

Interactional Modifications and Grammar Development in Text-Based Computer Mediated Communication

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Abstract

The interaction hypothesis claims that interactional modification promotes language development through increasing comprehension. Owing to the fact that online interactive exchange offers learners many opportunities to use the target language to negotiate both meaning and form in a social context, this study is an attempt to compare the types and frequency of Interactional Modifications as employed by two groups of intermediate EFL students—one interacting via online communication and the other through regular oral class interaction-- to explore the potentials of text-based online chat in facilitating the development of question forms in English as a foreign language. To do so, while a total of eighteen paired intermediate EFL students used a synchronous chat program (Yahoo Messenger) over a seven week period to complete a series of communicative tasks outside their classroom time, the members of the comparison group did the same tasks using plain classroom oral interaction. The results show that Iranian EFL learners in computer mediated communication (CMC) environment had over five times as many turns, and used a much greater variety of interactional modifications in comparison to the group in class environment. Data from this study also suggest that interactional modifications during online negotiation facilitate the development of question forms in English as a foreign language. Given that the current study only focused on online interaction among non- native speakers (NNSs), future studies on online negotiation including both NNSs and native speakers (NSs) are still needed.