

Book Review

Book title: *Social Interaction in Second Language Chat Rooms*

Author: Christopher J. Jenks

Publisher: Edinburgh University Press

Year of Publication: 2014

Pages: 176 pp.

ISBN: 978074864948 (paperback)

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Although the English language used in chat rooms has been extensively investigated in computer-mediated communication (CMC) literature, most of the data is text based (e.g. Simpson, 2005; Smith, 2008; Pojanapunya & Jaroenkitboworn, 2011). Christopher Jenks's *Social Interaction in Second Language Chat Rooms*, on the other hand, investigates second language chat rooms which are voice-based. It is a book of timely investigation of chat rooms as we are entering a new frontier of technology that can transform our interaction and allow us to be connected faster than ever before.

This book comprises 10 chapters of which Chapter 1 introduces the book, and Chapters 2 – 4 review key concepts, terminology in conversation analysis (CA), previous studies on CMC, and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). Chapters 5 - 7 present an analysis of audio online conversation and discuss the effects of technology to human interaction. In Chapter 8, the author shows how voice chat rooms contribute to second language acquisition (SLA). Finally, the last two chapters (chapters 9 – 10) explore the social and linguistic implications of communicating in second language chat rooms.

The author introduced his book in chapter 1 by pointing out a research gap that voice-based chatrooms and the social interaction perspective in spoken online communication has been paid little attention to. In Chapter 2, he reviews principles in CA and CMC. Additionally, Jenks proposed CMSI which stands for computer-mediated spoken interaction. He also explains the key notion 'social interaction' in which typically spoken words and utterances are the primary means of the socialization process and the creation of communicative norms in the online world. Moreover, the author discusses the importance of synchronous voice chat rooms in relation to technology and society for such online communication is currently part of our everyday lives.

In chapter 3 – 4, Jenks reviews and discusses the studies of CMC and its association with CALL. In his view, although CMC-CALL research, which is mainly text-based analysis, aims to help improve L2 learners' communicative skills, especially speaking skill, the data in the research are not authentic enough to create activities when teaching L2 in the classroom since texting chatrooms lack some natural features such as turn overlapping and variation in pitch which can signal messages to the interlocutors or other participants in an online community.

Chapter 5, which deals with the core issue of the book, is the analysis of voice chat rooms via Skype. Skype is a popular platform which offers audio, video and texting capabilities. In this book, Skypecasts, which is based on an audio conferencing tool, was selected as the platform of the main data set. With Skypecasts, the callers can see the names or pseudonyms and photos or avatars of the other callers, but not the physical presence. Jenks demonstrates that participants or interactants need to make much more effort in communication than those in text-based chatrooms (see more details in Chapter 6). In Chapter 7, the author discusses technological constraints such as background noise and audibility.

Chapter 8 is dedicated to discussing how ESL/EFL teachers and researchers in SLA can gain benefits from the insights that the CMSI study of voice chat rooms provides, for instance, with the opportunity to have an authentic learning experience outside the classroom. Jenks argues that second language chat rooms are ideal pedagogical sites to practice speaking and improve interactional competence (see more details on pp.123 127). Furthermore, this type of research is claimed to shed light on how intercultural competence is developed and allows researchers to explore whether CMSI platforms provide different cultural learning opportunities.

Jenks addresses how CMSI participants can also acquire negotiation skills as it is a joint endeavor. Participants wish to engage in communication with people from diverse geographical locations, so they learn to understand what is normatively right or wrong and negotiate levels of formality, styles of speech, and turn-taking rules. More importantly, as national and social boundaries have been blurred by technologies in the online world, L2 learners are allowed to create new identities, namely global identities via the use of English as *lingua franca*.

This book is an invaluable resource for both ESL/EFL teachers and researchers. As the book provides an investigation of audio online conversation in chat rooms, both social interactional skills and conversational patterns of L2 learners who use English as *lingua franca* are thoroughly analyzed and presented. ESL/EFL teachers can make use of the study results to design learning activities, particularly for speaking practice, in the digital world using online tools to create a platform for their L2 students.

For instance, “Conversation Cloud”, a speaking activity offered by Chulalongkorn University Language Institutes to freshmen of the university in particular, was originally

designed by Mattanee Palungtepin in 2018 using a web-conferencing tool to create the platform. According to Palungtepin (Personal Communication in November 2019), students find the activity enjoyable and natural as they can speak in English with other participants with a physical presence and it is an opportunity to talk to people from different cultures. Moreover, it is convenient for them to learn outside the classroom.

Compared with Skypecasts as a platform of voice chat activity in Jenks' book, I agree that it is safe for the participants to use pseudonyms and fictitious profile pictures to disguise themselves for the sake of research ethics. However, in terms of second language learning, having no real physical presence of participants in the chat room might make it difficult to create an authentic setting or natural environment for language learning since body gestures and facial expression can also signal messages to other participants. Accordingly, Hopkins (2010, p.254) interviews a student who said that talking online with someone without a physical appearance or with no use of a webcam was similar to speaking with someone who was wearing sunglasses. So, it may still be unnatural as long as the other interlocutor is in disguise.

For the language identity, I agree with the author that in such a setting or in a chat room where participants are L2 learners, they tend to negotiate to be part of the online community. They are open to learning new cultures and are engaged in the communication to gain a sense of membership. Using English as lingua franca in synchronous communication in chat rooms can enable them to gain global identities. Therefore, it can be said that the ESL/EFL interactants or participants in chat rooms are trying to become global citizens in the online world.

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Kandaporn Jaroenkitboworn is an assistant professor working at Chulalongkorn University Language Institute, Bangkok, Thailand. She earned her Bachelor's, Master's degree, and PhD at Chulalongkorn University. Her areas of interest include discourse analysis, humor study, and pragmatics. Currently, she is the editor of PASAA, the oldest journal of learning and teaching English in Thailand.

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