Foreign Language Productivity in Synchronous versus Asynchronous Computer-mediated Communication

By Luisa L. C. Pérez

Reference


Definitions

- **Synchronous** = Chatroom sessions
- **Asynchronous** = Email dialogue sessions

Previous Research

González-Bueno and Pérez (2000/2001)

- observed the effects of dialogue journaling through email on foreign language writing compared with paper and pencil
- Results = Positive effects on language productivity in email dialog journals

Other Research Findings

- Synchronous nature provides more opportunities to negotiate meaning & converse in spontaneous, everyday language
- Electronic discussions encourage learners to construct knowledge collaboratively
- Synchronous conferencing tends to encourage fluency
- Electronic dialogue journals beneficial for language productive
- “CMC seems to enhance some of the more discourse- and content-oriented components of writing proficiency.” (González-Bueno & Pérez, 2000, cited in Pérez, 2003, pg. 91)
Pérez Research Questions

- Which form of CMC -- synchronous or asynchronous -- would be more effective in increasing language productivity in foreign language learning?
- Which form of CMC -- synchronous or asynchronous -- would participants in the project prefer?

Design

- Participants → 24 college Spanish 1 students
- Length → One semester
- Procedure:
  - Tuesdays → Participants emailed a dialog journal of min. 80 words to instructor. (Instructor responded back and used covert corrections)
  - Thursdays → attended a chatroom session for on hour with the instructor.
- Questionnaire administrated to assess preference of email or chat.

Results

- Quantitative (research question #1)
  - Difference not significant between word productivity in chatroom and emails
- Qualitative (research question #2)
  - Student responses were equally divided:
    - 50% chatroom discussions
    - 50% email assignments

Discussion

- Although the equal preferences, none disliked either technique
- Both learning tools proved to be effective and enjoyable
Advantages vs. Disadvantages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Email (Asynchronous)</th>
<th>Chatroom (Synchronous)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+ More time to think &amp; elaborate messages</td>
<td>+ Immediate responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Feel more relaxed</td>
<td>+ Topics of interest chosen by participant. (teacher facilitator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ More freedom and at own pace to self-correct</td>
<td>+ Learn sentence structure faster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ More chance to write</td>
<td>+ Real everyday usage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ More language required</td>
<td>+ Instructor &amp; Peer learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Unlimited time</td>
<td>(-) More intimidating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ More preparation required</td>
<td>(-) Less preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Instructor learning</td>
<td>(-) Less language required</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Conclusion

- No quantitatively significant differences in students’ vocabulary enrichment
- Qualitatively – 50/50 preference of both activities
- Both electronic techniques beneficial & positive for FLL
- Both tools enhanced learning and motivated students
- Both activities created a non-threatening atmosphere & lowered affective filter
- Both activities helped establish and maintain a good rapport between instructor and students

Limitations & Suggestions

- Larger student population needed
- Variety of languages
- Different levels of language learning

Critiques

- Lack of control and comparison group
- Experimenter bias