­­­Christina Henson

Topics in Applied Linguistics: VR Enhanced Language Learning

Activity 4

The topic of virtual reality ls one that many individuals come into contact with. Whether in the form of a game or on social media platforms, the accessibility and applicability of virtual reality has grown immensely. According to Sherman’s excerpt there are four fundamental elements of virtual reality: a virtual world, immersion, sensory feedback, and interactivity. These aspects of virtual reality, when implemented in a classroom setting, could provide to be beneficial to language acquisition and teaching.

The four key elements of virtual reality are summarized by Sherman as being essential in the understanding and experiencing of not only virtual reality but any reality. The first element, virtual world can be defined as the content of a medium. This can take the form of being only in the mind of the creator or broadcasted or shared with others, as well as with or without a virtual reality system. It is important to keep in mind that a virtual world can exist without hardware, software and other stereotypical content. The second element, Immersion is the inherent sense of being in an environment. However, it is also necessary for a consumer to perceive and be pulled into a story or medium (mimesis). Immersion can be classified in two different ways, mental and physical (sensory) immersion. As stated by the terminology, mental immersion focuses on the state of being deeply engaged, involved and in suspension of disbelief. Whereas physical immersion, respectively deals with the synthetic stimulus of the body’s senses via the use of technology. Sensory feedback is important in providing the consumer with a more compelling media experience. It is the direct feedback to the participants based on their physical positioning. This is normally done with a tracking mechanism. Finally, interactivity is necessary to ensure the authenticity of the virtual reality experience. To achieve this, it is of utmost importance that the virtual reality should respond to the user actions. This can be done by including interactive fiction or other media that is not limited to computer graphics. All of these aspects, as stated by Sherman play a role in creating the world of virtual reality and without each of these, virtual reality would fall flat.

Virtual reality has been used throughout history as a mechanism of teaching and learning. Whether as simulation (flight) or military, or in language use, virtual reality can be helpful in the effectiveness of learning. With regard to English learning, virtual reality could be used to solidify and learn vocabulary. This could be done with interactive images where the user can explore various real-world situations and learn by experiencing. Similar to the notion of learning under stress. Similarly, virtual reality could provide students with a multisensory experience where they are required to use the language in a setting which is outside of a “normal” classroom. Possibly including a situation where the student(s) must interact with native English speakers to complete some sort of task in a country and/or area they do not know. This would give the students the chance to simulate a common experience and learn the necessary tools in order to complete the task at hand. I am a proponent of incorporating various forms and methods of learning into the classroom so that students can form stronger neurosynaptic spikes while learning the language.

Activity 5

1. For my activity I would like to focus on the learning aspect of receiving directions.

For this activity, you could use a 360° camera to photograph situations where the student has to find certain individuals and listen to their directions in order to find a specific object or person. This could bring the student on somewhat of a scavenger hunt. In order to make it a bit more difficult there could be “wrong” individuals or objects placed into a scene to ensure the student pays close attention to the directions and the descriptive characteristics of the item/person. In order to create a 360° immersion activity like this, there would have to be multiple images (perhaps shops or locations around town) as well as individuals and/or items that would contain clues when clicking on them. The use of a microphone would be necessary to record the “responses” or clues given by the items/ individuals.

An example could be searching for a lost dog. The student starts with a initial clue telling them where the dog was last seen. Upon arriving there they must find the individual (an older man with a blue baseball cap) who saw the dog last. From him they would receive a further clue stating that the dog headed east to the playground (so on and so forth) until finally the student finds a few dogs and must correctly select the lost dog. And upon the selection, the dog is brought back home.

Something similar cold be implemented with other aspects of problem solving and scavenger hunting.