

Chapter 39

Pragmatic Development Through Blogs: A Longitudinal Study of Telecollaboration and Language Socialization

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ABSTRACT

In the acquisition of pragmatic competence, technology-mediated telecollaboration can be a crucial advantage as learners can be socialized into the pragmatic strategies of expert language users in a dynamic interactive context. This chapter focuses on the pragmatic development of three foreign language learners of Japanese over 16-21 months as they blogged with Japanese learners of English in Japan before and after studying in Japan. The blog-mediated learning was provided in conjunction with face-to-face instruction, and the learners' sense of community expanded through the study abroad experience as well as the blog-based telecollaboration. The learners' pragmatic development observable in their blog posts included their use of address terms, gendered sentence-final particles, a regional dialect, emoticons, and style shifting between the clause-final desu/masu and plain forms. The findings indicate that learners' pragmatic language choices can be interpreted in relation to their language socialization and agentive negotiation of emerging multiple identities.

INTRODUCTION

As an increasing body of research in Computer Assisted Language Learning demonstrates, technology can create authentic intercultural contexts and has the potential to enhance language learning, especially in foreign language (FL) contexts (Belz, 2007; Blake, 2011; Kinginger & Belz, 2005). While opportunities to interact with target language (TL) speakers tend to be scarce in the traditional FL classroom,

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technology-mediated telecollaboration can connect electronically learners to expert speakers of the TL and stimulate the learners' motivation to communicate with them in a meaningful manner. This can be a crucial advantage in the acquisition of pragmatic competence, which is understood here to mean knowledge of appropriate and effective norms of verbal and non-verbal behavior situated at the intersection of language and culture. Following Belz (2007), Taguchi and Sykes (2013), and Thorne, Black, and Sykes (2009), we argue that learners can be socialized into the pragmatic strategies of expert language users in a dynamic interactive context mediated by telecollaboration. In such online interactions, learners' pragmatic choices can bring about real-life consequences (such as offending others) through which both learners and their interlocutors negotiate their relationships.

One platform that can support learners' technology-assisted interactions is blogging technology. Being asynchronous reflective and interactive tools, blogs can facilitate introspective and metacognitive activities such as reading and writing, reflecting, and analyzing on the one hand, as well as written interactions between the authors and multiple blog readers on the other. In addition, since blog posts are direct records of these individual and interactive activities, blogs can afford researchers, educators, and learners themselves opportunities to study and assess or self-reflect on authentic language behavior, an added value for enhanced credibility in research and pedagogy. Given this, this study makes a unique contribution to the current literature by focusing on the potential role of blogs in promoting the development of pragmatic competence and language socialization of learners of Japanese as an FL. More specifically, taking advantage of authentic written data, we investigate the pragmatic development over 16-21 months of the learners as they used blogs as part of their FL courses in the United States (U.S.) before and after they studied in Japan for a period of six to 12 months. Specifically, we explore in depth the pragmatic and metapragmatic awareness and language use of the three focal learners in an attempt to understand the complex processes underlying their language socialization.

BACKGROUND

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is increasingly viewed as an influential resource with which to facilitate various aspects of language learning. Peer interaction through CMC can facilitate the negotiation of meaning, stimulate learner motivation, enhance autonomy, and promote the construction of bilingual identities (Freiermuth & Huang, 2012; Lam, 2004; Lee, 2011; Smith & Craig, 2013). As opposed to the traditional view of learning that positions learners as passive recipients of knowledge, CMC can construct learners as knowledge creators in the process of social learning (de Andrés Martínez, 2012; Guarda, 2012).

Language and Cultural Learning Through Blogs

Blogs (a.k.a. weblogs) are online journals typically consisting of a title, text, images, and links to other webpages. Blogs are increasingly recognized as an interactive virtual medium ranging from a journalistic online resource of a public nature to personal and private reflective websites connected to social networking services (Carney, 2009; Ducate & Lomicka, 2005; Murray, Hourigan, & Jeanneau, 2007; Swanson & Early, 2009). To encourage reader participation, space for comments is often provided after each blog post, which can facilitate multi-directional interactions. As the creation and development of a blog requires no technical knowledge of web programming or web authoring software (Swanson &

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