



## Special issue: On communicative skills in foreign language teaching and academic language instruction: tools, resources and methods in the digital era

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### Introduction

This volume, as hinted by the title, adds to the current debate between foreign and academic language instruction and digital resources (or methods). Such debate has been particularly present in the last two years during Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, in which teachers and instructors have been challenged to design fully digital resources to continue with their intended syllabuses. Regardless of the outcomes of the pandemic, one silver lining is that this new situation has had an impact on pedagogical approaches, particularly those that are most significant to language instruction and practice, thus “[showing] promise for assuring that [language learners] can develop academic language proficiency” (Ranney, 2012, p. 560). The need to find effective strategies and methods, conceived to enhance language learners’ fluency and communicative (and academic) achievement, conforms to, among others, the long-standing theories on interpersonal communicative skills and language academic proficiency (Cummins 1981; 2000). These theories, especially those revolving around the so-called Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), demonstrate that linguistic resources should be necessarily adapted to the scopes of social interaction and interpersonal communication.

The topic of gaining communicative skills in foreign and academic language instruction is, therefore, not limited to linguistic competence, which means that designing new teaching strategies is somehow susceptible to renewal. The process of digitalized learning confirms, as a matter of fact, the natural path of BICS and CALP, since the essence of interpersonal communicative skills is based on up-to-date realities and social tendencies. The question here lies in determining the type of perception learners might have towards the fast-growing process of digitalized learning, as well as the benefits and limitations of digital resources in foreign and academic language instruction. This compilation of articles pays attention to the interplay of language instruction and

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digital resources (or strategies), in particular, to the way digitalized learning should be addressed as far as communicative and cultural competences are concerned.

This volume aims to gain insights into communicative skills in foreign language teaching (FLT) and academic language instruction (ALI) in times where most strategies and tools are adapted to digital formats. In doing so, this edited volume adopts a critical approach to the analysis of how these new resources can allow for meaningful learning in a foreign-language context. Special attention is also given to the aspect of adaptability and cognitive predisposition of learners towards the implementation of these digital tools. On the whole, present-day researchers on FLT and ALI should be encouraged to map out both how specialized knowledge is efficiently acquired and what types of learning environment are generally rigid or artificial (Roth, 2005; Richardson Bruna et al., 2007).

The volume covers a range of topics and a variety of sources of study material. It opens with the article entitled “Moodle E-learning Platform as a Complementary Tool in ICLHE Contexts”, by Miguel Ruiz-Garrido and Inmaculada Fortanet Gómez. By delving into the so-called Integrating Content and Language in Higher Education (ICLHE), or EMI (English Medium Instruction), the authors discuss how Moodle is resorted to by teachers, and how the way the platform is implemented depends on whether students are L1 or L2 speakers. Based on a general taxonomy and a triangulation strategy with the subject teachers (i.e. business), the study offers a finer-grained analysis of the prerequisites needed to guarantee an optimum use of the e-learning platform.

Somewhat similarly, the second article, entitled “Telecollaborative Projects for Teaching English for Professional and Academic Purposes”, by Ricardo Casañ Pitarch, Olga Demydenko, Iana Tikan and Miguel A. Candel-Mora, aims to examine what sort of perception students have towards international communication, following Lehman and DuFrene’s (2013) classification of communicative situations. Through a collaboration project between a Spanish University and a Ukrainian one, the study succeeds to verify that telecollaborative projects in a foreign language can lead participants to enhance their communicative competence, particularly in international online settings, as well as their digital and intercultural skills. A study such as this one is an asset to other researchers of the field who seek updated strategies that are based on both digital resources and a widening of the scope of learning competences.

Following the same line of thought, as far as telecollaborative projects are concerned, the article “Enhancing FL learners’ perception of non-native English pronunciation with a telecollaborative project work”, by Ricardo Casañ Pitarch and Miguel A. Candel-Mora, examines the types of perception that university students might have towards native and non-native pronunciation of English. Based on a survey-based methodology, the participants were asked to assess the accent of other international students, who were also non-native speakers of English. One group of participants consisted of students involved in a telecollaborative project, which was an interesting variable to measure the degree of ‘tolerance’ towards non-native pronunciation of English. The findings clearly show that this kind of collaboration project can have a positive impact on cultural competence, thus detaching the aspect of non-native-ness from negative prestige in speakers of English as a second language.

The article “Effects of the development of reading comprehension questions on learning improvement”, by Raúl Gutiérrez Fresneda and Monserrat J. Planelles Ivañez, explores ways of accessing textual information through teaching proposals, which necessarily involve active learning and critical thinking. In this case study in particular, the research project aims to draw a comparison between two levels of written comprehension of 116 students in the fifth year of Primary Education. The levels correspond to two groups in which one type of reading strategy was used: one in which texts are based on everyday life as well as collaborative methodology, and the

other where the same texts are accompanied with some questions which were previously arranged by their teachers. The relevance of this study lies in the need to implement new methodologies that are meant to upgrade reading comprehension regardless of the educational level.

Finally, the article “Recurrence, emotion and appropriateness in English and Spanish. The language of tourism on promotional websites”, by Eva M. Llorens Simón, explores the benefits of web-language in translation teaching strategies. Based on a compilation of authentic tourism-related web content in English and Spanish, the study finds that the aspects of frequency and positiveness can certainly be of avail in unraveling the difficulties of specialized discourse in translation classes. While the research points out a useful strategy to guarantee high-quality translations, it also describes how this method is easily extrapolated to other types of discourse.

This collection of articles should be seen as an invitation to reflect on the importance of digital resources in foreign and academic language instruction, in an attempt to place more emphasis on the need to reconduct traditional teaching strategies. This does not imply ignoring the advantages of non-digital resources, but rather adapting the existing ones to new pedagogical models. In fact, the pandemic has taught us that new learning experiences must be explored, and that our alliance with digital resources should be based on how these experiences are perceived by learners. In other words, and as suggested by the articles of this special volume, cultural and communicative competences are open to an array of new forms of adapted online resources; our primary task, as teachers and communicators, is to make sure that these resources both conform to the objectives of the course (or subject) and gain acceptance as a long-lasting teaching approach.

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