

Future language teachers learning to become CALL designers – methodological perspectives in studying complexity

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Abstract. Language teachers of the future, our current students, live in an increasingly technology-rich world. However, language students do not necessarily see their own digital practices as having relevance for guiding language learning. Research in the fields of CALL and language education more generally indicates that teaching practices change slowly and the integration of technologies into pedagogic practices needs to be developed. This sets challenges for language teacher education: we should be able to educate language teaching professionals who are agile (but responsible) in adapting their pedagogic practices in response to the changes in society. To meet this challenge, we have been developing an approach for university language students to strengthen their expertise in designing theoretically informed CALL pedagogies. However, these attempts have not been fully successful as the development of pedagogic expertise involves a complex rhizome of factors and issues reaching from the participants' early language histories to current practices in the field. In order to shed light on this complexity, three different research approaches are compared for their suitability to explore developing pedagogic expertise, i.e. nexus analysis, conversation analysis and multimodal (inter)action analysis. The analysis focuses on multiple data from the university course, used as a case example.

Keywords: research methods, professional expertise, language teacher education, change.

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1. Introduction

Our everyday life is increasingly technology-rich and we are constantly urged to take this into account in different fields of society, especially education. However, research indicates that teaching practices change slowly (see [Facer & Sanford, 2010](#)). There is also variation in relation to how newly qualified language teachers adapt to changes. Some tend to believe that there are external forces constraining their pedagogic approaches, while others feel empowered as language educators making their own choices ([Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2011](#)).

It also seems to be challenging to put objectives into practice: even if the course plan appears to promote professional competence and lifelong learning, the concrete activities performed in the classroom may be very mechanical ([Jalkanen, Pitkänen-Huhta, & Taalas, 2012](#)). Diverse attempts have been made for facilitating modern pedagogic design in the fields of learning design (e.g. [Conole, 2012](#)), design-based research (see [Bergroth-Koskinen & Seppälä, 2012](#)), educational engineering related to conflicting personal and pedagogic goals ([Colpaert, 2010](#)) as well as participatory design of language learning with new technologies ([Kuure et al., 2015](#)). The current study takes a methodological perspective to the issues involved.

2. Method

The investigation of the development of pedagogic expertise of future language teachers involves a complex rhizome of factors and issues. Three research approaches will be examined as regards their suitability for capturing the complexity of developing pedagogic expertise.

2.1. Three approaches to study complex (inter)actions

This study focuses on the following question: what are the affordances and constraints of nexus analysis, conversation analysis and multimodal interaction analysis in studying the development of professional expertise among future language teachers?

Nexus Analysis (NA) applies diverse tools of discourse and interaction analysis, with an ethnographic emphasis. Social action is seen to arise from the social relationships among participants (interaction order), people's life experiences, memories and learning (historical body) and the physical, semiotic setting (discourses in place) ([Scollon & Scollon, 2004](#)). In doing NA, the researcher

first engages the nexus of practice by becoming a participant in the activity being examined. S/he then navigates the nexus of practice, at the same time contributing to change as a member of the community.

The interest in **Conversation Analysis** (CA) lies in discovering the orderly practices with which people conduct their everyday lives in social interaction with others. CA views social interaction as organized in sequences of actions where the design and timing of a vocal or embodied action builds on what has occurred immediately before and, in turn, impacts on what comes next (e.g. Sacks, 1992). Interactional practices can thus be examined as they emerge and evolve through participation and collaboration in multiparty interactions on a moment-by-moment basis, in video-recorded data (see, e.g. Goodwin, 2013).

Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis (MIA) (Norris, 2004) is based on mediated discourse theory, as is nexus analysis. Social action is the unit of analysis, produced by social actors with tools, the environment and each other. MIA also pays attention to the more distant discourses traceable in the site of engagement, visible as frozen actions (e.g. design of a traditional classroom). Collaborative identity production, which is considered as an orchestration of identity elements (e.g. being a mother or a wife), is also highlighted (Norris, 2011).

2.2. Data and the research process

The observations are based on four iterations of a university level course that focused on the affordances of new technologies on language learning and teaching. The materials were gathered from face-to-face meetings and online work. Course design drew on a socio-cultural view of language learning, emphasizing the learners' opportunities for participation. A problem-based approach was followed whereby students designed and implemented different kinds of technology-enhanced projects. Cultural probes and diverse action methods were used to facilitate the students' critical examination of current practices and search for new solutions for future CALL.

The engaging perspective involved ethnographic fieldwork on language education with special emphasis on language teacher education. We examined the nature of current practices and future developments of language education together with the students. In so doing we navigated the practices using different kinds of action methods and the approach of participatory design. These were attempts at contributing to the language students' understanding of the requirements of their future profession as language teachers.

3. Discussion

Throughout the annual iterations, we have observed difficulties in how the shared goal is being negotiated among participants. Despite the various efforts to help students detach themselves from the current classroom-based practices of language teaching to envision new kinds of futures for language learning, the students easily returned back to their familiar practices and thinking.

In order to understand these challenges and the complexities of the situation (e.g. multiple participants, interactions, discourses, materialities and temporalities), we have explored the notion of change through theoretical considerations and empirical analysis. Each iteration of the course has produced some insight into the complexity of change, leading to different kinds of experimentations and new interventions for instigating change. However, traditional views and historical bodies change very slowly, and the problems still persist. Our current understanding is that the next step would be to apply nexus analysis in the course for the students' own examination of their historical bodies.

4. Conclusion

Investigating and contributing to change requires long-term commitment. As CALL designers, and in studying the complexity of developing pedagogic expertise, we have found that NA suits our work well as an overall framework: it enables the development of participatory agency through its focus on social action as an intersection of interaction order, discourses in place and especially historical body of all the participants. The sites of engagement where future directions and their links to our past are negotiated, are crucial from the point of view of change. These moments face-to-face or in distributed time-places can be investigated in detail with MIA and CA. MIA enables one to examine communication in its wider socio-historical context, while CA provides a view on social interaction as it is constituted in situ. These approaches provide an interpretative framework for understanding what is going on and where the crucial social actions hindering or advancing change are made visible and hence analyzable. This enables the participants (teachers and students themselves) to research and facilitate change.

In teacher education, the concepts of reflective practitioner and action research are widely acknowledged. The present approach takes this a step further: it provides a participatory research perspective on future language teachers' professional growth and provides tools for social change.

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