

Chapter 45

Development of Language Accuracy Using Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning Activities

Jorge Eduardo Pineda

Universidad de Antioquia, Colombia & Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Spain

ABSTRACT

Language teaching is a field in constant evolution and the use of technology has boosted its development. This article explores the design and the implementation of synchronous and asynchronous learning activities to develop oral skills in an online English course. The article uses a mix-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative research methods. The participants in the study were 6 graduate students. The main findings of this investigation show that the synchronous learning activities prompt errors that translate into opportunities for learning. These results show that the use of asynchronous learning activities produce errors despite the fact that the participants have time to prepare and anticipate language inaccuracies. The results suggest that the use of asynchronous learning activities promotes the development of language awareness as participants can identify general categories of errors.

INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of computer-mediated communication (CMC) technologies that target language learning has increased recently and they provide language teachers with new tools. However, as Zhao (2003) cited by Gleason & Suvorov (2011) claims their implementation is still a concern for both teachers and researchers. Oztok, Zingaro, Brett, & Hewitt (2013) believe that CMC generates high levels of social presence, it contains numerous communication strategies and a wide range of discourse patterns and syntactic complexity. According to AbuSeileek & Qatawneh (2013) the implementation of CMC technologies in language teaching is based on the assumption that using the technology-enhanced language learning approach promotes interaction and communication between EFL learners, which support their

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efforts to produce more linguistic output. Abrams (2003) suggests that CMC helps learners interact and negotiate with their peers and develop their communicative competence. Although a great body of research has investigated the benefits of synchronous and asynchronous CMC on language learning, Hirotani (2009) claims that there is still a need to investigate the difference between synchronous and asynchronous CMC and their effect on learning outcomes. And a need to investigate the effects of synchronous and asynchronous CMC on the language output the students produce (AbuSeileek & Qatawneh, 2013). This study focuses on the effects that synchronous and asynchronous learning activities have on the development of language accuracy by focusing on the production of clauses that contain errors of a group of 6 students who are between 30 and 49 years of age, whose English language level is low (A2, B1), who learn English in an online course designed to develop oral skills in English and who take the course because the program they are pursuing requires oral and written competences in English before graduation. This study also analyzes the participants' insights on how their language accuracy develops as a result of the use of synchronous and asynchronous learning activities. This investigation is a case study with a mix-methods approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The research data in this study are drawn from the following sources:

1. The oral performances in the synchronous learning activities (online lessons and online interviews), which are synchronous sessions that employ a video conference tool where the participants have to carry out different tasks such as providing short descriptions, comparing texts or giving opinions about a topic and the oral performances in the asynchronous learning activities (audio forums, video forums and podcasts), which are recordings that the students post in the course that aim to use the language, content and information explored in the synchronous learning activities where the participants have to provide descriptions, to play roles or to give arguments;
2. The participation in focus groups and in-depth interviews.

The study uses the clause, understood as an utterance that contains a finite verb, as basic unit of analysis (Espasa, Guasch, & Alvarez, 2013). This research uses the number of clauses containing errors as units of measurement of the development of language accuracy. For the purpose of this study a definition of error will be provided later. The study analyzes the transcripts from the in-depth interviews and the focus groups to identify general opinions about the course, the online learning activities and specific insights of how the participants think their language accuracy develops as a result of the use of the synchronous and asynchronous learning activities. The present study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) what are the effects of synchronous and asynchronous learning activities on language accuracy evidenced in the number of errors that students produce? and (2) what are the participants' perspectives on the production of errors in the synchronous and asynchronous learning activities, which can lead to identify their level of language awareness or self-diagnosis?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Computer-Mediated Communication

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) is an umbrella term for human communication that takes place between people via the instrumentality of computers (Hampel, 2014) including phones and tablets.

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