

Chapter XVIII

The Functions of Negotiation of Meaning in Text Based CMC

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims at describing the patterns of negotiation of meaning functions in text-based synchronous computer-mediated communication by using computer-mediated discourse analysis. Two research questions were sought in this study: (a) what types of negotiation of meaning emerge in text-based synchronous CMC environments, and (b) is there any difference between native speakers (NSs) and non-native speakers (NNSs) of English in terms of negotiations of meaning functions in this environment. The emerged functions of meaning negotiation were presented, and when comparing the NS with NNSs, the most frequently used negotiation of meaning functions were found to be different, but the least frequently used ones were found to be similar. The findings of this study might give insights to researchers, educators, and teachers of English Language when designing instruction in terms of patterns of negotiation of meaning functions in text-based synchronous computer-mediated communication.

INTRODUCTION

With the substantial developments in computer and communication technologies, educators and researchers are challenged in integrating these tools into the learning and teaching processes. The invention of the Internet paved the way for

educators and researchers to create virtual communities of learners in virtual meeting spaces.

The idea of creating new environments is grounded on the theory of social constructivism. According to social constructivism theory, learners should take part in different contexts; they should interact with different people around

them to apply what they have learned at school (Doolittle, 1999; Salter, 2000, Johnson, 2001). Moreover, learners construct their knowledge by combining their prior knowledge with new information, according to the social constructivists. In other words, it can be claimed that when learners enter a different context, they combine the knowledge which they received at school and at home with that which they come across in this new context. The Internet provides these contexts, these environments, for the learners. When an individual connects to the Internet, he or she has the chance to meet someone by means of computer-mediated communication tools.

Computer-Mediated Communication

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is any form of communication between two or more individuals who interact and/or influence each other via separate computers through the Internet or a network connection, using social software. The computer is the medium for the communication, and people around the world communicate with each other regardless of the time and place. Kiesler, Zubrow, and Moses (1985) mentioned the importance of the computer as a medium of communication 20 years ago and stated that it would become a very important development in communication as follows:

Just as the telephone and the automobile did, modern computing technologies seem likely to have major effects on patterns of social contact. People are using computer networks for communicating through electronic mail, computer bulletin boards, asynchronous computer conferencing, instantaneous document facsimile production, and online simultaneous conversations. Computers used for communication will be a significant technological development over the coming decades, and it seems sensible to study the underlying psychological and social implications of this development. (Kiesler et al., 1985, pp. 78-79)

As Olaniran (1996) states, computer-mediated communication has gained more popularity among organizations to promote group communication through available communication tools, such as electronic mail, voicemail, and videoconferencing. Moreover, Olaniran (1996) goes further to add that teleconferencing, which enables synchronous communication, is an increasingly demanded feature by organizations.

Until recently, researchers have been interested in the outcome of this interaction as to whether the interaction leads to learning or not. Among the most frequently raised questions are to find out the results of instruction using computers and the Internet as language learners interact in new contexts with new events, objects, and people. According to Chappelle (2004, p. 595), there is an emerging need to understand the context of interaction, which may or may not lead to learning. Therefore, she adds, there is a need for “ethnographic and discourse-analytic methods’ with an emphasis on the broader context in which the learning takes place...” to find the patterns on the Net. Chappelle (2004) goes further to urge researchers to analyze the context of these environments in order to provide teachers with a better understanding of their learners.

Research about the linguistic perspective of the Internet environments includes different aspects of the languages such as speech acts (Crystal, 2001; Oliver, 2002), negotiation of meaning (Warschauer, 1998; Sotillo, 2000; Rapaport, 2003; Bitchener, 2004; Jepson, 2005, Patterson & Trabeldo, 2006), and question types (Leahy, 2001; Schweinhorst, 2004).

The content of the CMC environments in both synchronous and asynchronous areas has also been a major focus of research (i.e., Stevens & Altun, 2002; Mercer, Littleton, & Wegerif, 2004). Researchers explored what the learners were talking about, and they attempted to categorize the outcomes of these CMC environments in terms of their content. The other dimension of the research related to CMC is comparing the interaction

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