ALAPSZAKOS SZAKDOLGOZAT

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angol szakirány

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Bölcsészettudományi Kar

ALAPSZAKOS SZAKDOLGOZAT

Információs és kommunikációs technológiák szerepe a nyelvelsajátításban

The Role of Information and Communication Technologies in Language Acquisition

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Abstract

Information and Communication Technologies are increasingly popular among young people. This popularity can be used to exploit the opportunities of ICT for learning, especially for language learning. Based on the Incidental Learning Theory and Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory, ICT can become an effective way of promoting language learning and language acquisition in the future. The purpose of this study is to investigate the beneficial effects of ICT on language acquisition and the restrictions of this potential. 50 university students majoring in English were asked to fill in a questionnaire and provide their opinion on whether the frequent use of ICT can help language acquisition or not, and which competencies and skills can improve this way. Students' proficiency of English varied from upper-intermediate to advanced level. Actual measurement of change in proficiency was not carried out but rather the perceptions and experiences of the participants were investigated. Results revealed that students unequivocally felt the positive effects of ICT on their language development, moreover, improvement was discoverable in several different language competencies and skills, however, to a varying degree and only under some conditions.

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1. Introduction

In just the past few decades an enormous revolution run its course in the field of technology that has completely changed people's life forever. We live and work in this rapidly changing environment where the new generation has become the so called digital natives, for whom the new forms of digital communication are second nature. There is not a moment when we are not surrounded by the newest technologies, and our access to the Internet and other types of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is unlimited. We can send and receive messages, videos, sound files anywhere and any time, check our social network sites for news, watch the latest episodes of our favorite series just a few minutes after their release. Naturally, this massive rise in digitally mediated communication has radically changed people's way of interaction and their possibilities of accessing information. The effects of ICT on the younger generations are even more conspicuous: they spend a significant part of their days glued to the screens. For all the above mentioned reasons an idea presents itself: it may be beneficial to use their heavy reliance on modern technology to support learning, especially language learning.

The use of ICT as possible instruments for helping foreign and second language learning and language acquisition have become popular research topics, however, most of the studies mainly focus on the application of ICT in a classroom environment. Relatively few researchers were engaged in expansively examining the relationship between language acquisition and ICT outside of the classroom. This, together with the fact that the time young people spend with ICT is often considered to be wasted, inspired me to explore the hidden potential of Information and Communication Technologies for promoting language acquisition.

The research questions for this study are the following:

1. Do Information and Communication Technologies, used frequently, aid language acquisition according to the perceptions of young and advanced language learners?

2. Do Information and Communication Technologies promote the improvement of several different language competencies and skills according to the perceptions of young and advanced language learners? Which ones?

On the basis of the research questions, I propose two hypotheses:

1. The frequent use of ICT aids second language acquisition.

2. ICT help to improve several different language competencies.

To achieve my purpose, I had to find one or more second language acquisition theories which may provide the framework for my study. I also used a questionnaire to investigate the issue.

My thesis is structured in the following way: in my Literature Review I will introduce the notion of incidental learning and Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory after giving the definition of the term Information and Communication Technologies. Next, I am going to present some of the previous studies focusing on the relationship of language acquisition and ICT, mostly examined in classroom environment. Then I am going to describe my research project, introduce and analyse the results of my questionnaire, and finally discuss the issue in the light of my findings.

2. Review of Literature

In my literature review I would like to establish the background to my research by referring to some of the relevant studies and also by establishing a connection between the literature and my research project. First, I am going to introduce the fundamental definitions beginning with Information and Communication Technologies. Then I am going to explain the notion of incidental learning and its possibilities in the ICT environment followed by a short review of Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory and its relationship to my topic. Finally, I am going to outline a few researches to show the potentials of different Information and Communication Technologies for the improvement of language competencies.

2.1 Information and Communication Technologies

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is an umbrella term adopted to denote a number of technologies used in the process of collecting, storing, editing, retrieving, receiving and transferring digital information (Olakulehin, 2007, p. 136). ICT may refer to different devices or applications including computers, internet, television, social networks, movies, and several other pieces of equipment that are suitable for the above mentioned purposes.

Examining the relationship between ICT and language acquisition is a relevant topic in these days and justified on various grounds. In the past few years a revolution has been taking place in the field of IC technologies. Naturally, this growth has had an enormous impact on people's life, especially on the life of young adults. With every passing day, technology is becoming more embedded in our culture. Therefore, possibilities to use it for educational purposes cannot be neglected. A good example of that is the growing number of Facebook

users. Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfield (2006) states that the number of active Facebook users among university students is rapidly increasing. A logical step would be to exploit their strong interest in social networks and other technologies to support language learning and language acquisition.

Exposure to ICT and its benefits in terms of language learning and language acquisition is also attracting increasing interest among researchers. (Lai & Kritsonis, 2006; Kabilan et al., 2010; Cetin, Sozcu, & Kinay, 2012) These researches explored a number of positive effects technology can have on the process of language learning and acquisition. Maybe the most important among them is the ability to easily attract students' attention, however, others are also mentioned. For instance, among others ICT can help students to build their confidence, to enhance their motivation, to foster positive attitude toward language learning in general, and also it can reduce learning stress and anxieties. Therefore, ICT open up opportunities for more effective language learning and language acquisition not only inside but also outside of the classroom.

2.2 Incidental learning

The notion of incidental learning can be linked to the frequent use of ICT as a way of acquiring language, and the phenomenon is in the focus of many researches. (Saffran, Newport, Aslin, Tunick, & Barrueco, 1997; Kerka, 2000; Hulstijn, 2013) The term refers to the process of acquiring language, especially words and expressions in an unintentional way, as a result or by-product of other activities. Picking up an unfamiliar word without effort from a song or from reading a text is a good example of incidental learning. (Hulstijn, 2013)

Incidental learning in general can happen in many ways, for instance through observation, repetition, social interaction, and problem solving (Rogers, 1997). It can lead to

several positive outcomes for the learners, such as improved competence, changed attitudes, growth in interpersonal skills, extended self-confidence, and self-awareness. (Kerka, 2000)

The advantageous effects of incidental learning can also be examined in connection with language acquisition. It is generally accepted that children aquire a significant part of their native language incidentally, simply because they are unable to engage in intentional, conscious learning. (Saffran, Newport, Aslin, Tunick, & Barrueco, 1997) Children's primary task is to understand what is said or sung and learning emerges from this need. The same can happen with second language learners, too. Here I feel the need to briefly introduce the difference between second language learning and foreign language learning. In short, English as a foreign language (EFL) indicates the teaching and learning of English language in a non-English speaking region. As opposed to this, English as a second language (ESL) means the teaching and learning of the language within the Anglosphere, where English is official language, and students are surrounded by it everywhere. In this paper, although I am dealing with foreign language learners, I consider ICT as a native language environment i.e., a second language environment, and the connection with language through ICT as rather acquisition, than learning, therefore, I am going to apply the rules of acquisition.

At a rough estimate, the vocabulary of an average adolescent native English speaker contains at least 20 000 base words. It is clear that this amount of words could not have been taught to them explicitly, therefore, it is safe to say that they must have learnt many of them incidentally (Hulstijn, 2013). In other words, incidental learning is an existing, valid phenomenon.

The following research of Saragi, Nation, & Meister (1978) well illustrates the effectiveness of incidental language learning. In their study, these researchers used the famous novel Clockwork Orange by Anthony Burgess to show that incidental learning can happen during reading. This novel contains an invented language, 'nadsat'. In this research, adult

native speakers of English were instructed to read the novel without being informed of the purpose of the study. In the end, a multiple-choice test was given to them covering 90 nadsat words. The results supported the hypothesis, considerable vocabulary acquisition had taken place among participants, that is, an average 76 % of the nadsat words were acquired successfully through merely reading them repeatedly in a meaningful context.

It is safe to conclude, then, that language learners can also enhance their vocabulary and other language competencies indirectly by reading, watching movies and series, listening to songs, and participating in communication with others in English, all of these made possible by the extended use of ICT.

2.3 Second Language Acquisition Theory

So far, the terms ICT and incidental learning were introduced, however, the relationship between ICT and incidental learning needs to be elaborated on more precisely. To find a theoretical framework which explains why ICT promotes incidental learning, I will review the relevant parts of Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory. It demonstrates the components necessary for successful language acquisition and thus enables me to compare these elements with the characteristics of an ICT environment. This way, I can establish if the ICT environment facilitates successful language acquisition or not.

First of all, an essential distinction needs to be made between language learning and language acquisition on the basis of Krashen's theory. (Krashen, 1985) According to his conception, learning and acquiring are separate methods of gaining knowledge. While learning is a conscious effort to obtain information, acquisition is usually subconscious; moreover, its results are not always perceivable, that is why it is hard to measure. Krashen states that "acquisition now appears to play a far more central role than learning in second language performance. Our ability to use second languages comes mostly from what we have

acquired and not what we have learned" (Krashen, 1985, p. 8). This statement, however, is handled with some reservations here, because my purpose is not to convince anybody about the utmost omnipotence of acquisition and incidental learning, but to prove that it can be a useful by-product of ICT usage.

Still, if we accept the importance – though not omnipotence - of acquisition, another question arises, that is, how people acquire languages. Krashen identified several factors that promote successful language acquisition, so in the following section I am going to discuss them one by one, and then explore whether these factors are present in ICT environments or not. If yes, then it is presumable that ICT environments will promote successful language acquisition.

The first factor is called the Input Hypothesis. (Krashen, 1985) The idea suggests that acquisition can happen in only one way and this is by accessing comprehensible input. When input is comprehensible it means that learners are able to interpret the essence of what was presented to them. According to the hypothesis, languages can be acquired mostly through understanding messages and since these messages contain the rules of language, while understanding them, people will simultaneously and sub-consciously figure out these rules and learn how to use them i.e., acquire the rules themselves, too.

However, in itself, comprehensible input is not enough. To aid this kind of acquisition, "extralinguistic context, knowledge of the world, and our previous linguistic competence" are also needed. (Krashen, 1985, p. 9) In other words, the main idea behind the Input Hypothesis is that if comprehensible input completed with the above mentioned elements is provided for the language learners, it will contain all the necessary components of language to make successful acquisition possible. Furthermore, according to Krashen's theory, input must be not only comprehensible, but also a bit above the level of the learner's knowledge of language so that there is always something new to acquire: i+1. Here, 'i' is the

current stage of development of the language learner, who can reach the next level of structure i + 1, if he or she obtains input that contains i + 1. (Krashen, 1985)

Krashen apparently emphasizes the importance of context and comprehensible input, both of which are present in the ICT environment. Context relates to many ICT devices and applications, for instance movies, computer games, social networks, and the internet, just to mention a few. What makes its role significant is that the elements of language are not only standing by themselves but are provided with background which makes acquisition a lot easier, because learners can link the new knowledge to its context where it was first encountered. Comprehensible input is also present in ICT environment, although it is different for every language learner, depending on their level of proficiency. All learners may find comprehensible input while using ICT, however, upper-intermediate and advanced level language learners can profit the most from this kind of environment because almost any level of language they meet through ICT can be considered as comprehensible input for them. As Krashen also suggests, "although the classroom is the best place for beginners, intermediates are better off in the country because they can be provided with comprehensible input all day long" and "if beginners "go to the country", they will encounter only incomprehensible input, or noise." (Krashen, 1985, p. 11) To interpret this idea to my study, the country can correspond to the ICT environment, and this is the reason why the participants of my research are mostly advanced users of English.

Another element of Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory that can also relate to the ICT environment is the Affective Filter Hypothesis. Krashen claims that all the above mentioned are important, though not enough to promote language acquisition. Even if there is comprehensible input supported by the context and other elements, it is not certain that this input will reach the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) and if it does not, the acquisition will not be successful. For this problem, he says, the Affective Filter can be

blamed. This is a barrier in the mind that is able to prevent input from reaching the LAD. Usually several factors can generate this barrier, among which lack of self-confidence, high anxiety level, and low motivation are the most common. (Krashen, 1985) Consequently, the aim would be to lower this barrier, and it is claimed by many researches that ICT, especially movies, social networks, and games can create a positive learning environment where it is possible to reduce stress and even to encourage shy learners, allowing for the input to get through to the LAD. (Danan, 2004; Lam, 2004; Purushotma, 2005; Lai & Kritsonis, 2006; Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2006; Cetin, Sozcu, & Kinay, 2012)

It can be seen that several of the conditions Krashen mentions for successful language acquisition can be fulfilled by Information and Communication Technologies, thereupon, ICT may be considered as an adequate language acquisition environment. However, the above mentioned are not the only factors necessary for language acquition, according to Krashen's theory. On the other hand, the lack of space does not make it possible for me to elaborate every aspect explained in this theory, that is why I will not detail the Monitor Hypothesis and Natural Order Hypothesis but focus on the more relevant ideas.

2.4 The development of language competencies and ICT

ICT can establish a fitting learning environment, as it is clear from the analysis mentioned above. Using this technology learners can conveniently acquire language through incidental learning. With the help of ICT and on the basis of Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory several of the learner's language competencies have the opportunity to develop to a certain degree. Numerous researches claim that among many, reading and listening comprehension, pronunciation, speaking skills, and especially vocabulary is able to progress incidentally with the help of ICT applications, for instance movies, social network sites, and computer games, just to mention a few. (Agor, 1984; Weyers, 1999; Koolstra &

Beentjes, 1999; Krashen, 2003; Danan, 2004; Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2006; Cetin, Sozcu, & Kinay, 2012)

Significant incidental vocabulary development through ICT is illustrated in the research of Cetin, Soczu, and Kinay (2012). They concluded that a notable number of foreign language words can be acquired with the help of online games. In their study, Turkish elementary and secondary school students participated. These students were active users of social network sites and frequently played online games available there. A questionnaire of English words taken from the popular game Farmville was given to them, and they were asked to provide the Turkish equivalent of each word. The results were positive, and they proved that students can acquire vocabulary items indirectly by playing online games.

Another study conducted by Yuksel and Tanriverdi (2009) supports the previously mentioned results. These researchers were interested in how short movie clips promote the acquisition of English vocabulary among Turkish intermediate level university students. Two groups of participants were formed: the first group watched the ten minute-long movie excerpt twice with captions and the second group watched it without the captions. To analyze the results, Wesche and Paribakht's (1996) scale of vocabulary knowledge was used, which is a scale that specifies the stages of vocabulary acquisition. According to the scores of participants, a significant development in vocabulary was achieved by both groups. Students not only remembered the words and expressions, but they also could accurately guess the meaning of approximately half of them. It is also important to mention, that the first group performed slightly better thanks to the captions, however, the difference was insignificant. This research also supports the previously mentioned claim that the role of context is essential in vocabulary acquisition, and supports Krashen's Input Hypothesis.

In strong connection with vocabulary, students' listening comprehension skills can also be improved through the usage of ICT. Weyers (1999) reports noticeable development in

the listening comprehension skills of American university students who were exposed to Spanish speaking videos on a regular basis. In his experiment, participants watched two episodes per week of an authentic Spanish series and after each episode comprehension questions were given to them. Results show that by the end of the eighth week there was a great difference between the performance of the experimental group and the control group which did not watch the series regularly. Not only did the listening comprehension of the experimental group develop significantly, but they also achieved greater confidence in their language use and gains in vocabulary.

The role of reading is also not to be neglected because through it reading comprehension, cultural knowledge, writing skills, vocabulary, grammar and even confidence in speaking can be enhanced. To my knowledge, there is no extensive study investigating the concrete relationship between reading and ICT, nevertheless, on the whole, I think the same conclusions may be drawn from reading books and magazines than from reading websites or other ICT, because these environments are quite similar. Lee, Krashen, and Gribbons (1996) in their research emphasize the importance of free reading. They claim that the number of years spent with reading English magazines, newspapers, and fiction can predict some of the linguistic abilities of international students. Those who read more have better abilities in translating and judging the grammaticality of complex grammatical constructions. Also, the more students read for pleasure, the better their score on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) will be. (Constantino, Lee, Cho, & Krashen, 1997)

In my literature review I defined the main terms I am using in my study, explored the concept of incidental learning, and those elements of Krashen's second language acquisition theory which prove that ICT environment do have the potential to promote language acquisition. Then I went on to present the findings of some studies which explored how ICT can have a beneficial impact on several facets of learners' foreign language competence. In

the next section, I am going to introduce the methods and results of my research, and finally I am going to discuss the findings in the light of my research questions and the relating literature, seeking to find justification for the outcomes.

3. Methods

3.1 Participants

The study was conducted with 52 language learners, including both males and females from Hungary. Participants were undergraduate university students majoring in English, therefore, their language proficiency ranged from upper-intermediate to advanced level, which was important regarding their time spent in English language environment and the appropriate level of comprehensible input. For the questionnaire it was important that participants should be active users of ICT not only in their mother tongue but also in English and that they have the appropriate proficiency in the English language to link my results to Krashen's theories. Upper-intermediate or advanced level knowledge was needed to consider any level of the language of ICT as comprehensible input for the participants, and also because Krashen claimed that this proficiency level is the most suitable for acquiring language incidentally. (Krashen, 1985, p.11) The selection of participants was only based on their major and their level of education, otherwise anyone was free to fill in the questionnaire. Two of the students failed to answer one or more questions, as a result their surveys were incomplete. Due to this, the data they supplied had to be removed from the data pool, consequently the final sample size decreased to 50.

3.2 Methods of data collection

3.2.1 Instruments

The instrument used in this investigation was a questionnaire that consisted of three sections and fourteen questions altogether. The first section dealt with the everyday ICT using habits of the participants and contained two questions on the topic. The second section comprised of four items enquiring about the student's opinion on ICT and language

acquisition, and the last section included seven questions on the relationship of language competencies and ICT. The final question was open-ended and required the participants to add any comments or ideas.

The types of questions ranged from multiple-choice questions to checkboxes, open-ended, yes/no questions and their combinations, and were based on the findings of the previously mentioned literature. It is important to note that the questionnaire mainly asked about participant's perceptions and opinions, and I recognize that their views of their language development as a result of the use of ICT is not proof of actual language improvement, however, my opportunities were too limited to carry out a real proficiency test with a control group.

3.2.2 Procedures

The questionnaire was originally composed in Hungarian and participants also filled it in on their mother tongue to avoid even minor misunderstandings. (see Appendix A for the English and Appendix B for the Hungarian version of the questionnaire). First, several drafts were prepared and the final draft was given to four people for piloting. According to their pieces of advice some changes were made so that participants can better understand the tasks, then I created the final version of the questionnaire with the help of an online survey software. Finally, I distributed the questionnaire in the Facebook groups of the university classes. It was possible because each year a new group is created for the freshmen with the purpose of helping each other and sharing information and these groups usually continue to function. This way, I had access to all three Facebook groups of BA English students and with their help I managed to collect a sufficient sample of answers.

3.3 Methods of data analysis

The questionnaire I composed consisted mainly of closed questions so they yielded quantitative data and for the analysis frequency and percentages were used. The number of answers was counted and on the basis of the highest and lowest rate of answers, trends were identified. Because of the relatively low number of participants, more serious statistical analyses were not possible. Thus the results are valid only for this group of people and the trends are not generalizable. It is important to note that in aswer to several questions it was possible to choose from among several responses, and that in such cases the answers were counted separately.

4. Results

The questionnaire consisted three sections: the first was concerned with the general usage of ICT, the second focused on ICT and language acquisition and it was in strong connection with my first research question, and the third part contained questions in connection with the effect of technologies on the participants' different language competencies and skills referring to my second research question. The review of the results will also follow this pattern.

From the 50 students who participated in the study everyone uses some kinds of ICT. These are mainly computer, movies and series, and also social network sites, all of them used by more than 90% of participants. Regarding the frequency of usage in English, the majority of students uses these technologies at least once a week and it is also common that they use it even more often, for example, many of them watch English movies daily (46%) and read websites and news (56%) or log into their social network account multiple times a day (60%).

One of the main questions of the survey, namely, whether frequent ICT usage can result in improved language skills without any conscious learning attempt, was supported by 49 participants which is 98 % of the answers. According to the data, all of the students experienced this phenomenon, some of them even shared concrete cases, for instance, one participant claimed that his 10 year old brother profited greatly from English video games in relation to the number of acquired words, although he never attended any language courses before.

Participants claimed that movies and series, mainly without subtitles, were the most helpful ICT that strongly supported the development of their language acquisition (80%). Music i.e. lyrics followed with 76 % of all the answers and also reading of web pages was considered to be highly beneficial, while social network sites helped only moderately.

Surprisingly, chat sites and video calling softwares fell behind, only 8 – 16 % of participants mentioned them as being very useful in incidental learning.

Considering the reasons for successful language acquisition with the help of ICT, 88 % said that the role of context was the most important, followed closely by the importance of the fun-factor. 33 people (66%) drew attention to the significance of low-stress environment and frequency and 64 % mentioned authenticity.

Regarding my second hypothesis, namely, that ICT help to improve several different language competencies, the agreement among the participants was complete, everyone supported the idea. In connection with vocabulary, 100 % felt that ICT helped their development, mostly through watching movies and reading websites. More than half of them reported that after several encounters with words, they recognized them immediately when they saw them again and suspected their meaning, while 38% believed that they surely knew the meaning of the words and were able to use them in a sentence. Again, frequency obtained an important role, as 39 participants claimed that those words were acquired by them that frequently re-occured and attracted their attention.

Apart from vocabulary, students gave an account of the improvement of other language competencies as well, for instance, they reported the development of listening comprehension (97%), reading comprehension (90%), pronunciation (88%), and also mentioned speaking skills (58%), cultural knowledge, (68%) and interaction skills (44%) among others.

5. Discussion

The findings of my study indicate that among the participants of my study ICT effectively aided language acquisition. In accordance with my first hypothesis, all of them claimed that the frequent use of ICT truly contributed to their language development and also in relation to the second hypothesis that ICT helped them improve several different language competencies. The results unequivocally supported my presumptions, however, I feel the need to repeatedly emphasize that the answers only mirror participants' opinions and perceptions, and I did not measure actual development in their language proficiency.

The introductory questions showed that participants are active users of ICT and this fact overlaps with the previously mentioned trends reporting a radical increase in the number of users of social networks, internet, computer, and such. Consequently, the ideas supporting the integration of ICT in education, whether at home or at school, are important and to exploit the enthusiasm and heavy reliance of young people on ICT is worth considering because of the side benefits.

In strong relation to this, frequency of usage is another integral element regarding ICT and language acquisition. According to the answers, participants used the most common technologies in English at least on a daily basis. It is clear that this rate contributed to their language development significantly. Repetition is a necessary part of language acquisition, as Baddeley (1997) points out in his book. He claims that elaborate processing of new information is a necessary pre-condition of acquisition, however, it is not enough as the new knowledge must be frequently reactivated to form connections in the mind. This is what he calls elaborate rehearsal and the results of my research indicated that participants also thought that frequency has a significant role in the acquisition of languages. Therefore, incidental learning is strongly interconnected with the notion of frequency.

The data showed that participants were very keen on watching movies, especially without subtitles. They even reported to watch several movies or episodes of series a day and they claimed that these movies helped a lot in their language development, mainly in terms of extending their vocabulary, improving their listening comprehension skills, and pronunciation. In fact, participants unanimously found movies the most important ICT technology: they used this ICT most frequently, according to their opinion movies helped their language acquisition most, and also movies aided the improvement of most of their competencies. In my view, this is due to the fact that series are very popular these days, and because participants mainly used this media, it was the one that could assist their language acquisition best. Besides, in movies visual elements and spoken text can complement each other, making understanding easier. At the same time, researchers claim that movies are the most beneficial if watched with subtitles, (Koolstra & Beentjes, 1999; Danan, 2004; Yuksel & Tanriverdi, 2009) nevertheless, the participants of my study mainly watched them without captions or subtitles and they still felt a serious development. I would say that this is because these students achieved a level of proficiency where they do not need subtitles anymore since most of the information can be regarded by them as comprehensible input.

On the other hand, virtual world games and softwares for the purpose of interaction, for instance, chat or Skype, were not among the ICT reported to be useful. It was a surprising fact, doubly so as previous studies suggested great potential in these applications, such as access to countless native speakers and authentic language, encouragement of shy learners, learning about culture and language, increase in motivation. (Purushotma, 2005; Thorne, Black, & Sykes, 2009; Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010). The main reason behind the lack of improvement promoted by these technologies can be that only a relatively few students used virtual world games, chat, or Skype regularly and because of this no extensive development could take place. Despite this fact, I recognized an interesting pattern in the results, namely,

that around half of the participants reported advancement in speaking skills and interaction skills without the usage of any ICT that may have helped them with these competencies. The only explanation I could find refers back to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which states that "the ability to speak 'emerges' on its own, as a result of language acquisition, as a result of obtaining comprehensible input." (Krashen, 1985, p. 9) If we accept this view, it is probable that students could improve their speaking skills passively, by watching movies or listening to music, without the help of ICT designed for direct communication.

Movies, music, and web pages were mentioned as the technologies aiding incidental learning of participants the most. I already stated my opinion on movies, hence, I am going to concentrate on the other two instead. The fact that so many people chose music as a helpful instrument of language acquisition was surprising for me, because in my exploration of the professional literature I did not focus on this topic. Nonetheless, about three-fourth of the students claimed that music or rather the lyrics had an important role in their English language development, in line with an early study on the subject by Richards (1969), who emphasized the importance of music and said that songs "may be use to help establish (1) sounds; (2) rhythm and stress; (3) formulae; (4) syntactical items; (5) vocabulary." (p. 161)

Regarding the usefulness of frequent reading of web pages, again, Krashen's thought needs to be evoked. In fact, what he means by reading is reading books, however, I feel that reading news or articles on the internet are not so different, therefore, I will apply his ideas in this context, as well. Krashen is convinced that "pleasure reading has a powerful effect on language acquisition" if the text is comprehensible and interesting. In consequence, language learners need a great amount of reading which motivates them and by this improves their skills. (Krashen, 1985, p. 19) According to the answers of the participants, they felt the same way, in agreement with Krashen's concepts.

Considering the reasons for successful language acquisition with the help of ICT, the outcome was quite diverse. The most frequent choice of the participants stressed the importance of context, which correlates with the previously mentioned popularity of movies and reading. Beck and McKeown explained that "the learning of words from context may be regarded as a stepwise process in which the learner constructs the meaning of a word making use of the semantic and syntactical cues that the context provides" (as cited in Koolstra & Beentjes, 1999, p. 51) It is clear that the role of context is significant and that meaningfulness of the input is certainly of central importance.

According to the second most common answer, the key to successful language acquisition is the so called fun factor. If the material is interesting and entertaining, students will be more likely to pick up parts of it incidentally. This can be explained by the fact that acquisition is easier when students focus on the meaning making process, and not on the language learning itself. (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2006). This can also relate to the idea of low-stress environment during language acquisition. If students are having fun they will not be anxious, that is, their Affective Filter will be significantly lower during the use of ICT than in a classroom environment. Furthermore, as it was explained before, assuming that comprehensible input is provided, the reduced Affective Filter will make acquisition inevitable. This is what Krashen considers to be the so called Fundamental Principle (Krashen, 1985, p. 5), and it shows that the reasons behind successful language acquisition overlap.

Interestingly, authenticity of the input was not among the most frequent answers, despite the fact that literature claims it has an important role. For instance, authentic videos are very helpful due to the fact that students are not often exposed to the target language outside the classroom and these videos and movies can help them access a great amount of authentic language and to create an appropriate learning environment they do not have outside

of school. In addition, frequent exposition to authentic oral language input would improve the listening comprehension of language learners. The reason why participants did not choose this option is questionable. I could not find a valid explanation except that they probably considered the other factors more important.

In the last section of my questionnaire I focused on the development of different language competencies consisting mainly vocabulary, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, and pronunciation. This part of the survey attempted to seek answer to my second research question. In the literature review I already established the background by introducing several studies, indicating that not only one or two but several different skills of language can be improved incidentally, and through the extensive use of ICT. Thereupon, I would say that I was looking for the answer of my research question not only in the questionnaire, but also in previous studies.

Among the listed competencies, vocabulary was the most unambiguous; every student reported its improvement as a result of watching movies, reading websites, or playing computer games. This effect of ICT was expected since a great number of researches focused on this field and showed positive results regarding incidental learning. At the same time, the extent of acquisition or rather of word recognition was interesting, as more than half of the participants only had guesses of the correct meaning of words after they had met them repeatedly. Only 38 percent reported that they accurately knew the meaning of these words and were able to use them in a sentence and I assume this was probably due to the fact that they previously looked up the meaning in a dictionary to promote acquisition. This result draws attention to an important shortcoming of incidental vocabulary acquisition, namely, that there is a risk of learning words incorrectly if the contextual message is unclear because it can lead to wrong inferences (Bensoussan & Laufer, 1984). Hence, guessing is not always a good solution, moreover, sometimes it can have adverse effects for vocabulary acquisition.

It is also important to conclude that vocabulary acquisition is in strong connection with the frequency of encounters and interest. These two factors had the most influence on student's vocabulary acquisition, as three-fourth of participants emphasized them in the questionnaire. Frequency, again, refers back to the previously mentioned concept of elaborative rehearsal by Baddeley (1997), and so it is not necessary to explain it further. It is also clear, that people will acquire those words that are interesting to them and attract their attention.

Finally, I am going to discuss the development of listening comprehension, pronunciation, and reading comprehension through ICT, however, the results were so clear-cut that much explanation is not necessary. The outcome of my questionnaire completely supported the statements of relevant literature, that is, almost every participant agreed with the fact that improvement had taken place in their competencies as a result of frequent use of ICT. The only minor variance concerned the development of pronunciation. This was the only area where the agreement was a little under 90 percent but this distinction was insignificant. Two types of explanation came from participants stating that their pronunciation did not improve due to the frequent use of ICT. One was that they did not use specifically those technologies that were able to help their development, for instance, movies or music. According to their second explanation, only listening to the pronunciation of others in movies or such was not enough in itself to improve their own skills but they would need to repeat the words out loud to achieve positive results. This view is interesting because it contradicts the idea of Krashen about passive development of speaking skills, at least regarding pronunciation. Aside from these reservations, however, the success of ICT is unambiguous in improving not just one but several language competencies and skills.

To conclude, the present study supports the notion that ICT is an effective way of aiding language acquisition, and it is also true that ICT can develop different areas of

language competencies. I recognize that these statements are not generalizable due to the low number of respondents, however, compared to the results of other studies I can say that I found positive confirmation to both of my research questions and hypotheses.

In this section my goal was to present the interpretation of my results. In the following I am going to sum up the answers given to my two main research questions, and demonstrate the limits of my study. Finally, I am going to set out possible future research directions.

6. Conclusion

In my study I attempted to introduce the hidden potential in Information and Communication Technologies for promoting incidental language learning and language acquisition as an additional means of language development. With the help of literature and my questionnaire I showed that these opportunities actually exist, as both of my hypotheses were confirmed by the results.

My first hypothesis was that ICT, if used frequently, are indeed able to aid the process of language acquisition. The answers indicated that my assumption was correct, as almost all of the participants experienced this effect. Surprisingly, though, not all ICT were considered to be equally useful by the participants. The survey results showed that movies, lyrics, and reading were the most helpful, while chat rooms, Skype, and games fell behind.

My second hypothesis was that ICT can help to improve several different language competencies and skills, such as vocabulary, reading comprehension, listening comprehension, speaking skills, interaction skills, cultural knowledge, writing, and so on. The answers were again reassuring, but at the same time it turned out that the extent of improvement can be different for different skills, for instance, the development of vocabulary was doubtless in general, but the case of pronunciation was not so unambiguous . Also, the quality of vocabulary acquisition was interesting as more than half of the participants had only guesses of the meaning of words encountered repeatedly, which raise the question whether it can be considered as actual acquisition or not.

Nonetheless, both of my hypotheses were supported by the participants, so the outcome of my study was positive. However, due to the low number of responses my results are not generalizable, which is a strong limitation of this paper together with the fact that the present study was based only on the perceptions and opinions of the participants, because actually measuring the change in students' proficiency as a result of ICT usage was

unachievable under the circumstances. Further research can be conducted with a larger sample to examine the effects of ICT on the improvement of real proficiency of students and also the actual effectiveness of incidental learning, meaning under what circumstances and to what extent can people acquire languages incidentally and what are the best ways to exploit this opportunity.

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Appendix A

Dear Mr/Mrs,

I would like to ask for your help in filling out this questionnaire for my thesis. The topic of my research is the role of Information and Communication Technologies in language acquisition. (ICT in short) ICT is an umbrella term for devices and applications used for communication, for example, computer, internet, social network sites, movies, etc. The aim of this research is to examine these technologies in relation to the acquisition of English language. The questionnaire is anonymous and it takes around 10 minutes to complete.

Using ICT in everyday life

1. Which of the following ICT do you use most often in your everyday life? (You may underline several answers)

TV   Computer   Cell phone   Email   Forums   Virtual world games

Video calling softwares (Skype)   Social Network Sites (Facebook)   Movies / Series

Videos (Youtube)   Computer games   Websites (blogs, news)

2. How frequently do you use the following ICT in English?

	A few times a day	Daily	A few times a week	A few times a month	Less often or never
Facebook or other social network sites (for chatting, gaming, browsing)					
Movies/Series/Videos – English speaking with hungarian subtitle					
Movies/Series/Videos – English speaking without subtitle					
Virtual World Gamesn (World of Warcraft, Second Life, etc)					
Websites, Online Magazines, News sites					

ICT and language acquisition

3. With the help of Information and Communication Technologies English language skills can improve incidentally, without any conscious learning attempt. Do you agree with the statement?

☐ Yes, because…………………………………………………………..

☐ No, because..…………………………………………………………..

4. Have you ever felt that your language competencies (vocabulary, listening comprehension, reading comprehension) incidentally developed with the help of ICT?

☐ Yes, for example……………………………………………………..

☐ No, because ………………………………………………………….

5. To what extent do you think using the following technologies and applications in English may have improved your English language competencies incidentally, i.e. when language learning was not your primary intention.

	Very much	A little	No improvement	Not sure
TV				
Computer				
Reading websites				
Chat (eg. Facebook chat, MSN)				
Email				
Forums				
Video calling softwares (eg.Skype)				
Social network sites				
Movies/Series (with subtitles)				
Movies/Series (without subtitles)				
Virtual world games				
Computer games				
Music				
Other………………				

6. Why do you think ICT may promote language acquisition to some extent? (You may choose several answers)

- ☐ low stress level, allows learner to relax

- ☐ real, authentic language

- ☐ my knowledge improves incidentally through interection with others / native speakers

- ☐ I am more confident using the English language outside of the classroom, as I don't have to worry about making mistakes

- ☐ I can access entertaining and interesting materials

- ☐ sometimes I need to make some effort to understand what I have heard/read, eg. I look up the meaning of a word and because of this the new content sticks in my head

- ☐ because of the frequent and repeated encounters (eg. with word, pronunciation)

- ☐ I can put into context what I have seen/heard/read, so next time it is easier to recall it (eg. in movies, when the new word is connected to the scene in which I met with it)

Language competencies and language acquisition with the help of ICT

7. Do you think your vocabulary improved due to your ICT use ?

- ☐ Yes, thanks to …………………………………………...

- ☐ No, because…………………………………………………

8. If you have encountered a word repeatedly, what is your reaction when you see/hear/read it again?

- ☐ I have seen this word before but I don't know what it means.

- ☐ I have seen this word before and I think I know what it means

- ☐ I know the meaning of this word.

- ☐ I know this word and I can use it in a sentence.

9. In general I remember words…. (You may choose several answers)

      ☐ I encounter repeatedly

      ☐ I look up in a dictionary

      ☐ that are necessary for comprehension

      ☐ that attract my attention

      ☐ Other…………………………………..

10. Do you think your listening comprehension has improved due to your ICT use?

      ☐ Yes, due to………………………………………………

      ☐ No, because……………………………………………..

11. Do you think your pronunciation has improved due to your ICT use?

      ☐ Yes, due to………………………………………………

      ☐ No, because……………………………………………..

12. Do you think your reading comprehension has improved due to your ICT use?

      ☐ Yes, due to………………………………………………

      ☐ No, because……………………………………………..

13. Apart from the competencies previously mentioned do you think any other of your language skills has improved due to your ICT use ? (You may choose several answers)

☐ speaking skills

☐ grammar

☐ spelling

☐ writing skilly

☐ interaction skills

☐ mediation skills

☐ cultural competence

14. Should you have any comments regarding the topic of the questionnaire, do not hesitate to share it /them with me.

This is the end of the questionnarie. Thank you for your kind help!

Appendix B

Tisztelt Hölgyem/Uram!

Szakdolgozati kérdőívem kitöltésében kérném segítségét. A kutatás témája az Információs és Kommunikációs Technológiák nyelvelsajátítását segítő szerepe. (A kérdőív során röviden IKT) Ezek magukban foglalnak szinte minden kommunikációs eszközt vagy applikációt, úgy mint: számítógép, internet, közösségi oldalak, filmek, egyéb. A kutatás célja ezen technológiák megvizsgálása az angol nyelv elsajátításának szempontjából. A kérdőív anonim, kitöltése körülbelül 10 percet vesz igénybe.

IKT felhasználási szokások

1. Milyen IKT eszközöket használ Ön leggyakrabban? Húzza alá. (Több válasz is lehetséges)

TV   Számítógép   Mobiltelefon   Email   Fórumok   Virtuális világok

Videó hívások (Skype)   Közösségi oldalak (Facebook)   Filmek,Sorozatok

Internetes videók (Youtube)   Számítógépes játékok   Weboldalak (blogok, hírek)

2. Milyen gyakran használja Ön a következő IKT eszközöket angol nyelven:

	Naponta többször	Naponta	Hetente többször	Havonta többször	Ritkábban vagy soha
Facebook vagy más közösségi oldal (Chatre, játékra, böngészésre)					
Angol nyelvű, magyar feliratos filmek/videók/sorozatok					
Angol nyelvű filmek/videók/sorozatok felirat nélkül					
Virtuális világok (World of Warcraft, Second Life, etc)					
Weboldalak, online magazinok, hírek olvasása					

IKT és nyelvelsajátítás

3. Egyetért azzal az állítással, hogy az IKT eszközök használata közben önkéntelenül, konkrét tanulási szándék nélkül is fejlődhet az angol nyelvtudás? (pl. „felszedhet" új szavakat, fejlődhet a kiejtése, szövegértése)

☐ Igen, mert…………………………………………………………..

☐ Nem, mert…………………………………………………………..

4. Volt-e már rá példa, hogy valamilyen nyelvi kompetenciája (szókincs, hallás utáni szövegértés, olvasott szöveg értése, stb) önkéntelenül fejlődött az IKT eszközök közreműködésével?

☐ Igen, mégpedig…………………………………………………..

☐ Nem, mert …………………………………………………….

5. Mennyiben segítette a következő eszközök nem nyelvtanulási célú, de angol nyelven történő használata kommunikatív kompetenciái fejlesztését?

	Sokat segített	Kicsit segített	Nem segített	Nem tudom
TV				
Számítógép				
Weboldalak olvasása				
Chat (pl. Facebook chat, MSN)				
Email				
Fórumok				
Videó hívások (pl.Skype)				
Közösségi oldalak (pl.Facebook)				
Filmek, Sorozatok (feliratos)				
Filmek, sorozatok (felirat nélküli)				
Virtuális világok				
Számítógépes játékok				
Zenék				
Egyéb, éspedig …………………				

6. A következők közül véleménye szerint <u>mi az oka</u>, hogy az IKT eszközök alkalmazása közben sor kerülhet bizonyos fokú nyelvelsajátításra? (Több válasz is lehetséges)

☐ alacsony stressz-szint, relaxáló tevékenység

☐ autentikus, valódi nyelvvel találkozom

☐ másokkal/anyanyelvi beszélőkkel való kommunikáció közben önkéntelenül is fejlődik a tudásom

☐ magabiztosabbnak érzem magam az angol nyelv használata közben, mint ha nyelvórán kellene teljesítenem, nem kell aggódnom a hibák miatt

☐ szórakoztató, számomra érdekes dolgokkal foglalkozhatok

☐ olykor erőfeszítéseket kell tennem az IKT-k használata közben, hogy megértsem, amit olvasok/hallok, (pl. utánanézzek a jelentésnek) és ezáltal megragad az új információ

☐ az ismétlődés, gyakoriság miatt (pl. szavaknál, kiejtésnél)

☐ kontextusba tudom helyezni amit látok/hallok/olvasok, így később könnyebben fel tudom idézni (pl. filmeknél az új szóhoz kapcsolódik a jelenet is amiben előfordult)

Nyelvi kompetenciák és az IKT nyelvelsajátítás

7. Véleménye szerint fejlődött-e a <u>szókincse</u> valamilyen IKT eszköz(ök) használatának köszönhetően?

☐ Igen, mégpedig a ……………………….. köszönhetően.

☐ Nem, mert…………………………………………………

8. Ha Ön többször is találkozott már egy szóval (olvasta, hallotta, etc.), újbóli találkozásnál általában mi a jellemző reakciója?

☐ Láttam már a szót, de nem tudom mit jelent.

☐ Felismerem, és azt hiszem, tudom mit jelent.

☐ Tudom a szó jelentését.

☐ Tudom a szó jelentését, és használni is tudom.

9. Általában azokat a szavakat jegyzem meg… (Több válasz is lehetséges)

☐ amelyekkel újra és újra találkozom

☐ amelyenek utánanézek szótárban

☐ amelyek feltétlenül szükségesek a megértéshez

☐ amelyek felkeltik a figyelmemet

☐ Egyéb, éspedig ……………………..

10. Véleménye szerint fejlődött-e a <u>hallás utáni szövegértése</u> valamilyen IKT eszköz(ök) használatának köszönhetően?

☐ Igen, mégpedig a ………………………….. köszönhetően.

☐ Nem, mert……………………………………………..

11. Véleménye szerint fejlődött-e <u>kiejtése</u> valamilyen IKT eszköz(ök) használatának köszönhetően?

☐ Igen, mégpedig a ………………………….. köszönhetően.

☐ Nem, mert ………………………………………………..

12. Véleménye szerint fejlődött-e az <u>olvasott szöveg értése</u> valamilyen IKT eszköz(ök) használatának köszönhetően?

☐ Igen, mégpedig a ………………………….. köszönhetően.

☐ Nem, mert ………………………………………………..

13. Az eddig említetteken kívül fejlődtek-e más nyelvi kompetenciái is? (Több válasz is lehetséges)

☐ beszédkészség

☐ nyelvtan

☐ helyesírás

☐ íráskészség

☐ interakciós készségek

☐ közvetítő készség (hallott és/vagy olvasott szöveg tartalmának lényegi közvetítése)

☐ jártasság a nyelvet használók kultúrájában

14. Ha a kérdőív témájával kapcsolatban bármilyen megjegyzése van, azt kérem írja le itt!

A kérdőív ezennel véget ért, köszönöm segítségét!