

Situated Language Learning: Concept, Significance and Forms

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Abstract. *Currently, there is a shift in language learning from the 'acquisition' metaphor to the 'participation' metaphor. This involves viewing learners as active constructors of knowledge who can collaborate together to create meaningful language learning situations and contextualised practices. Thus, this worksheet aims at exploring the concept of 'Situated Language Learning' by shedding some light on its significance and importance for many language learning purposes, and also the forms that it might take represented in the approaches and learning scenarios which are consistent with situated language learning as an umbrella term. These forms include: Community-Based Language Learning (e.g. Community Of Practice and Online Language Learning Communities); Authentic Language Learning Pedagogy; Task-Based Language Learning; Virtual Language Learning (VLL); and Cognitive Apprenticeship Models.*

العنوان والمستخلص باللغة العربية

التعلم الموقفي للغة: المفهوم - المغزى - الأشكال

ورقة عمل مقدمة لمؤتمر شباب الباحثين الثالث (مايو 2015) بكلية التربية - جامعة أسيوط

اعداد

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مدرس المناهج وطرق تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية

كلية التربية – جامعة أسيوط

يشهد الواقع المعاصر لتعليم اللغة نقلة نوعية من التركيز على نموذج اكتساب اللغة معرفيا إلى نموذج المشاركة والتعاون في صنع المواقف التي تساعد على اكتساب اللغة اجتماعيا. وهذا يتضمن النظر إلى المتعلمين باعتبارهم مشاركين نشطين في صياغة وصنع المعرفة معا عن طريق الإندماج في الممارسات المرتبطة بالواقع المعاش، وكذا خلق مواقف ذات معنى ودلالة تسهم في تعلم اللغة. ولذا، تمثل الهدف من ورقة العمل هذه في استكشاف مفهوم التعلم الموقفي للغة بشكل أعمق، وهذا يتضمن إلقاء الضوء على أهمية هذا الإتجاه في تحقيق العديد من أهداف تعلم اللغة بصفة عامة – واللغة الإنجليزية بصفة خاصة – وكذا الأشكال والصور والطرق أو السيناريوهات التي يأخذها هذا المدخل أو الإتجاه التعليمي والتي تحقق فلسفته الأساسية منها: التعلم المجتمعي، وتعلم اللغة الحقيقي القائم على مواد واقعية لم تصمم لأهداف تعليمية، والتعلم الإفتراضي، والتعلم القائم على المهام، والتلمذة المعرفية، والتعلم بالدراما والتمثيل ولعب الأدوار.

1. Language and Participation

Many educators and researchers in language learning (e.g. Warschauer, et al., 2000; Shih and Yang, 2008; Yang, 2011) strongly believe that successful learning is anchored in collaboration, cognitive apprenticeship, and situated cognition. It is assumed that situated, contextualised practice always leads to deep understanding and meaningful learning (Abdallah, 2011).

According to Sfard (1998), there is a shift of learning from an *acquisition* metaphor that involves students in cognitive activities mainly to facilitate the acquisition of some imposed symbolic mental representations, towards a *participation* metaphor in which knowledge is considered fundamentally situated in practice (see also Barab & Duffy, 2000).

Thus, the most effective way to learn a language is to *participate* in a community in which the target language is used to communicate in a real context. In such an environment, the language learners are left with no place to hide. They are forced and encouraged to think, speak, and write in the target language. In other words, they become immersed in an input-rich, natural, and meaningful context in which the target language can be acquired spontaneously (Shih & Yang, 2008).

2. Meaning of Situated Language Learning

Situated learning in general refers to that type of learning which takes place in the same context in which it is applied. It employs the social aspect of human nature to help learners feel relaxed and at ease while learning. Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that learning should not be viewed as simply the transmission of abstract and decontextualised knowledge from one individual to another, but a social process whereby knowledge is co-constructed; they suggest that such learning is situated in a specific context and embedded within a particular social and physical environment.



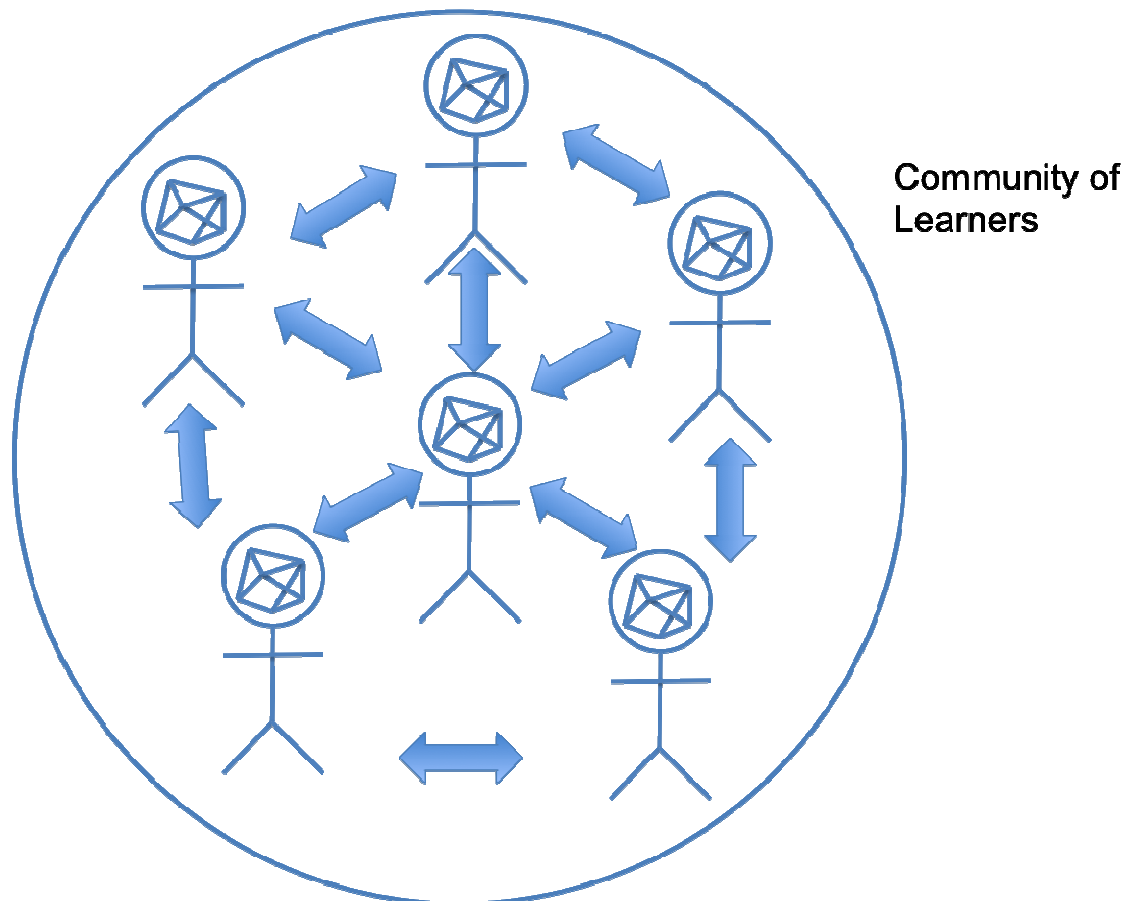
Through situated learning students will be able to learn the skills and also be able to accurately use the skills they have learned. Situated learning allows students to gain experience through doing in some way; and from this experience they are able to be productive in their lives after they have graduated.

Situated language learning in particular approaches language learners as 'active constructors of knowledge who bring their own needs, strategies and styles to learning, and skills and knowledge are best acquired within realistic contexts and authentic settings, where students are engaged in experiential language learning tasks' (Felix, 2002: p3). Thus, it focuses on the role of the *context* and *situation* in language learning and knowledge construction.

It is a well-known fact that 'language is practice'. *Practice* here is a fundamental process in which learning occurs through *immersion* in purposive and practical activities. Brown

et al. (1989) and Barab and Duffy (2000) propose that learning is always situated and progressively developed through activity, and hence, it is only through use that concepts are fully understood. Knowledge itself differs in nature, taking a *situated stance* which Barab and Duffy (2000) describe as neither 'objectively defined' nor 'subjectively created', but rather 'reciprocally constructed' within the individual-environment interaction. Such arguments lead to the conclusion that situated, contextualised practice always leads to deep understanding and meaningful learning.

Situated Learning



3. Importance and Significance

Based on review of some literature in the area (e.g. Barab & Duffy, 2000; Brown et al., 1989; Shih & Yang, 2008; Lave & Wenger, 1991), I can confidently argue that situated language learning is important and significant in many ways:

- It attracts learners' attention and increase their language learning motivation;
- It draws on social capacities of learners which are useful in language learning;
- It helps with developing and improving communicative and pragmatic competencies in language;
- It creates a meaningful language learning environment;
- It indulges the creative side into the traditional language learning process;
- It reinforces a positive and interactive language learning atmosphere;
- It bridges the gap between language learning theories and actual practices (i.e. linking theory to practice);
- It reinforces a contextualised acquisition of new language items (e.g. vocabulary and structure);
- It connects linguistic forms and structures with real-life uses;
- It helps students feel relaxed and at ease while learning;
- It widens and expands learners' horizons;
- It adds fun and joy to language learning;
- It turns the language learning process into a contextualized process;
- It helps learners realize learning goals and objectives;
- It helps with resisting boredom and tolerating time;
- It helps learners with sharing and employing their linguistic input;
- It helps with exploiting digital tools and social media in meaningful language practices;
- It reinforces reflection on one's own learning;
- It attracts learners' attention.

4. Forms of Situated Language Learning

Situated language Learning can take many forms in teaching-learning situations, such as:

1-Communities of Practice (CoP): A community of practice for language learning purposes refers to a group of learners who share common goals, interests, orientations, and needs. Learners communicate interactively as a social community to achieve some language learning goals and purposes (Barab & Duffy, 2000).



2-Online Language Learning Communities: Those communities are mediated by the Internet or the Web to overcome physical boundaries. They exchange language learning ideas, materials, experiences and facilities online.

3-Authentic Language Learning: Nunan (1999) defines *authentic materials* as spoken or written language data that has been produced in the course of genuine communication, and not specifically written for purposes of language teaching. Similarly, Rogers and Medley (1988: p468) define *authentic materials* as 'samples that reflect a naturalness of form and an appropriateness of cultural and situational context that would be found in the language as used by native speakers'. Therefore, authentic language learning can be viewed as an approach in which realistic language learning is targeted through genuine authentic materials used in the classroom.

4-Task-Based Language Learning: Under the umbrella of 'Situated Language Learning', *Task-based learning* is viewed as an approach to language learning according to which the tasks done by students become central to the learning process. It requires the teacher to organise classroom activities around those practical tasks that language users will engage in when they are 'out there' in the real world (Oura, 2001). Situated learning is

consistent with this task-based learning approach when tasks are authentic, interactive, situated, and goal oriented.

5-Virtual Language Learning (VLL): It refers to employing 3D Virtual Environments or MUVES as tools of foreign language instruction that promote collaboration and social presence in a lifelike 3-D environment (Cooke-Plagwitz, 2008). In virtual worlds, such as *Second Life*, language learners can communicate with anyone with no boundaries. Individuals are represented by *avatars* that can freely move, walk, fly, and socialize on their behalf. This allows for mimicking real-life situations in this virtual environment. Besides, it enables simulation (and acting out) of some situations that would develop functional and pragmatic use of the target language.

6-Cognitive Apprenticeship Model: It is a situated constructivist learning model in which the teacher is approached as a master of a skill who teaches this skill to an apprentice (a student). It is employed to capture the implicit processes involved in carrying out complex skills while teaching novice learners (Collins, et al. 1987).

7-Dramatisation: Using drama in language classrooms is a favourable activity if more active and realistic language learning is the target. Dramatisation helps language teachers to transform the artificial world of the classroom into quasi-real language learning situations (Boudreault, 2010). Role-playing itself turns passive language learners into active participants. The improvisation aspect of drama gives students opportunities for developing their communicative skills in authentic and dynamic situations. Thus, learners would contextualise language and make it come to life by adding the dimensions of vividness and fun into it.

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