Title: Integrating the Principles of Universal Design for Learning in an Online Linguistics Course

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Abstract:

This paper describes the experience of integrating Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles in an online third-year linguistics course of 80 students in the summer of 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. The course had no prerequisites and attracted a heterogeneous student population from linguistics majors/minors to students completely new to linguistics. Furthermore, due to border closures, some international students were taking the course from their home countries located in different time zones. Faced with the challenge of catering to diverse student needs in a fairly high-enrollment course, we chose to enrich our course design with UDL strategies, which include multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation and multiple means of action and expression. UDL is a framework that highlights flexibility and choice and aims to appeal to the largest number of learners (La, et al., 2018, p. 3). Ralabate (2016) points out that instruction infused with UDL strategies "emphasizes interactivity, heterogeneous grouping, rich scaffolds and supports for learning, and independent learning" (p. 85).

This presentation, given by the course instructor and teaching assistant, looks at how UDL principles were applied to different course components, delivery methods and assessment. In our course, we incorporated UDL through a choice of real-time classes and video recordings of lectures, material presentation with a range of media (videos, audios, graphic images, etc.), group projects with a selection of topics and a variety of project sharing assignments, a combination of synchronous and asynchronous discussions (as a whole class and in groups, orally and in the chat, on the university LMS using both text and various visuals) as well as flexible assessment techniques. We found that learning technologies served as an additional asset to facilitate UDL incorporation as they provide students with more choices of formats and media.

UDL integration yielded positive results, accommodating diverse student needs and increasing student agency and inclusivity in this heterogeneous class. We believe that UDL, coupled with the use of learning technologies, is an efficient framework to support innovative developments in higher education.

Key words: online learning, UDL, learning technologies, inclusivity, student diversity

References

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