REFLECTIONS ON PRACTICE

Replication of Communities of Practice via a Multimedia-based Vocabulary Learning Tool to Enhance Sociolinguistic Competence

PARK Mihi

Centre for Language Studies, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, National University of Singapore

Correspondence:

Name: Dr PARK Mihi
Address: Centre for Language Studies, National University of Singapore, AS4 9 Arts Link, #05-10, Singapore 117570
Email: mpark@nus.edu.sg

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the possibility of using a multimedia tool as an effective channel to enhance the sociolinguistic competence of learners outside of Korea who are taking Korean as a second language (L2). Singaporean learners of L2 Korean at the National University of Singapore (NUS) are generally high-achieving in terms of their linguistic knowledge. However, they lack considerable sociolinguistic competence in comparison with other aspects (e.g. accuracy). This is perhaps due to their lack of exposure to communities of practice, which is considered crucial to achieving sociolinguistic competence (Albirini, 2015). To enhance such learners' sociolinguistic exposure to non-Korean communities in a practical yet meaningful way, a multimedia tool was developed to replicate these communities of practice. This tool is an online dictionary which enables searches in a video library to present 10-second video clips which include the searched word. These clips are presented alongside contextual information such as venue, interlocutors, and scenarios, in addition to literal information. To understand learners' behaviour and the development of sociolinguistic competence, the author conducted semi-structured interviews and journaling with eight L2 Korean learners on their experience with the tool. The study revealed that the tool indeed impacted their learning behaviour, such as in noticing the information, metacognitive activities, and supplementary action. With regard to sociolinguistic competence, their receptive abilities were developed through interaction between their prior knowledge and newly acquired knowledge using the tool. However, as there is no evidence of enhanced sociolinguistic competence in production, a follow-up to this study is proposed to investigate this aspect to further enhance the sociolinguistic competence of L2 learners.

Keywords: L2 Korean, Sociolinguistic competence, multimedia, information gap

BACKGROUND

Sociolinguistic competence refers to the ability to recognise and produce contextually appropriate language, including sensitivity to differences in variety and register (Hymes, 1972, i.a.), which means being able to produce contextually correct sentences beyond structurally correct ones. Given that sociolinguistic competence can be best achieved by living in speech communities or "communities of practice" (Albirini, 2015), language learners outside such communities may to experience difficulties in building this competence.

I teach an advanced Korean course at the National University of Singapore (NUS), and my students display limited sociolinguistic competence in production despite advanced receptive competence. For instance, they often used a highly informal word, "daebak" (which means surprising) in formal essays, unaware that it is contextually inappropriate. Another observation of imperfect acquisition of sociolinguistic competence is the unintentional use of hyper-formal or offensive expressions, and that can be an obstacle in students' ultimate attainment of Korean as second language (L2). In this Reflection, "L2" is used as an umbrella term to indicate non-native languages (Gass & Macke, 2007).

To address this challenge, I introduced a few initiatives so that my students had opportunities to enhance their sociolinguistic competence beyond direct engagement with the Korean-speaking community. Firstly, I provided information about words in terms of their usage patterns or limitations, such as argument structure, semantic restriction, and collocation in text form, instead of simply providing the definition only. Although students found it interesting, this knowledge was too extensive to digest, and as a result, they were unsuccessful to innate. Also, listening activities with teacher-created scripts were introduced in class to achieve a similar aim; however, students failed to comprehend the intended situational information from the activities due to limited input from only the auditory channel.

Upon reflection, the failure of these two previous attempts could be attributed to the fact that, a) learners could not recognise the necessary sociolinguistic information, and b) a single channel input was insufficient to deliver sociolinguistic information effectively, and least two or more channels should be utilised simultaneously to complement each other, e.g. multimedia. In fact, those two factors are interrelated: for successful processing of multimedia information, the correct words and pictures need to be selected from the presentation, meaning that learners have to pay attention to specific and relevant linguistic and non-linguistic information (Plass & Jones, 2005). In the field of second-language acquisition, the process of focusing attention on certain aspects of the target language is known as "noticing" (Schmidt, 1990).

MULTIMEDIA-BASED LEARNING TOOL

Second-language acquisition with multimedia (SLA-M) is defined as the use of words and pictures to provide meaningful input, and facilitate meaningful interaction with the target language (Plass & Jones, 2005). Based on this understanding, K-media (e.g. pop music and TV shows from Korea), that is familiar to students, has been identified as a potential resource to replicate speech communities. After exploring the most suitable way to utilise K-media for successful SLA-M, a media-based vocabulary learning tool, the Motion Dictionary (hereafter called "MD") was developed in 2017 with the Rakuten Institute of Technology, Singapore.

MD is a multimedia-based dictionary that searches the entire video (K-drama) library to return results of video clips in which the target words are spoken. The tool provides an avenue for learners to have access to the Korean language outside the classroom, and facilitates the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence through exposure to various registers of vocabulary use. Video clips of Korean dramas that the MD provides

carry meaningful input such as contextual information, and syntactic construction of the target vocabulary or expressions, in addition to their literal meaning. The MD aims to support self-study, where learners apply the interactive processing strategy (Plass & Jones, 2015) individually, with a hope of nurturing self-directed and active student learning.

To use the MD, learners select the course that they are currently reading at NUS after logging in. A click of the course will lead them to the page where the target vocabulary list is displayed according to chapters (Figure 1).

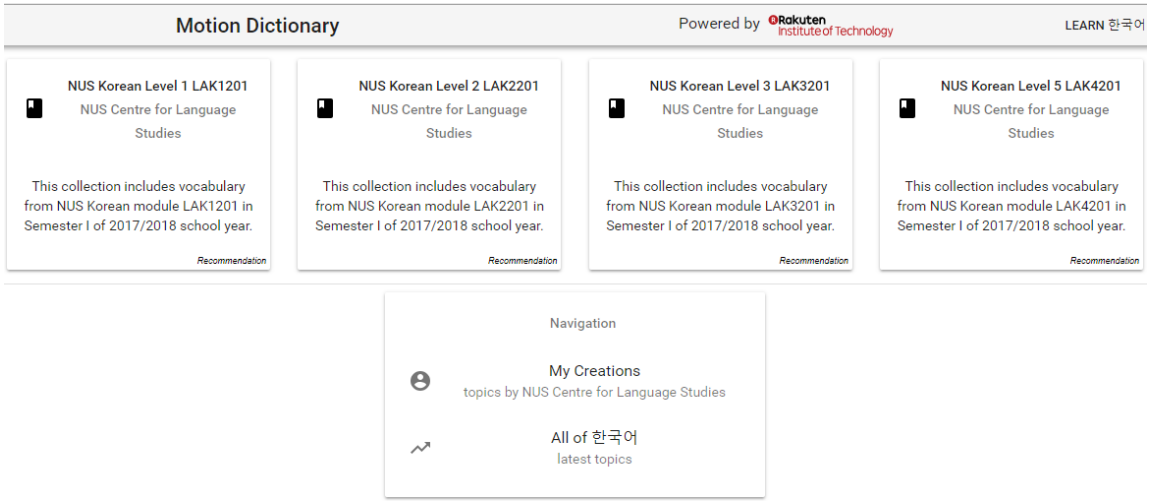

Figure 1. Main page of the Motion Dictionary (MD).

Each word in the chapter is presented with an English definition (computer-generated), Romanised pronunciation, and a maximum of 10 video clips. The administrator can select and modify the English translation of each word to be shown, for instance, that is, to only show the target meaning of the word among various usages. Each video clip is 10 seconds long, and the speed of speech is adjustable (Figure 2). In addition to listed words, students are able to freely search other lexis using the 'Search' function.

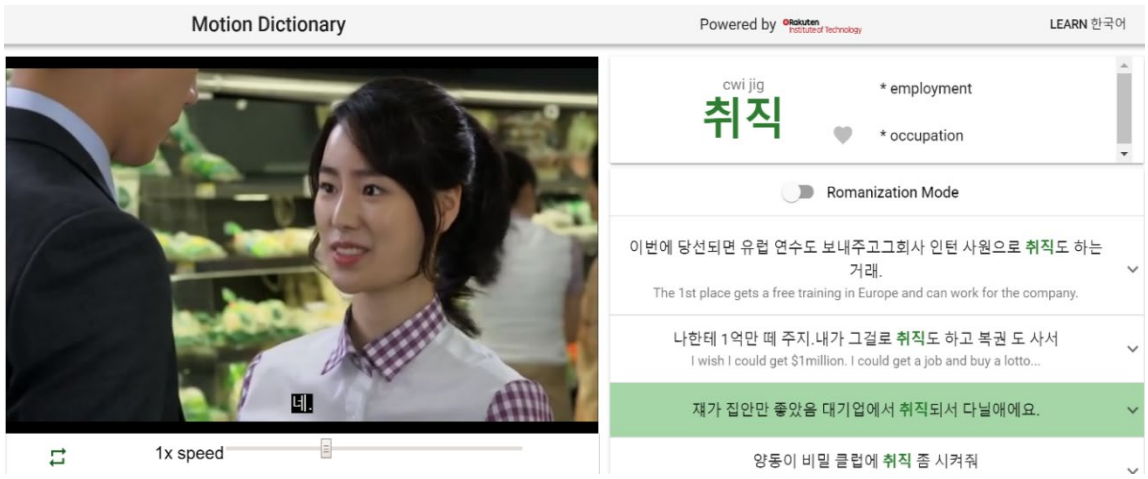

Figure 2. Presentation of video clips

To evaluate the effectiveness of the MD in enhancing my students' sociolinguistic competence, a study was carried out with the following objectives:

a) to find out how "noticing" happens while learners interacted with the MD, and

b) to ascertain learners' behaviour in processing recognised information.

METHODOLOGY

Eight female students in the advanced Korean course were paid for voluntary participation. No male students responded to the call for participation. The study was conducted in three phases, and students were given 30 words to study. A pre-survey on the pre-existing knowledge of 30 words was conducted in the first phase. In the second phase, while using the MD to study the target words over a week (at least an hour a day), students were requested to keep a learning journal based on guidelines (Table 1). Finally, the journals were collected before individual semi-structured interviews were done to clarify the notes in the journal. The interviews aimed to investigate learner behaviour and perception in relation to sociolinguistic information of L2 Korean, as well as to clarify reflections in the journals. The interviews were all recorded, transcribed, and three themes—"noticing the information", "metacognitive activities", and "supplementary action"—were identified.

Table 1
Guidelines for a pre-study survey and a journal

Pre-study survey questions	1. What do you know about the word, e.g. meaning, any sample sentences, images? 2. What do you expect to see in the video clips, e.g. situations?
Instruction for journal writing	Please write a journal of memorable sentences, and newly discovered knowledge, or already known. In addition, feel free to explore additional words while studying, and add them to the list and write a study journal of them too.

The study was designed with a pre-survey, journal entries, and an individual semi-structured interview to gain insights to the information process. In particular, it sought to map out the synthesis between prior knowledge and the newly-acquired (contextual) knowledge from using a multimedia tool in self-study mode. It also recorded the learners' own perception and reflection of their process of building sociolinguistic competence.

FINDINGS

In this section, the findings from the journal entries and the interviews are discussed, in particular the extent to which they address the research objectives mentioned in page 4. Firstly, "noticing" was found to occur when participants experienced something unexpected, namely when they perceive an information gap. Upon realising that previously-known words were being used in an unexpected way, all participants reported that they consciously resolved this particular uncertainty and unfamiliarity by researching for more information within and beyond the video clips. In one case, after the participant learnt from the MD that the word 'cat' was used as a metaphor to mean 'a well-behaved person', she independently searched for other situations in which 'cat' was used to mean something else. The Information-gap Theory (Loewenstein, 1994) that identifies a perceived information gap as one of the strongest triggers in tapping one's curiosity, may explain this behaviour well.

To address an information gap, participants utilised multi-channels that video clips carry for meaning-making, as pointed out by the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (CTML) (Mayer, 2009). In particular, all the participants mentioned that they relied on video-based information to perceive sociolinguistic information such as contextual meaning, and the registers of unknown and previously-known words. In their reflection journals, for instance, participants recorded observations on the relationships between interlocutors (e.g. boss-employee), physical venues (e.g. at work, at home), tone (e.g. mood of a speaker), and formality (e.g. formal vs informal), all typical pieces of sociolinguistic information. This is illustrated in Excerpt 1 below:

> Excerpt 1
>
> "I think English translation does not carry the exact meaning (of Korean words), so I felt safer to look up Korean-Korean dictionary. But I sometimes cannot understand the Korean-written definition, or sample sentences. In MD, the way they say, or whom they are talking to, facial expression, and tone, I can understand the real intention."

This excerpt shows that participants retrieved information from both visual (e.g. place, relationship among interlocutors, facial expressions) and auditory (e.g. tone and voice) channels to construct and clarify information from the video clips. In fact, the literature (Plass et al., 2003 i.a.) reinforced this notion of the effectiveness of visual and verbal annotations in ensuring higher retention, or glosses in vocabulary acquisition in a SLA-M setting, particularly its strength over text-only annotations (Chun & Plass, 1996).

In other words, the findings show that the participants actively and selectively collected information from multi-channels while interacting with the MD, particularly to fill the perceived information gaps. It is noteworthy that they explicitly reported a focus on aural and visual information that assumedly they lacked prior to this study, such as contextual meaning rather than literal meaning (e.g., venue and a relationship between interlocutors), and non-linguistic information (e.g. emotion of a speaker). This shows that the participants meticulously complemented various channels for noticing, in line with findings from Plass and Jones (2005). Plass and Jones (2005) also found that incidental acquisition was effective for learning words where learners looked up both picture and text annotations. In this regard, the video clips delivering contextual and sociolinguistic usage of words in this study are deemed to be beneficial for language learners in acquiring sociolinguistic competence.

In addition to utilising multi-channels, another frequently reported strategy was "transfer" from previously acquired languages (in this study, Chinese and English). Conscious cross-linguistic transfer is a metacognitive activity in language learning, based on control and analysis ability (Bialystok, 2001). For instance, phonetic similarities between L2 Korean and Chinese as a first language (L1 Chinese) stimulates knowledge transfer from L1 to L2 in deriving the meaning and usage of new words. Five out of seven participants proficient in L1 Chinese mentioned that it is usually the first strategy they used to resolve ambiguity. Interestingly, L1 Chinese is not the only source of transfer: two participants mentioned that they also relied on L1 English to extract structural information (e.g. argument structure and case-marking) from English words that share their translated meaning with L2 Korean, as well as sociolinguistic knowledge such as where, whom, and how to use the word.

In addition to noticing sociolinguistic information and cross-linguistic transfer, all the participants reported that they voluntarily moved on to explore new (assumed) contextual meaning and usage learnt from the video clips, and to clarify these assumptions. Although participants were not expected to further increase their knowledge of these words through the MD, the search returned with results of new and unfamiliar contexts in these words were used, prompting them to look up these unexpected results voluntarily. This implies that discovering novel contextual information can motivate learners to become more active and

autonomous in information processing and meaning-making, and eventually learning becomes more effective (Pluck & Johnson, 2011). The CTML perspective views this as being cognitively active in that a learner is encouraged to make sense of the presented material (Mayer, 2009). While using the MD, participants consciously selected strategies to fill perceived information gaps, demonstrating metacognitive behaviour to support their own learning (Bak & Park, 2019).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study attempted to investigate how L2 Korean learners outside Korea utilised an alternative to the community of practice that is crucial for them to attain sociolinguistic competence. The proposed alternative, a multimedia library tool, had an impact in enhancing "noticing" and "processing" sociolinguistic information from multi-channels. Participants demonstrated the following steps in learning with the MD; 1) noticed information gaps, 2) utilised linguistic and non-linguistic information from the MD and beyond in filling the gaps and enhancing the meaning-making process, and 3) confirmed their assumptions and further noticed information. Consequently, the findings highlight the interaction between information from multi-channels and noticing. In other words, active noticing, metacognitive activities, and supplementary actions occurred among L2 Korean learners in the context of multimedia learning, particularly to resolve the information gaps, perhaps because learners also became curious about missing information (Loewenstein, 1994), and sought more information to make sense of the newly-found meaning and usages of a target word.

Even though the MD supported the development of sociolinguistic competence and aspects of self-directed learning, there are areas to improve to enhance learning. One potential point for improvement is selecting appropriate video clips for educational purposes. For instance, some expressions or structures used in K-media may be inappropriate, and learners may lack the capacity to discern and select contextually suitable video clips. Furthermore, while learners are exposed to accurate and alternative definitions of the words, there is no active production required in this activity. The multimedia library needs to help learners develop productive competencies, in order for the tool to become a viable replacement to the community of practice. Perhaps a follow-up production activity (written or spoken) prepared by the lecturer could be one way to address this gap. Most importantly, given that the learners subconsciously used various strategies to process information, for future iterations explicit instructions for using the strategies could precede individual activity time with the MD. This will maximise the potential of the tool in enhancing L2 sociolinguistic competence outside the target language speaking community.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PARK Mihi is a Senior Lecturer at the Centre for Language Studies (CLS) at the National University of Singapore (NUS). Her research interests include computer-assisted language learning programmes, multilingualism, and cognitive development through language learning. As a founding staff member of the Korean language programme at NUS, Mihi has been developing the curricula, materials, and assessments for these courses.

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