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Is synchronous computer-mediated communication a viable instructional mode in the language classroom? A facilitator and learner perspective

A B S T R A C T Increasing enrolments at tertiary institutions in South Africa have seen a proliferation in the number of courses offered via blended learning systems. This paper reports on one such system at the University of the Free State in which a third-year module, *Computer-assisted Language Learning*, was offered via WebCT in 2007. During synchronous communication, a simulation was devised in which learners had to (a) complete activities in a foreign language (Latin)[1], and (b) discuss the feasibility of learning a foreign language in synchronous WebCT Chat. Employing a conversation-analytic perspective, the logs were analysed to determine whether the interaction reflected in them replicated that characteristic of face-to-face classroom interaction. Once the discourse study had been completed, the logs were used to determine learners' perceptions of synchronous learning. As a follow-up exercise, some of the learners wrote an assignment in which they had to weigh up the strengths and weaknesses of the networked environment for language learning. The findings of both analyses confirm the notion among some researchers that '[c]ontroversy surrounds the relative learning benefits of synchronous...text-based discussion...' (Johnson, 2008: 166).

Keywords: blended learning, CALL, synchronous CMC, WebCT Chat

[1] Latin was chosen for the simulation as none of the learners, barring one, had had any previous instruction in this language as was the case when it came to languages such as Sesotho, German and French.

1. Introduction

As is the case at many tertiary institutions in South Africa, there has been an increasing tendency among educators at the University of the Free State to supplement their courses with asynchronous and/or synchronous technologies (cf. Cox, Carr & Hall, 2004:183). One of the authors of this paper, for instance, offered a third-year module, *Computer-assisted Language Learning*, via synchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC) in 2007 using the WebCT platform. The main aim of this paper is to report on facilitators' as well as learners' perspectives on learning a foreign language via this platform, focusing specifically on the viability of employing synchronous WebCT Chat as an instructional mode in the language classroom. The facilitator of the module devised a 50-minute simulation in which learners were required to (a) complete basic Latin activities collaboratively, and then (b) discuss the feasibility of learning a foreign language in the synchronous mode of CMC. Employing a conversation-analytic (CA) perspective discussed in section 3, the researchers analysed the chat logs with a view to determining whether or not the discourse reflected in these logs replicated that characteristic of face-to-face classroom interaction. Three specific issues which emerged from this discourse-based study related to language, pedagogy and chat room management. With regard to the latter two issues, the facilitator was compelled to re-assess how effectively she had structured and managed the chat sessions. Once the CA study had been completed, the chat logs were used to determine learners' perceptions of synchronous learning. After the scheduled chat sessions, learners were required to submit a written assignment on a CALL topic of their choice. The researchers were particularly interested in those assignments in which learners had opted to weigh up the strengths and weaknesses of using synchronous WebCT Chat for language learning. The results of both analyses confirm the notion among some researchers that 'it may be that synchronous text-based CMC, while enjoyable, [provides] a context that [exacerbates] less than optimal learning [behaviour]' (Johnson, 2008:169; cf. Chen, Liu & Wong, 2007:222).

It should be reiterated that, adopting a descriptive qualitative approach (Ghani & Daud, 2006:52), this paper reports on facilitators' and learners' perceptions of synchronous interaction in the language classroom; it does not set out to prove the superiority or inferiority of this dimension. As Al-Sa'di and Hamdan (2005:421) point out, 'it is not necessarily the case that e-English must be superior or inferior to speech or writing. One reason is that it is in many cases more rule-free and much less formal than both modes'. Identifying the typical discourse features reflected in the synchronous mode contributes to our understanding of this unique discourse setting, and illustrates how the features differ from those of face-to-face discussions. Before turning to the report, a closer look is taken at contextualising the research topic.

2. Literature review

2.1 CMC and foreign language learning

Research that focuses on CMC and language development suggests that synchronous instruction may have a positive effect on foreign language (FL) performance, particularly when it comes to negotiated, oral communication (cf. Sotillo, 2000:82; Darhower, 2002:249; Abrams, 2003:157-158; Smith, 2003:38; Park & Bonk, 2007:245). This is in line with the Interaction Hypothesis according to which acquisition of the target language is 'enhanced by having...

learners negotiate meaning...with other speakers, native or otherwise...' (Blake, 2000:120). In a study of synchronous discussions in an EFL (English as a foreign language) reading classroom, for instance, Kung (2004:172) found that 'students performed in ways that are conducive to language learning, such as using the target language almost exclusively, and initiating different kinds of discourse'. This finding is supported by other studies, notably those that have been conducted by Chun (1994), Kern (1995), Warschauer (1996) and Kwang-Kyu (1996). Indeed, a review of the literature seems to indicate that the use of synchronous electronic discourse 'creates more opportunities for the production of more complex language' (Sotillo, 2000:82) than is the case when it comes to traditional classroom discourse.

Synchronous CMC is not without its problems. As mentioned above, proponents of this dimension claim that it promotes collaborative, negotiated interaction among learners much in the same way as face-to-face interaction does (Beauvois, 1997). However, in the words of Smith (2003:39), 'we may be tempted to assume that computer-mediated (negotiated) interaction among learners occurs to the same degree and in the same fashion as that found in a face-to-face environment'. What we cannot disregard is the fact that there are significant differences between face-to-face and CMC interactional patterns (cf. Blake, 2000:122; Okuyama, 2005:4; Castro, 2006:77). It is the interactional patterns characteristic of synchronous WebCT Chat sessions that are the focus of this paper, and one of the challenges involved in analysing these patterns pertains to finding an appropriate analytical framework within which to examine them.

2.2 CMC and conversation analysis

The nature of synchronous CMC is such that the interactional patterns reflected in it are typically 'fragmented, agrammatical, and interactionally disjointed' (Herring, 1999). For this reason, established discourse-based models may not be suitable for studying synchronous CMC (cf. Simpson, 2005:357). The typical Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) model proposed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975; 1992), for example, cannot accommodate the 'incoherence' (Castro, 2006:77) of synchronous chat.

A review of the literature has reflected a number of interesting discourse models that attempt to accommodate the discourse patterns of CMC. Based on the research of Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), and Kneser, Pilkington and Treasure-Jones (2001) have devised a method of analysing CMC referred to as Exchange Structure Analysis or ESA, a method which enables the researcher 'to analyse the relative roles of students and educators in online learning conversations' (Cox *et al.*, 2004:184). A useful conversation-analytic (CA) model is that proposed by Simpson (2005), who adopts the notion of conversational floors in his analysis of synchronous discourse. A CA model is also adopted by Negretti (1999) to investigate synchronous discourse produced by native speakers of English and ESL (English as a second language) learners. Castro (2006:77) too employs a CA framework to examine the discourse that dominates synchronous chat, arguing that '[a]lthough chat manifests certain deviations from face-to-face conversation, it has many features that resemble spoken rather than written discourse'. It is a CA model which is used in this paper and which is briefly outlined in the next section.

3. Methodological orientation

3.1 Theoretical framework

Lund, Prudhomme and Cassier (2007:2) argue that, although the use of CA is problematic when it comes to the notion of context, for example, it is, nevertheless, a theoretical framework that assists analysts in understanding how participants in synchronous interactions co-construct knowledge. Indeed, Lund *et al.* (2007:2) regard CA as being more 'stable' than Interaction Analysis (IA), which is another principal approach to studying talk-in-interaction. Lund *et al.*'s (2007) point of view is echoed by Saarenkunnas, Kuure and Taalas (2003:210), who state that 'conversation analysis has proved to be useful in the study of computer-mediated interaction, as it examines language production and interpretation *in situ*'.

The reasons for adopting CA as a framework of analysis for the lingual data discussed in this paper are numerous. First, CA is able to cope with what Castro (2006:78) refers to as chat's 'synchronic [real-time] mode of interaction'. Second, this framework is able to identify synchronous chat's typical turn-taking and repair features. Third, CA takes into account the fact that CMC is ungrammatical: 'One finds lots of fragments and shifts in thought commonly found in spoken discourse' (Castro, 2006:78; cf. Kern, 2006:193) in synchronous chat. Finally, applying the CA approach 'leads to a deeper insight into the rules and standards of a relatively new environment in which speakers are forced to establish new and alternative strategies for communicating with each other' (Negretti, 1999:76). The table below summarises the discourse features that dominate synchronous CMC.

Opening and closing sequences	• Speakers devote a great deal of time to openings and closings in synchronous chats (Negretti, 1999: 82). *Openings:* Participants generally self-identify using explicit strategies such as icons or quotation marks (Negretti, 1999: 82-83). Participants greet one another by either acknowledging individual speakers through different postings, or by greeting the room as a whole (Negretti, 1999:82). *Closings:* Typically, 'the pre-closing statement usually solicits farewells from the other speakers, while the closing statement calls for a definitive goodbye from the participant who is about to leave' (Negretti, 1999:83).
Turn-taking features	• Turn-taking does not develop sequentially (Negretti, 1999:80). • There is no control over turn positioning (O'Neill & Martin, 2003:41). • Adjacency pairs are often disrupted (Castro, 2006:80, cf. Herring, 1999, O'Neill & Martin, 2003:42). • So-called 'phantom' adjacency pairs may occur (O'Neill & Martin, 2003:42; Simpson, 2005:343). • The presence of multiple speakers generating talk simultaneously means that there are 'rapid exchanges of turns' (Castro, 2006:79, cf. O'Neill & Martin, 2003:43).
Grammatical and paralinguistic features	• Non-standard usage of grammar is common. • Emoticons, uppercase letters, punctuation, and onomatopoeia are frequently employed as communicative strategies (Negretti, 1999: 84).

Table 1: Conversation-analytic model of synchronous CMC (adapted from Negretti, 1999, O'Neill & Martin 2003, and Castro, 2006)

3.2 Subjects and tasks

The students in this study were enrolled in a third-year computer-assisted language learning module. Of the 33 students registered for the module, 25 participated in the simulation. These students were divided into groups and placed in four chat rooms in a computer laboratory - 6 students in chat room 1, 5 in chat room 2, 5 in chat room 3, and 3 in chat room 4. The reason why only 3 students were assigned to chat room 4 had to do with the fact that they experienced username and password difficulties which had to be resolved by the University's e-learning helpdesk. The remaining 6 students completed the simulation in chat room 1 in the evening as they were unable to attend the day class owing to workplace commitments. During the simulation, the facilitator briefly visited each chat room to monitor students' progress. For the first 30 minutes of a 50-minute session, students had to complete two Latin grammar activities. Thereafter, they were required to engage in a 10-minute discussion of the following question posed by the facilitator: Can chats be used to learn a (foreign) language? In the remaining 10 minutes, learners had the option of either staying in the chat rooms or leaving.

A total of 165 postings or turns were generated in chat room 1. The evening group assigned to this room produced 101 postings. Sixty-nine postings were generated in chat room 2, while 45 were recorded in chat room 3. Chat room 4 yielded 98 postings.

The Latin lesson, adapted from an online course offered by *The Cambridge School Classics Project or CSCP* (http://www.cambridgescp.com), required students to translate a short Latin passage into English collaboratively, and then translate three English sentences into Latin. To aid them in their translations, students were given a one-page handout containing a Latin-English vocabulary list divided into nouns, verbs and prepositions, as well as simple grammatical notes on these parts of speech.

For the sake of clarity, the following should be noted. First, the lesson described on the next page was structured *outside* the chat rooms. Specifically, before learners logged into WebCT Chat, the facilitator briefed them on what they would be expected to do. Second, prior to the simulation, although most of the learners were familiar with WebCT, they were unfamiliar with its educational chat facility, although many of them had participated in private chat rooms. On reflection, the facilitator – who at that stage was a newcomer to managing synchronous CMC – should, amongst other things, have set up a tutorial aimed at familiarising learners with WebCT Chat. Since the simulation involved learning a language, she could also have structured the chat environment in such a way that learners were more sensitive to the importance of avoiding chat room grammar and punctuation (Sullivan, 2002:403).

4. Analysis

The authors of this paper conducted exhaustive analyses of all 478 postings reflected in the 5 transcripts collected. The analyses are divided into two parts discussed below. Owing to space constraints, only a selection of chat exchanges is highlighted under the relevant headings. Where students have used their mother tongues to communicate with one another, a translation is provided in italics. All original language, spelling and typographical errors have been retained.

ACTIVITY 1:

Using the vocabulary list provided, translate the Latin passage into English

Caecilius est in horto. Caecilius in horto sedet. servus est in atrio. servus in atrio laborat. Metella est in atrio. Metella in atrio sedet. Quintus est in tablino. Quintus in tablino scribit. Cerberus est in via.

Verbs		**Nouns**		**Prepositions**	
est	is	*servus*	slave	*in*	in/on/into/onto
sedet	sits/is sitting	*atrium*	main		
laborat	works/is		room		
	working	*tablinum*	study		
scribit	writes/is	*via*	steet		
	writing	*horto*	garden		

ACTIVITY 2:

Revise the grammar notes below before completing Activity 3.

laboro	I work	*ambulo*	I walk
laboras	You (singular) work	*ambulas*	You (singular walk)
laborat	He / she / it works	*ambulat*	He / she / it walks
laboramus	We work	*ambulamus*	We walk
laboratis	You (plural) work	*ambulatis*	You (plural) walk
laborant	They work	*ambulant*	They walk

ACTIVITY 3:

Translate the sentences below into Latin.

1. I work in the study.
2. They work in the main room.
3. You (plural) walk in the street.
4. We walk in the garden.

Table 2: Latin Grammar Activities (Adapted from The Cambridge School Classics Project)

4.1 Analysis of the language lesson

4.1.1 Opening and closing sequences

Chat room participants spend much time performing greetings and farewells in openings and closings respectively (Negretti, 199:82). An opening sequence is reflected in the excerpt of data shown below.

Excerpt 1 [Chat log: Day class: Room 3, 28 August 2007]

1 Student 2 Hi!
2 Student 1 Hey people!
3 Student 5 guys how is morning so far
4 Student 1 Cool thanx, yours?
5 Student 5 a bit nervous with this chat room thing

Rintel, Mulholland and Pittam (2001) observe that tokens or 'verbal salutes' such as 'hi' and 'hey people' in Excerpt 1 'are common signals that perform the critical functions of attention-

getting and availability-establishment'. The fact that Students 1 and 2 in the first excerpt have accompanied their greetings with exclamation marks is not, according to Rintel *et al.* (2001), unintentional. Matching punctuation such as exclamation marks is, amongst other things, a way in which chat room participants establish intimacy with one another (Rintel *et al.*, 2001). It is interesting to note that, out of the 5 transcripts analysed, it is only two that reflect some of the students greeting one another individually. Most of the opening sequences are therefore similar to that shown in Excerpt 1. Negretti (1999:83) observes that '[t]he latter strategy is very typical in [synchronous chat], where it is important to convey a maximum of information in the shortest possible way'.

According to Negretti (1999:83), a closing sequence generally reflects either a closing statement or a pre-closing followed by a closing statement. Excerpt 2 illustrates the former type of farewell. (It should be noted that 6 students initially participated in Room 1. The excerpt below shows the presence of a seventh student who left Room 2 at the end of her session to join students in Room 1.)

Excerpt 2 [Chat log: Day class: Room 1, 28 August 2007]

162 Student 5 Ok, let's go.

163 Student 5 Yes.

164 Student 6 Ok, bye!

165 Student 7 Ok, bye!

Pre-closings are often used by a chat room participant to provide a reason for exiting the chat room, 'as if he or she were trying to avoid conveying a negative feeling such as boredom or disinterest to the room' (Negretti, 1999:83). The chat logs analysed in this paper indicate that, for the most part, a pre-closing and closing occur in the same turn as is the case in the following extracts.

Excerpt 3 [Chat log: Day class: Room 1, 28 August 2007]

108 Student 3 Okay you guys – goodbye! I am logging into other rooms!

Excerpt 4 [Chat log: Day class: Room 2, 28 August 2007]

64 Student 4 Ek gan dan nou maar gaan!!! *[I'll be off then!!!]* places to c people 2 meet!!!

4.1.2 Turn-taking features

What makes chat room interaction seemingly incoherent is the fact that turn-taking does not develop sequentially (Negretti, 1999:80). This incoherence or fragmentation is shown in the following exchange in which the students are in the process of translating English sentences into Latin.

Excerpt 5 [Chat log: Day class: Room 1, 28 August 2007]

62 Student 6 C. Quintis et Caecilius Metella amo

63 Student 1 I think – Take the 'o' of 'amo' away, and put in 'ant'

64 Student 3 I do not understand the second rule very well. Help please!

65	Student 3	Sonja do you take Latin as a subject?
66	Student 5	What is the word for love?
67	Student 4	should amant not be at the end of the sentence as: Quintus et Caecilius metella amant?
68	Student 1	No, but French comes in handy
69	Student 6	amo means I love

Student 3 is struggling to understand how verbs are conjugated in Latin, hence her statement 'I do not understand the second rule very well' and subsequent request for help in turn 64. She has noticed that Student 1 is more familiar with the rules of Latin, and thus asks Student 1 if she is registered for a Latin module in turn 65. Note that Student 1 only responds to this question in turn 68. Similarly, in turn 66, Student 5 asks what the Latin word for 'love' is, and only gets a reply in turn 69. Interaction in synchronous CMC 'is disrupted and discontinuous since many different topic strands and interactions can be carried out simultaneously' (Negretti, 1999:80). In the words of Castro (2006:79), '[u]nrelated messages from other participants intervene between an initiating message and a response...'.

The fact that chat room interaction is not sequential and that 'turns are constructed in isolation from other participants' (Markman, 2004:116) before being posted is also illustrated in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 6 [Chat log: Day class: Room 1, 28 August 2007]

10	Student 4	The slave works in the main room
11	Student 6	Ceacilius is in the garden
12	Student 3	Metella is in the main room.
13	Student 6	Caecilius sits in the garden

What is problematic about the above exchange is that the learners are simply working on the Latin translation in isolation, not monitoring one another's turns and essentially talking past one another, as it were.

The unique temporal aspect of synchronous CMC has two interesting consequences. First, a participant cannot control his or her turn positioning (O'Neill & Martin, 2003:41). Second, multiple speakers produce rapid, simultaneous talk (Castro, 2006:79). The negative impact that these turn-taking features may have on language learning is discussed a little later on in this paper.

In light of the above turn-taking mechanisms, it is not surprising that adjacency pairs are frequently violated in synchronous chat (O'Neill & Martin, 2003:42). Consider, for example, the exchanges below.

Excerpt 7 [Chat log: Day class: Room 1, 28 August 2007]

60	Student 5	But in the Latin sentences at the top it goes infront?
61	Student 3	Quintus et Caecilius amorant Metella?????
62	Student 6	C. Quintis et Caecilius Metella amo
63	Student 1	I think – Take the 'o' of 'amo' away, and put in 'ant'

Excerpt 8 [Chat log: Day class: Room 2, 28 August 2007]

39 Student 4 What about Rule 2. (laborat without the -at)

40 Student 3 C. Quintus et Caecilius amo... Metella

41 Student 3 HELP

42 Student 2 I think it is amorant, but I'm not sure!

In Excerpt 7, Student 5 wishes to know where a verb is positioned in Latin sentences and thus asks a question in this regard (turn 60). However, none of the students replies to this question; each simply continues translating his or her own sentences. Likewise, Student 4 in Excerpt 8 asks a question about 'Rule 2' in turn 39, but fails to elicit responses from the other students in the room. Interestingly enough in both extracts, Student 3's questions elicit answers: In Excerpt 7, a student in turn 63 responds to Student 3's question posed in turn 61, while in Excerpt 8, Student 3's request for help in turn 41 is met by Student 2 in turn 42. A possible reason for this is that, in both excerpts, Student 3 makes use of attention-seeking devices, namely, multiple question marks and uppercase letters: 'They serve as a visual substitute for an aural clue to attract the attention of other speakers' (Negretti, 1999:84).

In addition to being disrupted, adjacency pairs may in fact be false or phantom in nature (O'Neill & Martin, 2003:42). A false adjacency pair occurs when 'posts...are displayed in sequential order by the computer, but were begun by their respective authors independently of each other' (Markman, 2005:118). Thus, for instance, a participant may ask a question of another participant only to be interrupted by a technical problem. An hour later, another participant may log in and answer the previous participant's question. A chat log will not give any indication of the time delay, and one may falsely assume that an adjacency pair was created (Markman, 2004:118-119). The data collected for this paper show no instances of false adjacency pairs. No technical problems occurred to interrupt the 50-minute session, and there was therefore no risk of two unrelated posts being positioned near each other by the server.

4.1.3 Grammatical features

Amongst language facilitators, a criticism of chat room interaction is that rules governing spelling and grammar are neglected or even disregarded altogether (Sullivan, 2002:403). In turn 33 below, for instance, Student 3 uses 'laboro' ('I work') instead of 'laborat' ('he works), while in turn 34, Student 1 misspells 'Metella' and mistakenly uses 'laborat' ('he works') instead of 'laborant' ('they work'). Indeed, words are frequently misspelled during synchronous interaction.

Excerpt 9 [Chat log: Day class: Room 2, 28 August 2007]

33 Student 3 A. Quintus in horto laboro.

34 Student 1 Matella et Quintus in horto laborat.

Paralinguistic features are not analysed here as some of them have been identified in the two previous sections.

4.2 Analysis of learners' perceptions of synchronous CMC

An analysis of the learners' chat room discussions of the viability of using synchronous chat for language learning indicates that, while learners described the simulation as ''fun', they were not positively disposed towards this type of CMC. Some of their comments are reproduced below.

Excerpt 9 [Chat log: Day class: Room 1, 28 August 2007]

81 Student 1 Chats can help, but they can't replace traditional teaching methods.

82 Student 2 Absolutely!

83 Student 6 I agree!

84 Student 4 I prefer a teacher as well, maybe because I am old fashioned...

85 Student 5 Yes, they can only supply additional info.

86 Student 3 Also: when I chat on the net I am in a relaxed mood. It does not feal very academic!

87 Student 3 oops feel, sorry

88 Student 1 I agree

89 Student 5 Yes. It feels more like fun, not studying.

90 Student 4 I know, and it is difficult not to use the 'sms' mode

91 Student 6 It's just easier to follow a lesson in a traditional classroom. This goes way to quick for me!!

These kinds of observations were confirmed in some of the learners' written assignments which were submitted some time after the scheduled simulation. Again, some of these comments are recorded below.

Student 1: 'The chatting occurred at a very fast pace and I struggled to keep up.'
'I am a person who likes to reflect on what I write - especially when I communicate in a language other than my mother tongue. I did not have time to consider the topic at hand and to think my answers through.'

Student 2: '...in a networked environment, students can just sit at home and have their friends or someone else doing their work for them.'

5. Discussion of the findings

It is undeniable that effective chat room management can foster FL performance (cf. Negretti, 1999:75). It has already been noted that the facilitator in this study could have structured the chat sessions more effectively, by, for example, familiarising learners with WebCT Chat and introducing them to chat room netiquette *before* the simulation. However, even with sound management, it also cannot be denied that the interactional patterns of chat room discussions present specific problems for language learners. The temporal aspect of synchronous chat reflected in the various exchanges above poses certain difficulties for language learners, one of which is that 'they must acquire the typical structures and sequences of the foreign language and then adapt them to this new communicative setting with its contingent standards and rules' (Negretti, 1999:80). To complicate matters, the fact that learners cannot control turn positioning '[causes] confusion over threads' (O'Neill & Martin, 2003:41). This in turn compels learners to generate short responses which lack the syntactic complexity of responses found in asynchronous CMC. As Sotillo (200:106) rightly observes, in asynchronous mode, learners have the opportunity to master form and meaning in the target language which is not the case in synchronous mode.

The fact that the learners in this particular study were generally sceptical about the extent to which synchronous CMC might be useful for learning a foreign language is unsurprising; Hedberg, Harper and Corrent-Agostinho (1998) examined learners' reactions to synchronous chat, and concluded that chat sessions were not particularly successful: 'Participants reported a sense of confusion about expectations and were only motivated to contribute when synchronous chat related to tasks that were linked to assessment' (Burnett, Dickinson, McDonagh, Merchant, Myers & Wilkinson, 2003:151).

It has not been the authors' intention to disparage synchronous CMC, but rather, to add a cautionary note that, while synchronous technology can play a role in language learning, effective strategies need to be put in place that will promote language learning. These strategies include scaffolding interaction in the chat room. Roehler and Cantlon (1997) state that scaffolding could include providing learners with maintenance strategies that will help them to avoid generating divergent threads in the chat room (Burnett et al., 2003:160), modelling desired utterances in the target language, and verifying whether or not learners understand the various notions under discussion during the chat sessions (cf. Epp, Green, Rahman & Weaver, 2009:6). Scaffolding is supported by Okuyama (2005:5), who argues that chat room tasks should be designed in such a way that learners are encouraged to generate 'comprehension checks, clarification requests, recasts and other traits of negotiated NS-NNS interaction'.[2] Learners who utilise synchronous chat to learn a language need to be sensitised to the fact that this dimension represents a unique discourse setting, the interactional patterns of which need to be mastered if learning is to take place.

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[2] NS: Native speaker
NNS: Nonnative-speaker

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