

## Using an Instant Messenger to Learn a Foreign Language in a Peer-Tutoring Environment

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores useful ways of using an instant messenger in a peer-tutoring environment when two students exchange their mother languages. Seven learners of Korean and seven Korean students learning English were paired randomly to conduct language exchange via an instant messenger, KakaoTalk. The pairs (five of male and female pair and two of same gender pair) were engaged in a one-hour session once a week for ten weeks, half an hour in Korean and half an hour in English. The meeting aimed to improve partner's pronunciation, vocabulary and understanding of the cultures. The results of the exchange activities showed the positive impacts of language exchange for students.

**Keywords:** Korean language, peer tutoring, instant messenger, KakaoTalk

### INTRODUCTION

A central goal of modern approaches to language teaching, including communicative language teaching, task-based learning, process approaches to writing and training in language learning strategies, is to enhance student autonomy and control over the language learning process (Warschauer, & Turbee 1996). Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), which in its early days was dominated by "drill and kill" instructional programs, has also embraced this goal. New multimedia programs allow students more choice and flexibility in working with materials for their learning. Programs such as word processing and desk-top publishing do not attempt to deliver instruction but instead provide an instrument for students to express their thoughts and ideas. The most recent, and some believe revolutionary, application of the computer as an instrument for communication in the foreign language classroom is social networks. These networks take advantage of computer mediated communication (CMC) to bring together pairs and groups of students for collaborative learning projects in a single classroom or in various classrooms around the world" (Warschauer, & Turbee 1996).

Instant Messaging (IM) and more generally 'presence awareness' is one of the fastest-growing applications in history, used increasingly by companies and learning organizations to bring together online populations. There are now well over 200 million instant messaging users worldwide divided among the 'big four' messengers (AOL Instant Messenger, ICQ, MSN Messenger, Yahoo! Messenger), and it is believed that by 2004, 60 percent of real-time communication, including voice, text or call-and-response, will be driven by Instant Messaging technology (Eisenstadt, Komzak, & Dzbor, M., 2003). It was already being claimed that, at least in the UK, mobile technologies were "a familiar part of the lives of most teachers and students" (Facer, 2004, P. 1). Yet their integration into teaching and learning has been more gradual, as educators have sought to understand how best to use their tools to support various kinds of learning (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield 2007).

The interuniversity, collaborative experiments described at length in this article make full use of network communication and the instrumentality of computers, attributing a central position to goal-oriented activity in the teaching and learning paradigm. They constitute a powerful language learning model going well beyond the "chat line" stage on which many network experiments are based. While this type of casual exchange has its place, the continuing use of networks must anchor itself to redefined goals, priorities, and a unifying conception of what should transpire in the language classroom, thus creating an environment capable of fostering natural and productive language learning (Barson, Frommer, & Schwartz 1992).

Recent research on Internet interest communities has suggested that they provide rich empirical grounds for exploring the varied forms of second language engagement, development, and socialization that are taking place via new information and communication technologies. Early explorations of CMC posited the emergence of netspeak (Crystal, 2001), or homogenized language varieties that developed in tandem with the use of online media such as email and Internet Relay Chat (IRC). However, more recent sociolinguistic research has focused on the wide range of new media practices that proliferate in distinct online contexts. In particular, such work has drawn attention to the ways that multiple languages and emergent discourse practices are used to construct relationships and establish social identities online (Androutsopoulos, 2006). The research reviewed in the following section addresses the ways that individuals use first language and second language proficiencies for the discursive construction of self and social relationships in a variety of Internet interest communities (Thome, Black, & Sykes, 2009).

In school, work, social, and recreational settings, new media and communication technologies enable, and indeed require, participants to perform and modify presentations of individual and group identity, a dynamic that Thurlow and McKay (2003) have described as "the Internet as learning and lifestyle resource" (p. 98). The mercurial rise in digitally mediated communication has radically transformed everyday practices in the areas of relationship development and maintenance as well as information consumption and production. The primary objective of this study is to explore useful ways of using an instant messenger in a peer tutoring environment when two students exchange their mother languages.

## **ROLES OF TECHNOLOGY IN LEARNING LANGUAGES**

### *Instant Messaging and Mobile communication*

Mobile learning is undergoing rapid evolution. Early generations of mobile learning projects tended to propose formally-designed activities, carefully crafted by educators and technologists, and using emerging technologies that were not yet widely accessible or well understood. Current widespread ownership of mobile and wireless devices means that learners are increasingly in a position to take the lead and engage in activities motivated by their personal needs and circumstances of use, including those arising from greater mobility and travel (Kukulska-Hulme, Traxler, & Pettit, 2007).

Mobile phones are becoming more widely used in learning vocabulary, as is shown in a number of studies (Chen & Chung, 2008; Kennedy & Levy, 2008; Lu, 2008; Pincas, 2004; Stockwell, 2008; Stockwell, 2010; Thornton & Houser, 2005; Yamaguchi, 2005). In one study, Lu (2008) had students learn two sets of English vocabulary words either through mobile phones or by a paper-based format. Students who learned via SMS were found to understand more words than students presented with the paper-based tasks. Kennedy and Levy's (2008) research investigated the acceptability of a pushed mode of mobile phone operation; these authors sent short messages containing known words and new words mixed together. They found that the students appreciated the experience of reviewing learnt information and that the students found the message content often useful or enjoyable. Butgereit and Botha (2009) described a system that allows language teachers to create spelling lists or vocabulary lists in English and Afrikaans. The system then generates a fun mobile phone application using multiple texts-to-speech engines to encourage African pupils to practice spelling the words. Cavus and Ibrahim (2009) developed a system to send technical English language words together with the meanings in the form of SMSs. Studies have also shown that MALL's utility is not just limited to vocabulary learning; mobile phones can also be applied to other learning situations. Comas-Quinn and Mardomingo (2009) carried out a mobile learning project to engage learners in the creation of an online resource that focuses on a foreign culture. In their project, students used their mobile phones, digital cameras, and MP3 recorders to select and record samples of their encounters with foreign cultures; students then sent or uploaded these encounters to a cultural blog to be shared with other group members. Chang and Hsu (2011) developed a system to integrate an instant translation mode, an instant translation annotation mode, and an instant multi-user shared translation annotation function to support a synchronously intensive reading course in the normal classroom. The project was designed for personal digital assistants (PDAs), not really for mobile phones. Demouy and Kukulska-Hulme (2010) also reported on a project that allowed students to use iPods and MP3 players, as well as mobile phones, to practice

listening and speaking. They found that whilst project participants readily adopted the use of iPods and MP3 players, the process of doing activities on mobile phones was deemed less satisfying. (Wang & Smith, 2013)

#### *Peer-to-Peer Networking and Exchanging*

Some language educators have recommended use of peer-to-peer (P2P) for sharing of teaching resources, though it has not been widely used for that purpose, due perhaps to the discrediting of the P2P process (through copyright infringements) and of P2P software (through intrusive adware and spyware). One interesting example, however, is the built-in P2P functionality of the Canadian LLEARN project for learning French (at the secondary school level). It is being used as part of the learning infrastructure to provide students a means to find and exchange resources. Peer-to-Peer networking is not new. Already a few years ago the advantages of *Peer-to-Peer* networking have been recognized and thus investigations into these architectures were made [You93] [Sim91]. Others like e.g. [Met01] and [Wra94] define *Peer-to-Peer* networks as a collection of heterogeneous distributed resources which are connected by a network. Some attempts to describe *Peer-to-Peer* networks more extensively, than in just an application specific way, define *Peer-to-Peer* simply as the opposite of *Client/Server* architectures [Sin01] [Tho98].

However, from our point of view, the most distinctive difference between *Client/Server* networking and *Peer-to-Peer* networking is the concept of an entity acting as a *Servent*, which is used in *Peer-to-Peer* networks. *Servent* is an artificial word which is derived from the first syllable of the term server (.Serv-) and the second syllable of the term client (-ent.). Thus this term *Servent* shall represent the capability of the nodes of a *Peer-to-Peer* network of acting at the same time as server as well as a client. This is completely different to *Client/Server* networks, within which the participating nodes can either act as a Server or act as a client but cannot embrace both capabilities (Schollmeier, R 2001).

#### *Collaborative Language Learning Using Social Network Service*

Vocabulary, alongside grammar, has been one of the traditional areas of focus in CALL (Levy, 1997). Vocabulary continues to attract attention because of the sheer size of the task for the learner, its obvious importance for students with varying goals and proficiency levels, and the inherent capabilities of the computer that are more attuned to dealing with the more discrete aspects of language learning. Not surprisingly, the range of technologies is broad and includes courseware (commercial and self-developed), online activities, dictionaries, corpora and concordancing, and computer-mediated communication (CMC) technologies (Stockwell, 2007). Almost a decade later Chun (2008) noted "technological advances in acoustic phonetic software have the potential to help learners improve their pronunciation and speaking competence but that sound pedagogically-based feedback beyond simply displaying pitch curves is still lacking, yet essential" (p. 17; see also Engwall & Baiter, 2007).

Culture may be conveyed through receptive and productive means. Simply accessing an L2 Web site can expose learners to numerous aspects of the target culture, and much knowledge may be acquired through reading, listening, and observing. Here, authentic materials play an especially important role because they are designed by native speakers for native speakers and, therefore, provide real data for any exploration of the L2 culture (Levy, 2009). Since the term mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) was first coined by Chinnery (2006), the use of mobile devices to support language learning has increased exponentially. Although, in general, MALL has been considered as a subset of both mobile learning and computer-assisted language learning, Kukulska-Hulme and Shield (2008) note that MALL differs from CALL "in its use of personal, portable devices that enable new ways of learning, emphasizing continuity or spontaneity of access and interaction across different contexts of use" (p. 273).

The literature summarizes the benefits of using MALL as follows. First, MALL enables students to more easily and more promptly access language learning materials and communicate with people at any time, from anywhere. Second, the nature of digital technology facilitates students' participation in both collaborative and individualized language learning activities synchronously and/or asynchronously allowing rapid development of speaking, listening, reading, and writing, skills. Third, mobile technology provides various resources and tools for language learning that encourage learners to be more motivated, autonomous, situated (site-specific), and socially interactive Kim and Kwon (2012) (p. 35). Networked collaborative interaction (NCI) promotes lively exchanges by learners within a social context, a setting that facilitates the development of their communicative competence. The online tools most commonly used are e-mail, bulletin boards, and chat rooms. These tools create a socially and linguistically enriched environment for NCI (Lina, 2004).

Inquiry into online communication spaces has been particularly useful for understanding the many shifts taking place in late modern communicative and compositional practices. Over a decade ago, the New London Group

(1996) put forth a manifesto that called for a broadening of traditional language-based approaches to literacy teaching and learning to acknowledge and accommodate emergent literacy practices catalyzed by "the multiplicity of communications channels and increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in the world today" (n.p.). According to the New London Group, the term hybridity denotes "the mechanisms of creativity and of culture-as-process particularly salient in contemporary society" (n.p.). Hybridizing (i.e., the process of taking existing linguistic, semiotic, and/or cultural materials and recombining them to create new meanings) is a particularly salient aspect of contemporary youth's participation in online affinity spaces (Gee, 2005).

For example, a hybridized communicative practice common to online registers is the melding of textual and conversational styles in which users combine the conventions of print-based text with the linguistic and paralinguistic features of face-to-face conversation to create a new communicative mode that addresses the constraints of text-based media while taking advantage of the rapidity of electronic information exchange. Many modern technologies facilitate the hybridizing, or remixing, of available cultural materials by allowing users to easily combine, modify, and transform existing images, files, and texts. Lankshear and Knobel (2007) have described numerous cases of remixing literacy practices and made the following observations: Even the concept of "text" as understood in conventional print terms becomes a hazy concept when considering the enormous array of expressive media now available to everyday folk. Diverse practices of "remixing"? where a range of original materials are copied, cut, spliced, edited, reworked, and mixed into a new creation have become highly popular in part because of the quality of product it is possible for "ordinary people" to achieve, (p. 8)

## METHODOLOGY

### *Participants and Procedure*

Seven learners of Korean from Boise State University (BSU) and seven Korean students learning English at BSU were paired randomly to conduct language exchange via KakaoTalk (Korean Instant Messenger). The seven learners of Korean language are undergraduate students who registered Korean 201, Fall 2016. The seven Korean students are the students who registered Intensive English Program at Boise State University, at Fall 2016. The goal of the language exchange was to observe as a complement for the improvement of student's pronunciation, vocabulary and understanding of the cultures. The pairs (five of male and female pair and two of same gender pair) were required to engage in a one-hour session once a week for ten weeks, half an hour in Korean and half an hour in English. The participants usually had language exchange session at the Student Union Building (SUB). Most of the participants prefer face-to-face instead of messaging each other, but all of participants prefer to use instant messenger as setting up their sessions.

Following each language exchange session, each student was given two learning steps.

**Figure 1:**

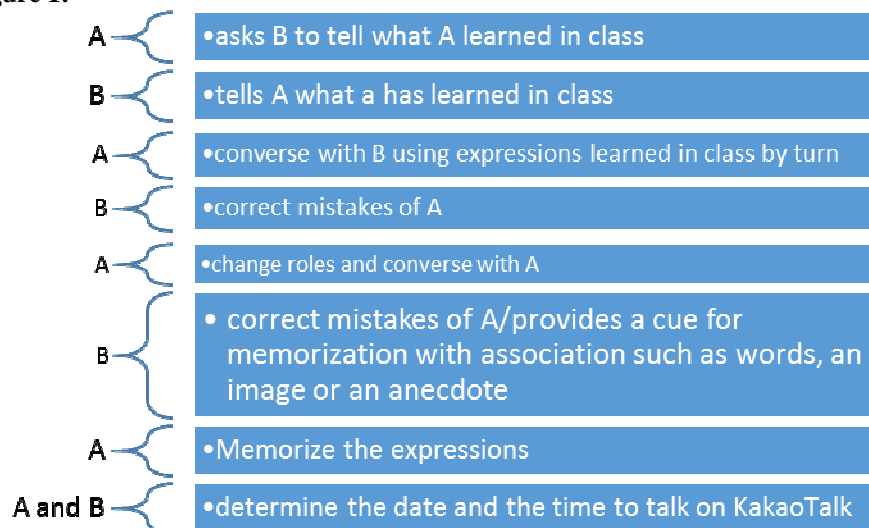


Figure 1 is the method of pronunciation learning step that given participants to improve them for effective language learning. Participants ask and converse with partner expressions learned in class.

**Figure 2:**

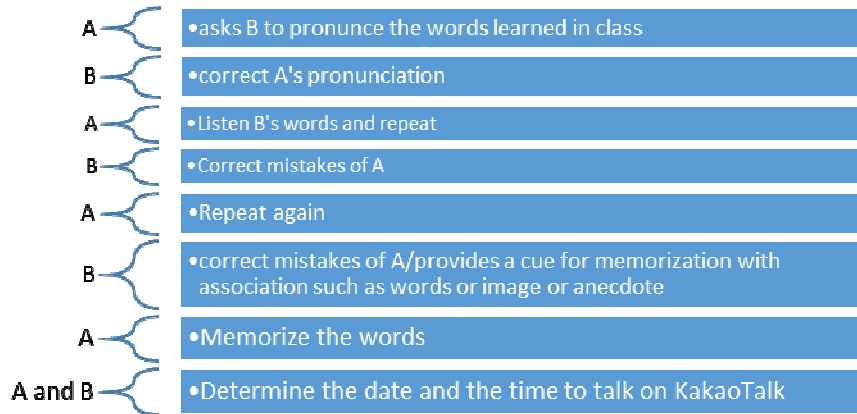


Figure 2 is the method of the vocabulary-learning step that helps participants improve their effective language learning. Participants ask the partners to pronounce the words that have learned in class and make participants repeat the words.

However, all students did not follow those learning steps and did not even know that two learning steps existed. They had a meeting once or twice a week. One of the Korean learner's partner said he could not contact with his partner anymore. Participants use instant messenger as setting up the learning sections.

#### *Data Collection*

The students from both sides were asked to complete the questionnaire for each language exchange session, and to write a journal of each session. They used KakaoTalk to set up for the next meeting. Most of students preferred a face-to-face meeting, instead of answering a question from KakaoTalk. A survey was collected twice a month. The first, second and third questionnaires had the same questions, nothing change. The first questionnaire was focused on what they learned from the language exchange meeting, how they felt about the meeting, is this meeting helpful for students or not, what is role for instant messenger, and any suggestions for improvement of this language exchange? The second questionnaire focused on what is the purpose of using instant messenger, and the learning steps that I gave to them was helpful or not. The major focus of the third questionnaire is the purpose of using instant messenger and is using instant messenger a great tool for improving language skills?

## **RESULTS**

The findings of this survey is how they felt about this meeting, and was it helpful to improve language skills. The purpose of this question is to receive feedbacks from students about the meeting to find better improvement. All of the students responded that the language exchange sessions were helpful.

### 1. Describe how you feel about the meeting and is this helpful to improve your language skills?

*S1: This meeting went well. We had not looked at the book in a while, so it felt like I recognized more when we went over it this week. Also, my partner seemed more confident in her understanding of the things she was to be tested on.*

*S2: The meeting went well. We discussed our winter breaks and our plans for the semester.*

*S3: This meeting was helpful. I have a better understanding of some of the topics that we do not discuss in class.*

*S4: I believe this meeting was helpful, because we were able to get used to each other and discuss topics that we don't talk about in class.*

The first question shows that they all enjoyed having language exchange session and feel helpful for improving their language skills. All students responded they had a better understanding of some of the topics that they did not discuss in class. The second question is about what they learned and what they usually do with their partners. We are looking for what they addressed on and found out how they improved language skills, such as conversational, vocabularies, or grammar expressions.

### 2. Describe what you learned and what do you usually do with your partner?

*S1: My partner helped me go over the vocab list as we discussed some common words used among the young adults.*

S2: *This week, we discussed some of the topics that we are addressed on a teaching exam that she had to take. As for practicing Korean, we went through some of the questions in my beginning Topik text book.*

S3: *My partner helped me study for the vocabulary quiz by switching between the words and contextual sentences.*

S4: *The meeting was extremely helpful as I got to learn the new vocab and partner gets to know some new English expressions and phrases.*

The second question shows that students learned new vocabulary and expressions, and some of the topics that they discussed. Studying for vocabulary quiz by switching between the words and contextual sentence and discussed some of the topics that they addressed on an exam. The major of focus is how they think about the learning steps that we suggested. We gave two different learning steps above Figure 1, and Figure 2.

3. Do you follow the learning steps? Do you think the learning steps are helpful? Why or why not?

S1: *I do not follow the learning steps because I am more curious about other topics related to Korean culture and Korean language other than those that come from the textbook.*

S2: *I did not even know there was such thing. I'm sure it's not helpful.*

S3: *No, because everyone learned differently and so do I, so I have a different method.*

S4: *Maybe for some people these learning steps are helpful, but I have a different way of doing things.*

Everyone learns differently. They are more curious about knowing other topics that does not relate from a textbook. Most of student said that they have a different method that is better than the learning steps. What they think about the purposes of using instant messenger for learning language. Finding disadvantage of using instant messenger.

4. What is the purpose of using instant messenger for learning language, such as KakaoTalk and is there any advantage or disadvantage of using instant messenger?

S1: *It's quick. But the disadvantage of using it is sometimes there are misunderstandings.*

S2: *I would prefer to use my built-in text-messaging app to send messages rather than sending messages on a third-party application.*

S3: *Main disadvantage would be the lack of oral communication. While it is great at helping us keeping in touch throughout the week, it doesn't do a very good job at improving.*

S4: *To be able to have more opportunities to stay in contact with your language partner.*

It shows the main disadvantage is the lack of oral communication. While it is great at helping them keeping in touch with their partners. The purpose of using instant messenger is for quick easy communication and organizing meetings, and instant feedback. Looking for usage of KakaoTalk. The major focus of the question is finding how we are going to apply instant messenger into learning instant messengers from their feedback.

5. Is using KakaoTalk a useful tool for learning foreign language?

S1: *By using instant messenger, such as KakaoTalk, I can quickly get answers to questions that I may have for my language partner. So yes, I like using it.*

S2: *It's an easy quick form of communication.*

S3: *KakaoTalk is always useful. We are able to set meeting times and ask each other questions when necessary.*

S4: *KakaoTalk is useful since it allows us to communicate better.*

This shows the reasons for using KakaoTalk is an easy quick form of communication and quickly receive answers to questions that we may have for their language partners. They did agree that KakaoTalk is great tool for improving language skills, meet not just for quick communication. The major focus of this question is how often meeting with partner effect improvement of language skills. Therefore, we are looking for how many often having meetings are the most effective to improve language.

6. How often do you meet with your partner?

S1: *I meet my partner once a week. We are all happy with this arrangement, because we knew we could also contact each other if we needed help.*

S2: *We meet for an hour once a week. I am very satisfied. My partner is really helpful.*

S3: *We usually meet once or twice a week with an average of 1.5 hours per week.*

S4: *We meet each other once a week.*

Students usually meet once or twice a week with an average of 1 hour and half per week and go over questions about Korean culture or discussions about things that both are interested in at the SUB. They learned something new every meeting. Their partner taught those many useful Korean phrases that they have not learned from the class along with many other interesting cultural facts about Korea. All of students agreed that language exchange activity is very helpful. Having a partner to practice foreign language on a weekly basis really helps improving speaking and listening skills.

As a result, all students feel this meeting is helpful and like to meet with their partners to share their culture. This activity allowed them to learn to improve the speaking and reasoning skills. They think using instant messenger is missing oral communication and not helpful for improving language skills. The instant messenger is only for setting up the meeting with their partners and getting instant feedback from their language partner.

## CONCLUSION

The tutoring attendees use instant messengers mostly for simple questions or making appointments rather than learning. Therefore, it is crucial to find other methods for effective learning through instant messaging. For example, a native speaker can send a word of the day to students on daily basis, use the voice recording feature in the messenger to practice the correct pronunciation of words, send videos of teaching the right orders of vowels and consonants through the message, use video call feature to exchange language if the partner lives abroad, and more. Language exchange has to be done voluntarily by students. Learning steps for the language exchange have been suggested before. However, it was not followed by any of the students and some students have forgotten about it completely. It is determined that it is unnecessary to give students instructions in exchanging languages. Everyone's different learning styles have to be respected. It will be more practical to observe what kind of cultures and grammars the attendees are learning through the language exchange. It can be done by looking into journals and interviews. This study showed the positive impacts of language exchange for students. However, the utilization of KakaoTalk in language exchange failed to show its full capacity in this field of study. Considering the good potential of KakaoTalk in Language exchange, the use of KakaoTalk for educational purposes can be a good research subject for future studies.

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