ムードルによる国際オンライン学習交流

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	作成者: ハグリー, エリック トーマス
	メールアドレス:
	所属:
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Moodle as a Conduit for International Telecollaboration

Eric HAGLEY[†1]

Telecollaboration has become a powerful means of allowing students to interact with learners in foreign countries and giving them all the benefits that such international collaboration entails. For language learners in countries or regions where there is limited opportunity to interact with other cultures and speakers of the target language (TL) physically, this is a particularly important feature of telecollaboration. Moodle is an excellent platform on which to run telecollaboration projects because of the many features it includes and this paper will outline how it was used for two different types of successful telecollaboration between students in different countries. It will go on to show how the author used Moodle to allow his students, who study English in a regional university in the north of Japan, to interact with students in several countries thus giving them greater motivation to use the language they are studying. The students used English in activities that promote cultural awareness and developed all five of the language skills. Moodle's forum, wiki, questionnaire, quiz and book modules were extensively used to promote online exchange. Data suggests the methods used were beneficial to language acquisition and cultural understanding and were popular with students. It also shows there are clear differences between the two types of telecollaboration outlined.

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エリック ハグリ一[†1]

近年、オンライン学習交流（テレコラボレーション）は外国にいる他大学・高等学校の学生と国内の学生との交流できる優れた手段となり、その国際交流の様々な利点ももたらします。他国の文化と触れ合う機会や目標とする言語の実践的な使用する場が少ない国や地方にいる学生にとってテレコラボレーションの特徴です。ムードルはテレコラボレーションの活用における充実しているプラットフォームです。交流を実施するために様々な機能があり、本論文では数力国間でムードル上のテレコラボレーション企画について報告します。本論文には、日本北部の地方大学でムードル上の国際語学学習と交流における学生の英語勉強に対するモチベーション向上や実践的な英語を使用する場の提供について説明します。ムードルのフォーラム、ウィキ、調査、小テスト、ブックモジュールの利用により5つの言語スキルを向上し、多文化理解を高めることも出来ました。データの参考による今回使用した方法は語学取得や文化理解にとってためになり、学生からの評価も高いと示します。

1. Introduction

As the field is relatively new, a definitive term has yet to be agreed upon: telecollaboration, online exchange, computer mediated communication, eTandem and virtual exchange in addition to others have all been used to date. In this paper, telecollaboration will be the term used. It involves students, usually in different countries but could also include different regions of the same country, collaborating in projects and/or exchanging ideas and language using the Internet.

The author in the past has used the terms "online cooperative language exchange" and "online collaborative language exchange" to try and differentiate between exchanges where the former entailed students using both their first language (L1) and the target language (TL) and the latter involved only English as a lingua franca. This distinction is perhaps not clear enough and hence in this paper, the terms "single language" and "dual language" telecollaboration (SLT and DLT) will be used to differentiate these different types of exchange.

Though the field is young, it has already developed a strong body of research that shows the benefits of telecollaboration. It has been shown to increase the level and amount of participation in communicative events, (Pais Marden and Herrington, 2011; Sotillo, 2000); increase the amount of interaction of people with lower power positions (Kern and Warschauer, 2000); improve peer feedback (Bower and Kawaguchi, 2011; Ware and O'Dowd, 2008) as well as increase

opportunities to participate in and learn from and about other cultures (Chen and Yang, 2014; Thorne and Black, 2007). These studies have all been either SLT or DLT. There have, to the author's knowledge, been no studies on the differences between the two. Nor have there been papers looking at how Moodle helps in the facilitation of such exchanges.

2. Use of Moodle to facilitate telecollaboration

The papers that were detailed in the introduction used a variety of means to carry out the telecollaboration projects researched. However each one was reliant on only one mode, whether that be email, synchronous chat, or forums. Only Chen and Yang used a multi-modal exchange model though only mail was open for students to use outside of class time. Moodle combines all of these tools in one easy to use package, which students can access at any time and from anywhere. It also adds **the wiki, which is a powerful tool for students to participate in** collaborative writing.

In both the SLT and DLT projects, students used Moodle forums, chat and wikis to carry out projects. Within the forums, students attached audio files, video files and other multimedia. In the ongoing exchanges from 2014, students no longer have to attach these to forums as they can directly add them using the Poodll add-on. In addition to Moodle, Skype was used by some of the students to carry out synchronous oral exchanges. The benefits of this setup are obvious. Students have access to all the material they are sharing in one space. They can easily access past exchanges between themselves in the forums to develop their arguments and synthesize these in the wikis. When needed, they can exchange ideas in real time via the chat.

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†1 室蘭工業大学 Muroran Institute of Technology

With email, students only have their own and their partner's mail to view. The teacher can also supply students with the necessary language scaffolding using other features of Moodle. In the author's case, these included the book, quiz and questionnaire modules as well as the page resource.

3. SLT and DLT course outline

Both the SLT and DLT courses detailed here were carried out on Moodle. In the SLT, Japanese university students, who were majoring in engineering, collaborated with students from a Vietnamese architectural university. English was the only language used. The topics covered were introductions, fashion, holidays and also a project. The project entailed students, in groups that included students from both countries, deciding on the design of a multi-cultural home. To compare the two styles of telecollaboration, the DLT was carried out with the same topics covered and the same project. The students in the DLT were students from the same university in Japan and high school students in the United States. The students in the United States were studying Japanese so that this course involved students exchanging in both English and Japanese. Forums for each language were set up so that only one language was used in any particular forum.

Since 2003 the author has been carrying out both SLT and DLT projects. However, initially only the DLT projects had the full cooperation of the teacher in the U.S. The SLT projects were more informal and often revolved around the students in Vietnam (and other countries) volunteering. Their teachers were not involved to any degree. Importantly for this paper, the teacher in Vietnam became involved for this course in second semester 2013.

In the DLT course being examined here, there were 47 active students – 20 Japanese and 27 American. The SLT course comprised 36 Japanese and 25 active Vietnamese students for a total of 61 students. The Japanese students were from the same department and randomly assigned into one of the two classes. The Japanese students' attitude to English was, on the whole, very negative. They didn't have to take an English entrance exam to enter the university and their general level of English is quite low. Their average TOEIC scores were in the 310 to 330 range. The course they were participating in was a general English communication course.

Japanese students were given 30% of their final grade based on their participation in the forums, with a holistic grade being assigned to each forum based on the amount of language used and the effort used to communicate. In the DLT course the English forums were given a smaller grade than in the SLT courses as in the DLT course a small grade was also given to the students for communicating in the Japanese forums and this was added to the grade for English forum participation.

3.1 SLT – benefits and drawbacks

The first benefit of SLT is that there are many more chances for it to take place. There are many more students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) than there are native English speakers studying Japanese as a Foreign Language (JFL) or indeed, native speakers of English. As this is the case, finding partner schools or classes should, in theory, be much easier to do. In the author's case, a sister school agreement was the starting point for the two schools' students to interact. The author approached the international office at his university to attain a letter of introduction to the teachers in the sister school in Vietnam. This was obtained and signed by the dean of the school. Emails were exchanged and the course began but it was the student body in the university in Vietnam that carried the exchange in the early years. This was due in a large part to the lack of training the teachers in Vietnam had

taken. Over a period of three years the author created tutorials for the teachers in Vietnam and went there to carry out workshops. This is probably the main reason that the teacher for the most recent of the SLT projects became more involved. This involvement included the teacher checking what her students were doing in the forums and giving feedback – something that was not being done in previous projects, thus resulting in less extrinsic motivation for the students to participate. This was born out in the statistics from the various courses done over the last 5 years. The DLT courses averaged more than 3 times the participation of the SLT courses as measured by Moodle's course participation reports. In the course just completed, the participation reports for both the DLT and SLT courses had similar outcomes.

Another enormous benefit of the SLT course is the affordance of cultural exchange. Though still needing improvement, Japanese students understanding of the majority of cultures where the English language is used as the main language in the country, is greater than that of the cultures of non-English speaking countries. Japanese students have little to no knowledge of the culture of Vietnam and it is this that leads them to negotiate cultural standing – something that requires them to use the language they are studying. Long's (1996) interaction theory promotes the negotiation of meaning as an important factor in acquiring a language, but in the case of English as a foreign language in telecollaboration, it is not only negotiation of meaning that occurs but also negotiation of cultural standing. This makes for deeper discussions. It can also result in misunderstandings but, in the classroom environment, such misunderstandings can be used to teach intercultural communicative competence as outlined in Byram (1997).

SLT has the additional benefit of being able to include multiple countries' students in the one course. To date, the most varied course the author has carried out was in 2010 where students from Colombia, Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam and Japan all interacted in a single course.

There are drawbacks to SLT. The different goals and expectations that teachers bring is possibly the biggest one. This is magnified when there are multiple countries' students involved. Other problems arise with differing levels of technical know-how, which leads to a power imbalance regarding organizing the online platform. Discussions between teachers need to be frank and development of the course needs to begin early.

3.2 DLT – benefits and drawbacks

The first benefit of DLT is the dynamic that develops. There is a spirit of cooperation amongst the students – you are helping me learn your language, and I'm helping you learn mine. This becomes a powerful motivator for students, particularly if they see the students in the other country making gains in their language study. Competition also develops. "If those students are that good at Japanese, I need to become better at English" was a quite common comment on post-course questionnaires. Japanese students also have expressed their satisfaction at being able to interact with native speakers – something they can seldom do if they live and study in a regional university in Japan. Amongst the teachers there is not as big a communication problem regarding content as with the SLT example. As the Japanese teacher is free to choose the subject matter for the Japanese forum content as the English teacher is regarding the English content, there is no need to agree on content and hence there is less of a power imbalance between teachers. In the majority of cases, the JFL students and teachers are in developed countries where they both have a greater understanding of the technology being used. Less time is required to orientate teachers and students regarding Moodle

and there are also less technical problems to face. This also translates into more motivation to use the site.

4. Some results from the courses

The results outlined here come from the reports section of the Moodle course, which teachers can access. There are also statistics taken from the site administration reports section "course overview". The interaction took place over a 6-week period in second semester, 2013. Students created some video exchanges as well in these courses but only the text exchanges will be reviewed here.

4.1 DLT course results

Recalling that there were 47 active students – 20 Japanese and 27 American and looking at the course administration reports section, there were 5826 views of the English forums in this course (this figure covers both Japanese and U.S student views). The Japanese students used 10,194 words in the English forums for an average of 509.7 words per student in a total of 207 forum postings (though in actual fact some of the students were responsible for a lot more than others). Total activity in the course as measured by the Moodle course overview statistics was 22596 or 498 per active student, these numbers representing the number of "hits" to the course page. In a post course student survey, 93% of students were strongly affirmative or affirmative to the statements "I enjoyed communicating with students in the other country online", "The online exchange increased my motivation to study the TL" and "The online system (Moodle) was good."

4.2 SLT course results

36 Japanese and 25 Vietnamese students for a total of 61 students actively participated in the SLT course. There were 7963 views of the English forums (this figure covers both Vietnamese and Japanese student views) and the Japanese students used 12201 words in the English forums for an average of 339 words per student (though again some of the students were responsible for a lot more than others). This from a total of 493 forum posts. Total activity in the course as measured by the Moodle course overview statistics was 36238 or 594 per active student, these numbers representing the number of "hits" to the course page. In a post course student survey, 85% of students were strongly affirmative or affirmative to the statements "I enjoyed communicating with students in the other country online", "The online exchange increased my motivation to study the TL" and "The online system (Moodle) was good."

5. Discussion

For both courses, students appreciated Moodle as a platform. From the teachers' perspective, it was also a safe environment. Privacy, in Japan in particular, is a major issue. Moodle, as a closed, password-protected platform is ideal for this reason. The constructivist theories on which Moodle is based ensure that the platform is one on which students can share their ideas freely and easily and create representations of each other's worlds because of it. It offered students a means of interacting with students from other countries in the TL – something they would have struggled to be able to do without it.

The DLT course resulted in a good deal of language production per Japanese student and this language production was more concentrated too. 207 forum posts resulted in 10,194 words for an average of 49 words per post. Though perhaps not a great amount by general standards, for engineering students who don't like English and who struggle to produce language at

any time, it is considerable. In addition to actual production, there was a great deal of "consumption" of language in this course too. Forum views, at an average of almost 124 per student, were far greater than forum posts and from this it is obvious that students were reading other students' posts. This "input" is another powerful means of TL development and is not possible with email exchanges.

SLT did not precipitate as much language production per Japanese student as the DLT course. Japanese students created an average of almost 25 words per forum post – considerably less than the DLT course students. Their consumption of language was a little more than 130 views per active student. This number is greater than the DLT course, but if the amount they were reading was less, then the end result means their actual consumption would have been less than the DLT course. It is still, however, a large amount of input that was being consumed outside of class time.

What the SLT course did result in was new knowledge. The majority of topics in the DLT course developed from a strong understanding base. Many of the exchanges were based on reciprocal understanding. However in the SLT exchanges there were numerous examples of "I don't know...." and "I've never heard of ...." Though the American students sometimes used these phrases, the Japanese did not in the DLT course. In the SLT course, they were numerous. The fact that they did not generate more language production requires more research as to why – something the author will be doing in the future.

6. Conclusion

Both SLT and DLT courses give students the chance to use the TL for real communication with students in other countries. Students are overwhelmingly positive regarding the telecollaboration and it results in extensive communication occurring outside of class time, a goal of any teacher of communication. At present, it would seem that DLT is easier to carry out and results in more interaction between students. However, as teachers in countries where EFL is taught become more technology literate, the ease of creating SLT courses should improve. Once this happens and if agreement can be reached between the teachers involved regarding content, means of assessment and promotion to students, then increased interaction would follow. As the interaction in the SLT courses can involve multiple countries and cultures, it is the author's hope that these types of exchanges become the norm. There is certainly room for DLT courses but the future of telecollaboration will more than likely reside in SLT. As has been shown here, Moodle is an ideal platform for this to eventuate.

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