

## Digital stories: Overview

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### Abstract

*This article provides an overview of how digital stories (DSs)—storylines that integrate text, images, and sound—have been used in second-language (L2) contexts. The article first reviews the methodical and planned, albeit non-linear, steps required for successful implementation of DSs in the L2 classroom and then assesses the observed linguistic and rhetorical gains learners may experience in their language skills (speaking, listening, and writing), including their use of correct grammar, vocabulary, and writing conventions. This article also points out the shift from a traditional literacy concept to a new concept of multi-literacies, exploring the notions of new genres and the application of social-semiotic perspectives to understanding the development of DSs. The final section illustrates limitations of current DS research and concludes with a discussion of the future roles of DSs in CALL.*

KEYWORDS: DIGITAL STORIES; LINGUISTIC AND RHETORICAL GAINS; LITERACIES; GENRE; MULTIMODALITY

### 1. Introduction

Digital storytelling, which was first developed in the 1990s by the Center of Digital Storytelling (currently known as StoryCenter) in Berkeley, California, has been increasingly integrated into second language (L2) classrooms. Digital storytelling, at its core, “is the practice of using computer-based tools to tell stories” (University of Houston, 2015, para. 1). Digital stories (DSs) are storylines, two to five minutes in length, that require the complementary

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integration of text, images, and sound. Traditionally DSs were focused on personal stories (Lambert, 2012), but current educational uses also include historical documentaries or stories designed to inform or instruct viewers on particular concepts or practices (Robin, 2006) and, as Gregori-Signes suggests, sociopolitical themes (as cited in Gregori-Signes & Pennock-Speck, 2012). Regardless of its focus, a DS is a form of self-representation through media (Hull & Nelson, 2005), which generally engages learners in both traditional ways (e.g., research, writing, interviewing) and novel ways (e.g., graphics, animation, music) to convey a story, allowing for a more far-reaching definition of the telling of stories (Gregori-Signes, 2008). Different from traditional forms of knowledge distribution, which are commonly related to narrative, expository, or argumentative genres, DSs involve “narratives with ordinary people’s stories, digitalized and displayed on publicly available websites and made through cultural institutions in society” (Alcantud-Díaz, Ricart Vayá, & Gregori-Signes, 2014, p. 188). DSs engage “the whole range of personal stories being told in potentially public form using digital media resources” (Couldry, 2008 p. 374). Developed with user-friendly software, such as Photo Story 3, Windows Movie Maker, or other similar programs that are downloadable for free from easy-to-access websites, DSs create opportunities for second language (L2) learners to share their voices and views in open and interactive environments (Gregori-Signes, 2008; Ohler, 2008; Robin, 2008; Sadik, 2008), discuss cultural topics (Bataller Catalá, 2013; Brígido-Corachán, 2013), and develop language skills (Lee, 2014a; Pascual Lence, 2013). DSs help students to integrate academic writing knowledge and processes into the development of multimodal texts (Porto & Alonso Belmonte, 2014; Oskoz & Elola, 2014), which involves the merging of different modes such as text, visuals, and sound. Although DSs help learners develop the four skills (Ramírez Verdugo, 2013; Sevilla Pavón & Serra Cámara, 2013), because of their strong writing component and, therefore, their potential value for L2 writing development, DSs have been used in English as a Second Language (ESL), heritage-language learners, and foreign language classrooms.

Yet, despite the burgeoning number of studies on DSs, their implementation remains innovative, challenging, and underexplored in the L2 classroom. Hence, after reviewing the necessary elements for designing a successful DS task, this article presents an overview of the uses of DSs for pedagogical and research purposes. It then reviews current research that has examined the contributions of DSs on learners’ gains in listening and oral production, as well as more specific linguistic and rhetorical gains in grammar, vocabulary, and genre structure, among other aspects of language. It follows with a discussion of how DSs have contributed not only to the development of 21st-century digital literacies, but a new (or newer) genre in the L2 classroom that

requires the inclusion of non-traditional L2 classroom theoretical frameworks, such as social semiotics. The article concludes with suggestions for the future of DSs in L2 education, including the need for (1) research informed by second language acquisition (SLA), applied linguistics, or rhetorical theoretical frameworks; (2) better examination and assessment of L2 learners' language development; and (3) sound integration of L2 linguistic and writing knowledge with 21st-century literacies.

## 2. Digital stories

### 2.1 Design consideration

DSs are typically multimodal in nature, consisting of around 250–300 words. They are about two to five minutes in length and require tight control of the content, narrative structure, and organization. The language used must correspond to the target genre, and efficient use of storytelling software is required. Given that DSs are usually personal accounts, they tend to be conducted in a first person narrative, which provides a personal tone. In addition to comprising detailed descriptions, DSs are often accompanied by soundtracks to keep the audience's attention. Because the integration of all of these elements enhances the complexity of the task, the success of a DS rests on the task design, which, according to Lambert (2012), stems from implementation and consideration of the following seven elements:

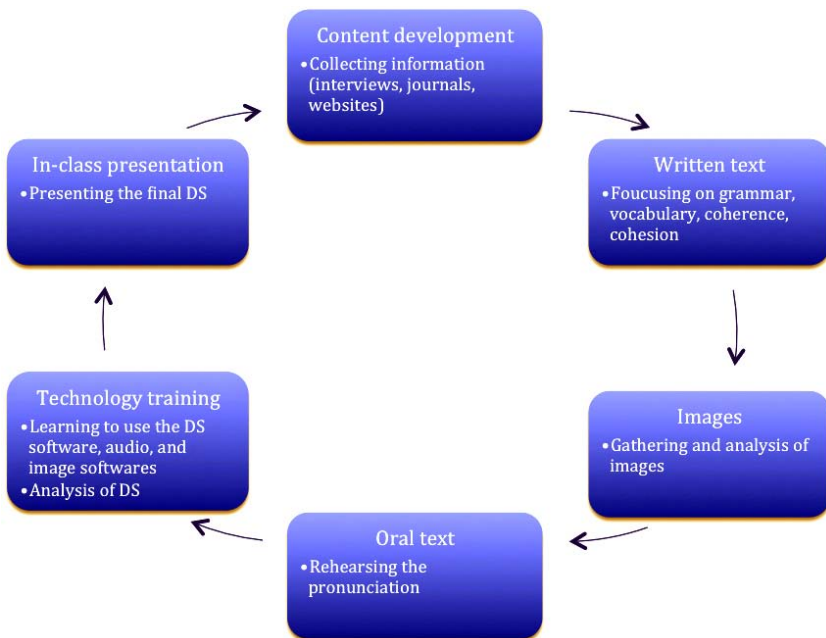
1. A personal point of view: the main point of the story, told from the perspective of the author.
2. A dramatic question to be answered: a key question that keeps the viewer's attention and will be answered by the end of the story.
3. Emotional content: serious issues that come alive in a personal and powerful way and connect the audience to the story.
4. Narrator's clarity of voice: a way of personalizing the story to help the audience understand the context.
5. Economy: use of just enough content to tell the story without overloading the viewer.
6. The power of the soundtrack: music or other sounds that support and embellish the story.
7. Pacing: the rhythm of the story and how slowly or quickly it progresses.

These elements provide a DS with structure and organization, as well as helping to bring in narrative and multimodal considerations that a DS needs to integrate in its crafting. Robin and Pierson (2005) also include in this list of elements: (1) the purpose of the story, (2) the quality of images and incorporation of video and other multimedia elements, and (3) the inclusion of good grammar and language use, which is especially relevant to L2 educators and

researchers. The development of a DS in an L2 classroom, therefore, involves combining traditional language skills with certain technological knowledge, which, in the case of learners who lack expertise, can be time consuming (Brigido-Corachán, 2013).

To avoid the frustration that the integration of DSs might bring to the classroom, many L2 DS studies implement a process-oriented approach to help learners develop their research, L2 writing, and digital literacy skills. Although they differ in their process approaches to some degree, implicitly or explicitly following a task-based approach, these studies break down the DS process into sequential stages that help learners develop their content, fine tune their writing and oral components, facilitate the integration of text, images, and sound, and polish their final DSs. In the first stage—development of the content necessary for the DS—Brigido-Corachán (2013) noted that learners' engagement in preliminary research using a wide range of sources (e.g., interviews, journals, websites) helped them develop their DS content. In a study by Oskoz and Elola (2014), learners worked on a series of argumentative and expository essays that gave them the background knowledge they needed for their DS scripts or narratives. In the second stage of the DS process, once the content is narrowed down, instructors can then turn their attention to emphasizing the accuracy of the learners' written language (Pascual Lence, 2013; Reyes Torres, 2013). Either by revising several drafts (Oskoz & Elola, 2014) or focusing on language accuracy in classroom sessions (Pascual Lence, 2013), learners not only gain focus on their grammar and vocabulary, but also on the structure and organization that would bring narrative cohesion and coherence to their texts (Pascual Lence, 2013). Third, given the importance of the visual component of DSs, instructors work on the quality and relevance of the selected images. Bataller-Catalá (2013) involved his students in a series of literary tours that helped them gather pictures and videos to include in their DS productions. Another aspect related to images was seen in Oskoz and Elola's (2014) study, wherein learners became aware of the power of implicit or explicit images and how their use could amplify the meaning of the written text to create compelling multimodal metaphors. The discussion of images has also been seen with music, as in the studies of Brigido-Corachán (2013) and Ricart, Montañés, Fernández, and Knörr de Santiago (2013), which address music- and image-copyright issues with their learners. If needed, in a fourth stage, instructors can focus on the actual recording and on the pronunciation of their scripts (Lee, 2014a, 2014b; Pascual Lence, 2013). In the fifth stage of the process, since learners do not always have the digital skills required to complete the assignments (Lee, 2014a), training on the use of DS software is often necessary to ensure the successful completion of the task (Ricart et al., 2013). Pascual-Lence (2013), Castañeda (2013), and Oskoz and Elola (2014),

for example, in addition to showing their learners examples of previous DSs before and throughout the project, established specific training sessions in the language lab, and Ricart et al. (2013) provided detailed training on the use of tools such as Microsoft Movie Maker, Audacity, or Liftmagic. Finally, presentation of learners' DSs to the class or an outside audience provides a sense of culmination and helps motivate the learners to polish their final DSs (Brigido-Corachán, 2013; Pascual Lence, 2013; Ricart et al., 2013; Sevilla Pavón & Serra Cámara, 2013). Except for the final presentation, this process is nonlinear because, as Castañeda (2013) notes, "the digital storytelling process is creative and cyclical" (p. 46), even though the above-mentioned steps do indeed move learners from the conceptualization to the completion of a DS.



**Figure 1:** Stages of DS development.

An interesting aspect of the creation of DSs is the potential for learners to work individually or collaboratively. The differences between studies that embrace a more collaborative as opposed to an individual approach are related to their end goals. Collaborative projects tend to be culture-based projects (Brigido-Corachán, 2013; Lee, 2014a, 2014b), whereas individual projects, although often retaining a cultural or social component (Lee, 2014a, 2014b), frequently involve a more personal story (Castañeda, 2013; Oskoz & Elola, 2014). In her culture-based project, for example, Brigido-Corachán (2013)

asked her learners to collaboratively develop both their research and digital skills, and Reyes Torres's (2013) learners worked in pairs to develop digital stories that would be included in their didactic units for primary-education children. In an English for specific purposes class, Ricart et al. (2013) asked their learners to develop collaboratively a DS featuring specific landmarks of the Valencia area as if they were promoting them for tourism purposes. One study by Oskoz and Elola (2014), in comparison, asked learners to develop their own personal narratives, based on a cultural and socially relevant argumentative or expository essay that they had completed during the semester. In another example, Castañeda's (2013) high school learners' DSs involved reflections of their high school experiences. The dichotomy between collaborative culture-based stories and individual, personal stories was bridged, however, in a study by Lee (2014a, 2014b), whose learners worked individually on weekly digital news stories related to current cultural topics of the Spanish-speaking world but also engaged in several interactions when responding to each other's DSs. Independent of whether learners engage in collaborative or individual endeavors, many DS projects involve story circles, forums composed of small groups of learners (Lambert, 2010). In story circles, learners read to their classmates and listen to their stories, providing and receiving suggestions for their narratives (Alameen, 2011), use of images, and integration of sound (Oskoz & Elola, 2014). The benefit of story circles is that they provide comfortable settings in which learners can share comments and suggestions without undermining each other's intentions (Castañeda, 2013), even before receiving instructor feedback.

Because of the integration of text, images, and sound, assessing DSs brings new challenges to the L2 classroom. As Pascual Lence (2013, *Methodology*, para. 9) notes, assessment is "one of the most important and complex elements in the whole process" (n. p.). Not only is the language evaluated, but also different modes are integrated in a technologically savvy manner. Assessment can concentrate on the process, emphasizing such elements as participation in story circles to discuss different drafts (Serrano Pérez, 2013; Vinogradova, Linville, & Bickel, 2011), or on the final product (Oskoz & Elola, 2013; Vinogradova et al., 2011). As the University of Houston's Educational Uses of Digital Storytelling website (2015) points out, rubrics created to assess a learner's performance can include categories related to the quality of the story (Ohler, 2008), the extent to which the images create a specific atmosphere or tone (Teehan, 2007–2008), and the audio quality (Barrett, 2006). Of course, L2 accuracy, pronunciation, and vocabulary are also of concern in the L2 classroom (Oskoz & Elola, 2013). Assessing a DS in an L2 setting, therefore, while it may focus on visual, audio, and oral modes, must still maintain a focus on the language production in the oral and written forms of communication, as

they have traditionally been assessed in the L2 classroom. This reminds us that, although the appeal of DSs relies in many cases on their visual and the audio modes, the greatest success of a DS requires a well-designed plan, as does the development of any successful task in the L2 classroom.

## 2.2 Why are DSs used in the L2 classroom?

Without a doubt, the visual and audio components of the DS have an obvious pull, especially to a younger generation of learners. The “deep language acquisition and meaningful practice” (Rance-Roney, 2008, p. 29) ascribed to this genre, though, appeals to educators and learners alike. In fact, as the edited volumes of Gregori-Signes and Alcantud-Díaz (2013) and Alcantud-Díaz and Gregori-Signes (2013) suggest, most of the research on L2 DS has focused on its pedagogical implementations, from elementary school to university levels. These descriptive and often practical case studies, focusing on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher education (Brigido-Corachán, 2013; Reyes Torres, 2013) and on L2 learners’ linguistic development or motivational involvement (Lee, 2014a, 2014b; Pascual Lence, 2013; Sevilla Pavón & Serra Cámara, 2013), have addressed hands-on and educational goals. For example, Reyes Torres (2013) asked his future EFL teachers to create didactic units that connected the use of children’s literature and digital storytelling. Ricart et al. (2013) asked their English for Tourism learners to create DSs of tourist landmarks to promote the area where they lived. Serrano-Pérez’s (2013) learners completed DSs that narrated the invented story of a young adult, one whose human rights had been violated, as a means to develop L2 learners’ writing skills. Either when focusing on language-teacher education or language learners, DSs have been considered alternative forms of knowledge that develop not only learners’ linguistic but also their digital competences.

## 2.3 Linguistic and rhetorical gains

Instructors acknowledge the benefits of DSs on L2 development both at the linguistic and skill levels. Because of the oral nature of DSs, learners are able to improve their pronunciation of specific linguistic features (Lee, 2014a; Pascual Lence, 2013) as well as their overall oral skills (Castañeda, 2013; Lee, 2014b; Sevilla Pavón & Serra Cámara, 2013). In terms of oral production, when preparing her learners to complete their recordings, Pascual Lence (2013) put a strong emphasis on pronunciation, encouraging her learners to say out loud any words that were difficult to pronounce or often mispronounced because of mother-tongue interference, such as past-simple endings, difficult suffixes, vowel sounds, or consonant sounds. Lee (2014b) found that thanks to their weekly digital news projects, her learners improved their pronunciation of specific linguistic features, such as the unaspirated Spanish *p* or the silent *h*.



The ability to conduct multiple recordings, either because of the frequency of the task or the opportunity to re-record a DS until satisfied, allowed learners to work on and enhance their pronunciation skills. Verdugo and Alonso Belmonte (2007), who compared listening comprehension in EFL primary-school children in experimental and control groups, also found that after listening to weekly digital stories for several months, learners in the experimental group improved their listening comprehension more than those in the control group.

As Robin (2007) suggests, the processes of selecting a meaningful theme and writing the story are two crucial elements in every digital storytelling process. In the development phase, learners write creatively, organize thoughts in coherent ways, and construct their own narratives (Gakhar & Thompson, 2007; Robin, 2006). Yet, mastering the DS genre brings additional challenges. Learners who are familiar with traditional forms of academic writing (e.g., argumentative and expository essays) that require assembling facts in an objective manner, might take several drafts to latch onto the more personal nature of the DS (Nelson, 2006; Oskoz & Elola, 2014). Additionally, the oral storytelling nature of the script results in the inclusion of stylistic devices better suited to narration (Gregori-Signes, 2008; Oskoz & Elola, 2014), linking oral and written proficiencies (Lotherington, 2006). Yet Buehler (n.d.) points out that “unlike [in] traditional oral or written stories, images, sound, and music [are] used [in DSs] to show a part of the context, create setting, give story information, and provide emotional meaning not provided by words” (para. 5). As such, Oskoz and Elola (2014) note the striking linguistic change that takes place when learners move from argumentative or expository essays to the DS script, substituting their use of lexical connectors with pauses, repetition, and voice inflections as transition devices.

The DS genre also appears to encourage learners to pay attention to grammatical rules and other linguistic issues (Reyes Torres, Pich Ponce, & García Pastor, 2012; Lee, 2014b), gaining as good of an understanding of grammatical aspects (Lee, 2014a) as they do with academic essays (Oskoz & Elola, 2014). In Reyes Torres et al.’s (2012) study, the awareness of a wider audience motivated learners to use a wider range of tenses (e.g., preterit and imperfect) than they had in their previous essays. The combination of children’s literature with DSs also motivated learners to focus on selecting the necessary and appropriate grammatical structures needed for their DSs (Reyes Torres, 2013). In terms of vocabulary use, given the often personal nature of the DS, learners tend to tailor the vocabulary they use, moving from a logical, concrete, informative, and academic lexicon, distinctive of argumentative and expository essays, to more emotive vocabulary in their attempts to move and influence their audiences (Oskoz & Elola, 2014). In non-personal DSs that elaborate on cultural,



historical, or specific disciplines, such as aerospace engineering, learners also said that working on their DSs allowed them to develop technical vocabulary (Sevilla Pavón & Serra Cámara, 2013). Learners' reflective conclusions suggested that the inclusion of the DS genre in the FL classroom could be a valuable pedagogical practice for content development (Oskoz & Elola, 2014) as well as for oral skills improvement (Sevilla Pavón & Serra Cámara, 2013).

### 3. Integrating new notions of literacies and genres

The development of new digital literacies is at the heart of many current DS studies. Traditionally, literacy implied “the mastery over predetermined, increasingly federally mandated content, reading and writing traditional school-based genres of text (i.e., the five-paragraph essay, the term paper), ritualized performance on decomposed tasks, [and] participation in an activity cleaved from other social processes and institutions” (Squire, 2008, p. 662). Literacies in the 21st century and social uses of digital communications are very different from those of a decade ago (Lotherington, Neville-Verardi, & Ronda, 2009, p. 16), given that these new literacies reflect changes in technology and new “ways of doing things, ways of being, [and] ways of viewing the world” (Coiro, Lankshear, Knobel, & Leu, 2008, p. 7). This view of literacies not only seizes upon the newness of digital media, but also the effects they bear on our social practices (Lotherington et al., 2009, p. 17). Today, therefore, literacy has an expanded definition that includes global literacy (the capacity to read, interpret, respond, and contextualize messages from a global perspective), information literacy (the ability to think critically about information), technology literacy (the ability to use technology to access, manage, integrate, evaluate, create, and communicate information), visual literacy (the ability to interpret, negotiate, and take meaning from information presented in the form of an image), and digital literacy (the ability to communicate with an ever-expanding community to discuss issues, gather information, and seek help) (Burniske, 2000; Gilster, 1997; Smolin & Lawless, 2003). As seen in the previous studies, the literacies involved in the creation of a DS entail the understanding and production of visual images (Bataller-Catalá, 2013; Brígido-Corachán, 2013; Oskoz & Elola, 2014; Ricart et al., 2013); the selection, evaluation, and synthesis of information (Brígido-Corachán, 2013); the use of technology to improve learning, productivity, and performance (Castañeda, 2013); and communication in an ever-expanding community (Brígido-Corachán, 2013), representing the diversity of literacies that need to be mastered in the 21st century.

This embedded multiliteracy approach to the DS process in the FL classroom allows learners not only to learn to succeed within an increasingly globalized society by making connections with other cultures through language,

but also to obtain competence in expressing their thoughts with new technologies, thus emphasizing the existence of communities of learning that occur outside the classroom walls (Castañeda, 2013). In line with this view, DS mirrors the multigenre paper and helps learners move from traditional structures to multiple modes of expression that result from research, experience, and imagination (Brigido-Corachán, 2013; Romano, 2000). It is for this reason that envisioning digital storytelling as a new genre is unquestionable. Traditional understandings of genre as the grouping of texts according to how writers use language to reply to frequent situations (Swales, 2004) have expanded in the 21st century. Genres are recurrent configurations of meaning that enact the social practices of a given culture (Martin & Rose, 2008). Yet, as Gebhard, Shin, and Seger (2011) point out, they vary not only according to how the story is conveyed to a larger community, but also according to the tool being used, whether it is a blog, Facebook, or, in this case, DS software. The use of digital storytelling to promote multimodal discourse, combining text, images, and sound, has been widely accepted (Erstad & Silseth, 2008; Hull & Nelson, 2005; Nilsson, 2010), and current research agrees that, when developing DSs in the L2 classroom, learners need to understand (a) how the integrated design elements of multimodal texts communicate meaning beyond the simple sum of their parts—that is, the synesthetic interrelationship between the diverse modes (Porto & Alonso Belmonte, 2014; Elo & Oskoz, 2015; Yang, 2012)—and (b) how to integrate nonlinguistic modes effectively to complement the central message without being used as supplementary resources (Shin & Cimasko, 2008) or as compensation for learners' own linguistic deficiencies (McGinnis, Goodstein-Stolzenberg, & Saliani, 2007).

Yang's (2012) and Nelson's (2006) studies have more closely examined the relationship between text, images, and sound. Following a social-semiotic framework, which focuses on the manner in which the sign-maker manages to express different meanings by choosing different modes (Kress, 2003, 2009), Yang and Nelson examined their L2 learners' interactions with the processes of transformation (the reordering and reposition of semiotic resources within a mode) and transduction (the reorganization of semiotic resources across modes). According to Kress (2003, 2009), both transformation and transduction are key to designing a multimodal text. In a DS, for instance, transformation is evident in the process of restructuring a narrative story into a DS script, or restructuring the syntax or structural complexity of sentences with the objective of fitting the same meaning into script form. Transduction, on other hand, involves the reorganization of semiotic resources across modes, altering the written narration into spoken language and incorporating images, music, and sound.

Through a process of transformation, Yang's learners presented their DSs' emotional stances using either a specific linguistic mode, such as rising and falling tones, pauses, stresses, and pitches in the script to prepare it for recording later on, or using a specific nonlinguistic mode, such as images with different colors and lines to illustrate a character's feelings. Through the process of transduction, learners combined the speech and written modes or the visual and written modes to demonstrate their characters' struggles. Moreover, Yang found that learners' arrangement of multimodal materials was not conducted at random but was determined by their intended message. Yet, neither transformation nor transduction is easy to achieve in the L2 classroom, and learners might feel dissatisfied with their ability to reorder and reposition semiotic resources within a mode (Nelson, 2006). In one study by Nelson (2006), a learner who had been trained in the stylistic and formal standards of academic writing expressed dissatisfaction with her inability to produce an essay that behaved like a movie, highlighting her difficulty in understanding how semiotic resources might be altered to convey specific meanings. The difficulty of creating a successful synesthetic semiosis among the different elements is also heightened by the brevity of the DS, which impacts writers' decisions about the inclusion and function of all images, sounds, and text. The integration of DS and other tools in the L2 classroom, therefore, is a clear sign that learners ought to be encouraged to view genres as flexible and evolving L2 texts that are socially situated and culturally rooted with the intent to illustrate "the beliefs, values, and ideologies of particular communities and cultures" (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010, p. 195).

#### 4. The Future of DS in CALL

The plethora of studies on DSs illustrates their potential in the L2 classroom, though their incorporation is still largely exploratory. Future L2 DS research will need to (a) be informed by SLA, applied linguistic frameworks, or rhetorical perspectives and move towards other fields, such as social semiotics; (b) focus on linguistic skills conventions; and (c) further explore the notion of multimodalities and multiliteracies in the L2 classroom.

So far, most of the research on DS has not been framed by clear SLA, applied linguistics, or rhetorical perspectives. Except for a few studies, such as ones by Lee (2014b) and Oskoz and Elola (2014), who followed sociocultural approaches or Activity Theory, many studies have inferred SLA frameworks but have not totally examined these frameworks or clearly explained their connection. Exceptions to this are studies such as Lee's (2014b) on digital news stories which have followed a social constructivist paradigm of language learning, or Oskoz and Elola's (2014) study, which was grounded in an Activity Theory framework, discovered how learners' interactions with tools

and artifacts mediated their evolving perceptions of the object (DS), and how learners reoriented their linguistic repertoire from academic texts to a DS product. Even though, to differing degrees, these studies explained their data or results within those frameworks, we need to move beyond learners' perceptions and tap into other sources that more accurately inform how DSs can be beneficial to L2 development. In addition, taking into account that a merely linguistic approach is not able to teach learners about other modes of making meaning, researchers need to rely on social semiotic approaches to obtain a portrait of the full potential of the DS. Therefore, continuing Yang's (2012) and Nelson's (2006) work, DS research should explore DSs within a social synesthetic semiosis, particularly with regard to the transformation and transduction processes.

Second, although most L2 studies acknowledge the potential for DSs to help learners develop their linguistic skills (e.g., Lee, 2014a, 2014b; Reyes Torres et al., 2012), to date these studies have only provided glimpses of the benefits of DS. To fully examine and assess learners' language development, the field needs methodologically sound studies that provide strong quantitative and qualitative data (see Verdugo & Alonso Belmonte, 2007, for an exception). Only by obtaining measureable data will we grasp the full potential that digital storytelling brings to the L2 classroom.

Finally, to truly serve L2 learners in the 21st century, researchers need to continue to address the notion of multiliteracies and multimodal texts that represent the world we inhabit. Merging L2 educational objectives with current extended views of literacy pushes the L2 profession to integrate L2 learners' required literacy skills in the L2 classroom. When well integrated into the L2 curriculum, the DS has the potential to combine the development of L2 linguistic and writing knowledge with 21st-century literacies, a central goal in modern L2 curricula (Haffner & Miller, 2011). Keeping to process-oriented or task-based approaches when working with digital storytelling might ease learners into producing multimodal artifacts that resemble sophisticated media products with which they are becoming increasingly familiar.

To conclude, the incipient and burgeoning research on digital storytelling points to the benefits of its integration in the L2 classroom. Digital storytelling, as a representation of newer genres that include text, images, and sound, has the potential to become an accessible platform for L2 and multiliteracy development. It not only expands teaching practices, but encourages further examination of theoretical frameworks that better inform us about the characteristics of not only this, but also new genres to come. Keeping L2 learners and their needs in mind, a sound research agenda that responds to the linguistic and non-linguistic characteristics of 21st-century genres is required.

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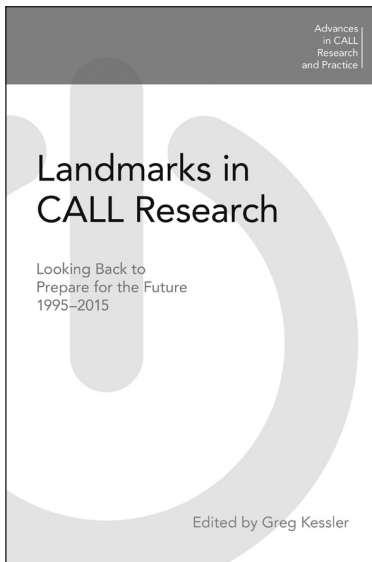
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