

Chapter 54

Korean Foreign Language Learning: Videoconferencing With Native Speakers

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ABSTRACT

This article presents intercultural and linguistic exchanges by foreign language learners in an exploratory study of Internet-based desktop videoconferencing between Korean learners at a university in the United States, and their counterparts at a South Korean college. The desktop videoconferencing project was designed for foreign language learners of Korean to assist in developing linguistic competence, as well as intercultural communicative competence, by providing the learners with the target language and culture through real-time, one-on-one communication. The study shows the emerging themes that recur in a video-chat. It also reports on the Korean language learners' self-rated proficiency in their target language. Challenges and difficulties in video-conferencing are examined, followed by a discussion of the effectiveness of synchronous one-on-one video-conferencing for language learning in general, and in Korean language education in particular.

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1990s, networked computers have been used in a variety of ways as an inexpensive, cost-effective medium for interactive communication that can be accessed by anyone connected online (Kern, Ware, & Warschauer, 2008; Ortega, 1997). The advantages of networked multimedia in fostering communicative competence in second as well as foreign language have been well documented in a number of studies, particularly in those written from an interactionist perspective (e.g., Blake, 2000; Fernández-García & Martínez-Arbelaiz, 2002; Pellettieri, 2000; Smith, 2004; Toyoda & Harrison, 2002; Tudini, 2003; Yanguas, 2010). In general, studies reported that networked computer mediation provides language learners with:

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1. Increased opportunities to produce the target language, and
2. Opportunities to engage in active negotiation of meaning using various discourse strategies (Blake, 2000; Chun & Plass, 2000; Fernández-García & Martínez-Arbeláiz, 2002; Kelm, 1992; Kern, 1995).

Kern (2015), for example, found that in a group discussion setting, students produced two to four times more sentences in synchronous conferencing sessions than they did in oral discussions. In Fernández-García & Martínez-Arbeláiz's study (2002), it was observed that the negotiations of meaning common in oral interactions (e.g., confirmation, requests for clarification) were also recurrent in the synchronous electronic medium.

Among the variety of network-based communications, often referred to as Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), synchronous CMC has received much attention for its resemblance to oral communication in terms of the types of discourse functions generated during the interaction (Chun, 1994; Sotillo, 2000). Herring (1996) defines Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) as “communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers” (p.1). This communication can be synchronous or asynchronous depending on the goal of communication. Compared to asynchronous communication such as e-mail correspondence, online face-to-face communication motivates language learners to learn language due to the virtual, yet social presence, perceived proximity, and close to real-time speed and spontaneity of communication (Yamada & Akahori, 2009).

While previous studies have reported that text-based CMC—a hybrid of written and spoken language—bears some similarities to face-to-face communication with regard to its interactive discourse features (Kern, 1995; Blake, 2000; Smith, 2003; Hampel & Baber, 2003), it lacks the use of social cues such as eye-gazing, nodding, and gestures so commonly associated with face-to-face interaction which enhances interpersonal solidarity and comradery (Yamada & Akahori, 2009). In her study of distance language learning via desktop videoconferencing, Wang (2006) found that both parties of the videoconferencing frequently used visual cues to confirm understanding or nonunderstanding and such visual information significantly facilitated communication. In a similar vein, Lee (2007) observed that synchronous videoconferencing, by exposing L2 learners to authentic target language input involving nonverbal cues, fostered oral interaction, as well as intercultural exchanges.

In actual face-to-face communication between language learners, Winstead (2013) reports that although there is initial apprehension, that nevertheless students problem-solve, engage in different discourse functions, and gain confidence and motivation to learn from others as they develop social comradery. CMC-mediated types of interactive learning may possibly produce similar results. Some studies about CMC-mediated interaction reveal that not only did CMC help increase participants' L2 confidence given more opportunities to practice the L2 (Gleason & Suvorov, 2012) but also increased motivation to use the target language with others (Gleason & Suvorov, 2012; Wu, Yen, & Marek, 2011; Sun, 2009).

Based on a search of the literature, the majority of previous research on the use of asynchronous as well as synchronous CMC in language learning has been carried out using text-based media (e.g., Blake, 2000; Smith, 2004; Sotillo, 2000). There is a dearth of studies concerned with oral or oral-visual modes of CMC including asynchronous video (e.g., Hirotoni & Lyddon, 2013), asynchronous audio (e.g., Gleason & Suvorov, 2012), and synchronous videoconferencing (e.g., Katz, 2001; Lee, 2007; O'Dowd, 2000; Schenker, 2013; Wang, 2006). Much of the research has been focused on CMC-mediated ESL/EFL (English as a Second Language/English as a Foreign Language) learning (e.g., Gleason & Suvorov, 2012; Smith, 2004; Sotillo, 2000; Wu, Yen, & Marek, 2011), or learning of commonly taught languages such as Spanish and French (e.g., Blake, 2000; Katz, 2001; Lee, 2007; Yanguas, 2010). Little research,

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