

Running Head: REALIA EDUCATION IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Realia Education in Language Learning

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Abstract

Language is the primary tool of communication. Learning and understanding languages is of utmost importance in this fast-paced world, be it for professional communications or for casual conversations, where cultures and languages are no more bounded by regions. In the present world, technology has a major impact on our lifestyle. In the present scenario, our life has become one long race where everyone is running to beat others, and in this process, we have become more and more mechanical. The advent of technology has catalysed this process of mechanisation. We forget to learn, but only keep memorizing as much as we can stuff in our brain. We do not gain in-depth knowledge but a memorized knowledge which is more likely to be forgotten after some time, but it does not necessarily need to be so. Technology has the capacity to lead us farther from the real and practical world, but it also has the potential to assist in our interaction with the real world. The method of Realia learning is a strong example of how technology can be a powerful tool to facilitate in-depth learning by inducing practical, real life stimuli in the process of learning. This paper describes what Realia education is, how it can be used in language learning and how technology can be further used to support Realia learning.

Keywords: education, language, technology in education, realia

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Language is an important and sensitive tool in practical life. It forms the medium of communication for everything. It is hardly possible to carry out any task without the use of language because it is the primary mode of communication between people in professional as well as personal life. So, learning languages is of utmost importance in order to communicate effectively by making the correct use of the language. The more languages we learn, the greater will be our value in the industry because we will have the ability to communicate with a larger group of people to fulfill our needs.

Realia basically refers to the use of objects from real life in classroom instruction by educators to improve students' understanding of other cultures and real-life situations. Introducing Realia in the language learning process will enhance our learning experience and provide a stronger and in-depth knowledge of the language. From Wikipedia.org, "A teacher of a foreign language often employs Realia to strengthen students' associations between words for common objects and the objects themselves. In many cases, these objects are part of an instructional kit that includes a manual". Such a teaching method provides more concrete and permanent knowledge to the students and helps in better learning the language. The use of Realia is commonplace in the classroom and is widely considered to have great value in fostering an active teaching-learning environment. It is simpler to understand and appropriate for any age level of students, from beginner to advanced. The vocabulary learned from Realia emphasizes essential words that the student would encounter in the regions of the target language. The use of Realia with students will not only be fun, but it will also provide a practical and interactive approach to learning English. Students will immediately find relevance in the lesson by navigating through the vocabulary on information like bus timetables, signs from airports, listings online and receipts. Additionally, students are more likely to remember the vocabulary

presented in Realia as they recall the real contexts where they learned it, and such kinesthetic learners will benefit from the tangible examples provided for them.

Technological Impact And Appropriate Use

virtual realia: (in language teaching) digitized objects and items from the target culture which are brought into the classroom as examples or aids and used to stimulate spoken or written language production. (Smith, 1997)

Here rises a big question, “Can Virtual realia still be considered realia?” (Smith, 1997). To this, he provides a list of definitions of realia, as stated.

realia: (in language teaching) actual objects and items which are brought into a classroom as examples or as aids to be talked or written about and used in teaching. (Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics. Richards, Platt, & Platt. 1992. Essex.)

realia: anything which has a purpose outside of the ESL classroom and can be brought into the classroom. (Realia: Bringing the Real World into the Classroom [Online]. Dickens, Robertson, & Hofmann, 1995 Victoria, BC.)

realia: objects of any origin used to illustrate vocabulary and structure in the L2. (Celce-Murcia & Hilles, 1988)

realia: concrete objects and the paraphernalia of everyday life. (Zukowski-Faust, 1997)

An observation and analysis of these definitions of realia reveals that virtual realia does satisfy the objectives placed by these definitions. It does assist in bringing real, daily life objects into the classroom for interactive learning, albeit in a digitised manner.

Technology has begun to impact the use of Realia by adding the virtual Realia option, whereby three-dimensional models can be displayed through projection or on computer screens, allowing the learner to see detail otherwise difficult to acquire and to manipulate the object within the medium on which it is displayed. The option of zooming and looking within objects makes virtual Realia an important learning tool in technical environments where it may be difficult or impractical to examine an object in as much detail manually, such as the workings of living organs or machinery containing hazardous parts, such as combustion engines. Modern technologies like VR and holographic projections are making the virtual Realia objective a reality. Quoting London-based freelance writer and journalist Marianne Stenger (2017, <https://www.opencolleges.edu.au/informed/edtech-integration/10-ways-virtual-reality-already-used-education/>), current usages of VR in language education include

1. Language Immersion

Virtual reality simulations can trick the brain into thinking the experiences are real, and a number of new language learning apps that use VR are now being developed.

One such app is Unimersiv, which can be used together with the Oculus Rift headset. The app allows learners to connect with people from all over the world and practise their language skills while playing games and interacting with other students in a virtual world.

2. Game-based learning

Virtual reality is likely to completely change the way games can be used for learning. Game-based learning works because it increases engagement and motivation, and virtual reality can take this to the next level.

Jane Wilde, an instructor at Marlboro College in Vermont who has been using games and simulations in her lessons for some time now, notes that although virtual reality games are not the only source of fun and engagement in class, they can make a substantial difference.

“In my own experience game-based learning is motivating because it is fun,” she says. “The playing field is leveled – a player’s gender, weight, race don’t have to interfere with their acceptance by other players. You are judged by your actions.”

A lot can be accomplished in a virtual environment that would not be possible in real life. Also it is memorable – the visual and kinesthetic experiences in virtual worlds contribute to our ability to learn.”

3. Virtual campus visits

Technology is changing the way students select universities and many schools have now started virtual reality campus tours as a way to connect with applicants on a wider scale. These campus ‘visits’ allow students to see what it would be like to attend universities in other cities and countries even if they can’t visit in person.

The virtual reality tours use photos and videos of campuses and their surroundings that enable students to explore the campuses at 360-degree angles. For instance, the University of Michigan Football program now has a virtual reality tour that lets students experience what it's like to play at the university's stadium.

For language immersion, consider a situation where a 3D animated rendering of a railway station or an airport can be developed in order to give the students a live and realistic experience of the various interactions one can encounter in day to day life.

Adding to her observations, the benefit of cross-cultural interaction also occurs.

Cross-cultural interaction

Since the VR interaction is not limited by distance, it can enable cross-cultural interaction. Students, guided by their respective teachers, from various parts of the world can join hands and go on a VR-assisted field trip with global peers, interacting using their VR avatars. For example, in our above situation of the VR-railway station, we can include native speakers and learners of the local language used in the location of the railway station to guide and interact with foreign learners of the local language. This exposes the learners from both sides to cultures beyond the borders, along with the basic requirement of the language being learned interactively.

Challenges to adoption of technology assisted Realia

Despite its many benefits, technology assisted Realia has a few roadblocks.

1. Resistance to new technology

This usually happens with adults. They are familiar with traditional methods and take time to adapt to advancements. However, this challenge can be effectively overcome by appropriate training and advertisement of the wider scope offered. They can be made aware of the advantages of using such technologies in the process of learning by proper advertisement and counselling.

2. Heavy costs

Since the VR and AR technologies are still developing, it involves research costs. Further, the end-products, apps and equipment are also priced beyond the reach of the economic middle class of people.

3. Network issues in many regions of the world

These technologies are highly dependent on fast and uninterrupted Internet services. Such high speed services are not available throughout the world and can hamper the adoption of the suggested technologies.

Conclusion

Proper learning and application of language is very important to carry out an effective conversation without mis-representing facts and ideas. For that we need to have thorough knowledge of the language used. Realia can provide an engaging platform for faster and deeper understanding of languages, expanding the scope beyond traditional classrooms. The use of modern and upcoming technologies enables Realia to be utilised to the core for better imparting and imbibing of knowledge. The interaction of foreign learners of a language with the native speakers of the same will be an academically and culturally enriching experience for both the groups of people.

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