Chapter XXXII
Adapting to Virtual Third Space Language Learning Futures

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides a basis for thinking about the dynamics and boundaries of foreign language learning in virtual learning communities of the future. It is suggested that their members increasingly create and operate in so called Virtual Third Spaces. Teaching and learning in these environments requires an adaptive pedagogy that goes beyond mere enthusiasm and technophilia to render them successful. Adaptations in pedagogical practice are proposed in three categories: (1) affective, (2) cognitive, and (3) operational. Consideration is given to the roles of both the learner and educator. Attention is also drawn to an important ethical dimension pertinent for the online virtual environment, but seldom mentioned in the language learning literature: data and information privacy. The chapter concludes by imagining some online language learning futures.

INTRODUCTION

The acquisition of language skills and intercultural competencies presupposes a feedback loop of interactive opportunities, exploration, reflection, mediation, and understanding. One way to do this is by engaging students in purposeful, communicative interactions (be they semantic, pragmatic, or relationship-building) and by providing them with "real-world tasks" designed to solve complex "real-world issues" (Butorac, 1997). Over the last 50 years or more, a number of technologies have been explored for their potential to support students in this effort. They range from the language laboratories of the 1950s and 1960s to the interactive computer assisted language learning exercises of the 1990s to today's blended learning communities that integrate face-to-face teaching with diverse wired or wireless Internet-based technologies built

around authentic, project-based learning activities (Pouchol, 2004). Indeed, for learners of a foreign language and their instructors, the Internet is fast becoming an important vector for unlimited social, creative, and linguistic learning opportunities on a local, national, or international scale. As most language students are unable to immerse themselves in their target language and culture first-hand, the Internet can artificially create such possibilities by allowing them to create their own Virtual Third Space on the Web. The chapter begins by characterizing the Virtual Third Space as located within virtual learning communities of the future and describes some of its particularities and benefits for language learners. Furthermore, the chapter highlights various affective, cognitive, and operational pedagogical adaptations that can support language learning and intercultural learning processes. It proceeds by emphasizing the importance of an often overlooked aspect of learning in porous, persistent Web-based environments where data and information are being collected, exchanged, and stored indefinitely: the protection of an individual's privacy. The final section concludes with providing some glimpses of future trends with regard to learning in Web-based environments.

BACKGROUND

On the Web, Virtual Third Spaces are created within virtual learning communities. Virtual learning communities strive toward being supportive and collaborative groups of learners, practitioners, and/or professionals who come together for a common purpose. They engage in sharing ideas and using their individual experiences, knowledge, and resources to address or solve specific problems or to undertake a particular project creatively and collaboratively (Wenger, 1999). While these communities currently require expensive setups, the next-generation technologies are getting smaller; are more intuitive, less costly, and increasingly mobile; changing the way many people will conduct their affairs in the future, with important consequences for students. Virtual learning is one aspect of that change. Virtual learning communities have arisen for several reasons, some of which are outlined by Lewis and Allan (2005), such as:

- Working and communicating with others, even across national borders
- Pursuing cooperative and collaborative partnerships
- Solving problems together efficiently and effectively
- Decreasing the cost of travel and other incidentals
- Allowing for continuous learning and professional development

For language learners, some additional reasons can be mentioned, such as:

- Providing novel platforms for mediated language learning
- Creating exciting transcultural communicative spaces
- Facilitating intercultural communication
- Increasing opportunities for complex, real-life, immersive encounters

In the institutionalized foreign language learning context, virtual learning communities are seldom stand-alone entities. Instead, they form part of a blended learning environment, combining computer-supported learning with face-to-face interactions in classrooms and institutions. However, with commercial social networking sites entering the foreign language learning market, there is likely to be a greater shift toward Web-only learning environments.

This journey into the future requires preparation in the present. Virtual learning communities are not created in a vacuum. In the institutional setting at least, preparing foreign language classes

for virtual learning needs careful preparation, not only in technical terms (e.g., infrastructure) but also on a personal level. To feel personally connected, language students need to master appropriate linguistic skills. They should also be familiar with a number of fundamental communicative skills. These skills are as follows (points 3 and 4 have been adapted from Flechsig, 2000):

1. An awareness that different cultural backgrounds influence a person's expectations and discourse strategies
2. A disposition that is active, adaptable, and dynamic rather than passive, inflexible, and static
3. An understanding that differences in language ability or sociocultural background are signposts for negotiation and mediation, which might best occur in "third spaces"
4. A recognition that language proficiency and intercultural skills are expressed as a continuum, with individuals and groups achieving fluency along greater or lesser trajectories
5. A willingness to search for metalinguistic expressions and discourse strategies that might overcome differences by simplifying the discourse or by positioning concepts and behaviors on a higher, more abstract level, or both

The development of these skills requires a progressive and adaptive pedagogy and a conducive language teaching and learning environment.

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

Characterizing the Virtual Third Space

In the context of foreign language learning, the Virtual Third Space is a space where visitors can experience and practice mediating linguistic and sociocultural differences in a way that is partly reminiscent of the "third space" originally coined by Bhabha (1994). Bhabha defines third spaces as "discursive sites or conditions that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, and rehistoricized anew" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 37). It is a place where participants construct, reconstruct, and negotiate identity—an identity that is temporary and fluid rather than fixed (English, 2005). While commonalities exist, the Virtual Third Space as introduced here differs in important aspects. It is occupied by participants of virtual learning communities who coconstruct knowledge; who investigate issues or relationships; who work on projects collaboratively and creatively; and who negotiate their diversity of approaches, worldviews, and intercultural differences online. It is not a closed or bounded space. Instead, it is porous (which has important privacy implications), moving participants across and between private, public, and work-related domains (Punie, 2007). Table 1 is an attempt to define the third space as it is created in the virtual world and contrast it, as far as possible, with the conventional third spaces as previously described.

While in the Virtual Third Space, users can connect individually, collectively, or both to secondary clusters of social networks or to external information resources (or similar) through the use of hyperlinks. Users might join disguised as their virtual public self and usually adopt a particular group's identity and social behavior. Discourse among group members is generally characterized by brevity and informality (Nilsson, 2003). Data and information privacy is not guaranteed, and data mining and profiling by third parties are possible, despite existing privacy policies. Social networking Web sites create their own private or public virtual "third spaces" on the Web. Increasingly, some of them, such as "Young Germany" (http://www.young-germany.de/thegermanlanguage.html) or "Spanglish"

Table 1. The third space—real and virtual

Real World Third Space	**Virtual Third Space**
Is entered as the real persona. Participation is restricted in numbers; space is nonporous.	Often entered with an altered/imagined identity and role. Participation is either restricted to specified group or porous, with hyperlinks connecting with the larger Internet community.
Participants meet in tangible, real location.	Participants meet predominantly in the virtual environment of the Web, bridging distances via electronic means; meetings can also occur in imagined places. Follow-up meetings in real physical spaces also occur, where teachers and students interact and communicate in person according to need.
Centralized location, technology-oriented, hierarchical; bounded by contextual aspects such as available resources and organizational culture.	Decentralized location, process-oriented, democratic; bounded by users, stakeholders, and strategic partnerships as drivers and mediators.
A preparatory phase is recommended, which equips students with linguistic and conceptual tools useful in intercultural encounters.	For language instructors, a prolonged, detailed and complex preparatory phase is needed for at least two reasons: (i) preparing language students for the encounter and (ii) addressing technical challenges (e.g., technology, time zones, etc.). Teachers need to learn how to include and cope with information and communication technologies (ICTs) in their daily practice.
Mediation of linguistic differences.	Mediation of linguistic differences seen as joint responsibility, particularly when setting up a group; then compliance to established in-group linguistic norms, especially style. Authentic communication in its own right with its own expectations on mode of discourse and etiquette.
Learners are individual consumers of learning content; some collaboration and coconstruction of knowledge building possible. Focus is on learning objectives and learning outcomes (Punie, 2007).	Learning is mainly a social process with learners coproducing learning content in plural and dynamic learning spaces. In addition, learners create their personal, digital learning spaces according to their needs and preferences or for strategic advantage (e.g., displaying achievements for career purposes). Focus is on transmitting knowledge and on interaction.
Mediating sociocultural differences is an important objective throughout the communicative encounter.	Mediating of different degrees of intercultural awareness particularly intensive during introductory phase followed by compliance to in-group sociocultural and discourse norms; improvement in intercultural understanding no guarantee (Belz, 2002; O'Dowd, 2003).
Sustained engagement common. Opportunity for in-depth communication.	Sustained engagement in online community more difficult due to a number of factors, such as loss of immediacy; technology, or reduced visual cues. In-depth communication difficult to maintain, primarily due to an expectation of brevity in discourse (Kern, Ware & Warschauer, 2004).
Searching for commonalities; constructing, deconstructing, and negotiating identity. .	Searching for commonalities in closed group setting; frequently more personal and less inhibited. In open networking situations, searching for commonalities commonly through initial brief visits (lurking). Often conscious selection of group according to similar outlook and attitudes.
Uses traditional collaborative practices.	Collaboration purposeful, immediate, and often inquiry-driven; creative coconstruction of new knowledge common; participants use each other as resource; willingness to improve each other's language and intercultural competencies. More relaxed communication style can enhance linguistic performance and language output.
Copyright issues seldom applicable.	Copyright an issue, particularly for downloads of images, audio/video files, DVDs, or documents.
Privacy easier to maintain as participants determine if and to whom information or comments are passed on. Usually there is no permanent record of the communicative exchange.	Consent to publish and use data generally not sought from participants; most people are unaware that their input is recorded permanently; data mining by third parties possible. Threats to privacy partly offset by secure and private personal digital spaces, mimicking private "virtual residences" (Beslay & Punie, 2002); at present, however, privacy cannot be guaranteed.
Working for the common good.	Working for the common good.

(http://www.spanglish.ie/learn), explicitly advertise their site for its language learning potential to a global audience.

Adapting Pedagogy for Virtual Third Spaces

Creating and operating in Virtual Third Spaces requires an adaptive pedagogy that goes beyond enthusiasm and technophilia to render them successful. Ad hoc or only occasional participation in virtual learning communities are unlikely to result in more than temporary motivational pulls. Instead, careful scaffolding and sequencing are often required and, preferably, a preparedness to investigate collaboratively with a particular group of students how to use the Web environment to make interpersonal encounters and learning activities as enjoyable, useful, and meaningful as possible. In these environments, the teacher takes up the crucial role of facilitator and manager.

At present, virtual foreign language learning takes place asynchronously or synchronously. Asynchronous means that participants choose a time to communicate that suits them. E-mails, SMS, discussion boards, blogs, Wikis, streamed videos, and audios are all asynchronous communication tools. Wikis, for example, are collaborative multiauthored Web-based communication tools consisting of any number of Web pages that can be linked in multiple ways to each other or to other Internet resources, producing a growing, somewhat permanent depository of knowledge. For language learning, wikis are an interesting and creative way to foster reading and writing skills in foreign language students. The wiki environment has the added advantage of allowing students as well as teachers to continuously review progress by tracking, correcting, and updating content and comparing current versions of content with previous ones (Godwin-Jones, 2003). In general, asynchronous encounters invite reflection, allow analysis and evaluation, and enable more complex and in-depth interactions and collaborations. However, despite their positive features, asynchronous encounters facilitate only limited spontaneous interactions. While asynchronous communication tools do not demand instantaneous responses, in contrast, synchronous communication tools let people communicate with each other "live." The most common synchronous virtual communication tools currently used are chats or conferencing, voice-over Internet protocol (VoIP), teleconferencing (one to a few), and videoconferencing (point to point and multipoint). When engaging in synchronous communication on the Web, the second language soon becomes the incidental, immersive medium, mimicking to some extent the conditions of first language learning or immersion programs as they were first conceived in Canada in 1965 (Lambert & Tucker, 1972). Some communication tools, such as those employed for gaming or social networking on the Web, allow for both synchronous and asynchronous communication. The rapid emergence of social software products and interaction software infrastructures, combined with portable wireless technologies, create new opportunities for increased and more immediate and flexible interactions and novel learning spaces (Milne, 2007).

Many of the aforementioned means of communication can be integrated into content or learning management systems such as the traditional Blackboard learning management system (LMS) or an open source learning management system (Brandl, 2005; Godwin-Jones, 2006) such as Moodle. The dazzling technical possibilities and opportunities demand some adaptations to pedagogical practice in order to create the milieu and the appropriate conditions for online learning in Virtual Third Spaces. The pedagogical practices can be structured along three categories: (1) affective, (2) cognitive, and (3) operational. The categories are not to be understood as fixed and separate; instead, they are fluid and interdependent.

Affective pedagogical practices refer to behavioral modalities such as motivation, willingness

to adapt, and openness. Behavioral modalities can be influenced by standard good teaching practices such as student-centeredness and scaffolding. Taking a constructivist approach, Salmon (2002) suggests a progressive, five-step model to achieve active online learning. She recommends that students and teachers move purposefully upward from first becoming familiar with the online setting and technology (step one: access and motivation), progressing from there to short online socialization activities designed to build trust between participants (step two), continuing on to information exchange (step three), knowledge construction and independence (step four), and finally to stage five, developing new cognitive skills with which to monitor and evaluate their learning experiences. An additional benefit of progressing gradually is that it allows time for reflection (Woodall, 2006) and time to create a mutually beneficial Virtual Third Space. Some of the benefits pertain to its potential for social support. This is especially important for those students who find it difficult to participate fully, perhaps because they might be inclined toward passive, unidirectional learning, or because their competency in either the foreign language or in using the technology is low. Other students may have low self-confidence and might prefer to communicate anonymously, perhaps utilizing environments such as MOOs (multiple user domains object-oriented), which facilitate the uptake of different personae. Research has shown that learning outcomes for weaker students can be greatly improved when they create for themselves an avatar, a fictional new identity (Mikropoulos, 2006), or use an alias. Virtual Third Spaces can preserve such anonymity. Disguised, these students may find it easier to explore and practice their language and intercultural skills. Davis (2002) reports that learning outcomes for these students improve because of the students "agency" or, using another term, their "active presence."

One of the most striking developments in recent years pertains to the rise in social networking sites, which Milne (2007) perceives as leading to "The Dawning of the 'Interaction Age'" (Milne, 2007). From Second Life®, YouTube, Facebook, Blogger, Flickr, and others, social networking sites provide both "a wealth of teaching potential and problems" (Talab & Butler, 2007). They are also amenable to the creation of Virtual Third Spaces. Although social networking Web sites have currently not yet found their way into institutionalized foreign language learning to any large extent, they could offer some language students an additional platform from which to practice their language skills and/or immerse themselves in their target language. Carefully chosen, these virtual environments offer both instant "always-on" communication with others and connections to target-language places where many students cannot physically be. Virtual residential sites, even whole cities, are currently being created in virtual reality. Students, disguised as their avatars, may choose to "visit" these places, go shopping, or interact with others in the target language they are learning. For some individuals, the synthetic, complex, attractive, often sophisticated virtual environments (Anderson & Rainie, 2006) may even become addictive.

The second set of pedagogical practices refers to the *cognitive* aspect of learning and interacting in Virtual Third Spaces. Not surprisingly, learning another language and engaging in another culture using the Web as prime platform could provide an opportunity for more effective higher order encounters. This is especially so in the international online environment. International environments can influence behavior and alter expectations by exposing and challenging individuals to cope with different ways of doing or/and diverse norms or rules of interpersonal conduct. In order to illustrate this point, Lam (1997) presents his well-known "a tale of two firms." It is the story of two companies, one situated in the UK and the other located in Japan. Both are linked in a technological partnership online, both wanting their graduate engineers to learn to work

together and occasionally share their respective knowledge online. The process turned out to be fraught with difficulties due to deep intercultural differences in employment practices. In the UK, it is customary that each graduate engineer, upon entering employment, works autonomously on one particular aspect of a program. Outcomes are expected to be detailed and well documented. In contrast, in Japan, graduate engineers are not expected to contribute to a project immediately. Instead, they are gradually rotated through all sections of a company receiving on-the-job practical training. Once assigned to a team, the young engineers continue to work across different sectors and levels, which allows them to make useful functional linkages and learn from reciprocal exchanges of information and ideas put forward by different layers of the company's hierarchy. Final decisions are not made autonomously, but collectively. Throughout a given project, every person participates in several meetings in which various aspects of the project are discussed and negotiated. Documentation is left intentionally open and incomplete. The two approaches resulted in two very different outcomes for both groups of engineers and, ultimately, were the reason the collaboration was successful for only one group. The outcome for the group of engineers in the UK was disappointing because the UK engineers, who were used to working alone and relying on their detailed documentation for comprehension, found it difficult to learn from the Japanese who did not make any notes and instead relied on their memories and expertise. In addition, as the young UK engineers were not rotated through the departments as their Japanese colleagues were, their knowledge remained restricted to only one area of expertise. When coming together online, the UK engineers found it impossible to make sense of the cursory, undetailed, multi-area documentation and reports of their Japanese colleagues. In contrast, the Japanese engineers found it relatively easy to interpret the work of their UK colleagues and fill in any remaining gaps with their own experiences, as they had acquired a much wider knowledge base during their departmental rotations and progress meetings, and were used to coping with incomplete information. This online partnership did not succeed, mainly because of insufficient knowledge regarding intercultural differences and a lack of practical mediation skill.

Transferring international management theory into second language learning, the previous example demonstrates the importance of making students aware of their own cultural rules and the rules of others. Students need to realize that their rules and way of seeing the world may not necessarily be shared, and they have to be prepared to negotiate their differences. This they learn while creating their Virtual Third Space on the Web. In order to do so successfully, students need to be provided with insights and functional tools with which they are able to mediate between different approaches or knowledge (see Hanna & Toohey, 2005). In the previous example, prior knowledge about the different workplace expectations and likely outcomes could have paved the way for more mediation between both approaches. Adequate language and intercultural communication skills could have further supported a fledgling online partnership.

The third set of pedagogical practices pertains to the *operational* and functional, which includes the learning itself, but also the technology. A rapidly expanding body of research and practical guidance in the application of multimedia technology for foreign language instruction is evident (reviewed, for example, by Dudeney, 2007; Holmberg, Shelley & White, 2005; Levy, 2007; Yang & Chen, 2006). It is important that language teachers model effective communication for Virtual Third Space interactions. Effective communication online and off-line entails active listening, turntaking, observing, empathizing, supporting, responding, elaborating, clarifying, adjusting, comparing, and reflecting—all "normal" skills that language learners acquire and

practice as they endeavor to become proficient in their target language and culture. However, students need to be reminded of these communication devices and be given the opportunity to revise appropriate phrases and words, as they have to be internalized to be useful in limiting communication breakdown (Hanna & Toohey, 2005). Communicating in virtual, synchronous environments such as the Virtual Third Space can be extra stressful, not least because of their immediacy and the speed of responses required. Formulized protocols might be helpful (an "etiquette for foreign language students") to reduce anxiety and provide guidance. For example, when learners make errors while communicating in virtual space and their partner recognizes the error, the partner could repeat the phrase, albeit in corrected form, or signal comprehension by nonverbal means (e.g., gestures or facial expressions). Another example is provided by Yamada and Akahori (2007) using videoconferencing as a communication tool. They found that the visual input of video resulted in an increase in the number of turntakings and triggered self-correction. Contextual cues are important (Schegloff, 1972). From "normal" face-to-face communication, we know that body position and body movement, including hand and face gestures (Birdwhistell, 1970; Ekman & Friesen, 1967; Erickson, 1982; Goodwin, 1981), gaze (Goodwin, 1981; Goodwin, 1980), timing (Erickson, 1982), and speech prosody (Gumperz, 1982, cited in Suchman, 2007), all influence understanding and the flow of discourse. Indeed, findings by Mehrabian (1968) demonstrate the importance of extralinguistic cues, which tend to be 55% facial, 38% vocal, and only 7% verbal. These studies suggest that video images can support online communication by presenting participants with nonverbal cues about their speech partners' dispositions, providing comfort and satisfaction. These cues can motivate speakers and listeners to deal in a positive way with their respective speech partner's grammatical and lexical errors or other distractions. For example, using positive emotional cues such as laughing and nodding can smooth stretches of unsuccessful communication. Simplifying vocabulary or syntax when discourse partners become aware of difficulties in comprehension is equally helpful devices. Of course, a simplified vocabulary and syntax, combined with brevity of communication, have become one of the hallmarks of communication in the third space, where they appear to contribute to a more relaxed and constructive language learning environment (Gunawardena, 1995; Hackman & Walker, 1990; Yamada & Akahori, 2007). All in all, the Virtual Third Space provides ample opportunities for linguistic and intercultural skills developments.

The operational also refers to the technology itself. As synchronous meetings may take place across different time zones, careful timing is a necessity. So is technical support by trained technicians at both locations. It is likely that in the future, the overt technical complexity will be hidden behind cleverly designed communication tools. However, as long as these remain nonintuitive and are prone to interferences, successful online synchronous communication is challenging. Sometimes, successful encounters in the third space are difficult to achieve, especially in environments of low capacity. Building and learning in virtual communities is at present only possible in highly developed, technology-savvy environments where technology literacy and standards are high, the acquisition of computer-driven technological devices are no burden, and a technology-rich work environment is the norm. This is in contrast to capacity-poor environments where access to high technology is not the norm, nor is the acquisition of skills that would enable students to take part in virtual learning. Warschauer (2003), however, reminds us that providing physical or digital resources to students in developing or developed countries contributes little to capacity building when human resources such as literacy and education or social resources such as supportive community, institutional, and

societal structures are inadequate. Only when all four sets of resources work as an integrated whole can gaps in capacity be overcome. Thus, language learning in the real or virtual world is never isolated from economic, political, and social realities. One such social reality pertains to ethical issues on the Web, for which privacy protection is the most prominent issue.

Controlling Disclosure of Personal Information in Virtual Third Spaces

Language learning online and/or within networked virtual communities has an important ethical dimension, especially with regard to privacy. In its original definition, privacy means to have the "right to be left alone" or "being free from intrusion" (Warren & Brandeis, 1890), and discussions about privacy were brought about by concerns about the impact of "instantaneous photography." Today, privacy is being defined in various ways. For our purpose, we address information privacy only, which Tavani (2004) defines as "control of the flow of one's personal information, including the transfer and exchange of that information" (Tavani, 2004, p. 121). Privacy preserves dignity and autonomy. An important aspect of privacy is that an individual maintains some control over when, where, and to what extent he or she provides personal information and to whom. The most likely privacy risk for participants is through their Web browsers. When interacting with the Web browser, the information generated is generally not linked directly to a person, but rather to a particular computer connected to the Internet. Each computer has a unique Internet Protocol (IP) address. A computer's IP address can be used to build profiles about an Internet user. However, IP addresses do not necessarily remain static. For this reason, some Web sites use cookies, which are files containing unique identification information (usually an identification code). An extensive amount of information about a person's browsing habits on a Web site can be collected via cookies, including a person's interests. When a person visits a cookie-enabled Web site, the Web site's server stores a cookie on the person's computer. As the person navigates the site, the cookie can be used to identify the user, retrieve his or her profile, and update it over time. Most Internet browsers support cookies, and most accept them by default. Cookies can be used for beneficial and malicious purposes.

For the uninitiated, the increasing use of sites that allow personal material to be published on the Internet might suggest that privacy is of little concern, but this is not the case. Many Internet users are very anxious about the information they divulge online (Jackson, von Eye, Barbatsis, Biocca, Zhao & Fitzgerald, 2003). Indeed, according to a Harris-Westin survey in 2001 (Westin, 2003), only 8% of the population is not concerned about privacy. At the other end of the spectrum are the so-called "privacy fundamentalists" (34%) who are very protective of their privacy, while the largest group (58%) belongs to the so-called "pragmatists" who are willing to trade some aspects of their privacy for desirable benefits (Ackerman, 2004). The disparate regard for privacy may be one of the reasons the question of privacy of information and personal data in virtual learning communities, including language learning communities, has hitherto received almost no attention. Another reason might be that most of the privacy intrusions remain invisible to the online user. However, virtual environments, including e-mails, chat rooms, message boards, blogs (which can be enhanced with images or other media or by providing links to other blogs or Web pages), games, social networking sites such as *MySpace* and *Second Life*®, and others, create a permanent record of all the personal information and commentary we post. Each record is stored "in countless independent permanent storages and retransmitted [to others] with the click of a button" (Rosenblum, 2007). They can be used for data mining and profiling, which involves the collection of personal information from a number of

sources and analyzing them for implicit patterns through which individuals can be categorized into groups. Inferences can then be drawn, which could be unjustified or detrimental to the individual whose data are being mined or profiled. Many online participants remain unaware that the stored records can be searched and accessed by third parties without major difficulties. According to Rosenblum (2007), many employers or university administrators already search Web pages, blogs, networking sites, and other Internet archives to obtain additional information about a person, which they would not receive through regular job interviews. Similarly, online searches and data mining operations have also become highly attractive to business organizations, because:

An entire generation's tastes can be micromonitored, micromanaged and manipulated: "...our very activity online has become a valuable commodity—an indicator of interest and therefore something to be measured, tracked, bought and sold, and archived by search magnates and data compilers (Zeller, in Rosenblum, 2007, pp. 46-47).

Cookies, data storage, data mining, and data profiling should be of concern to language learners and their instructors when they go online. They should be aware that online information is largely public information. For these reasons, language learners meeting and conversing online become vulnerable to invasions of privacy because they often provide sensitive data and information about themselves. At the beginners' proficiency level, where it is quite common to exchange personal data and information in the course of learning the basic day-to-day vocabulary and structure of the target language, students might divulge their name, date of birth, where they live, how they live, their hobbies, interests, studies, and so forth to their online friends or study partners. Intermediate students might exchange ideas and opinions about such issues as global warming, the environment, political and social leanings, and so forth. Advanced language students might participate in simulated business or other professional meetings or project work online, during which they not only display their growing language proficiency and intercultural competency, but also their capacity to work in and collaborate with a linguistically and culturally diverse team.

Privacy-enhancing identity management systems (IMS) are currently being developed to provide users with some control of their online personal data at least in private spaces, their "virtual residences." It is likely that privacy needs to be managed at the individual level. Educators ought to ask for students' informed consent before they let them go online to exchange personal information. They should discuss salient points regarding privacy with their students before they enter virtual spaces, recommending to students to adopt a common-sense approach when divulging personal data or information online. Students should be made aware how they can manage their own data and information flow and how they can minimize privacy intrusions. They should know that once personal material is published on the Internet, it is likely to remain in existence indefinitely, even after the original source is deleted, since the material will be downloaded to other people's computers, indexed by search engines, archived, and backed up many times. Educators could also advise students to assume a pseudonym, which, in normal circumstances, cannot identify the individual. At present, however, it is questionable how far privacy is achievable in virtual language learning environments because students and their teachers rarely know their rights and duties with respect to the collection and passing on of personal information; they might also find it challenging to deal with existing privacy policy statements (Gow, 2005).

FUTURE TRENDS AND CONCLUSION

Making projections regarding the future impact of Virtual Third Spaces can be full of uncertainties and inconsistencies. Future trends may point toward potential, but potential might be superseded by particularity. The use of the Internet and Web-based communication tools for language learning will increase. The technology itself will become richer but less intrusive. Interconnections will expand. It is likely that face-to-face communication will become as common in virtual as in real life. Dependence on hard-wired devices will diminish as wireless technology becomes the norm. Language learners will routinely access a small German, Spanish, Mandarin, or other language learning group whenever they can and from wherever they happen to be. Learning will continue to be self-directed and become more selective and open-ended. In a rapidly globalizing world, proficiency in other languages and cultures will become a necessity for mediating differences and for facilitating the pooling of experiences, knowledge, creativities, and patterns of cognition from around the globe quickly and efficiently. The Internet is and will further develop as a natural meeting place, a Virtual Third Space on the Web. In the interim (and it will always remain an interim), what is needed is an approach to teaching and learning languages and intercultural communication that evolves alongside changing technological platforms, is adaptable, sustainable, and future orientated.

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KEY TERMS

Asynchronous Learning: Learning takes place intermittently, with a time delay for interactions between instructor-learner, learner-learner, or learner-network technology. Asynchronous Web-based learning is a special form of asynchronous learning that occurs in cyberspace with learners using computers, networked communication technologies, and the World Wide Web to access remote learning opportunities, other people, and resources at will.

Blended Learning: An approach to learning that combines various off-line and online delivery media and modes that are designed to complement and support each other to promote learning. It may include traditional face-to-face instruction, synchronous e-learning, online collaborative learning, asynchronous self-paced study, or, when used in the workplace, specific just-in-time performance support tools.

Cookie: Short sequence of information stored on a person's computer after he or she has visited a Web site. Cookies can have privacy implications.

Data Privacy: Personal data should not be automatically available to other persons or organizations. Even if data have been processed, each individual should be able to exercise his or her right to control access to data and related information.

IP (Internet Protocol): Describes the international standard for addressing and sending data via the Internet.

Language Learning Environment: The physical and/or virtual setting in which language learning occurs.

Online Learning: Learning delivered by Internet-based technologies.

Privacy: "The interest that individuals have in sustaining a 'personal space,' free from interference by other people and organizations" (Clarke, 2006).

Social Networking Site: Sites such as Second Life®, MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube that provide a forum for people to share thoughts and experiences with others by communicating and socializing on the Internet.

Synchronous Communication: Real-time communication during which two or more learners communicate with each other at exactly the same time. In this chapter, it specifically refers to communication in the online environment.

Virtual: Not concrete. For example, virtual learning does not take place in a building, but instead is held over the Internet.

Virtual Third Space: A a largely porous entity on the Web. It may be entered as a real or virtual person. It facilitates and supports learning. Collaboration is inquiry-driven and process-orientated. Participants are frequently used as resources. Links to secondary clusters of social networks or external information resources are common. A strong group identity usually exists. Communication is often mediated, brief and informal.