

Foreign Languages Turned into Second Languages through ICTS

Luciana Caffesse, Teresa Guasch

E-mail: lcaffesse@uoc.edu, tguasch@uoc.edu

Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (Spain)

Abstract

The need to learn foreign languages is constantly and enormously increased due to globalization, migration, mobility, and tourism, and contact with the target foreign language and culture (FL&C) is essential for proper learning. While the term 'second language' is used to refer to a language abundantly present where it is taught or learned (e.g. Italian in Rome), the concept of 'foreign language' implies distance to, absence of, and slim contact with a certain language and its continent cultures (e.g. English in Rome). Then, proximity to, and/or presence of a language in a given geographical area are essential for sociolinguistic categorization into a foreign or second language, and determine the pedagogical approach and design a country or region, and educational stakeholders are to take for instruction. By bringing the FL&C as close as our home, office and classroom, ICTs can break down geographical barriers and educational constraints.

By reviewing literature from the sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic and psycho pedagogical fields, we investigated the bringing-closer feature of ICTs which may facilitate de contact with a target FL&C. This paper reviews literature on the second and foreign language concepts, and studies on the pedagogical effects of using ICTs to approach the target FL&C.

ICT has qualitatively transformed everyday communication and information practices in commercial, financial, professional, educational, recreational, and interpersonal realms (Castells, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2004). In the language learning arena ICT has moved many educators from cognitivist assumptions about knowledge and learning as brain/local phenomena to contextual, collaborative, and social interactional approaches to language development (Thorne, 2008). In a similar way ICTs have effectively reduced the 'distant' feature of foreign languages and transform them into a surrounding element. By having everyday and unlimited access to the universe of a target FL&C in the form of information and knowledge, didactical materials in a wide variety of formats, numerous native speakers for interpersonal synchronous and asynchronous communication within language -specific learner and/or teacher forums or otherwise, like hobby and personal interest blogs.

This shift elicits the redefinition of 'foreign language', and this 'cultural moving' feature of ICTs facilitates the overall teaching, school and lifelong learning, language policy and management processes. As language learning and training stakeholders, we should exploit ICTs' benefits and become aware of what a giant we have under our fingertips.