Investigating the Affordances of L2 Collaborative/Social Reading Spaces via Digital Annotation Tools

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Résumé

Over the last two decades, reading has begun to shift from a print-based experience to one that is primarily carried out in a digital environment due to the proliferation of a myriad of technological tools and reading devices. This change has resulted in learners attempting to transfer and, at times, re-think their reading strategies with digital texts (Hayles, 2012; Park, Zheng, Lawrence, & Warshauer, 2013). Digital annotation tools (DAT) facilitate the development of new, digitally based reading strategies by allowing learners to collectively read and highlight digital texts with multiple colors, add text-, video-, and picture-based annotations, among other features, such as tag/comment clouds, heat maps of annotations, and integrated dictionary search fields. Blyth (2014) refers to this kind of activity as digital social reading, which he defines as "the act of sharing one's thoughts about a text with the help of tools such as social media networks and collaborative annotation" (p. 205). The use of DAT in L2 learning contexts has given rise to collaborative/social reading experiences for learners which has transformed what is oftentimes a solitary learning activity (i.e., assigning students to read a literary text on their own outside of class) into one that is inherently social and open in nature in a digital space. With the rise of digital reading as a new form of literacy, coupled with the emergence of a number of DAT, it is imperative that the reading process and strategies used in these new L2 digital environments are understood for the development of future DAT and for the benefit of learners, practitioners, and researchers alike. This project analyzes learner-learner interactions within a virtual environment when collaboratively reading Spanish poetry in a Hispanic literature course at the college level course via an ecological theoretical perspective (van Lier, 2004). Following a case study approach (Duff, 2008), the study focuses on the ways in which learners perceive others' interpretations/annotations of eighteen Spanish poems read over a 4-week period via a DAT called Hylighter. Three primary research questions are explored: 1. what is the nature of the linguistic, literary, and social affordances for learners when engaging in collaborative reading of Spanish poetry in a virtual environment?; 2. what are the challenges/constraints for learners when engaging in collaborative reading in a virtual environment?; 3. what are the primary benefits and challenges of incorporating collaborative reading in a university-level L2 poetry course via DAT from an instructor perspective? In addition to analyzing learners' comments/annotations while collaboratively reading the poems, other data sources include instructor and focal student interview data.

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