Shifting cognitive processes while composing in an electronic environment: A study of L2 graduate writing

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Date: 4 January 2012 (Wednesday)
Time: 12:30 pm - 2:00 pm
Venue: B4-1/F-37

Communication via visual symbols has undergone a myriad of transitions beginning with the discovery of symbolism by our ancient ancestors. The present study traces these transitions from the first symbolic gestures through to the cave art of the Cro-Magnon and onto the development of written characters which has resulted in our ability to communicate with the modern written word. The current shift from a pen-and-paper environment to a digital one in which multiple electronic tools and resources assist the writer in both generating ideas and translating them into words and sentences may represent yet another significant transition. Such a shift has implications for the cognitive resources allotted to the various behaviors taken by student authors as they set fingers to keyboards. This presentation explores the composing behaviors of 30 L2 graduate students who responded to a questionnaire inquiring about the extent of their use of electronic tools and resources as they wrote academic papers for their courses. Findings revealed that the students were heavy users of digital media and software during their composing processes and that such usage may be having an impact on the cognitive resources they employed as they wrote. Emerging from this understanding of how students compose in an electronic environment is a clearer picture about a variety of areas including how to best teach students to use the tools and resources and how to avoid plagiarism.

Paul is interested in how electronic media is impacting the idea-generation and composing processes of L2 writers.

All are welcome