## Disruptive technologies and the language classroom: a complex systems theory approach

**Regine Hampel, The Open University UK**

**Abstract**

This presentation uses a complex systems theory approach alongside sociocultural understandings of learning and the theory of multimodal communication to explore the potential of new technologies to transform education (Säljö 1999; Wertsch 2002), particularly in the context of language learning and teaching.

Although technology is embedded in students’ lives today, there is an assumption by many teachers and researchers that its use is inconsequential, an assumption that has been critiqued (e.g. Levy 2000; Hampel 2003; Thorne 2003) but that persists. So how can we ensure that educators understand how these new digital technologies are impacting on communication and meaning-making and align our language learning and teaching practices so they realize the potential that the online media offer and encourage a new learning ecology? To attempt an answer to this question, I will be using complex systems theory (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008) as a useful heuristic for framing my argument, conceptualizing the language classroom (in the widest sense) as an ecosystem consisting of different interacting parts and thus allowing for a focus on the changes that language education has undergone over the past decades as a result of the introduction of new technologies.

Focusing on communication modes, interaction patterns, and the positioning of the language learner in relation to the world I provide evidence for the disruptive effect of the new media on traditional language learning approaches and settings and for a resulting phase shift that is reshaping language education today. I highlight the implications of this phase shift for language teachers, for institutions and policy makers, and for research.