

USING COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION CHAT TO PROMOTE EFL STUDENTS' LANGUAGE COMMUNICATION AT BANGKOK UNIVERSITY

การใช้การพูดคุยแบบสื่อสารผ่านคอมพิวเตอร์เพื่อส่งเสริมการสื่อสารด้านภาษา
ของนักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยกรุงเทพที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ

Suttlak Meeampol¹

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to examine the synchronous (together at the same time) discussion chat supported by a network system known as Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC). Twenty-eight students who were studying English as a foreign language at Bangkok University read an article and discussed assigned questions through a software system called "Webex Meetings. Their chat transcripts were examined by means of content analysis. Unique characteristics of language and interaction in discussion chat were found to be similar to those in face-to-face communication. The questionnaire results revealed students' positive perceptions about this mode of communication.

Keywords : Synchronous Discussion Chat, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), Language and Interaction in Discussion Chat

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาการพูดคุยเชิงอภิปรายแบบออนไลน์พร้อมกันผ่านเครือข่ายการสื่อสารผ่านคอมพิวเตอร์ กลุ่มตัวอย่างคือนักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยกรุงเทพ จำนวน 28 คน ที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ อ่านบทความภาษาอังกฤษและพูดคุยเชิงอภิปรายแบบออนไลน์ด้วยโปรแกรมคอมพิวเตอร์ Webex Meetings นำข้อความการพูดคุยเชิงอภิปรายแบบออนไลน์มาวิเคราะห์เชิงเนื้อหา พบว่ามีรูปแบบการใช้ภาษาเฉพาะตัวและมีปฏิสัมพันธ์กันคล้ายกับการสื่อสารแบบตัวต่อตัว ผลการวิเคราะห์แบบสอบถามแสดงให้เห็นทัศนคติเชิงบวกของกลุ่มตัวอย่างต่อการสื่อสารในรูปแบบออนไลน์

คำสำคัญ : การพูดคุยเชิงอภิปรายแบบออนไลน์พร้อมกัน เครือข่ายการสื่อสารผ่านคอมพิวเตอร์ ภาษาและปฏิสัมพันธ์กันในการพูดคุยเชิงอภิปรายแบบออนไลน์

¹ ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ ดร. สถาบันภาษา มหาวิทยาลัยกรุงเทพ (วิทยาเขตรังสิต) E-mail: sutthila.m@bu.ac.th

Introduction

Communication has been recognized as significant to students learning a foreign/second language. In communicating with each other, students use the target language to express or exchange their thoughts, feelings, or information in order to accomplish the communicative purposes. With the advancements of computer technology in recent years, students also have the opportunity to communicate with each other with the network application known as Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC). CMC refers to “human communication via computers and includes many different forms of synchronous or asynchronous interaction that humans have with each other using computers as tools to exchange text, images, audio and video” (Mollering and Ritter, 2008: 375). Synchronous (together at the same time) applications are such as audio-conferencing, videoconferencing, white boards, and electronic discussion chat, while the asynchronous (together at a different time) applications are such as e-mail, blog, and computer bulletin board.

In the present study, synchronous text-based discussion chat was used to promote language communication among a group of students. “Chat,” as relevant to digital technology, is defined as the act of students’ “participating with others in a real-time conversation in a chat room by typing one’s contributions to the

topics under discussion and reading others’ typed contributions on the screen” (Chat, 2013). The research setting was a language virtual classroom created by the software system called “Webex Meetings” which also provides a chat application. To create the virtual classroom, online meetings are usually pre-scheduled by the host teacher. Consequently, an email invitation is automatically sent to a target group of students. At the study time as previously scheduled, each student logs on to the Webex program to participate in the virtual classroom. The classroom setting then comprises the host teacher and the participating students. Each person may be sitting in front of a computer either at home or anywhere with the internet access. Everyone can hear each other from their headphone sets during the learning session.

Students must be trained how to study in this virtual classroom. The training includes how to use the chat application which is basically about typing words in the chat box and clicking the “send” button to send the messages. Based on the text-based chat system, chat participants exchange messages in real time and the messages appear on the screen almost immediately after the typing, simultaneously creating many threads of discussion (Ingram and Hathorn, 2004: 219). The screen of a chat setting is presented in a figure below.

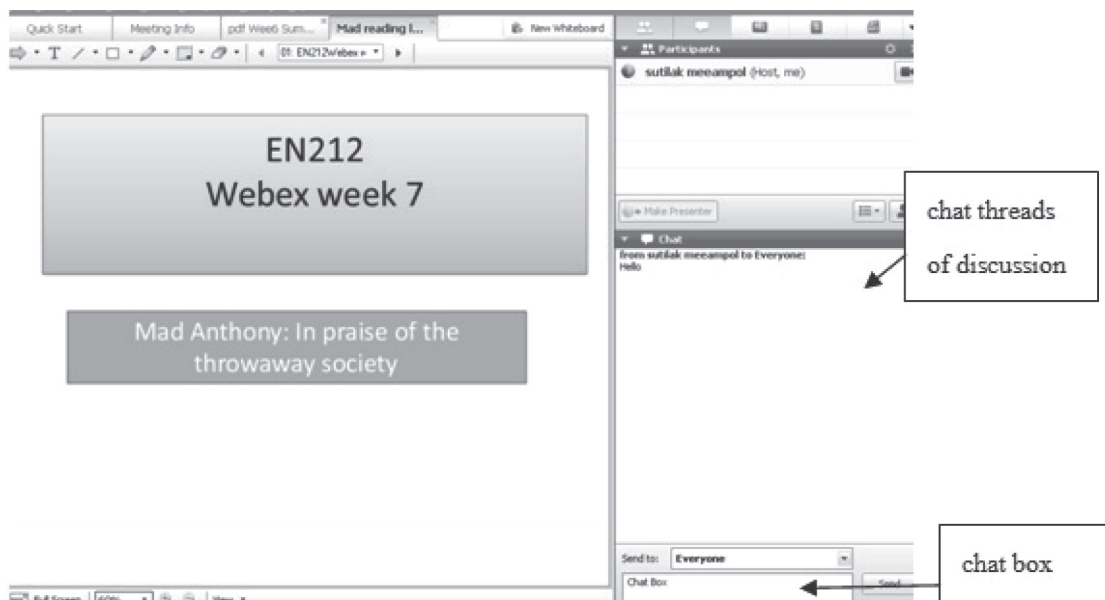


Figure : A Chat Setting

A guideline for online discussion chat was given to this student group to ensure that they would be most familiar with what to do and what to be expected while chatting. They were informed that their written or typed text could be observed by the host teacher, who could also intervene to motivate their ongoing discussion.

Chatting is an activity said to be “best suited for brainstorming and quickly sharing ideas” (Ingram and Hathorn, 2004: 219), which makes it suitable for promoting students’ language communication. While chatting in a group, students have the opportunity to learn collaboratively, despite the fact that chatting yields a constantly changing discussion. According to Freiermuth (2002), language learning is believed to be “enhanced via the interaction that takes place around the computer and through the development of the language issues that must

be addressed to meet the general requirements of the task” (36). Moreover, internet chat “has produced measurable language gains by students while providing them with satisfying language learning experiences” (36).

Objective and Research Questions

The study aimed at examining the discussion chat produced by a group of Bangkok University students and how they responded to this mode of communication. Three questions were addressed:

- 1) *What were the characteristics of the language used in the discussion chat?*
- 2) *What were the characteristics of the communicative interaction in the discussion chat?*
- 3) *What were the participants’ opinions about the discussion chat?*

Literature Review

Students type to converse with each other, forming a chat interaction. The content of the typed or written text reveals “patterns of human communication and how people derive meaning and understanding in CMC contexts” (Naidu and Jarvela, 2006: 97). The “computer-mediated discourse” or the language used in chat is the “communication produced when human beings interact with one another by transmitting messages via networked computers” (Herring, 2001: 612). In all forms of spoken interaction or talk among participants, what goes on in the talk is quite similar (Ellis and Barkhuizen, 2005: 197). First, they take turns at talk, and their talk is sequentially ordered into sequences of actions. They will, if necessary, repair problems of understanding the talk.

1. Language in CMC Communication

The typed messages are the product of chat communication. They usually have certain characteristics: being similar to spoken or written language, using simplified registers, being organizational structure, and using mechanisms for maintaining topic cohesion” (Murray, 2000: 400). The chat language normally lacks the “paralinguistic (intonation contour, stress, pitch, etc.) and nonlinguistic (nonverbal) cues” and the coherence of posted messages due to turn-taking of each student (Salaberry, 2000: 5-6). According to Herring (2001: 5-6), the reasons for such features of computer-mediated language are the economy of typing, expressive needs of using textual representation of auditory information, such as prosody and laughter.

In addition, the synchronous mode often influences features of computer-mediated language: length of information units, lexical density, and degree of syntactic integration (6). Werry (1996: 51-60) stated that the use of communicative conventions prevails in conversations among chat users, for example, addressing names to avoid ambiguity, using abbreviated words to suit the chat format, using paralinguistic and prosodic cues to create voice, gesture and tone, and using visual images to symbolize gestural qualities of face-to-face communication. According to Werry, the use of these conventions signals 2 indications among chat users. One is the compensating for and adapting to the chat constraints and the other is the reproducing and simulating the face-to-face spoken language (61). One of recent studies also reported that linguistic features of chat language are similar to those of written and spoken language (Cvjetkovic, 2010). Chat users adapt their language, making it short to save time and space to fit in with the chat system, yet they also reflect their speaking purposes through the use of, for example, emoticons, addressivity markers, colloquial lexicon (29).

On the one hand, using text-based chat to promote communication among EFL students may be arguable due to its uniqueness of discourse properties, which could result in being an inappropriate medium. On the other hand, it is said to enhance the use of the target language, increase motivation for using the language while reducing their anxiety, and foster sociolinguistic competence or the ability

to use the language to communicate with others (Salaberry, 2000: 6).

2. Interaction in Chat Communication

Foreign language interaction refers to spoken interaction performed by a participant using a language other than his or her native language with the other who may be either a native or nonnative speaker (Wagner, 1996: 215). Interaction can reveal how students communicate in the target language, which includes how they use the language in order to accomplish their communication.

In the context of discussion chat, what participants say or do on the screen can be seen as actions or behaviors which have functions in the communication. Based on studies, behaviors in electronic discourse can be categorized as, for example, requests, responses, apologies, greetings, complaints, and reprimands (Sotillo, 2000), or as communication strategies or tactics used for adjusting incomprehensible messages (Lee, 2002).

3. Related Studies on CMC Communication

There have been a large number of research and studies about features of language and interaction in online synchronous discussions. Sotillo (2000), for example, studied discourse functions and syntactic complexity of synchronous discussions as compared to those produced in the asynchronous mode written by 25 ESL students. It was found that the language of synchronous discussions were conversational which was similar to the language of face-to-face communication in terms of discourse functions: request, apologies,

complaints, and responses. Lee (2002) studied modification devices (or communication strategies or tactics used for adjusting incomprehensible messages) used by 34 native English students studying Spanish as a foreign language in synchronous electronic discussions. It was found from statements in the transcripts that the most used strategies for negotiation of communication (both meaning and form) were request for help, clarification check, and self-correction. It was also found that the rapid synchronous encouraged fluency rather than accuracy and they focused more on exchanging ideas than trying to correct linguistic mistakes. Kung (2004) studied the output of 47 EFL students' interactions in the synchronous electronic discussions. Using the open coding approach as well as observations and focus group interviews to identify the themes that occurred in the 10 discussion transcripts, it was found that the written discussions contained a large number of language errors. Also, the interactions were found to include initiating and managing discourse, specifying to whom a question or statement was directed, self-correcting one's errors, returning to the task after a digression, and encouraging each other to participate.

Research Methodology

1. Participants

The participants were 20 female and 8 male Thai students (N = 28) from the department of Digital Accounting, aged between 19-21 years, who were taking an Advanced

English course in their second year at Bangkok University. In their most recent foundation English course, 5 of them had received an A, 15, a B, and 8, a C. They were divided into 6 groups, 3-6 members in each.

2. Material and Instrument

A reading passage entitled “Mad Anthony: In praise of the throwaway society” was used as a reading material in the chat activity. It was written in a “blog” style, in which the author expressed ideas on the issue of throwing away old things rather than trying to fix them. It was viewed by the researcher as appropriate for arousing participants’ discussion. The participants followed the sequenced activities of reading: pre-reading, reading, and post-reading. The pre-reading activity (Search & Say) required that participants answer the question “What is a throwaway society?” by searching information from websites for the answer. The reading activity required that participants read the passage and answer the comprehension questions that followed. The post-reading activity required that each group find the answers to 2 questions: (1) Do you think it is better to fix old things or to buy new things? Why? and (2) Do you agree or disagree with Mad Anthony? Why? The task for chatting designed for each group was to discuss the answers of these 2 questions within 40 minutes.

A questionnaire was used to gain insightful information for the research. Its items required the participants to elaborate on important elements of the chat activity: “difficulties or problems about their own chatting and the

resolutions,” “problems about understanding their friends’ chat and the resolutions,” “the available access to the Internet while chatting” and “opinions about the chat activity.”

3. Data Collection

The text-based discussion chat was a post reading activity and the source of research data. The process of data collection started when participants began to type their messages in the chat box and lasted 40 minutes. A sequence of messages formed a thread of discussion presented in the chat transcript of each group. Since the discussion chat activity required that participants interact in each group, each chat transcript represented each group’s performance or interaction. After the chat ended, the participants answered the questionnaire. The researcher went through the chat transcript of each group, checking for its completeness. The researcher and her colleague had analyzed some of the chat data, and later gone through all transcripts. How statements in each message should be categorized was discussed (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Treleaven, 2004). Categories of interactions were set along with their examples. The levels of agreement on both defining categories and categorizing the data were over 97% between the two raters. Some of the categories are shown in the Appendix.

4. Data Analysis

In analyzing the chat data, each message from the threads of discussion was examined on the basis of both the language use and the interactional behaviors. To answer research question 1, the language use was analyzed

based on some specific aspects of writing: vocabulary (sophisticated range, effective word/ idiom choice and usage, word form mastery), language use (effective complex constructions, errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions), mechanics (mastery of conventions, spelling, punctuation, capitalization) (Brown, 1994, cited in Weigle, 2002: 116). The characteristics of the language were, however, looked at in terms of an overall appearance, rather than quantifying the specific aspects. To answer research question 2, the typed messages were analyzed to find the characteristics of the interactions among participants. Based on the behaviors or actions the participants performed in conversation in order to accomplish the goal of communication (Herring, 2001; Ellis and Barkhuizen, 2005), each message was categorized to represent actions of interaction and quantified. The focus of characteristics of the interactions was on how participants relied on the use of each category of actions. To find the answer to research question 3, the data from the questionnaire was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

Results

Research question 1: What were the characteristics of the language used in the discussion chat?

It was obvious that the participants used the conversational style of language in their discussion chat, which reflected in their choice of words being simple and conversational. Each post usually consisted of either complete or

incomplete sentences. Most sentences were found to be simple, less complex than those in their usual writing. Two unedited excerpts are shown below to illustrate the conversational style of the typed text.

Excerpt 1 :

from Nattakorn.naks to Everyone : group 1 :

Why Amy lost both herlegs?

from Siriya to Everyone : Group1 : She get the

Bacterial Meningitis to cause she is also a double leg amputee.

from pimlada pakin to Everyone : about 3.4 :

From this story I think “many obstacles in your life haven’t destroyed your dreams if you always believe you can do it.”

from Siriya to Everyone : G1 : She want to

travel around the world to take the picture.

Excerpt 2 :

from Thanaphon Yothasaen to Everyone :

Group4 : 3.4) I think that That our loss something to the body.We should be happy and live to continue to strong

from Boonwat to Everyone : burin what do you

ans 3.2 ?? (G4)

from Burin to Everyone : She is travel around

the world living in the place with snow.

from nattachai to Everyone : i agree burin

answer.

from Boonwat to Everyone : I agree but she

want’s living in the place with snow??.

In terms of language use, errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, and etc. appeared almost everywhere in the transcripts, as illustrated in 2 excerpts below.

Excerpt 1 :

from Ornwaree to Everyone : G6 : I will repair
product <missing of an article> because
I feel deplore <part of speech> it.
from Jaruwit to Everyone : Group 6 : Umm...

Excerpt 2:

from Nuntaporn Pattanakitkaroon to Everyone :
Group 2 : 3.2 She dreamed to <preposi-
tion> travel all around the world.
from oraphan maneechot to Everyone : Group
2 : who know 3.3
from laddawan trangkasirikun to Everyone :
G2.and living on <preposition> the
place in search of snow : 3.2

One prominent writing error found was the use of Thai sentence structures in places of English sentences, as shown in an unedited excerpts below.

Excerpt:

from Wanasma Weahama to Everyone : Group
6 : i think buy <Thai sentence structure>
new things make to be comfortable
<Thai sentence structure>. i must select
do <Thai sentence structure> it.

The analysis of mechanics revealed the ignorance of conventions, such as punctuation, capitalization, and spelling, as shown in an excerpt below.

Excerpt :

from oraphan maneechot to Everyone : Group
2 : she don't have <capitalization> feel
bad than her don't have legs
from laddawan trangkasirikun to Everyone : G.2
: 3.4) from the story I think,evey
<punctuation, spelling> obstacle is
surmountable.

Research question 2: What were the characteristics of the communicative interaction in the discussion chat?

Participants typed messages to interact with each other, forming their language communication. Table 1 below shows the categories of interactions of each group.

Table 1 : Categorized Interactions of Each Group

Category	Number of Messages of Each Group					
	1 (n=3)	2 (n=6)	3 (n=5)	4 (n=5)	5 (n=4)	6 (n=5)
<i>Expressing opinions</i>	11	10	8	19	12	17
<i>Expressing agree/disagreement with others</i>	12	11	16	13	8	14
<i>Asking questions</i>	8	5	4	5	-	9
<i>Answering questions</i>	3	1	3	13	-	7
<i>Addressing others by name</i>	4	9	5	26	20	15
<i>Responding to others</i>	1	-	-	-	2	9
<i>Giving compliments</i>	1	-	-	2	-	-
<i>Encouraging others to join</i>	-	1	-	-	-	-
<i>Expanding on the topic</i>	-	2	3	-	1	-
<i>Using humor</i>	-	7	-	2	3	-
<i>Expressing appreciation</i>	-	-	10	1	1	2
<i>Referring to the source text</i>	-	-	-	1	-	-
<i>*delayed messages</i>	1	6	-	6	1	2
Each Group's Messages	41	52	49	88	48	75

Table 2 shows the order of the most to least number of messages that indicate actions the participants took to interact. Please note

that the delayed messages were not counted as interactional messages.

Table 2 : Order of Categorized Interactions of All Groups

Category	Number of Messages
<i>Addressing others by name</i>	79
<i>Expressing opinions</i>	77
<i>Expressing agree/disagreement with others</i>	74
<i>Asking questions</i>	31
<i>Answering questions</i>	27
<i>Expressing appreciation</i>	14
<i>Responding to others</i>	12
<i>Using humor</i>	12
<i>Expanding on the topic</i>	6
<i>Giving compliments</i>	3
<i>Encouraging others to join</i>	1
<i>Referring to the source text</i>	1
Total Messages	337

It can be said that one prominent characteristic of the interactions among all participants was the main use of 3 actions: addressing others by name, expressing opinions, and expressing agree/disagreement with others. Three unedited excerpts are shown below to illustrate the finding. A category of action is put in the <brackets> at the end of the message.

Excerpt 1 :

from Siriya Piriyaongsak to Everyone : G1.

I think it's to fix can make the less costs. <Expressing opinions>

from Nattakorn.naks to Everyone : G1 : Yes I agree. <Express agreement or disagreement with others>

Excerpt 2 :

from Siriporn Thamma to Everyone : G2 :
Atinuch, Laddawan what do you think?
<Addressing participants by name>

Excerpt 3 :

from Jaruwit to Everyone : Group 6 : I think
we should fix it because in future we
can't buy it because it not production.
<Expressing opinions>
from rujira to Everyone : G6. But opal like buy
new things. <Expressing opinions>

Asking and answering questions were also used by participants to move the communication forward. An excerpt was shown below to illustrate the finding.

Excerpt:

from Nattakorn.naks to Everyone : G1 : why
many people like thowaway Society?
<Asking questions>

from Nattakorn.naks to Everyone : G1 : Do u
think why? <Asking questions>

from Siriya Piriyaongsak to Everyone : G1.
Because It's make me feel pity the
world. It's can destroy the world.
<Answering questions>

It was also found that their communicative interactions were natural. They expressed their appreciation and responded to their friends' messages, as shown in the 2 excerpts below.

Excerpt 1 :

from Nunchaliya Thapthananon to Everyone :
G3 : In my opinion,I think people
should buy necessary things.
from Nunchaliya Thapthananon to Everyone :
G3 : thank , tunyarot for the answer
<Expressing appreciation>

Excerpt 2 :

from Ornwaree to Everyone : G6 : I will repair
product because I feel deplore it.
<Expressing opinions>
from Jaruwit to Everyone : Group 6 : Umm...
<Responding to friends>

Their use of humor helped to relax during the chat activity. An excerpt below exemplifies the message postings that expressed the joking among each other.

Excerpt:

from oraphan maneechot to Everyone : G2 :

I want iphone5 Siriporn 5555 <Using humor>

from laddawan trangkasirikun to Everyone : G2.

I wanna new lens of camera 55 <Using humor>

from Siriporn Thamma to Everyone : G2 :

Laddawan we go to camera shop together 555 <Using humor>

from Showtika Phetpraneenukul to Everyone :

G.2 yes because I want to play games ha ha ha :) <Using humor>

from oraphan maneechot to Everyone : I know

u want sj more than camera5555 <Using humor>

from Siriporn Thamma to Everyone : G2 : why

you say that in our class!!

Research question 3: What were the participants' opinions about the discussion chat?

Regarding the participants' difficulties or problems about their own chatting and the resolutions, it was found that few participants (n=6) stated that they did not have any problem while the majority (n=22) stated that they had some problems with the chatting. The problems could be analyzed into those about language and those about the Webex program system. In general, participants thought the poor areas of the English language were grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and how to put words together to convey messages. However, they solved these problems by trying to use

the online dictionary and to use simple words in their chatting. Regarding the computer program system, the main problem was that the chat occurred among members, while the chat box was too small for typing, and the messages moved too fast to read. It was a confusing situation in which messages were interrupted by other messages all the time. Some of them said that they solved this message interruption problem by beginning their messages with the names so that everyone would know from or to whom the message was meant.

Regarding participants' problems about understanding their friends' chat and the resolutions, it was found that most participants (n=24) stated that they understood their friends' message postings well, while few (n=4) stated that they had a difficult time understanding their friends. The main reason that made the message postings understandable was the use of easy words and simple sentence structures or even the sentences with a Thai structure. The familiarity of the topic being discussed was also a reason of why they could understand the messages easily. However, they admitted that they used the dictionary to look for the meaning of unfamiliar words. Those who could not understand their friends' messages said that the problem was about the computer system. They stated that the chat moved too fast to read, and a lot of interruptions of the messages occurred while they were reading a message.

Regarding the available access to the Internet while chatting, all students (n=28) stated that the Internet was useful to them while chatting. The main reason was the access to the meaning of words and quick information necessary to support the discussion.

Regarding the opinions about the chat activity, all but 3 participants (n=25) stated that the discussion chat was a good activity for them. It was an activity that helped them communicate in English through writing and sharing ideas. Participants who were shy or poor at the language could share their ideas in the chat more than when they were in a regular classroom. They gave suggestions about improving the limitations of the computer system. For example, reducing the number of members in each group or providing more time for the chat activity. However, few participants (n=3) stated that they did not enjoy the chat activity due to the limitations of the Webex program system.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the findings about the chat language, participants' writing of the discussion chat was very much "speech-like" (Weigle, 2002). The language used in the chat was short and simple, which revealed certain characteristics of being similar to spoken language with its own simplified register and organizational structure (Murray, 2000; Cvjetkovic, 2010). The results showed the flow of the messages sent from one participant to another, indicating that the language used in the discussion chat was

natural. Despite being inaccurate, the language could still be understood among participants. The results suggested that what caused such characteristics of the chat language was an individual's language and writing ability.

In addition, the results suggested that due to the chat assignment participants may need to ignore the language rules and use an inaccurate language in order to arrive at the answers to the questions (Sotillo, 2000; Lee, 2002; Kung, 2004). In the present study, students realized that they did not chat for pleasure but had a duty to accomplish a communication purpose. This may lead to their perception of what was more important in the chat activity. In other words, arriving at the answers obtained from their group members was more important than using or typing correct words and statements in the messages (Werry, 1996).

Based on the findings about the interaction in chat, the results suggested that interactions occurred among participants, as indicated by 12 actions found from statements in messages. Three actions were found to be predominant: expressing opinions, expressing agreement and disagreement with others, and addressing participants by name. An explanation could be that due to the chat assignment most participants really focused on exchanging their ideas or information and on negotiating the final answers of their own group. Also, in trying to solve the problems of being confused while chatting among members and of the constraints of the chat system, most participants addressed names of others to indicate to whom they

wanted to talk. This was a predominant strategy particularly found in long chat transcripts. Such finding indicated that such action was a means to make the chat communication go smoothly.

Some of the actions, such as asking and answering questions, giving compliment, expressing appreciation, responding to friends, and using humor, obviously helped to simulate a face-to-face conversation. The findings about some use of paralinguistic cues (intonation contour, stress, pitch, etc.), which are normally absent in the chat language (Salaberry, 2000), suggested that the communication was perceived by most participants as real and personal. In fact, people may use voice, gesture, or tone as part of communication (Werry, 1996). Such findings about the natural, conversational interactions were in line with the questionnaire findings about participants' positive perception that indicated their comfortable feelings toward the chat activity.

It can be concluded that the discussion chat application is a special tool that can enhance students' communication skills, which include sharing ideas through writing in the target language. In other words, communicating in the target language can be fun and enjoyable by means of discussion chat. It is a new learning environment where students have an equal opportunity to express themselves and be supported with the Internet system.

However, integrating a chat activity with language learning may need to be well-designed and prepared. Obviously, the purposes of communication influence how students use the language and interact in the chat activity. Assigning the chat topic that does not require much of exchanging information may lead to a more variety of students' actions or a more relaxing environment. In addition, scores may be allocated on the language in chat so that students are more aware of the importance of the language use.

Limitations

The study focused only on one type of task, which was to discuss the questions and find the answers to them. Also, due to the real context of language teaching which usually involves a small number of participants, the generalization of the present study may be made with a consideration.

Recommendations

The researcher would like to recommend the integration of chat in an EFL classroom, which, as suggested by the results, could promote language use and create an enjoyable learning environment for students. As for future research opportunities, other task types can be designed for students to chat. Finding which tasks can encourage more interactions from students still needs to be investigated.

References

- Cvjetkovic, S. (2010). *Computer-Mediated Communication: A Study of Language Variation on Internet Chat*. Retrieved June 13, 2013, from https://gupea.ub.gu.se/bitstream/2077/22616/1/gupea_2077_22616_1.pdf
- Chat. (2013). In *Dictionary.com*. Retrieved January 3, 2013, from <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/chat>
- Ellis, R. & Barkhuizen, G. (2005). *Analysing Learner Language*. China: Oxford University Press.
- Freiermuth, M. (2002). Internet Chat: Collaborating and Learning via E-Conversations. *TESOL Journal*, 11(3), 36-40.
- Herring, S. (2001). Computer-Mediated Discourse. In D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen, & H.E. Hamilton (Eds.), *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Ingram, A. & Hathorn, L. (2004). Methods for Analyzing Collaboration in Online Communications. In T. Roberts (Ed.), *Online Collaborative Learning: Theory and Practice* (pp. 215-241). Singapore: Information Science Publishing.
- Kung, S. (2004). Synchronous electronic discussions in an EFL reading class. *ELT Journal*, 58(2), 164-173. Retrieved November 12, 2012, from <http://203.72.145.166/ELT/files/58-2-7.pdf>
- Lee, L. (2002). Synchronous online exchanges: a study of modification devices on non-native discourse. *System*, 30, 275-288.
- Mollering, M. & Ritter, M. (2008). CMC and Intercultural Learning. In F. Zhang & B. Barber (Eds.), *Computer-Enhanced Language Acquisition and Learning*. New York: Information Science Reference.
- Murray, D. (2000). Protean Communication: The Language of Computer-Mediated Communication. *TESOL Quarterly*, 34(3), 397-421.
- Naidu, S & Javela, S. (2006). Analyzing CMC content for what? *Computers & Education*, 46, 96-103. Retrieved November 10, 2012, from http://moodle.fct.unl.pt/pluginfile.php/54370/mod_page/content/1/gerais/sdarticle.pdf
- Salaberry, M.R. (2000). L2 Morphosyntactic Development in Text-Based Computer-Mediated Communication. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 13(1), 5-27. Retrieved October 25, 2012, from <https://webpace.utexas.edu/mrs2429/www/Salaberry2000CALL.pdf>
- Sotillo, S. (2000). Discourse functions and syntactic complexity in synchronous and asynchronous communication. *Language Learning & Technology*, 4(1), 82-119.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

- Treleaven, L. (2004). A New Taxonomy for Evaluation Studies of Online Collaborative Learning. In T. Roberts (Ed.), *Online Collaborative Learning: Theory and Practice*. Singapore: Information Science Publishing.
- Wagner, J. (1996). Foreign Language Acquisition through Interaction-A Critical Review of Research on Conversational Adjustments. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 26, 215-235. Retrieved September 23, 2012, from <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/0378216696000136>
- Weigle, S. (2002). *Assessing Writing*. UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Werry, C. (1996). *Linguistic and Interactional Features of Internet Relay Chat*. Philadelphia : John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Herring, C. (2001), *Computer-Mediated Communication*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Appendix

Definitions and Examples of Interactional Categories

Category	Definition	Example
<i>Expanding on topics</i>	a statement of an idea or about information relating to the topic of discussion	G5: i see many people that (are) not wealth(y) but they buy iphone ...you see it? it (is) not always that poor people (do) not use high technology
<i>Giving compliment</i>	a statement of admiring a person	G1. that (is a) good idea.
<i>Encouraging participants to join</i>	a statement that directly invites or asks friends in the group to discuss	G2:group 2 share chat
<i>Using humor</i>	a statement of teasing or laughing	G.2 yes because I want to play games ha ha ha :)
<i>Expressing appreciation</i>	a statement of thanking a friend in the group	G6. ok !! thank you for your opinions, my friends.
<i>Referring to the source text</i>	a statement of information taken from the reading text which is context of discussion	G4: the reading says the new technology comes out and it is cheaper than repairing the old
<i>Responding to friends</i>	a statement directly responds to a friend's posting, not necessary an answer	G 6: Umm...
<i>*delayed messages: a statement that belongs to a previous post but appears as a new post due to students' typing mistakes</i>		



Sutilak Meeampol is an English instructor at the Language Institute, Bangkok University. She received her Master's degree in English from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Louisiana, USA, and her Doctoral degree in Education (Curriculum and Instruction) from Kasetsart University, Thailand. Her areas of interest are teaching reading and integrating computer technology with language teaching.