Affordances for language development in underspecified tasks and place-based, hypercontextual environments

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We are interested in empirical evidence of the complexity (Larsen-Freeman) and contextually-embedded nature of language use and development (van Lier) for language learners in an increasingly technologically-mediated world. Our papers shows learners’ unplanned development of practices for language use in a moment by moment way through a sequential analysis of learners engaged in an augmented reality game played as part of their class curriculum.

Building on recent research on language use while walking (Haddington et al 2013) and the use of games for language learning (Sykes & Reinhardt, 2012), we analyze video recordings of small-group interactions of intermediate learners of English and French (16 hours) playing a quest game on mobile phones. The game asks players to take on identities as secret agents coming back from the future to report on green technology. These ‘agents’ are to make video reports of the green technology that they see in their environment (a college campus). Two participants wear head mounted cameras and a third camera captures the entire group’s interaction.

Conversation analytic methods are used to show how the sequential structuring of language for the game and membership categorization devices are used in concert with resources from the immediate environment. We show how the rich and shifting environmental context in which the game is played provide affordances for the improvisatory development of language practices for completing the game. This is apparent in the topics that are discussed by the game players and the formats they use for discussing those topics.

Keywords: conversation analysis, AR games, learning in the wild.