The new ecolinguistics: A vision for the future of language learning

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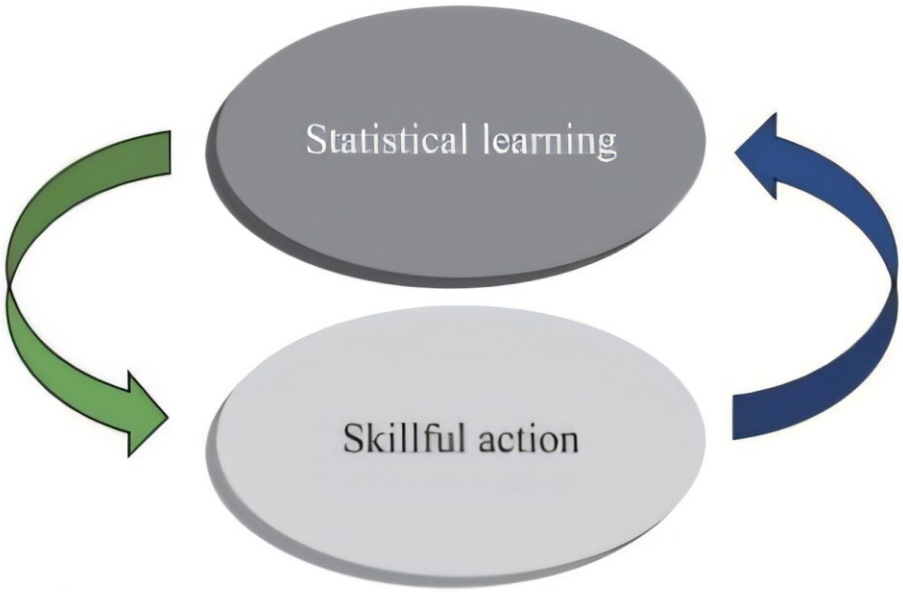

Figure 1 Multi-Scalar Language Learning Environment

Credit: Zheng, D., Cowley, S.J. & Nuesser, M

An article published in *Frontiers of Digital Education* advocates for a transformative approach to language learning by introducing a new ecolinguistics framework that emphasizes the dynamic interplay between language, technology, and embodied engagement. The work is titled "The New Ecolinguistics: Learning as Languaging with Digital Technologies."

This perspective departs from traditional models that focus on the acquisition of linguistic structures and instead foregrounds the development of skilled action and expertise through meaningful interactions with language and the surrounding environment.

At the heart of this framework is the concept of "languaging." This encompasses the multifaceted ways in which humans engage with language, including speaking, listening, reading, writing, and other forms of communication. Languaging is not a static process confined to the mind but a dynamic and embodied activity that shapes cognition, identity, and agency. It involves actively constructing meaning, interpreting and responding to the world, and participating in social interactions.

The authors draw on theories of distributed cognition and embodied cognition to support this perspective. These theories emphasize the interconnectedness of language, technology, and the physical and social environment. Language learning is not an isolated mental process but emerges through interactions with others and the surrounding context. Technology plays a crucial role in extending human capabilities, enhancing observation skills, and facilitating the development of expertise.

The article proposes a multi-scalar model for language learning that integrates statistical learning, skillful action, and observation within distributed cognitive systems. This model recognizes the interplay between macro and micro-level processes, emphasizing the importance of situated learning experiences and the role of context in shaping language acquisition.

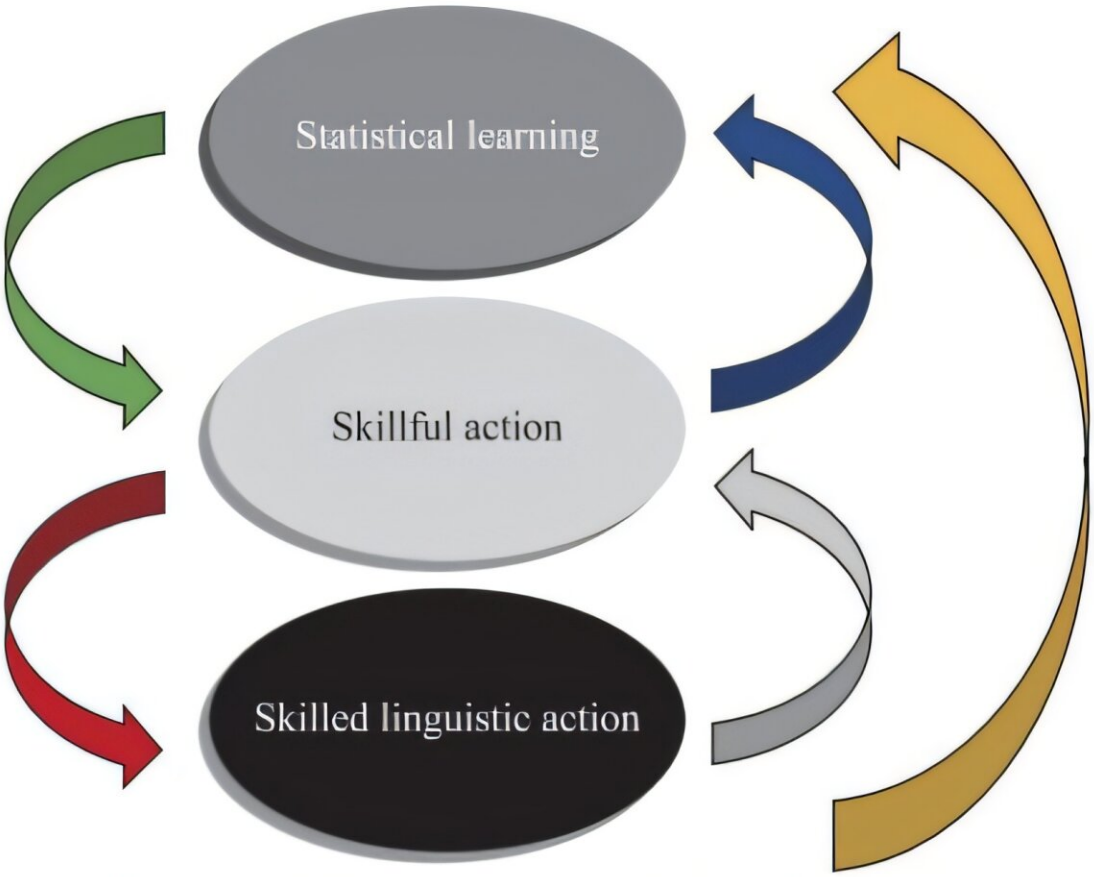

Figure 2 Multi-Scalar Distributed Language Learning Environment

Credit: Zheng, D., Cowley, S.J. & Nuesser, M

The authors advocate for the design of technology-rich environments that promote skilled linguistic action and foster meaningful engagement with language. These environments should go beyond mere exposure to linguistic input and instead provide opportunities for learners to actively participate in communicative activities, collaborate with others, and explore the affordability of technology.

By doing so, learners can develop not only linguistic skills but also

critical thinking, problem-solving, and other essential competencies for the 21st century.

The new ecolinguistics framework has significant implications for language education. It calls for a reevaluation of traditional pedagogical approaches and the development of innovative methods that leverage technology to create authentic and engaging learning experiences. It also emphasizes the importance of observing and reflecting on one's own language use and learning process, fostering a sense of agency and ownership in the learning journey.

In conclusion, the article presents a compelling vision for the future of language learning. By embracing the dynamic nature of languaging and the transformative potential of technology, educators can create environments that empower learners to become confident and effective communicators in an increasingly interconnected and complex world.

More information: Dongping Zheng et al, The New Ecolinguistics: Learning as Languaging with Digital Technologies, *Frontiers of Digital Education* (2024). DOI: 10.1007/s44366-024-0026-7

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