the myth that learning has to be 'fun' and easy, otherwise young people will not do it. Nicola King uses the expression 'chocolate-coated broccoli', hilariously fitting.

One of the findings in her essay is that many of a cohort of pupils who were expelled due to their persistent disruptive behaviour did *not* state that they had been *bored* but that they perceived school as *pointless*. Another finding is about video games and that many people who do not play assume that they are cheap pleasure and easy to play. (*I am sure that those exist as well but I assume this is about games like Civilisation or Tomb Raider...*). They are not! Many video games require deep learning with boring phases. What makes players go through those phases is an intrinsic desire to be able to play. **To toil through the learning, the game also has to be the right level and learning it has to be achievable for the player.**

This feeds into my working hypothesis of chunks or packages of content that can be learned within a given time. It also tells me that, if learning isn't pointless but relevant (because a student fundamentally wants to learn and because there is an aim and it is achievable) learning is likely to happen, with or without technology.

)* Twenty years ago, a small article by Alison King appeared in the journal *College Teaching*. It was titled "From Sage on the Stage to Guide on the Side." From: <https://designerlibrarian.wordpress.com/2013/05/24/reality-check-sage-on-the-stage-vs-guide-on-the-side/>