



Globalization and Tele- collaboration in Classroom Teaching and Learner Engagement: Japanese Perspective

Michael Greisamer
Kobe Gakuin University
Kobe Gakuin University, Kobe City, Nishi-Wash,
Ikawadani-cho, Arisei 518, Japan, 651-2180
E: mag@human.kobegakuin.ac.jp

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ABSTRACT

Globalization has brought the world closer together through economic, culture and language at a speed unprecedented in history. It is now possible to connect our students across continents through the Internet in the classroom. This paper will propose the use of Skype as a synchronous interaction tool. It will investigate how Skype's communicative content affects the process of acquiring a second language and how it changes the dynamics of classroom management. A collection of recorded video chat data between Japanese English learners and English learners from another country or background is the basis for a micro analytic process-oriented investigation conducted from a mixed methods perspective. Engagement will be operationalized quantitatively and qualitatively. The discourse collected from the learners will be measured and conversational analysis applied. Reflective journals and colleague's feedback analyzed for perspective and further research.

Key words: *Communication, classroom management, engagement, skype, tele-collaboration*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

With the advent of the Internet age various new modes of communication have become available. One of the more popular modes of communication with language teachers is the use of synchronous, computer-mediated communications (SCMC) in the practice of videoconferencing or "chat." Educators implementing SCMC have described in detail the various beneficial features of this medium, in particular, authentic, real-time interaction in the L2, assumed to inspire second language acquisition (Beauvois, 1992; Chun, 1994; Warschauer, 1997). Blake (2000) in his study of Spanish L2 learners, presented findings

indicating that the application of SCMC in conjunction with communicative tasks in the target language can create an environment rich in elements that foster the growth of a learner's skills and the development of confidence in the target language. These elements might include authentic language practice, teamwork and cultural growth.

Recently, various language educators have established international relationships involving the use of more than one classroom, usually in diverse countries. Commonly discussed as tele-collaboration (Guth & Helm, 2010; Warschauer, 1996), such trans-national partnerships commonly emphasize the importance of cultural in language acquisition and usage. Traditionally email has been the preferred channel for tele-collaboration. However, the technological advances in videoconferencing programs, such as Skype, have attracted more classroom teachers to experiment with synchronous audiovisual interactions. Skype allows for speech, gesture, visual, movement and imageries from the webcam and other affordances of conjoining auditory, audiovisual and text in online interactions (Guichon, & McLornan, 2008).

This paper focuses on Skype as a synchronous interaction classroom tool, examining how Skype's communicative content affect the process of acquiring a second language. The paper is pegged on communicative language educational approach, grounded on the principle that the main purpose for learning and using a language is communication (Richards & Rodgers 2001). The construct of engagement can be defined as a meta-construct that comprises developmental, responsive, and intellectual engagement (Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A., 2004). Behavioral (developmental) engagement draws on the idea of participation, taking part in the activity. Emotional (responsive) engagement refers to the confident and undesirable reactions to the situation (e.g. teachers, classmates and school). Cognitive (intellectual) engagement is defined as students' desire and motivation to study; their investment in learning. It incorporates being autonomous, tactical learning, and enthusiasm to exert the essential determination for comprehension (Mecce, Blumenfeld, & Hoyle, 1988).

The paper adopts the following critical research questions: Firstly, to what extent learners' engagement on tele-collaboration increases over a period of a semester in an Institution of higher learning? And secondly, what are the perspectives of teachers and students in the target university using Skype to develop language skills? The null hypothesis utilized in the paper states that, the learners' performance (e.g. comprehension and participation) will improve by taking an active role in communication and analyzing their own data.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The primary approach of communication afforded by the Internet that has become popular with language teachers is the use of synchronous, computer-mediated communications (SCMC), in particular videoconferencing, commonly known as "chat." Educators implementing SCMC have emphasized the unique benefits of the use this mode of

communication in the classroom. It is argued that this style suggests those benefits credited to SCMC communication in the L2 support second language acquisition as well as having other tangential, non-language related benefits exclusive to this method (Beauvois, 1992; Chun, 1994; Warschauer, 1997). Blake (2000) explores the notion that SCMC, in juxtaposition with interactive lessons in a second language, presents an environment where many factors that cultivate a learner's development of L2 towards the attainment of selected goals or targets. These factors include authentic language practice, teamwork and cultural growth. Recently, a large number of language and communication educators have established international relationships involving more than one classroom or multi-classrooms in different locations, frequently in separate nations. Often referred to as "tele-collaboration" (Guth & Helm, 2010; Warschauer, 1996), these transnational partnerships commonly place an emphasis on culture in language learning and use. Traditionally email has been the preferred channel for tele-collaboration. However, with the technological advances in videoconferencing programs, such as Skype, more educators have been attracted to research and test the potential of synchronous audiovisual interactions.

Skype is a multifaceted program that allows the user to use audio, voice, facial expression, movement and imagery from the device camera and microphone to allow for online exchanges (Guichon, & McLornan, 2008).

Research Questions,

1. Did learner engagement increase over the semester?
2. What are the perspectives of teachers and students in the target university on using Skype to develop language skills?

Hypothesis

The learners' performance (e.g. comprehension and participation) will improve by taking an active role in communication and analyzing their own data.

3.0 METHODOLOGY/DESIGN

A communicative blended learning course that combines "call" with the general classroom activities. The course is focused around video chatting with learners from a different background (e.g. country or culture). The study will be designed around a 15-week semester course. After the learners have settled into their class as usual the course and procedure is explained and then the actual Skype sessions will begin. Arrangements with the partner class are to be made in advance with corresponding time and dates for the chat. For this study there are 10 chat sessions each of 10-minute duration. The task goal is to have a conversation with their Skype partner. The topics for the session are given to the learners in advance with the suggestion to prepare questions and answers to help guide the task. At the start of each class the teacher will give an overview of the topic and promote a discussion in the form of brainstorming and to ensure the

comprehension of the topics being discussed. Some examples of main topics are: Family, Sports, Holidays, and Hobbies. The chat session can be done in pairs or individually with headphones and microphone. Each session is recorded. To record the session a popular software called "Call Recorder for Skype" from www.ecamm.com can be used. This software integrates into Skype and records in both video and audio mode. VOIP-sol.com, is a blog that provides reviews and comparisons of voice-internet technologies, lists 15 different software programs that allow users to record Skype conversations (e.g. Callnote or Soundflower). After the session the student will transcribe the main parts of the conversations.

There are two ways to transcribe recordings: using transcription software or manually. The main software used is NCH, it offers downloadable transcription software free of charge. NCH software affords adjustable speed playback, and works with Microsoft Word as well as other word processors (the transcription can be cut and pasted directly into a word processor blank page). Alternatively it can be done the traditional procedure of using QuickTime or PC digital media to listen to the recording and manually write out the text. The next step is for learners to analyze their data (to be explained in the data analysis section).

After the transcription has been completed a discussion will be held on the chat in general, along with the pragmatic and dysfluencies features that are observed (e.g. turn taking, false starts, negotiation of meaning). Finally the participants will be asked to write a reflective diary on their experience from the session.

The Instructional Content

The learners for this unit of work are first and second year Japanese university students in the Humanities department of a private school in Kobe, Japan. The course required is English practice with 15 classes of 90 minutes duration and the average number of students enrolled is 18 (male and female). The maturity of the learners range from the age of 17 to 20 years old. Previous language learning include approximately seven years of English learning from junior high school through to high school. Most are "false-beginning learners" that is to say; beginners who despite having many years of formal English training at school have limited proficiency. Their ability level remains at pre-intermediate that has focused only on their learning grammar and reading to strengthen test taking skills for high school and university entrance exams. However, they have minimal communication and practice with oral or written English and, for some, I am their first native English speaking teacher. One frequently reoccurring issue with Confucian-style classrooms as in Japan is one related to the power attached to the roles of both the teacher and the students during class. Willis & Willis (2007) described the necessary roles of the teacher during class as "leader", "facilitator", "motivator", "advisor" and "teacher" (p. 148-151).

Shy and timid, Japanese are proactive about saying they want to learn English. However when learners are placed into a forced position to speak before they are ready, or before they have gained adequate language skills (e.g. vocabulary and listening

comprehension) they will suffer from cognitive overloading (Johnson, 1995). Especially the learners who have been brought up in the Japanese English teaching system being employed today. With little chance to practice, if not placed in the exact setting they were taught they freeze and shutdown. The current system with its rigid manner does not lend itself to critical thinking thus inflexible.

Proficiency of English is required but not emphasized and students are generally allowed to pass the class simply by attending. This has good points and bad points. If students feel that the school does not take English seriously then they will not either. The good point is that after separating those that are there only to pass from the ones that want to learn, the class tends to have a more relaxed atmosphere to focus on learning and their needs, coupled to experiencing less fear and overload from those that simply attended.

Encompassing expertise into the language classroom predominantly among beginners has also been revealed to produce superior autonomy and implant enduring language learning strategies (Leung, 2004). Nonetheless, it must be recognized that not all learners progress in the same manner. Agreeing with the VARK guide to learning designs, a widespread guide to learning styles advanced by Fleming (2015) audiovisual materials appeal to multiple knowledge building styles. Students are classified into either one of the subsequent four principal learning styles (designs) or have two or more learning inclinations (e.g. multidimensional):

- Optical: The process information from maps, graphs, illustrations etc.
- Auditory: The preference of input that is verbal or announced.
- Reading or writing: The preference to receive input via the written word.
- Kinesthetic: The process of gaining knowledge through bodily feelings. In this style input can be from either actual or replicated incidents that may be inferred to as learning from movies, or other models of the L2 in practice.

By using video tele-collaboration it is possible to appeal to multiple learning styles and intelligences.

Instruments

The main instrument used is the popular and easy to use free program called Skype. The tool or program has become 'normalized' (Bax, 2003) for the student and they do not need to study how to use it, as it is second nature to young learners. Skype is a communication program or application that permits users to place audio and video calls over the Internet. These calls incur no charges if placed between other Skype clients. Skype also features a computer-to-telephone-line service for both local and international calls this unfortunately is not free. There are an abundant amount of online voice-over Internet protocol (VoIP) services allowing callers to make telephone calls and conduct group conferences via their computers (e.g. Facetime, Elluminate). Although Skype does not offer qualities such as black boards, polls or other characters with sophistication, it has become almost a household name, familiar to users around the world (Mullen et al.,

2009). Freely downloaded in its rudimentary form, calls can be made between members; however, free video calls are restricted to two users.

Academics assert that, in order to attain effective teaching, educators essential need to possess two types of knowledge: knowledge of subject matter and knowledge of classroom management (Kagan, 1992). In managing an Internet based class the dynamic are changed from the traditional settings. Where the teacher positions themselves is important to how they will gain the attention of the learners. As Brophy (1981) claims, students are more likely to be more attentive with the teacher directly in front of them. Unlike the lecture style classroom the instructor should monitor and roam providing personal attention.

4.0 FINDINGS / ANALYSIS OF DATA

The data is analyzed in three parts: The amount of discourse, conversational analysis and reflective. From the definition of engagement as “participation”, it can be measured by the discourse of the learner. Using the data from the transcriptions the AS-Units the following may be measured: (1) The total number of AS-Units in each condition as a measure of engagement. (2) The proportion of major and minor AS-units – as a second measure of engagement. (3) The average length of AS-units in words as a measure of complexity. (4) The normal number of clauses per AS-unit.

The second conversational analysis (CA) is chosen because it investigates the structure of social action in language, avoiding pre-formulated theories. This is especially important since SCMC represents a new SLA content forcing both parties to produce different structures and strategies. According to Psathas (1995), the fundamental postulation of CA is that “social actions are meaningful for those who generate them and they have a ordinary association that can be revealed and examined by close consideration.” Examples that can be examined are: Turn taking, openings and closing, greetings, and cohesion.

In taking a closer look at the following question “reflective diary” as well as feedback from of colleagues will be analyzed. Learners writing provide their perspectives and attitudes on the task and what has been learned from the session.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Many academics have contended that a key *métiers* of engagement is that it signifies a alteration from the emphasis on individual characteristics towards an examination of theoretically more flexible contextual factors that can be beleaguered in interventions (Fredricks et al., 2004). Overall, the construct of student engagement, though complicated, has considerable promise. Measurement matters should remain open to exploration in order to take advantage of this potential (Glanville & Wildhagen, 2007). Skype provides authentic communicative interaction for second language learners.

However, just because the technology is widely available, it should not be automatically assumed to augmented language learning. The specific and exact features of any technology should be carefully examined to determine those that are best suited to language learning. It also is required for them to be measured and suitable tasks prescribed to be planned so that the most effective usage of the newest technology can be used (Levy, 2009). Skype, is a tool, in this case an educational tool, and like any other technology it needs to be advanced in a academically and methodical method to have a “value for language learning” (Levy, 2009). A good example of this is when learners complete tandem-learning tasks, assigning tasks for learners to accomplish (Mullen et al., 2009) or requesting them to keep a learning diary with thoughts on the interactions or creating a portfolio (Elia, 2006) can assist enhancement of learning in this kind of project. Similar to this proposal, some educators assimilate Skype into their class or curriculum in a more controlled way as part of a mixed method learning adventure.

This proposal has been established using the assumption that SCMC enables student engagement in an L2 of a sort that inspires an L2 student to expand their interlanguage towards the target language and, more specifically, necessities a productive atmosphere for autonomous learning. It can not be technology alone to bring quality and autonomy but suitable and accurate encouragement, support, training and scaffolding allows students to eventually become independent (Luzón-Marco, 2002).

By incorporating Skype into a classroom learner can access authentic situations that necessitate communication the overall goal. The onus is on the teacher to ensure that class management and the cultural encounter is successful, by virtue of the responsibilities invested in him or her as the instructor.

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