



## **Chatting - An Effective Tool to Improve Second Language Learning**

**Nishant B. Pandya, Ph.D. (Pursuing))**

Assistant Professor of English, Smt. K.B.Parekh College of Computer Science.

Maharaja Krishnakumarsinhji Bhavnagar University. Gujarat, India.

### **Abstract**

*Technology contributes to the growth of language. The internet has created more and more opportunities to study English using a wide variety of the internet resources. Especially for the student whose first language is not English, these resources are important. They provide him with the opportunities for using English. One potentially useful internet activity for the language student is chatting. Some sites on the internet are specifically intended for chatting. Chatting gives an opportunity to the learner to practice the new structures with the goal of testing sociolinguistic appropriateness. Chatting provides an opportunity to observe the interactions of native speakers around him. When language learners acquire new lexical items and grammatical forms, it is vital that they examine with their language helpers (native speakers they chat with) the kinds of changes which would be made to the new language data as a result of changes in the context.*

*This research paper aims at exploring how chatting helps the learner of language to understand the role of culture in language. It also lessens the fear in learning the second language. Chat activities promote active involvement. Chat activities promote learner autonomy due mainly to the fact that the teacher's role is minimized. The learner has the opportunity to observe and evaluate language used by native speakers. It provides the learner an opportunity to participate in a discussion. Research suggests that there are a variety of benefits for learners engaging in synchronous CMC activities*

*including: high student participation; increased learner control; motivation; and development of interaction -competence.*

Learning a second language involves much more than learning a linguistic code. With the development of language skills, learners get acquainted with the complexity and richness of the second language as it is rooted in cultural and discourse practices of a community. Language teachers have recognized that the socio-cultural dimensions of language use are essential for successful communication. Attempts at integrating objectives and strategies to support L2 learners in the development of these aspects have been made. L2 teachers are aware of the fact that it is difficult to teach these aspects in a classroom and that the best way is to provide learners with authentic contact with the speakers and the culture of the language to be learnt. *Researchers have drawn the conclusion that contact with the speakers of the other language and its culture "is essential if the goals of such learning are sociocultural as well as linguistic" (MacFarlane & Wesche, 1995, p.255). Even more recently, contact with the target culture has been recognized as important in second language acquisition (SLA) with the shift in foreign language education from a focus on communicative competence to a shift on intercultural competence (Thorne, 2005). For example, according to the Standards for Foreign Language Education in the 21st Century (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1999), "it is critical to provide opportunities for many different kinds of interactions with members of other cultures, so that students draw informed conclusions and develop sensitivity to the perspectives, practices, and products of others" (p.49). Foreign language specialists have come to agree that to be able to interact appropriately with members of the target culture, learners have to also learn the rules of language use and the cultural context within which the language is spoken (Ballou, 2002). But this best way can be difficult for those who do not have easy access to native speakers in their surroundings.*

With the start of the 21st century and with the development of global communication networks and their integration in the language classroom, opportunities for contact with other cultures have become easier. As the Internet grows, there are more and more opportunities to students to study English using a wide variety of types of Internet resources. (Kitao and Kitao [1995].) Especially for English

language students in countries where English is a foreign language - that is, where English is not used in everyday life - these resources are important, because they greatly increase the opportunities for using English.

*The use of Internet technologies to encourage dialogue between distributed individuals and partner classes proposes a compelling shift in L2 and foreign language education, one that ideally moves learners from simulated classroom-based contexts toward actual interaction with expert speakers of the language they are studying.*

(Thorne, 2005, p. 3).

One potentially useful Internet activity for language students is "chatting," that is, communicating in real time by typing a message into a computer, so that it can immediately be read on other computer screens, even computer screens in another part of the world. Some sites on the Internet are specifically intended for nonnative English speakers, and they provide opportunities for non-native English speakers to communicate in English.

Today, language educators all around the world are organizing online exchanges because they recognize their potential in bringing the target language and culture together to L2 learners. As a consequence, computer-mediated communication (CMC), which refers to communication that takes place between human beings via the use of online tools such as e-mail, discussion forums, electronic bulletin boards or text and oral chat, has also received significant attention for its potential in facilitating language skills development. Through CMC, language learners have the opportunity to communicate in meaningful ways and to be exposed to contextualized authentic language, two factors described as essential for the development of the communicative competence of learners (Luke, 2006).

### **Interaction**

While Krashen (1981) asserted that comprehensible input was both a necessary and a sufficient condition for the acquisition of language, Ellis (1985, p. 161) said input and interaction influence second language acquisition. He listed eight characteristics of input and interaction which seem to facilitate rapid acquisition. They are:

- (1) A high quantity of input directed at the learner.
- (2) The learner's perceived need to communicate in the L2.
- (3) Independent control of the propositional content by the learner (e.g., control over the topic choice).

- (4) Adherence to the "here and now" principle, at least initially.
- (5) The performance of a range of speech acts by both the native speaker/teacher and the learner (i.e., the learner needs the opportunity to listen to and to produce language used to perform different language functions).
- (6) Exposure to a high quantity of directives.
- (7) Exposure to a high quantity of "extending" utterances, (e.g., requests for clarification and confirmation, paraphrases and expansions).
- (8) Opportunities for uninhibited "practice" (which may provide opportunities to experiment using "new" forms).

Of these factors in language acquisition, most are either facilitated by interaction or require interaction, as opposed to input alone. Interaction can be used to elicit input, increasing its quantity. Making friends through interaction is one perceived need for communication. Interaction helps the learner control the propositional content. Interaction can involve a range of speech acts, a high quantity of directives and extending utterances, and opportunities to practice.

### **Using Interaction to Learn Language**

Klein (1986, pp. 146-167) says that the more the learner interacts, the more language he/she has an opportunity to learn, and the more language he/she learns, the more input he/she can solicit in order to learn more language. At first, the learner uses whatever non-verbal means and small amount of verbal language he/she already knows. This elicits language, which the learner can use to confirm or disconfirm his/her hypotheses about the language. *The learner can use the newly acquired language to elicit more language and confirm or disconfirm new hypotheses.*

### **A Challenge**

"...the challenge for teachers often lies in moving students away from a mindset in which English is something learned through rote memorization for entrance exams, towards a view of English as a living language they can use to communicate with and learn about the world around them."

Muehleisen (1998: 69)

Most of the learners produce language to be evaluated by the teacher, not for expressing their ideas. Even non-native English speakers who are in an English-

speaking country might feel that they do not have enough opportunity to use English. They might prefer chatting on the Internet because it is less stressful than using English face-to-face.

### **A Solution**

For language students who wish to be able to communicate in English, the Internet provides an important opportunity to learn English. As Fritzler (1995) pointed out, *In general, to use the Internet is to communicate* (Anderson, 1995).

People all over the world get connected through the Internet to share information, experiences, and opinions. Since it is a natural resource (i.e. not a text-book created for the purpose of language teaching through **created** dialogues), it presents real language. While using the Internet, learners have to read and write in English. And it helps them **acquire** the language.

There are several resources for language learning on the Internet. However, synchronous communication in a chat room offers opportunities for interaction. This interaction, even though it is written and not face-to-face, can be more authentic than the type of face-to-face interaction that many language learners where English is a foreign language have access to. Davies, Shield, and Weininger (1998, pp. 17-18) asserted that

*"There is a real possibility to interact "naturally" with native speakers--communication is real, despite the virtual interlocutors, whereas the target language interaction in the classroom is quite often unreal, despite the real interlocutors.....: language is no longer a goal but an instrument to pursue other (real) goals; integrating into the MOO's COMMUnity is socializing in the target language, one of the highest ranking activities in foreign language learning."*

In chatting, basic textbook activities, like introducing oneself or talking about the weather become authentic, because learners constantly meet new participants. In other words, MOO users have easy access to authentic communication partners and *actually want to know the answer to a simple question rather than asking it as a formulaic classroom activity...*

Though MOOs involve reading and writing, *their structure is like a conversation and therefore should be made use of for conversational practice.* By chatting, learners become acquainted with the nature of conversational language and at the same time it

provides motivation to those learners who, due to their shyness, do not perform well in the activities like role-play. A look at some of the characteristics of spoken language given by Ronald Carter and Michael McCarthy in Cambridge Grammar of English: A Comprehensive Guide will make it clear.

1. Sentences in the written sense are difficult to identify in spoken language. What seems more important is the production of adequate communicative units and the taking of turns rather than the transition from one sentence to another.
2. Speech is marked by small units of communication often consisting of just single words or phrases, rather than complete sentences. Like, Age? Where? Why? Who? ASL Plz? Wanna chat? What u do? Job? Where work?
3. Speakers' turns, unlike written sentences, are not neat and tidy. The speakers regularly interrupt each other, or speak at the same time, intervene in another's contribution or overlap in their speaking turns. And any transcript of a real conversation is much less tidy than the layout of a dialogue in a drama script or in a course book for learning a language.
4. Listeners are not just passive recipients. There are back-channel items (e.g. *Mm, Yeah, Hnunmm, Yah00000, grr888*), by which listeners give feedback, and other (normally supportive) responses (e.g. *Right*).
5. There are abandoned or incomplete structures (e.g. *It was a bit enn ... A bit.*). 'Incomplete' structures rarely cause any problem of understanding, and can be collaboratively completed by others.
6. Ellipsis is common (e.g. [it] *All looks great.*). Ellipsis occurs when words usually considered 'obligatory' (e.g. a subject for a verb in a declarative clause) are not needed because they can be understood from the immediate context or from the knowledge which is shared between speakers. For speakers and listeners, there are no words 'missing', and what we call ellipsis is simply an economical and sufficient form of communication...

## **Conclusion**

It must be noted that by chatting learners can stay in touch with the language in use. Interaction is an important part of key to developing proficiency in a second language, and chatting on the Internet is one way for students to find opportunities for

interaction in the target language. Language teachers can use chat in the classroom or can introduce students to chat so that they can go on the Internet and chat individually.

At last we would like quote David Crystal's lines. And with that we shall be off the paper.

*"Technology always changes a language... I mean when the internet came into being, it changed the language. But nobody, I think, ever expected the language to be so diversified as a result of the internet... The actual language itself hasn't changed that much. It isn't the case as you look through different technological manifestations of English; you see new grammar, for instance. You don't get new patterns of grammar emerging... on the whole you look at a screen and what you see on the screen is the same kind of English language that we saw before the internet came into existence. Except now there are these new styles, to exploit. The language has become expressively richer as a result of the internet."*

*Learning English, Learning About English Global English By David Crystal Another Innovative Feature Of Macmillan's New Course Global*

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