

Summary

Constructing knowledge in written and asynchronous online interactions. New possibilities for language teaching and learning

The book entitled *Constructing knowledge in written and asynchronous online interactions. New possibilities for language teaching and learning* is devoted to the hybridization of academic courses. The discussion more specifically concerns the use of blended learning solutions in Modern Languages departments in Poland.

The main focus is on the possibilities of organizing and conducting group interaction tasks based on written and asynchronous communication and implemented in an online forum. It is assumed that online group interactions can foster the construction of personal knowledge and the development of learners' communicative competence if the learners, as interlocutors engaged in the task, adhere to the principles of the communicative contract at the core of a given interaction setting. This involves suitable preparation of the proposed tasks scenarios and thoughtful training of the interlocutors to introduce them to the specificity of a virtual environment. Here the emphasis is placed on activities of initiating and conducting online interaction in two contexts: a remote learning platform (interaction within the learner group) and online media portals (discussion is open and public).

The book consists of six chapters. The first chapter briefly outlines the development of the field of CALL around the world and in Poland, in particular, and indicates the need to develop learners' media competence, which is understood as knowledge and a set of skills for effective and independent work. The chapter also discusses the selected models of teachers' professional skills in training programs for in-service teachers and teacher trainees. It is argued that such an implementation of ICT should go beyond merely presenting the tools and should concentrate on developing the skills for applying these tools to support both the teaching process and group learning.

The second chapter discusses the application of the blended-learning formula on academic courses. The forum is understood as a basic tool used in remote and hybrid models of education to organize communication between learners and teachers. It has to be noted that not every inclusion of ICT in the teacher's work leads to the modification of the learning process, and this chapter points out that innovation is a feature of those blended courses which are oriented to support deep learning activities. Another topic is the so-called 'general forum' as a space providing additional opportunities for interaction and knowledge construction. Studies concerning the properties of mediated communication that facilitate cooperation between teacher and students are also taken into consideration. Particular attention is paid to the possibilities for learners to construct what can be termed a 'community of inquiry' by consciously controlling their online presence and activity.

The third chapter lays down the principles of organizing the learning processes in institutional educations, with a special focus on discussion tasks. It is also argued that students' discourse awareness should be developed, which can allow interlocutors to adapt their actions more effectively to the properties of the genre. The rational character of interaction that can lead to the construction of

personal knowledge is also emphasized. The chapter aims to define two academic genres of discussion: the first focuses on rational dispute resolution and eliminating opinion differences (in Polish “dyskusja krytyczna”); the second focuses on a group discussion, where speakers critically analyze different arguments and points of view (in Polish “dyskusja rzeczowa”). This distinction is referred to when discussing the purposes and properties of online discussion tasks. The fourth chapter addresses issues related to interactions in the open spaces of the Internet. Linguistic research on online communication and its genres are discussed, with the focus on studies about forum interactions. The concept of written and asynchronous small-group discussion is introduced, which allows me to systematize the discursive properties of interactions conducted in virtual spaces. The following part presents the selected properties of public interactions in ‘letters to the editor’ columns, in moderated forums accessible to selected communities of users, and on media portals. The chapter aims to define the properties of written and asynchronous communication, as well as the conditions underlying activities undertaken in the virtual space that help interlocutors to construe communicative situations which support reflections and the exchange of ideas. It is assumed that by observing online argumentative practices, learners may expand their repertoire of personal communication strategies.

The fifth chapter discusses the tools used in pedagogical and FL learning research to describe and evaluate action undertaken by learners in remote communication-based tasks. Observation grids used in discussion tasks and those determinants of critical thinking which offer example meaning construction processes in problem-oriented discussions are presented. The chapter goes on to describe observational tools for argumentative activities allowing the exploration of individual learning experiences in group interactions, including rational academic discussions. The authors argue for the potential use of these tools in the context of FL studies, in tasks aimed at constructing knowledge, and in improving foreign-language communicative competence.

The final chapter discusses the results of action research conducted at the Institute of Romance Studies at Adam Mickiewicz University. The study had two main objectives. The first was to propose a model of online academic discussion which takes into account the specificity of the processes of constructing meaning online and the objectives of FL studies. The second was to identify the sources of difficulties involved in implementing online work and to propose complementary tasks that may allow teachers and their students to negotiate their task representations and to adapt their activities to the generic requirements of the academic discussion’s model. The conclusions confirm the validity of the diagnosis at the basis of the didactic intervention and support the teacher-researcher’s construction of personal knowledge. The work is supplemented by a bibliography.

The research presented in this book deals with the essential issues of contemporary FL studies exploring the possibilities the systematic employment of ICTs in blended teaching/learning models. Research focusing on CALL provides a number of arguments pointing to the benefits of expanding communication spaces and diversifying interactional experiences with the use of online working tools. However, as we have shown, introducing these tools entails a need for suitable professional training of language teachers. It is also necessary to take into account the specificity of the context in which learning takes place. The book constitutes a contribution to the development of research on the use of blended learning and teaching solutions adapted to the particular profile of Modern Languages departments in Poland.