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A Three Step Model for Language Accumulation.

Abstract

The use of three-dimensional virtual worlds such as Second Life (SL) to support foreign language learning and teaching has been receiving increasing attention over the last decade. A review of the literature revealed a lack of activity design models for SL-based foreign language learning. This paper proposes a model that may be used by foreign language educators to design initial SL-based learning activities for their students. The suggested model integrates three language-learning features to contribute to effective language learning, to satisfy students' preference for working in groups, and to reduce SL's chances of crashing. The model also provides a mechanism for moderating SL's steep learning curve.

Language is the most powerful weapon that the human kind has. It is the only means of communication by which one can talk out their thoughts, feelings or express ones ideas. Animals and birds do not have the power of verbal communication. It is only the human kind that has the power of verbal communication. Language is what helps in bringing ones thoughts, the way one feel, and also the creative and the innovation ideas to light. Language in general is much more than one can define. The thought or an idea that can't be expressed pictorial can be told out through words which in turn forms language.

Language is what makes humans. In sense language is what defines mankind. Directly or indirectly it's the language that shows the other people who one is or what one felt about things. Language helps to express oneself to others. Language is not only verbal but there are other languages that people understand in different ways. For example the music language, sign language, etc.

There are many writers who tried to define language. Desmond Tutu said Language is very powerful. Language does not just describe reality. Language creates the reality it describes. Language is very powerful because it shows the strongest feeling and it also makes it possible to define the undefinable feeling or emotion or thought. Language describes everything. Language can be used to describe starting from the smallest creatures to the extension of the universe. Right from an atom to the infinity. Language can also make the unbelievable, believable. It can actually give the reality it describes.

Salman Rushdie observes that Language is courage; the ability to conceive a thought, to speak it, and by doing so to make it true. He actually points out that without language nothing can be expressed verbally or in written form. The use of the language is what makes a reader to feel that reading a book is worthwhile and worth spending the time to read.

In this paper I am suggesting a three step activity based design model. As the name indicates, the three-step design model includes three steps: setting the stage, acclimating, and testing the waters. Each step can have more than one activity based on the learning objectives. Usually, educators go directly toward what is equivalent to the last step - testing the waters - to implement their learning activities. The three-step model suggests two additional steps to gradually expose students to SL(Second life, meaning it is virtually life)-based learning, thus to help students overcome the steep learning curve associated with SL novice users.

The first step is called setting the stage. Being aware of SL's steep learning curve, some researchers suggest setting additional technical training sessions to help students get familiar with SL's basic functions. Although adding the training phase may solve some problems, it has limitations. First, the technical training has no relation to language learning. Consequently, students who are not interested in SL may have a hard time concentrating on the learning process. Second, the training activity takes up the already limited class time for language learning. Last, the training activity normally requires the gathering of students in a computer lab, which adds extra burden on the instructor and the lab technician.

The purpose here is to kill two birds with one stone by designing an activity that can function as a language learning activity while motivating students to learn to use SL at the same time. To serve this purpose, it is suggested that learning activities be centered around SL instead of necessarily being carried out within it. For example, SL's tutorials, instructions, and manuals are in English. A possible task for English as a Second Language (ESL) students could be to develop a SL user manual in their native language. First, students are grouped in pairs or trios to translate text-, audio-, or video-based SL tutorials. After the completion of the group translation, students' works are pooled together to develop a final SL manual. Students can then be assigned to install SL on lab computers or their own computers to test the manual. Through this task-based, authentic, collaborative learning activity, the ESL students may not only learn and practice basic SL functions, but also practice their English skills.

The second step is acclimating. A lack of feedback might add to the feeling of isolation experienced by learners. The linguistic signaling of engagement can help create a sense of social presence. However, the linguistic feedback cannot be guaranteed for novice SL users because they either have no friends and acquaintances in SL, or they may be too shy to initiate a conversation. Some feedback in SL, on the other hand, could even deter a novice user. Empirical studies have found that students could also get scared by sudden shouts or by

strange followers in SL. Moreover, even for students who have been exposed to similar virtual environments, online environments that operate exclusively in the target language with native speakers can be challenging for some students (Felix, 1999). For these reasons, it is important to scaffold the novice users to reach the proficiency of using SL by setting up a safe zone for them.

The goal of this step is to set a safe zone for students by assigning students to complete simple tasks in SL. In this step, foreign language students will be gathered in groups in an instructor-selected SL place to discuss assigned topics through text-based communication. By doing this, the expected feedback will be guaranteed, whereas the unexpected interruptions from strangers can be mostly eliminated. In terms of language practice, as Belcher and Hirvela (2008) point out, text-based interactions have significant relationships or overlaps with oral discourses. Second language learners' text-based interactions within SL are also likely to help them improve their spoken language. The discussion topics can also be aligned in the syllabus to make them an extension of the classroom-based discussions. Because foreign language students usually have few opportunities to practice the target language outside the classroom, the extension of the classroom-based discussions in SL might help keep students' minds on a topic for a longer time. Of course, the audio-based discussions can be gradually added to the tasks based on their improvement of technical proficiency and familiarity with the SL environment. In addition, because of the limited task load in this step, students can use this opportunity to practice their SL skills to reach an effective level of proficiency in SL use. Instructors can also embed SL skill-related performance to the tasks so as to encourage students' exploration of SL. For example, the task can include reporting the group chat log. Without being shown how to get the chat log, students will have to explore the SL interface to complete the task.

The third step is Testing Waters. Through the activities in the first two steps, the steep learning curve of SL should, at least to some extent, be conquered. Students are able to take SL seriously as a learning environment. In other words, students are ready to work on a final learning task in SL, such as practicing their foreign language skills with native speakers. The final task should also be a task-based activity; otherwise, learners could still be wandering around in SL, caught up in distractions

In conclusion, Based on the analysis of problems and issues associated with SL for conducting effective language learning activities, this paper has proposed a three-step design model for initial SL-based foreign language learning and teaching. The goal of this design model is to overcome SL's technical limitations and its steep learning curve to help students gradually adopt SL as a foreign language learning environment. This model integrates three basic language-learning features - task-based learning, the use of authentic activities, and collaborative learning - to ensure the effective design of foreign language learning activities, to satisfy students' preference for group work in SL, and to reduce SL's chances of crashing. In addition, a three-step design is suggested to moderate the steep learning curve associated with novice SL users.

The proposed model has yet to be empirically tested. Therefore, quantitative and qualitative studies aimed at producing evidence of the model's efficacy would be desirable. Further investigation should concern both the effectiveness and limitations of the model from the instructors' and students' perspectives. Moreover, there is a need to devise and validate assessment tools for the purpose of measuring task loads and ascertaining students' readiness to move from one step in the model to the next.

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