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Single and Dual Language Virtual Exchange for Language Learning

日英二重言語によるオンライン語学学習交流と英語のみのオンライン語学学習

室蘭工業大学 HAGLEY Eric

本論文では、オーストラリアの大学と米国の高校での日本語学習者と、日本の高等教育機関での英語学習者間における、日英二重言語によるオンライン語学学習交流(Dual Language Virtual Exchange DLVE)と室蘭工業大学と他の国内大学の学生とコロンビアやベトナムの学生の英語のみによるオンライン語学学習交流(Single Language Virtual Exchange SLVE)システムを紹介し、実践報告を行う。本論文で開発・実施した Moodle による VE のオンライン環境について具体的に概用を述べ、カリキュラムに組み込まれた交流課題、学生の投稿例を紹介しながら、オンライン交流の効果的な方法と利点を考察する。活動記録やアンケート調査の結果は、このような DLVE と SLVE (両方使うと VE) 方法が、学習言語使用の量と質、学習動機、他文化理解を高めることを示唆している。

国や個々の教育機関では、学習者が達成すべき特定の目標を提示している。米国におけるナショナル・スタンダード、及び、21世紀教育基準は、オーストラリアや日本の基準と多くの点で類似している。これらの国家的基準と個々の教育機関の目標、特にグローバルな視点を持つ学習者を育成する必要性に基づき、当システムを開発した。Bower & Kawaguchi (2011)、Vinagre & Muñoz(2011)の研究におけるオンライン語学学習に共同的かつ総合的な要素を加えることを試みた。

VEの目的は学習者に目標言語を使う場を与えること、そして、日本、米国、オーストラリア、ベトナム、コロンビアの文化比較やディスカッションをしながら互いの文化についての理解を深め、語学力向上を促していくことである。しかし、VEに潜在する可能性は知識、言語能力の発展にとどまらない。文化に関する交流課題を選ぶことによって、異文化理解の知識を深めると同時に、目標言語でのコミュニケーション能力に対する学習者の自信の向上につながった。更に、この交流は、ネイティブスピーカーとノンネイティブスピーカーの内容のあるコミュニケーションの機会を最大限に活用する機会を与えるだけでなく、それぞれが属するコミュニティの社会的な一員としての生活技能すなわちライフスキルの向上にも大きく貢献していると考えられる。現システムとその将来についても述べる。

Introduction

The use of technology in language classes around the world has become commonplace. Whether it is the teacher using Powerpoint, students using software or mobile devices, or classes participating in online exchanges of some sort, there is now an understanding that technology should play a part in language learning. The Internet makes it even more imperative that technology be a part of the language classroom. Virtual Exchange (VE) 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.

The European Commission co-financed INTENT project defines VE as technology-enabled, sustained, people to people education programs between geographically distant groups of students where online intercultural exchange, interaction and collaboration with peers occurs, under the guidance of educators and/or expert facilitators. VE is growing in importance throughout the EU and the number of exchanges has increased dramatically. VE is also being developed in the U.S. with the J. Christopher Stevens VE fund set up by the U.S. government to promote this. There are many examples of VE in the U.S. with the Soliya project being particularly well regarded for its promotion of peace. Both Europe and the U.S. are promoting VE because it offers students the chance to interact and develop contacts with students in other countries without the enormous cost of travel. We now talk of virtual mobility because of this fact. It also gives students the opportunity to use the language skills they are learning in class to participate in real world communicative activities in addition to developing intercultural competence. A number of institutions in Asia have also begun doing VE but the scale with which they have been done has been relatively small (Chun, 2014; Helm, 2015). There are many reasons for this that include poor access to a suitable platform, issues with interoperability between institutions, lack of links between faculty within and between different institutions, costs, lack of teacher training and difficulty in assessing such interactions. The benefits of VE in the Asian context are also not as well documented as in Europe and the U.S. and until July of this year, there was still not a community of researchers in the field.

In Japan there have been a number of examples of VE. Bower and Kawaguchi's (2011) VE was notable for its efforts at improving accuracy via peer correction. Harashima et. al. (2014) carried out VE between students in different universities within Japan to good effect because of the use of a learning management system (LMS). There have been others but most have struggled to be inclusive of full departments because of a lack of partner students and teacher training. Ensuring all students in a school have access to VE should be the final goal of such projects if they have been proven to be useful. VE 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). It is for these reasons that it should become a part of any communicative language class. 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 EFL students in Japan, but is extremely useful if such communication is to take place.

Virtual Exchange Method

VE can take many forms. Email, Skype, blogs and many other examples have been carried out as noted above. However each example 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. To be cost efficient, reliable and easy to use, a LMS has been found to be ideal (Hagley, 2014). The author uses a Moodle LMS on a server to host students from Colombia, Malaysia, Vietnam and Japan in SLVE, and students from the U.S., Australia and Japan in Dual Language DLVE. SLVE is where only one language is used during the exchange – in these cases it was English. DLVE is where two languages are used - in these cases they were Japanese and English. In both the SLVE and DLVE 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 since 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. 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.

As there are multiple modes of communication available, and these can be accessed from both mobile and fixed devices, the opportunities for communication increase dramatically. This is another reason that LMS, and Moodle in particular, are ideal for VE projects. Teachers are also able to easily access each student's participation and give feedback to individual students. The system is also password protected and without advertising thus improving the integrity of the course.

SLVE or DLVE?

VE itself is, as shown above, beneficial but which type you choose will depend on a number of factors. There are advantages and disadvantages to both types of VE from the teaching and learning perspective. One benefit of SLVE is, because 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, the opportunities to carry out SLVE are numerous. Therefore partner schools or classes should, in theory, be much easier to find. Sister school agreements can become the starting point for the two schools' students to interact or contacts made via meetings at conferences can be acted upon. There are a number of sites that also allow teachers to post their ideas and ask for partners to join them. The author is also developing a large SLVE project that already has over 800 students from Japan and Colombia participating in it. Students from eight institutions around Japan are working with students from the SENA in Colombia. This will expand and will be further outlined below.

The next major benefit of SLVE is the ability it has to create deeper cultural exchanges. Japanese students understanding of cultures where the English language is used as the main language, is generally deeper than that of the cultures of non-English speaking countries. Japanese students have little to no knowledge of the culture of Colombia, for example, and it is this that leads them to try and negotiate cultural standing – something that requires them to use the language they are studying. Long's (1996) interaction theory notes the negotiation of meaning as an important factor in acquiring a language, but in the case of English as a foreign language in VE, it is not only negotiation of meaning that occurs but also negotiation of cultural standing. Deeper discussions occur

which 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). With SLVE multiple countries' students can also be included 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.

Teachers and students participating in an SLVE can run into problems too. Teachers often have different goals and expectations and when these clash, miscommunication can occur. This is magnified when there are multiple countries' students involved. It is therefore imperative that prior to beginning, teachers have a clear understanding of each other's goals. Differing levels of technical know-how, which leads to a power imbalance regarding organizing the online platform, variations in students' language ability and other issues can arise so discussions between teachers need to be clear from the outset hence development of the course obviously needs to begin early. The benefits, however, far outweigh these problems.

With DLVE a prominent benefit is the dynamic that develops in the course. The author often sees a spirit of cooperation amongst the students – you are helping me learn your language, and I'm helping you learn mine. This is a powerful motivator for students, particularly when they see students in the other country improving their language level. In the past, competition has also developed. "If those students are that good at Japanese, I need to become better at English" was quite a common comment on post-course questionnaires. The ability to interact with native speakers - something they rarely do if they live and study in a regional area of Japan – is highly prized. Generally there is not as big a communication problem between teachers too as they only have to think about the goals of the language they are teaching so there is not overlap. Thus the Japanese teacher is free to choose the subject matter for the Japanese forum content and the English teacher the English content, so there is no need to agree on content and hence there is less of a power imbalance between teachers. Usually JFL students and teachers are studying in developed countries hence they both have a greater understanding of technology so less time is required to orientate teachers and students regarding Moodle and there are less technical problems to face. The major drawback of DLVE is that there are relatively few classes of JFL around the world. If one wants to scale VE to large numbers, it becomes impossible to do.

Both forms of VE resulted in improved cultural understanding and motivation to learn languages (Hagley, 2014). Numerous examples of negotiation of meaning, communication repair, collaborative learning and increases in both input and output by students could also be seen from these courses. The SLVE in particular was shown to be more useful in regards negotiation of meaning and more Japanese students preferred it, as they felt an affinity to others studying English as a foreign language. The extent of variation in culture was also more keenly felt in SLVE between students in the developing countries and the Japanese students and there was some evidence to suggest that Japanese students were helping the students in these countries develop their knowledge base in technology too.

Outcomes

Japan's ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) rightly is promoting education that will develop students that are global in outlook and understanding. The ministries of education in most countries around the world see that students are increasingly required to participate in international projects and know that the wealth of the nation will be tied to its ability to compete in an increasingly competitive global economy. To participate in such an economy, students require an understanding of foreign cultures, an ability to interact with them and language skills to do so. Both forms of VE offer students excellent opportunities to attain a global outlook and understanding of other cultures in addition to giving them the chance to use the language they study in class in real world situations. It does so by making them active learners as they pursue the goal of creating a relationship with people in other countries via the online exchanges. They are exposed to more input from other learners and required to produce more output to communicate. Input and output are the two main factors in developing competence in language (Krashen, 1981; Swain, 1995). Increases in both of these could be seen in both forms of VE.

Though there seems to be some evidence (Hagley, 2014) that DLVE results in more input and output than SLVE, the same article points out that SLVE results in more intercultural understanding and development. However, both types of VE resulted in students using and consuming more of the language they were learning than had they been in a typical language classroom. Students have also consistently been positive toward both forms of VE with over 85% of students stating in questionnaires that they very or quite enjoy interacting with students in other countries via the VE.

Present and future VE

Due to the positive feedback received from peers, the author opened up the SLVE to other teachers in Japan. From late September, 2015, some 400 students and 13 teachers from 8 institutions around Japan are working with over 400 students and 10 teachers from the SENA in Colombia on an expanded VE. Topics were agreed upon such that now over 800 students are using English to exchange information on a variety of topics in a Moodle course. The SENA is a government backed vocational school in Colombia supplying education to over a million Colombians. The VE that started in September is a pilot. If the outcome is successful, the SENA has mentioned it would like to expand the VE to include some 15,000 students there. The author has received assurances from many teachers such that there is that number of students in Japan so we will be able to continue the project on such a scale. Should this eventuate, we would also welcome students from the universities that participated in the Tohoku and Hokkaido region's university and higher education research conference. Consultation with teachers in the Middle East and one other country in Asia is also taking place. Should the project continue on course, there will be some 90,000 students participating from 4 different countries. 3 levels of language will be covered, beginner, intermediate and advanced with students from each of the countries participating in forum discussions on a variety of topics. At present the courses are only over 8 week periods but from next year some will expand to continue over a one year period. Ideally, this platform will become a template for others to be able to participate in VE as a natural part of learning a second language.

Conclusion

VE is slowly becoming more mainstream due to the power it has to bring people together. Many positive outcomes have been achieved from projects to date and it can be seen as an excellent tool for closer ties between people from around the globe. The Soliya project is sponsored by the United Nations and aims at improving understanding and through this, peace. The project outlined above is not on the same level, but it has the opportunity to improve students understanding of the world they live in and become more global in outlook. Obviously it is also a wonderful tool to promote language learning and intercultural competence. Most language teachers want their students to have the opportunity to use the language they are learning in real world situations and VE also gives them this chance. The biggest problems to date have been how to find partners, how to make the VE economically viable, simple to use and ensure positive outcomes for all those involved in them. The system outlined above using Moodle as a platform on which students from around the world come to exchange ideas and language is one means of overcoming these problems. The platform was created using a Kaken grant and has been promised continued finance from SENA and some of the Japanese institutions participating. It is a very cost effective method. Continued research on the effectiveness of such a large scale program needs to be carried out but from the results to date, there is much to suggest that the program is effective.

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【質疑応答】

Q. 海外に知り合いがいないと大変かと思うが、どうやって相手を探したのか。

A. 10 年前に始めた時は個人的な知り合いにお願いした。今は、姉妹校を活用してやっている。

Q. お互いの学生のクレジットはどうしているか。

A. こちらの学生は 30% ぐらい。姉妹校のコロンビア、アメリカ、オーストラリアでは 10% ぐらい。Moodle 上でルーブリックを作って、その中に投稿回数、質、内容などで評価している。

Q. 授業について何かやりとりを紹介してもらえるか。

A. 授業中 Skype を利用してみたが、南米は時差があり、うまくいかなかった。今は Moodle 上で誰と誰がするのか、先に設定して、宿題としてやっている。また、Moodle の中に PoodLL があるので、録音して利用している。