共同的と協力的なオンライン言語交流

Collaborative and Cooperative Online Language Exchanges

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Abstract　Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) is becoming a popular tool in EFL classes around the world (Levy & Stockwell, 2006; Thorne & Black, 2007). The type used depends on the teacher's situation. When partner classes are available, cooperative language exchange is one option. "Cooperative", here, means students in each of the countries participating are learning the language of the other partner. The example outlined in this paper is where American students studying Japanese are linked with Japanese students studying English. Collaborative exchange is another option. "Collaborative" means all students are EFL students and thus learn English only. The example illustrated here is where students from Colombia, Viet Nam and Japan worked together to learn English. There are positive aspects and difficulties to overcome with both forms of exchange. This paper will outline some initial findings on which type results in more output from students, in addition to which approach should attain better overall outcomes.

Key words　Computer Mediated Communication (CMC); Collaborative Online Exchange; Cooperative Online Exchange

1. Introduction

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms need to include a diverse range of ideas and materials in order to sustain learner interest. Opportunities for students to have access to appropriate input are essential as too, occasions to use the material they have learnt in meaningful and authentic interactions. Organizing opportunities for non-native speakers of English from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds to interact with each other is a relatively egalitarian and non-threatening way for learners to apply their English abilities, but this is difficult for teachers in an EFL context to do. Students, however, seem to have a desire for international exchange in their English classes with engineering students giving "high endorsement of instrumental and international orientations" (Johnson, 2012). If teachers have access to Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), opportunities to integrate online exchange into a well-developed syllabus abound.

The networks of teachers that exist today are such that teachers can and do collaborate with each other. There are numerous examples of teachers linking with their peers so that their students can interact online (Bower & Kawaguchi, 2011; Vinagre & Muñoz, 2011). Students then have the opportunity to interact in meaningful communication with other speakers of English on a regular basis – something that is not available to the majority of present EFL students, but is extremely useful if such communication is to take place. There are two types of online exchange that have been used by the author – collaborative and cooperative exchanges.

2. Online Collaborative Language Exchanges

Online Collaborative Language Exchanges (OCollLE) provide multiple benefits for students. An increase in the amount of exposure students have to English is one. Examples of this are outlined further below. The English they are exposed to is not native speaker English. As there are now more speakers of English as a second or foreign language than there are native speakers, classrooms should begin to reflect this situation. OCollLE help to do so. Unfortunately, many EFL teachers and students still prefer to use the idealized native speaker as the ideal input source. If teachers are thinking about their students' future use of English, then they should at least include some input from English as a second language sources as nowadays one has more chance of interacting with a speaker of English as a second language than one does with a native speaker.

Perhaps the greatest benefit OCollLE has is that it introduces students to a variety of different cultures rather than forcing the culture of the native speaker on them. It opens students' eyes to what Pennycook (1995: 78) notes when he writes "English is in the world, and the world is in English." Students are able to communicate with a variety of people from different cultures as part of their English language study. They do so on a more equal basis, as they know they are all studying the language as a second or foreign language.

There are far more chances for classes to link with other EFL classes than to do the cooperative language exchanges that are outline later in this paper. The sister school programs that many universities have lend themselves to the setup of OCollLE, though communication between the teachers at the respective institutions is obviously required. Partners can also be found through the extensive networks of teacher associations that are found throughout the world or through requests to language teacher mailing lists. The extensive nature of student interactions requires an understanding between teachers as, ideally, the participating classes would require a syllabus that covers similar topics and content.

2.1 Example of OCollLE

Once you have a partner or partners and have agreed upon the design of your syllabus, a medium for the communication to take place is required. Popular Learning Management Systems (LMS) are useful in this respect. The following is an example of OCollLE courses that have been carried out

from 2008 to 2012. The courses primarily employed Moodle as the LMS through which course content and CMC activities were delivered. The course was called "English communication" in the Japanese university's handbook. In this course 25 Japanese architecture students from a university in Japan interacted with 20 architecture majors from Vietnam and 25 engineering students from Colombia. A combination of synchronous and asynchronous methods was used including Skype, wikis, forum posts and e-mail/text messaging. The most commonly used method to communicate was the forum.

On a weekly basis topics were covered in class. At the end of each class and for homework students were asked to use the material they'd learned in class to communicate with the students in other countries. A large amount of interaction occurred online and the many replies students received and sent suggest a great deal of interaction was taking place in the forums and this interaction was over a period of time greater than the teachers had assigned.

In one forum from the second week of the course, students had to introduce a place from their country. This was a simple type of vocabulary exercise to develop their use of adjectives and the names of common infrastructure. Although it was the second week, the students participated actively as can be seen by the number of replies to each post (in excess of 10 replies for most posts). The majority of students did more than the minimum requisite stated by the teachers. They had been placed in groups where one or two students from each country were in each group. Each person in the group could post to the forum and replies would come to each person from others in their group. On a number of occasions the interaction went on for up to five pages. Colombian, Japanese and Vietnamese students used a variety of multi-media to introduce their countries in the same forum post. On average 13 replies were sent to each student's forum post. These often resulted in up to 1188 words being used in exchanges between these non English major students in a single forum posting. Using the Lextutor profiler we can see that about 80% of the words used are from the K1 list of the 1000 most used words in English. In addition to these, however, 10% of the lexical items were off list or academic in nature. As the forum posting developed, the students took it on themselves to discuss some of the material from their majors as it related to some of the topics they'd taken up. In this instance, initially extensive communication took place but it then developed into intensive discussion.

Other topics introduced were, in chronological order: introductions; introducing my home town and a wonderful place in my country; milestones in my life; cultural events in my country; cultural and social rules; health issues in my country; school life in my country; my country's food; things you can do in my country / home town; guiding around my place; and experiences I've had. Extensive communication took place in most of these topics though some of the topics produced more than others; something that the teachers are aware of and are working on improving.

Though a simple count of page hits is not always a good indicator of the amount of interaction occurring, it does give a basic idea of how much language is being "consumed". This course, with a

total of 135 active students, averaged some 7,000 hits per week with a peak of 8,500 hits in one week. This is an enormous amount of activity for a course in which the students studying English are non-English majors who generally don't like English. Many students from all countries commented very positively with regard to their interactions with each other. Some of the students said they also contacted each other personally via the LMS's message function, which allows students and teachers to send each other personalized messages. The goal of extensive communication was achieved for many students.

A majority of students also posted audio to some of the forums, using a free audio editing software program called "Audacity" to create audio files and upload those to the forums, after which the dialogue was continued in text, or occasionally further audio postings. Students were thus exposed to a variety of accented English at a level of proficiency similar to their own yet which often had some L1 interference. The asynchronous nature of this interaction gave students the opportunity to listen repeatedly and reflect on the meaning of the utterances, which they frequently did. There was also a project in which students had to collaborate to design a multicultural home. In this project, students initially had to share ideas via a forum and then bring those ideas together through negotiated discussion to create a written description using a wiki.

An in-class Skype session where one of the participating groups of Japanese students talked one–to-one (or sometimes two-to-one) with students in Viet Nam was also conducted. Some set topics were used, but there was also 10 minutes of time left for open dialogue. This synchronous form of interaction was appreciated by many of the students but, in feedback after the session, some students stated that it was too difficult to understand the accents of other countries' students. There was, however, general agreement that it was beneficial to language acquisition as students realized it was a very real communicative event.

2.2 Difficulties with Online Collaborative Language Exchanges

To this point many of the positive aspects of OCollLE have been outlined. They are numerous and very advantageous for EFL students. However, it is not a simple thing to organize and carry out. The amount of organization required involves a great deal of planning and understanding on the part of the teachers involved. Agreements on syllabi, understanding of circumstances, scheduling of regular online meetings, agreeing on a schedule and continuous encouragement are all required as a bare minimum.

Communication between the teachers is an area that needs particular mention. In many ways, this was a mirror of what students were expected to do in that, many of the same technological tools were used and English was not the first language of all the participating teachers. Planning in the above example was conducted by chat, email and Voice of Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology, in addition to shared access and editing of the Moodle LMS. Unfortunately, in many respects the teachers were not as communicative as the students. The Vietnamese situation was such that the

teachers were not really participating at all – it was entirely up to the students to participate and they organized themselves under the guidance of one particularly eager student. The Colombian teacher was positive but had ongoing technical problems and also struggled, as his institution was using a different LMS which led to students having to log in to numerous accounts. These, though seemingly minor points, when added up, can cause problems for students and teachers alike.

Some of the projects students worked on did not go well for all students. The project in which students had to work together to design a multicultural home described above asked students to finalize their interaction via a wiki. This "finalization" project did not go as well as was hoped for most of the groups. The technological features of wikis themselves were difficult for some students to grasp, and culturally divergent attitudes towards the task of collaboration sometimes led to conflicting behaviors. Ensuring there is enough support for students and teachers to understand the technology and be able to use it is essential. An online tutorial was made to address this shortcoming but it was too little too late. Furthermore, how use of the technology facilitates specific objectives needs to be clear to students as well as teachers. Teachers also need to incorporate the tasks into their curriculum – something that wasn't done in the Vietnamese context.

3. Online Cooperative Language Exchanges

There are also many benefits to Online Cooperative Language Exchanges (OCoopLE). Teachers of foreign languages (FL), more-so than second language teachers, can struggle bringing immediacy to their classrooms. Using CMC, FL teachers can give students opportunities to communicate with native speakers of the L2, something that is sorely lacking in most EFL situations in Japan. When done cooperatively, both countries' students benefit. Students are also exposed directly to the culture of the target language and because there is the sense of "give and take" in the learning, students tend to help each other by correcting the mistakes of the learner – particularly if they know that learner will help them when they are learning their language.

3.1. Example of OCoopLE

The author has carried out OCoopLE courses since 2004. Students have benefited from participation in cooperative online language exchanges integrated into the syllabus. Japanese EFL and American JFL students cooperated in learning the target languages, via the LMS, Moodle. Synchronous and asynchronous communication took place almost daily using forums, wikis, and Skype. These tools have been used so that discussion and comparison of cultural topics could take place, which in turn increased students' real world knowledge and confidence in their ability to communicate in an L2. As mentioned, L1 students also became peer reviewers of the L2 output of students in the other country.

The most common type of OCoopLE the author has carried out is where about 25 Japanese first year engineering majors work with about the same number of high school students studying Japanese.

The author has also worked with college teachers and their JFL students but working with the high school students has been more successful for a number of reasons. The high school students have been more motivated to do the interactions and have had more time to do so.

Similar to the OCollLE courses, topics on a variety of themes were used. The material students learned in class became the basis for in-class communication but also for communication with the students in the U.S. Again, similarly, a great amount of communication took place between the students. However, in OCollLE there are two forums each week – one for English only and the other for Japanese only. As one is in the students' L1, it is not as difficult or time consuming to do as the one in the target language.

The interaction in the OCoopLEs to date has always exceeded the length and depth of the OCollLE. In almost all forums there were in excess of 15 replies to each forum post with some going as long as 28 replies and 2000 words. The LexTutor breakdown was almost identical though. Again, though simple page hits are not always a good indicator of the amount of interaction occurring we can get some idea of how much interaction is taking place. In most of the OCoopLE courses hits averaged almost 8,000 per week with a peak of 10,500 hits in one week. This is an even greater amount than the OCollLE courses and, again, this is for a course where the students studying English are non English majors who basically don't like English.

Feedback from students was even more positive for the OCoopLE courses and many students continued on with exchanges after the course including making Skype exchanges.

3.2. Other points to consider with OCoopLE

As with Online Collaborative Language Exchanges, there is a lot of organization that is required. Hence, cooperation between the teachers is paramount. In the author's experience this seems much easier to do with OCoopLE than with Online Collaborative Language Exchanges. The development of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is more advanced in the countries where OCoopLE takes place and the teachers' understanding of it is therefore more advanced too. Students also seem more enthusiastic to be communicating with native speakers. This, however, created its own problems, as students would receive a far more limited understanding of different cultures.

4. Further Discussion

Numerous studies (Long, 1983; Gass & Varonis, 1985) have shown that interaction, even with other non-native speakers, is useful for second language acquisition to occur so both forms of CMC outlined here can be considered "useful". From the above examples it is apparent that OCoopLEs seem to produce more language from the language learners and are easier to organize than Online Collaborative Language Exchanges. As there is more peer review-taking place in OCoopLEs and native speakers are doing it, the chances of students becoming more accurate would also appear to increase. However, the number of opportunities to interact with different cultures and be exposed to a

number of different varieties of English is obviously far less in OCoopLEs. In addition there are far fewer partner schools available for OCoopLEs than there are for Online Collaborative Language Exchanges for the simple fact that there are far more people studying English as a Foreign Language than there are studying most of the other major languages.

5. Conclusion

There are many beneficial aspects to both cooperative and collaborative online language exchanges. From a purely academic point of view, it would seem that OCoopLEs offer more to both the teachers and students as, in the cases outlined here, more quantity and quality were achieved in those. In an ideal situation, students should have access to both forms of online language exchange. However, if only one can be achieved and with the world as it is today, where English is being spoken as a second language by many more people than there are native speakers of English, it would seem to be a better option for teachers to offer their students access to other speakers of English in the form of Online Collaborative Language Exchanges. Particularly if all the teachers involved are able to incorporate the exchange into their curricula and syllabi, the added benefits for students would be that they are exposed to a variety of different cultures and have more opportunities to use the language they are studying in meaningful interactions.

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